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The Practices and Developmental Pathways of Professional and Olympic Serial Winning Coaches

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In 2011, the Innovation Group of Leading Agencies of the International Council for Coaching Excellence initiated a project aimed at supporting the identification and development of the next generation of high performance coaches. The project, entitled Serial Winning Coaches, studied the personalities, practices and developmental pathways of professional and Olympic coaches who had repeatedly achieved success at the highest level of sport. This paper is the third publication originating from this unique project. In the first paper, Mallett and Coulter (2016) focused on the development and testing of a novel multilayered methodology in understanding a person through a single case study of a successful Olympic coach. In the second, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) applied this methodology to a large sample of Serial Winning Coaches and offered a composite account of their personality. In this third instalment, we turn the focus onto the actual practices and developmental pathways of these coaches. The composite profile of their practice emerging from the analysis revolves around four major themes: Philosophy, Vision, People and Environment. In addition, a summary of the developmental activities accessed by these coaches and their journey to success is also offered. Finally, we consider the overall findings of the project and propose the concept of Driven Benevolence as the overarching operational principle guiding the actions and behaviours of this group of Serial Winning Coaches.

Keywords: high performance coaching, winning, coach education, management, leadership

Public and private financing of high performance sport is at an all-time high. The results achieved by coaches managing these high-stakes investments in professional and Olympic sport are routinely and thoroughly scrutinised by their respective national sport councils, governing bodies, club owners, the media and the public and fans. The Innovation Group of Leading Agencies (IGLA) is a committee of the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE), which brings together twelve world-renowned national sporting organisations seeking to accelerate the development of coaching in certain key areas. Given the aforementioned, highly combustible context of high performance coaching, the effective recruitment and development of high performance coaches was identified as a priority area by the IGLA members.

Consequently, in 2011, the IGLA commissioned a unique research study of coaches described as 'Serial Winning Coaches' (SWC). SWC meet two key criteria: a) they have won multiple championships at the Olympics, World Championships, and/or in highly recognised professional leagues; and b) they have done so with multiple teams or individual athletes over a prolonged period of time. Access to this very special cohort of coaches has, up to this point, been limited. The main goal of the project was to develop a personality (what are they like?), practice (what do they do?) and development profile (how did they become the coaches they are?) of this very select coaching group. The ultimate aim of the IGLA members

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was to use the resulting profiles to guide and facilitate the identification, recruitment and development of prospective high performance coaches, as well as better support the further development of coaches already working in elite sport.

This paper is the third publication originating from this unique project. In the first paper, Mallett and Coulter (2016) focused on the development and testing of a unique methodology of understanding a person in the field of sport psychology, through a single case study of a successful Olympic coach. This pilot research was, to our knowledge, the first attempt to pursue a multilayered understanding (McAdams & Pals, 2006) of a (successful) coach. In the second publication, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) applied this multilayered methodology to a large sample of Serial Winning Coaches. As a result, they offered a composite account of their personalities, as well as a set of recommendations for the effective recruitment and development of high performance coaches. In this third instalment, we focus on the day-to-day work and the developmental pathways of this group of coaches. We share what we have learnt about 'what they do' and 'how they got there' and thus complement the previous two publications.

High Performance Coaching

The high performance sport environment (Olympic and professional sports) has been described as dynamic, complex, unpredictable, and at times characterised by chaos (e.g., Purdy & Jones, 2011). Achieving success in this climate is highly challenging. Succeeding repeatedly is the prerogative of very few athletes and coaches. Ever growing competition from increasingly more proficient national Olympic squads, the rise in popularity and commercialization, and improved quality of certain sports in nontraditional countries, the importance of the stakes relative to the country's investment in elite sport, the central role of sport in many societies, and the lack of optimal resources or appropriate coordination and maximisation of the wealth of resources available are some of the factors coaches have to contend with. In their role as central actors in the coach-athlete-performance relationship (Cushion, 2010; Lyle, 2002; Mallett, 2010), high performance coaches should therefore be considered as performers in their own right (Frey, 2007; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, & Chung, 2002; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

Against this unsettled background, recruiting and developing coaches of elite athletes and teams is problematic and typically marked by serendipity and chance (Mallett, 2010). In many sports, coaches are traditionally employed because of their playing success (Gilbert, Côté & Mallett, 2006; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006) and without sufficient training (Mallett, 2010; Mallett, Rossi, Rynne, & Tinning, 2015; Rynne, Mallett & Tinning, 2006). A suboptimal match between the capacity of the appointed coach and the situational demands of the job can lead to underachievement in performance outcomes and significant disruption and cost if released before completion of contract (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Therefore, investors and sport officials with responsibility for the identification, recruitment and development of elite coaches are keen to better understand what types of coaches and coaching practices lead to sustained success. They are also eager to gain further insight into how successful coaches develop their expertise to build appropriate coach education and development programmes that can enhance coaches' ability to negotiate and cope with the extreme demands of elite sport.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the importance and net economic value of sport in society, research in this field has intensified in recent years. Researchers have studied expert coaches' developmental experiences (Erickson, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Jiménez-Sáiz, Lorenzo-Calvo & Ibañez-Godoy, 2008; Koh, Mallett & Wang, 2011; Mallett, Rynne, & Billett, 2016; Nash & Sproule, 2009; Rynne & Mallett, 2012); their most valued characteristics and practices (Ruiz-Tendero, & Salinero-Martín, 2011; Vallée & Bloom, 2005); their perceived needs (Allen & Shaw, 2009); how they draw from the intelligence provided by sport scientists (Reade, Rodgers & Hall, 2008); their relationship with performance managers and directors (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011); and their psychological make-up, skills and coping strategies (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Olusoga, Maynar, Hays & Butt, 2012; Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees & Hutchings, 2008). In the main, a coach-focused approach has been used in the above studies. Some studies however, have also considered athletes' interpretations of their coaches' practices and methods and the impact they have on their performance (Norman & French, 2013; Purdy & Jones, 2011).

Method

The main goal of the whole project was to elicit commonalities amongst this very select group of highly successful coaches, and hence, a pragmatic research design that focused on trying to answer the questions posed by the IGLA was implemented. The researchers, however, were cognizant that gaining an insight into the different story each coach has to tell was as important as the shared attributes between them. Therefore, a mixed-methods approach, which combined idiographic and nomothetic techniques, was the chosen design. The study thus spans across research paradigms embracing a mix of positivist and phenomenological lenses to gather and interpret knowledge about the same issues from different vantage points. The integration of data from these multiple sources enables the creation of a meta-story about the world of consistently successful high performance coaching while also identifying and celebrating individuality and uniqueness amongst the sample. This acknowledgement recognises the futility of searching for a 'magic recipe' or 'single profile' for the SWC, yet aims to meaningfully contribute to an empirical base, which can hopefully better inform policy and practice in coach identification, recruitment, and development.

Participants

Using the criteria outlined in the previous paragraph, members of the IGLA group were asked to identify as many SWC candidates as possible within their countries and, where appropriate and feasible, from other nations. An original shortlist of 31 coaches was compiled. Institutional ethics approval was granted before sending a comprehensive information pack and a request to participate in the study to the nominated coaches. A total of 17 coaches accepted the invitation (see Table 1 for demographic data of the sample).

Following confirmation of the coaches' participation, they were requested to identify at least two athletes they coached for recruitment into the study. The criteria for athlete selection included having won a gold medal or major league championship under this coach in the last five years and having worked with the coach for at least two years. Altogether, 19 athletes relating to 11 different coaches were recruited into the study. The sample included athletes from six different sports (rowing = 7, field hockey = 4, speed skating = 4, sailing = 2, basketball = 1, windsurfing = 1) and six different countries (Canada, Germany, Israel, Netherlands, Spain, UK).

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. Coaches and athletes were asked to complete a preliminary demographic questionnaire aimed at gaining descriptive information as to their personal history.

NEO-FFI-3 (McCrae & Costa, 2010) and Personal Strivings Questionnaires Emmons' (1989). These two instruments were used to collect data specific to the first and second layer of personality—self as social actor and as motivated agent respectively (McAdams & Pals, 2006). For a full description please refer to Mallett and Coulter (2016) and Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016).

Semistructured Interview. SWC and the athletes they coach participated in semistructured interviews to corroborate or expand the data provided by the psychometric questionnaires. For example, coaches and athletes were asked: 'What personal qualities do you think have helped you/your coach to become a SWC?' Researchers also used the interviews to elicit new information regarding practical examples of their daily behaviours and the strategies coaches use to successfully navigate the high performance environment. For instance: 'What is it that you do/your coach does that has allowed you/her to become a SWC?'. The interviews also contained specific questions in a number of areas such as the learning and development opportunities accessed by SWC (i.e., 'What type of learning and development opportunities have you accessed over your coaching career?'; 'What learning and development opportunities have been most important in your journey to success?'); the vital steps in their journey to coaching glory (i.e., 'What have been the key steps in your coaching career?'; 'Have there been any critical moments in your coaching career?'); and the key challenges facing high performance coaches in the future (i.e., 'What do you think will be the biggest challenge for high performance coaches in the future?'; 'Do you think high performance coaching will change in the future and how?'). In addition, athletes were also asked to compare the SWC with other coaches they had worked with (i.e., 'What are the fundamental differences between this coach and other coaches you have worked with in the past?'); and with themselves over time (i.e., 'Has your coach changed in any way over the years? If so, what do you feel have been the main changes?').

The duration of the interviews ranged from 60 to 180 min and they were mostly conducted face-to-face. Three interviews were conducted using video conferencing. Interviews were conducted in the native language of the coaches and athletes, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently translated into English. Over 1,000 pages of double-spaced text were produced. Coaches and athletes were sent the interview transcripts for checking (Patton, 2002), however, no amendments to the transcripts were necessary.

Table 1 Serial Winning Coaches' Descriptive Data

Number of Coaches	17 (2 female) including 1 Paralympic coach
Sports	Field Hockey (2), Ice Hockey (2), Basketball (2), Speed Skating (2), Sailing, Windsurfing, Rowing (4), Swimming, Judo, and Athletics
Countries	Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Serbia, UK
Gender Coached	Male (4); Female (1); Male and Female (12)
Number of Combined Gold Medals/Major Championships/Professional League Titles	160 (at time of publication)
Age	44–75 years (M = 55.7 years)
Coaching	8–45 years (M = 29.2 years; HP M = 25.2 years)
Experience as Athlete	International (10), National/Regional (6)None (1)

Interview Data Analysis

In the present paper, we focus explicitly on the findings arising from the analysis of the biodemographic questionnaire and semistructured interviews. More specifically, we concentrate on two primary research questions; namely, coaches' practice (what do they do?) and their development pathway (how did they become the coaches they are?). For a full exposition of the personality profiles of the SWC please refer to Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016).

We analysed the data following the principles of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and managed the data using NVIVO10 software. The six-step approach proposed by Braun and Clarke included a period of familiarisation with the data through repeated readings of the data sets; a phase of initial generation of codes; categorising the general codes into themes; reviewing the themes; defining and refining the themes; and the final production of the full report from which this article has been developed. The coaches' and athletes' interview data were coded separately after which key themes from both data sets were compared. The broad themes that emerged were similar, yet there were noteworthy nuances within the themes, to which we draw attention in the results and discussion sections. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that there is always potential for some confirmatory bias in the analytical process, which we were cognizant of and attempted to minimize (Patton, 2002). Strategies to minimize researcher bias included multiple readings of the text by both authors, and the extraction of major themes that were discussed until consensus was reached.

Results

The Day-to-Day Practices of Serial Winning Coaches

The analysis of the interview data with the coaches and their athletes elicited four major themes: Philosophy, Vision, People, and Environment. Within each major theme, subthemes were identified thus providing an inductive operational framework of SWC's day-to-day practice (Figure 1).

Philosophy

Coaches and athletes felt that the SWC's practices were anchored upon a very clear philosophical standpoint (their goals, values and beliefs), which provided them with a strong sense of purpose and direction. Within this major

Figure 1 — Serial Winning Coaches Day-to-Day Practice Framework

theme, three recurring elements surfaced throughout both coach and athlete interviews: first, a disposition toward adopting an athlete-centred perspective; second, the espousing of high moral values such as honesty, loyalty and respect for the athlete; and third, the explicit attempts to reach a relative work-life balance for both athletes and coach (for a full description of this theme, please see Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Athlete 7 summarised it as follows,

> Yes, and coaching, but not only as a person, but also as a human being. And also some sort of a manager, because he wants… at some point my management quit, for example and he searched for a new management for me, so he wants the best for me and then… of course it is not part of his job, but he wants… he just does that. I think that is the bond you have or something, but he is very… yes, how should I say this… he is very involved with you. And sometimes more than you know. And he treats everybody of our team like that, so to speak. (Athlete 7)

Vision

A clearly articulated vision of what is necessary to win was central to success. Coaches and athletes concurred with regards to the importance of this area as well as the key elements within it that support its realisation. The ability to predict, particularly with regards to what 'it will take to win a gold medal or championship the next time around' (Coach 8) and, specifically, what will be the decisive elements of that performance that will make winning possible was highlighted by both groups. There was also a strong belief in the need to constantly innovate to stay ahead of the pack and to be "future-proof" (Coach 9). Equal importance was attached to the ability of the coach to simplify what is, by definition, a very complex environment with lots of moving pieces. SWC are able to consistently identify all these pieces, how they fit together and prioritize those fundamental for success. In the high performance environment, time, attention and resources are limited and having clarity about where the biggest return on investment is appears central to SWC practice. In addition, being able to maintain "focus on the big prize" (Athlete 11) and ignore myriad potential distractions along the way was identified as critical to success. Athlete 10 commented on this last point:

> So he's, that's just quite special within this sport because you know we really only peak for one event in the year, which is the world championships. We have a number of other events in the meantime but they are not as serious, it's not like [other sport] for instance where you get points for each game so you have to perform at a high level each time. What [name of coach] does very well, he's able to plan the whole year around how to perform at that one event, say the Olympics for instance. And it takes a lot of foresight and patience to get that balance right. And you can see other nations they might perform much better earlier in the year or you know at different times, but they don't really get the one that matters right. And for [name of coach] he is able to see the bigger picture, put together a training programme, put together the plan and how he motivates his athletes and pulls that into that picture. And that's what's able to bring the best out of his guys at the right time. (Athlete 10)

The emphasis placed on future performance markers and the simplification of the inherent complexity of the task led SWC to espouse a long-term view of planning focused totally around the realisation of the coaches' vision. In this planning process, coaches and athletes stressed the vast amount of time dedicated to putting the plan together and the deep levels of thinking that go into it to account for any eventuality and develop "a plan B, C and D" (coach 7). Importantly, the planning described by SWC was action-led and process-driven. In other words, for every set objective, the relevant actions to fulfil such objectives are clearly identified and a process is put in place to complete those actions. The following two quotes illustrate these elements.

> I think I am also able to plot out a career, so I am also able to tell someone to do this and to do that, that your route is not parallel to that [other athlete], and that you are not able to copy that route, is clear, because that is fairly unique, but I think I can provide direction to people and then strongly help them in that direction, yes, I think so. (Coach 7)

> I think you should know your highway [your plan], see always that point there and still be aware, that sometimes you have to go to a by-pass [take a diversion] because of some road work or something you have, it's not that straight every time, but you always know where the motorway is. (Coach 9)

The clarity exhibited in relation to their vision and the subsequent planning process facilitates the development of another fundamental process which SWC pay considered attention to: reviewing and adjusting the plan. Coaches highlighted the need to use high amounts of critical thinking around their own beliefs and actions and to decisively act and change things when something is not working. Acknowledging the need to adjust something "rather than not doing anything about it to protect one's pride" (Coach 2) was seen by both groups as a sign of strength on the part of the coach. In fact, athletes stated that they had a lot of respect for coaches who were able to admit their own mistakes and that, in turn, this supported the development of a culture where mistakes are acknowledged and dealt with quickly and expediently for the benefit of future performance.

Athletes highlighted that one of the most important elements of the review process SWC engaged in revolved around the monitoring of athlete progress and performance. While recognising the "painstaking and stressful

nature" of this process (Athlete 11), they stressed the contribution it made to the creation of a culture of accountability and responsibility. This also acted as a motivating factor for athletes who, due to the close monitoring of performance, felt "training was customised to suit their needs and stage of development" (Athlete 8) and not a one-size fits all. Similarly, this approach allowed athletes to keep track of their progression, thus also enhancing their intrinsic motivation.

People

SWC viewed the selection of competent staff and players who fit their culture as key to success. Factors beyond ability were considered for both groups. Special emphasis was given to the operational fit between the athlete/staff member and the gaps in current provision (i.e., bringing people in on a needs-led basis) and the character fit (i.e., ensuring that regardless of quality, the new team member would not upset the existing dynamic or uphold different beliefs and values to those of the coach). Coach 3 summarised this ethos in the following statement:

> [you need to build a group] in which players are comfortable with their roles and where at least they accept it, not always happily, but with a positive attitude to contribute to the project. A group where beside the legitimate personal and individual aspirations, what's at the forefront of everyone's mind is the team's success.

Once the right people were *on the bus*, careful management was highlighted as vital to ensure everyone could perform to their potential. For staff this meant maintaining a good working relationship, but most importantly, that the allocation of roles is clear, a good fit with their skillset and that they understand the *working ways* of the organisation. Some coaches stressed the need for them to actively engage in the development of their staff, either through direct intervention, or through the allocation of jobs that allowed staff to be stretched and thus grow.

The interviews also offered a view of the SWC as a person who carefully and purposefully set out to foster belief in and around the organisation, club or team. This belief was broken down into three areas:

Believe in ME. SWC try to foster a feeling of trust in the coach's ability amongst the group. The two most frequently identified sources of belief in the coach were the coach's social capital (past as athlete, previous wins) and his/her ability to develop a positive bond with the athlete and/or the team (i.e., personal touch, open and honest communications, integrity, empathy, holistic approach to athlete development, being reliable and emotionally stable). Other sources of belief included the coach's persuasiveness and the capacity of the coach to lead by example (i.e., always prepared and ready, remaining calm under pressure and being able to acknowledge personal mistakes). For example:

> You can't cut that out sometimes [the personal things]. You still have to be flexible when a guy comes to you when you have the most important session of the week and says 'look I have no-one to look after my child today.' You have to have a good compromise. (Coach 8)

> They look up to you, like kids to parents. If you are stressed, they are stressed. If you are calm they are calm. If you are convinced, they are convinced. (Coach 6)

> We set a certain standard, usually first to arrive and last to leave… Generally, I am around all the time, so I'm visible. Sometimes the visibility is more important than the details of what you are doing, so you are just, you are always in the line of vision. I think it is very important. (Coach 13)

Believe in YOU(RSELF). SWC invest time developing athletes' confidence in their own ability and the motivation to continue to strive to improve and win. This does not typically rely on kindness and positive reinforcement alone, but much more in striking an optimal balance between challenge and support that stimulates athlete growth. Belief is developed through close monitoring of performance metrics coupled with decisive and corrective actions when progress halts. Athlete 11 saw it like this:

> he is very perfectionistic, so he really focuses on the details, but he is very good at positive coaching, he does not only say what you are doing wrong, but he says what you are doing well and this combination makes him a champion maker.

Open demonstrations of trust in the athlete's talent, especially in the lead up to competition, focusing on process over results, shared decision-making, and the fostering of increased levels of self-reliance, self-awareness and leadership skills are important for this purpose too. Coach 6 indicated that "particularly before a competition, my job is to get their mind ready to compete, make them believe they can win". Finally, appropriate levels and modes of internal and external competition were also identified as a 'big driver for athlete motivation and success' (Athlete 11).

Believe in US. SWC promote a sense of common belief in the programme and the ability of those in it to achieve its joint goals. Various, and at times contrasting, ways to do this were elicited through the interviews. Some coaches advocated for the development of strong personal relationships with athletes and between them. Coach 4 talked about the importance of "a mountain retreat at the beginning of the year so they can get to know the new players" and "the need to do something special every now and then, a special lunch, change hotel or go for a drink or two". For others, a robust sense of collective discipline around common objectives was paramount. This shared identity included the surrendering of personal egos, clear understanding of and respect for everyone's contribution, and a sharp focus on day-to-day processes and routines with minimal fluctuations (see earlier passage from Coach 3).

Interviewed athletes expressed a view that team cohesion was built around personal connections with coach and teammates, coach discipline, provision of relevant and fresh goals to avoid stagnation, and the handing over of some of the leadership and initiative traditionally reserved for the coaching staff to the playing group. For instance, Athlete 1 said that his coach:

> was very aware that his job is to step in at the right moment and get the team moving. I think that's why he looks for a personal connection with the players beforehand, and it is very important for him to bring the team together as people.

In addition, a number of athletes indicated that, at times, their coach deliberately created instances of "crisis" (Athlete 2), which brought the team together (sometimes even against the coach) and was quite adept at playing "mind-games" (Athlete 1) to keep athletes from becoming complacent.

An additional area of interest in relation to athlete management revolved around the ability of the coach to be able to keep athletes level-headed and minimize mood fluctuations. SWC expressed a perceived need to keep athletes firmly rooted and grounded. This entailed three interrelated items: avoiding complacency, steering athletes away from developing a sense of entitlement, and providing emotional stability. SWC deal with athletes who are celebrities in their own right and are subject to adoration, criticism, and constant scrutiny by sports fans, and the media. The coaches in the sample had established strategies to tear down and rebuild athletes when they felt they were becoming complacent due to success on the field or to the status and comforts afforded to elite performers. SWC were very keen to address all these issues early, explicitly and directly. Coach 8 talked about "ensuring that the players understand that fame and making a bit of money on corporate functions on the back of an Olympic gold medal is ok, but if you don't win the next one that will dry out quite quickly".

Closely linked to this point, some SWC made a conscious effort to protect athletes against the development of a sense of entitlement, which could potentially impact on their performance. They spoke about using strategies to foster a feeling of gratefulness amongst athletes and the realisation that, despite having worked very hard for it, they were very fortunate to be in the position they were, and that they could lose it all very quickly. Athlete 1 explained how Coach 1 would "make me worry for four months about my place in the team for the Olympics, even though he knew I was a definite, just to keep me on my toes". Finally, amongst all the hype and high levels of examination, which surround high performance athletes, SWC expressed the need to find ways to normalise and neutralise what is an unusual, hectic, and pressurised way of life. The coach was seen as a provider of stability and dependability regardless of the inherent oscillations in stresses in a dynamic environment.

Finally, SWC generally agreed that, in the modern era of sport, crucial to success was the coach's ability to manage the high performance entourage (including coaching and support staff, directors, media, agents, athletes' families, etc.). Overall, there was an emphasis on the coach's aptitude to build and manage relationships with every stakeholder and member of the entourage. Role demarcation, performance management and recognition systems, and clear and open communications were rated highly by coaches and athletes. Within this need to manage athletes, staff and entourage, Coach 7 talked about being "selective in my communications and make my world as small as possible to be able to keep good relationships with those that really matter".

Therefore, to create the necessary conditions for success, SWC consistently demonstrated emotional intelligence, underpinned by enhanced self-awareness as shown by the high degree of coherence between the data collected from coaches and their athletes. Coaches reported that high levels of emotional intelligence were necessary to adapt their behaviour to each individual rather than using a one size fits all to relationship building and/or conflict management. In the main, SWC described themselves as collaborative and facilitative, or at least as "benevolent dictators" (Coach, 10) who had to make very hard decisions and were not afraid to do so, yet were always considerate of the impact on athletes. Knowing that the coach always had the best interest of the athlete and/or team at heart helped athletes deal with the harsh realities of high performance sport.

> I also believe that it's very important today to put yourself in the athletes' shoes too. I have a particular way of working too. When I suggest something to athletes, a work exercise, I test it beforehand. You have to always put yourself in the athlete's shoes, for you're likely to mess up if you only take an external perspective. Think that it's easy and in the end it isn't at all. Think that it's difficult when it isn't at all. So it's important to look at things from the athlete's perspective, not necessarily physically, but you can try to picture what the effect is on their emotions. This is important in training. (Coach 14)

> He knows where the bottom line is, he's quite open and he'll hear you out, but you'll more or less finish the conversation with him saying well right look, that's fine, but we just have to get you to do this, we think we're closer, we hope you've got a better understanding, go out and try it. (Athlete 13)

Athletes tended to see the relationship with their coach as much more of a partnership than an autocracy. Some athletes reported this as a departure from previous experiences of coaching and, while still respecting the coach's ultimate decision-making power, stressed that authoritarian approaches were on the decline and would not work going forward.

> He will still point us in the right direction, he will always give us things to work on, like a strategy of things to work on, but he will, to his credit I think, hand over [responsibility] to the athletes. So he would say to me at the Olympics to lead that

> technical aspect with my feelings and how I see fit and we'd come in, it was not like 'I'm the boss', but we would come back in and he would listen to the four very experienced athletes and their opinion. I think other coaches don't have the security to do that. (Athlete 12)

Evolution of the SWC Coach

Athletes were asked to reflect on whether they had seen any changes in their coach's ways of working over the time they had worked together. Three main themes emerged for those athletes who felt their coach had evolved during this period. First, SWC had over the years become more benevolent and less business like. Second, athletes reported how, over time, SWC had become "more flexible" in their planning and actions and less limited by their own self-imposed "expectations and working ways" (Athlete 14). This resulted in an enhanced capacity to navigate the dynamic waters of high performance sport and deal with, and even leverage, the uncertainty and unpredictability of the environment. Finally, a smaller number of athletes spoke about a significant change in the ability of their coach to manage the high performance environment. This included a better understanding of all the components and how they fit together, as well as a greater disposition and "ability to control and influence the environment" (Athlete 13).

Environment

Coaches and athletes indicated that fundamental to sustained success was the development of a 'high performing' culture where everyone in the organisation understood the required behaviours and ways of working that lead to consistent competitive results. SWC described five main pillars to develop and sustain the high performing culture.

First, there was value in espousing and 'enforcing' high expectations and standards to create a self-perpetuating culture of high performance. Athlete 11 described this reminiscing the first time he walked into the training venue: "as soon as you walked in there, you knew how to behave in that environment, the culture was everywhere". A significant part of culture building relies on the fostering of personal responsibility and accountability, and on the culture being led, shared and 'lived' not only by the coach and athletes but also by officials and administrators. Veteran athletes who unequivocally demonstrated these values on a daily basis were deemed pivotal to sustaining the high performing culture throughout the group.

Second, SWC recognised the need to "leave no stone unturned" (Coach 2) in the quest to maximise performance. Finding the right coaching and support staff and athletes that are world-class yet good cultural fits, attention to detail, controlling the controllable, regular efforts to find new elements that may provide an edge over competitors, proactive decision making that puts you "ahead of the game" (Coach 8) and a "constant seeking or manufacturing of opportunities to stretch and improve athletes" were stated as key behaviours (Coach 6).

Third, the development of a challenging training environment was reported as central to sustained performance. The role of healthy, yet "open and fierce internal competition" (Athlete 11) was emphasised. Setting practices that "contain a level of complexity and toughness similar or above that experienced in competition is capital" (Coach 2). SWC also pointed at the need to ensure that once training and competition goals are reached, "new higher goals are immediately set to avoid complacency and generate fresh motivation" (Coach 9).

Fourth, whilst challenging, the environment was seen to require a certain level of "stability and dependability" (Athlete 13) to allow all within it to thrive. This *Greenhouse Effect* requires that key features of the environment such as personnel, resources, schedules, relationships, and the motivational climate remain relatively stable so staff and athletes can concentrate on doing their job to the best of their ability. As previously mentioned, SWC were mindful that building stability and dependability did not interfere with athlete resilience or worse, "create a sense of entitlement detrimental to performance" (Coach 8).

Finally, SWC and their athletes stressed the importance of the coach being able to influence upwards in generating the right conditions for the environment to flourish. SWC deliberately try to impact on the decisions made by those in powerful positions within their governing bodies or clubs and even at the level of the international federation or in some cases, the equipment manufacturers (Coaches 7 and 8).

Comparison With Other Coaches

Up to this point, athletes had simply been asked to describe the way their coaches worked. However, to find the potential lines of demarcation between this very unique sample of SWC and other less successful coaches, athletes were specifically asked to elaborate on what they felt was unique about them. The coach's professional skills like work ethic, his/her credibility and their overall knowledge and skill level were all highlighted. However, athletes tended to place greater emphasis on the inter- and intrapersonal skills (i.e., soft skills) of the coach (e.g., empathy, persuasiveness, open-mindedness, self-awareness).

The coach's ability to be empathic and acknowledge the athlete's 'feelings and concerns beyond sport' (Athlete 7) were underlined. Likewise, the persuasion skills of the SWC were brought to the fore by a number of athletes. SWC seem to use high levels of persuasiveness to build a collaborative environment that is dialogue-based, founded on consensus, and supportive of athletes speaking out, displaying creativity and taking the initiative. A number of athletes expressed how they had struggled with this idea because in the past they had 'always worked under more directive coaches who told them what to do and when to do it' (Athlete 1). It is also recognised that some of the SWC still operated under this paradigm.

Athletes also reported that their coaches, while working from a bespoke operational framework, "tended to be open-minded" (Athlete 8). This translated into a heightened capacity to be flexible and adapt to the needs of the personnel, the situation and the context. This is consistent with the findings of the personality traits of these SWC (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016) and facilitates SWC's thinking in innovative ways and their ability to solve the challenges presented to them in the course of their day-to-day practice.

Finally, the elevated self-awareness of the coach (i.e., their awareness of their actions and their impact, their motives, and their feelings and those of others) was a recurrent theme in many of the athlete interviews. At times this wasn't explicit, yet the athletes' narratives portrayed their coach as possessing an advanced level of self-awareness. For instance, Athlete 10 talked about how their coach "wasn't always nice, but knew exactly when he was and when he wasn't and plays whatever role he thinks is going to get the job done on that day".

The Future of High Performance Coaching

SWC and athletes were also asked to forecast the main developments and challenges high performance coaches would need to be able to deal with in the coming years. Coaches highlighted how "keeping athletes grounded and motivated" (Coach 8), managing "ever larger teams of staff" (Coach 12), fulfilling multiple and varying responsibilities that go beyond the traditional on-field coaching, managing the "socio-economic impact of sport" (Coach 2), and keeping up with and forecasting new knowledge, technology and rules would be fundamental to achieving success in the mid- and long-term. Notwithstanding the above, some coaches warned about a key challenge being not forgetting about "doing the basics of teaching the sport well and managing people effectively" (Coach 7).

Athletes reported that one of the biggest challenges for coaches going forward would be the need to become increasingly athlete-centred (Athlete 1). This referred to getting to know the athlete better as a person, but also to foster player and team empowerment. Again, this seems to suggest that coaching at the high performance level is moving away from a coach-driven power relationship toward a cooperative partnership between athlete and coach and athlete and athlete.

Coping With Pressure and Failure

The IGLA was interested in the SWC's views on dealing with pressure, the threat and reality of failure, and the associated potential for stress in their work. As expected, coaches openly acknowledged that high performance coaching is a very pressurised environment, and that to survive, let alone succeed, in this environment "resilience and perseverance" (Coach 9) were fundamental attributes. SWC were able to clearly articulate their interpretation of pressure and failure. In the main, pressure was understood as inherent to the job of the high performance coach. As such, pressure is to be embraced and, as Coach 2 put it, "count yourself lucky because the day there is no pressure it means you are no longer a contender". Moreover, most coaches highlighted that pressure and high expectation acted as a catalyst for their effort. Again, Coach 2 emphasised that pressure "focuses rather than distracts me".

In relation to dealing with pressure effectively, SWC proposed a number of strategies. First of all, they had learnt to naturally "dissipate ordinary pressure over the years" (Coach 6) and to "normalise the job" and its daily demands (Coach 3). Past experience as an athlete and growth in status as a competent coach had facilitated that process. Coaches also reported trying to "focus more on the process and the journey than the final outcome" (Coach 2). Breaking challenges into smaller steps and tackling one step at a time was the *modus operandi* of the coaches which guaranteed them, as coach 6 reported "a sense of having done all I could to maximise my chances of success and get a certain degree of peace of mind". The need to set realistic expectations to avoid undue pressure and disappointment was also stressed. Finally, whatever the outcome, "taking total responsibility for it and a focus on taking out all valuable lessons" (Coach 2) appeared to be key to dealing with setbacks and losses. Getting quickly "past the personal affront and loss of pride" (Coach 3) provoked by the loss, and replacing it with learning and a plan for the future aided the recovery and healing process.

All coaches, to a greater or lesser degree, reported strategies to buffer the impact of pressure and stress on their own performance and, most importantly, on their physical and mental health. For some it was investing time into a particular hobby, which allowed them to take their mind off the job completely, even if for a short time. The wife of Coach 2 jokingly stated as the interviewer entered their home: "Are you here to interview my Summer or Winter husband; because they are two different people". For other coaches, spending quality time with their families was a top priority. Coach 6 described how family time seemed to have a dual effect: First, it relaxed him because he genuinely enjoyed it. Second, it also gave him added peace of mind to know he was fulfilling his family duties that, admittedly, were regularly challenged due to the time and travel-intensive nature of high performance coaching. In line with the above, 16 of 17 coaches in the sample were married and had dependents. Only one of the married coaches had divorced and remarried. In his own words, "I screwed up my first marriage [because of coaching], but I have taken steps to make sure it doesn't happen with this one" (Coach 9). One coach was single. Finally, all SWC emphasised that they took measures to stay in good physical shape and that this has a positive effect in their ability to deal with the pressures and demands of the job.

The second half of the results section revolves around the personal stories of SWC. These stories relate to their journey to success and the learning opportunities accessed in the process.

The Developmental Pathways of Serial Winning Coaches

Central to supporting those with responsibility to recruit and develop high performance coaches was to gain a deep understanding of the developmental pathway of SWC and what factors played a significant role in shaping it. This task was approached from three different angles. First, coaches were asked to detail their academic and coaching qualifications in the biodemographic questionnaires; they were then asked to indicate, in order of importance, the types of coach development opportunities they had accessed, but also their preferred modes of learning; finally, during the interviews, coaches were asked to elaborate on their journey to success (Figure 2).

Formal Education in the Developmental Journey of Serial Winning Coaches

SWC had, by and large, strong academic backgrounds. Nine coaches held sports-related degrees (i.e., sport science, kinesiology or physical education). One of them held a M.Sc. in Sport Science. Another four coaches had completed bachelor's degrees in unrelated subjects and three coaches had not attended university. One coach did not answer this question. Fifteen coaches held the highest possible coaching qualification for their country. Two coaches did not answer this item. When asked about their formal education during the interviews, SWC overall placed high value on their academic and coaching qualifications. Academic qualifications supported the development of competencies that SWC felt had contributed strongly to their success such as work ethic, critical thinking, planning, and management skills. For those holding sports related degrees, university had provided a very solid foundation from which to build their sport specific knowledge or make sense of the practical knowledge they had gained as athletes. Coaching qualifications were seen as key to SWC development, especially in the early stages of their career, where it had given them foundational knowledge and "mental frameworks" (Coach 3) used to interpret their own practice and accelerate on-the-job learning. A fundamental caveat to the above point however, was the unequivocal affirmation by SWC that formal education, to be effective, needed to be relevant and delivered by credible and capable coach developers. As Coach 6 put it "I hate token coach education; it's pointless".

Serial Winning Coaches' Access to and Preference for Learning Opportunities

The researchers included a section in the biodemographic questionnaire wherein coaches were asked to rank both

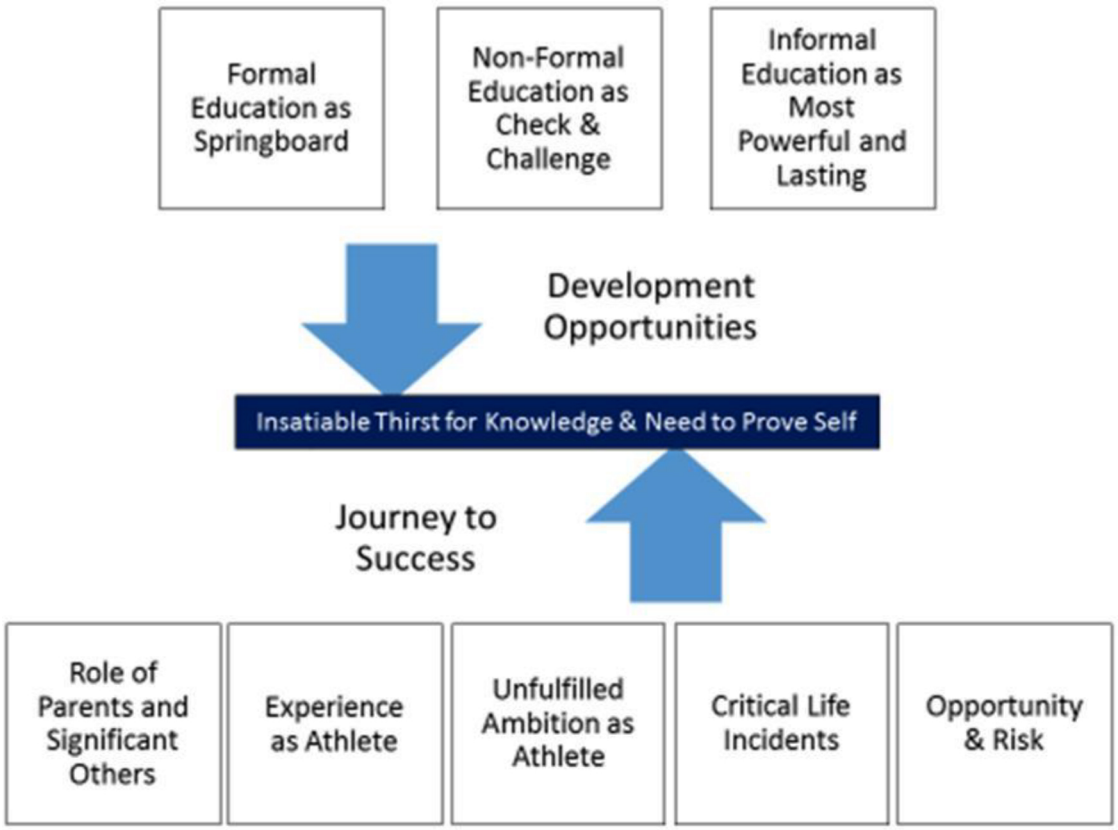

Figure 2 — The developmental pathways of Serial Winning Coaches

their most commonly accessed and their preferred learning opportunities from 1 to 4 in descending order. SWC ranked coaching qualifications, coaching clinics, on-the-job learning and self-study as the most commonly accessed learning opportunities. On the other hand, peer learning was consistently rated as the preferred learning opportunity by SWC followed by coaching qualifications, self-study, self-reflection and on-the-job learning (see Table 2).

Paradoxically, although mentoring did not feature extensively as a preferred learning choice in the results of the biodemographic questionnaire, during the semistructured interviews, SWC identified mentor-like figures who played a large role in their developmental journeys. These mentoring relationships operated along a continuum. For some coaches, it was based on what we have termed *organic mentoring*. Here SWC found themselves in the vicinity of a more experienced coach they admired and respected. No formal relationship or agreement existed, but SWC spend time observing this coach and tried to learn as much as possible from them. For others, a formal mentoring agreement was established whereby a more experienced coach offered a sounding board, asked fundamental questions and provided advice on request. Coaches 4 and 7 made the most of this opportunity by bringing their mentor officially into their coaching staff. Nonetheless, two of the SWC, despite valuing their mentor's counsel, made it clear that retaining decision-making power rather than relying on the mentor, and taking responsibility for their mistakes was central to their development. Coach 7 put it this way: "We argued sometimes, very bad, but I said to him: it has to be my decision, I am head coach and I have to feel like I am responsible for what happens. He didn't like it, but he respected that."

In sum, SWC's educational history and preferences are consistent with their typical personality and motivational profile of being curious and having an insatiable thirst for knowledge, their high degree of conscientiousness, openness, their never-ending quest for personal growth and their unwavering desire to learn and improve (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). This led them to seek additional learning opportunities such as coaching clinics and study visits, and made them avid readers of electronic and hard copy material, especially early in their careers. Nonetheless, SWC deemed a deep level of self-reflection and self-awareness as necessary for any learning to take place. Structured self-reflection was not considered essential, although necessary when dealing with technical and tactical debriefs (i.e., formal meetings with staff and players). Unstructured regular self-reflection was the preferred choice. In this regards, Coach 3 said "you never stop thinking about it when you go home; about the things you could have done better to impact the outcome". This continuous obsession with learning and improvement is underpinned by their acute need to prove themselves competent. All in all, SWC appear to view formal learning as a necessary springboard and compass to guide their early forays into coaching; nonformal learning as an opportunity to be checked and challenged by other coaches' practices; and informal learning through on-the-job learning (including learning from athletes), self-reflection, and interactions with peers and mentors as most powerful and lasting.

Table 2 Serial Winning Coaches Access to and Preference for Learning Opportunities[1]

Development Opportunity	Accessed	Preferred
Coaching Qualifications	1, 3, 3, 3, 1, 1, 1, 4	2, 2, 3, 2, 1, 3
Coaching Clinics	2, 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 4, 2, 3	1,
On-the-job learning	1, 4, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 1	2, 2, 2
Peer Learning: Conversations with other coaches/ Observation and questioning	3, 2, 4, 1	1, 3, 3, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
Self-Study: Reading/DVD	3, 4, 4, 2, 2, 3, 4, 2	1, 2, 2, 4
Self-reflection	1	2, 2, 3, 2
Mentoring	2	
Role models	3	
Experience as Athlete	2	
Athlete Feedback	1	
Writing own Books and DVDs	3	
From Business World	3	2
Watching the sport	3	

Key: coaches stated the 4 types of development opportunities they had accessed most frequently in descending order. As such, even when an opportunity is ranked as a 4, it still denotes a relatively high frequency compared with others that do not feature in the top four for each coach. Similarly, when asked about preferred opportunities, an option rated as 4 can still be considered as seen positively by coaches. Significant importance is attached here to the frequency with which a particular type of learning opportunity features in coaches' top four either as accessed or preferred.

Serial Winning Coaches' Journey to Success

No two coaches' career pathways were the same. In their journey into and through coaching, SWC travelled distinct and bespoke routes. However, amidst this variability, there appeared a number of recurrent features that may serve as reference points for the selection and development of the next generation of high performance coaches.

SWC tended to emphasise the role played by parents, extended family and significant others such as teachers or former coaches in shaping up their character and approach to life and coaching. Being brought up in rural/regional or nonaffluent environments had impacted on some of the coaches' work ethic and desire for success. For others, they placed high value on their parents doing a job that involved helping others such as in teaching, nursing or the armed forces, and claimed that "the teaching and helping gene was in my blood; I had no choice" (Coach 3). Along these lines, the majority of SWC described how, from an early age, they had "always felt a desire to coach" (Coach 4) and how they had, in their school years and emerging sporting careers, been given opportunities to lead their teams as captains. For instance, Coach 6 spoke about how "my PE teacher must have seen something in me as he always had me help in lessons, and I always felt like my job was to be the coach on the field, and I enjoyed that". Similarly, Coach 4 reminisced about how "older coaches used to mock me because I was going to coaching clinics when I was still playing" and how "my teammates always came to me for advice before going to the coach".

A further theme emerging from the interviews relates to the coaches' experiences as athletes. Ten coaches had been international and/or professional athletes themselves, six had competed at regional/national level, while only one of them had no experience in competitive sport. Of the 10 former international athletes, five had won medals at major events, yet only two of them had won gold. All SWC with athletic experience emphasised the role this had played in their development as a coach. For instance, understanding what it takes to compete at this level, being able to put themselves in the shoes of the athlete and the knowledge of their sport and coaching they had accrued during their careers were all highlighted as key factors. However, above all this, a recurrent theme underpinned how SWC viewed their athletic career: unfulfilled ambition and potential. SWC admitted to an underlying feeling of failure and regret in the way their athletic careers had developed and ended which fuelled a burning desire to "make amends as a coach" (Coach 6). At times, this revolved around their own lack of talent to go all the way to the top of their sport, yet in other cases, they felt a sense of injustice as to how the system around them had let them down which fed a hunger to do anything in their power to support their athletes fulfil their own ambitions.

In relation to the above, for six of the coaches, critical life events had coloured their athletic careers (especially their conclusion), pushed them toward coaching and shaped their approach therein. Coach 7, for example, had his one chance of going to the Olympics thwarted by his country boycotting the event, while Coaches 4, 9 and 12 were involved in serious car accidents. Coach 15 stated that growing up as one of the very few females playing the sport and having to endure discrimination and isolation had made her very resolute to show everyone what she was capable of. Finally, coach 14 explained how he declined the opportunity to compete at the Olympics to start a new career outside sport and had never been able to forgive himself until he returned to the sport as a coach.

The final common thread with regards to SWC's journeys to success revolves around the persistent role played by opportunity and risk-taking in the careers of these coaches. Car accidents that steered retiring athletes toward coaching (Coaches 4, 9 & 12), unexpected risk-laden job offers (Coaches 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 & 14), and, for some, a sense of "being in the right place at the right time" (Coaches 3, 4, 10, 11, 14) all had a significant impact. While accepting their share of chance and good luck, SWC were keen to emphasise that when the opportunity arose, they were ready and willing to take the risk associated with it. For many of the coaches, these opportunities facilitated by their experience, success and contacts, translated into very short transitions from athlete to high performance coach. They highlighted the important figure of the mentor as a guide during those uncertain and turbulent early years, and the value of constant self-reflection as they were making mistakes on a daily basis. For some coaches (Coaches 2, 4, 6, 8, 14, 15) these early jobs, although already in high performance sport, were in nations, clubs or programmes with low expectations for success. This afforded the developing coaches the opportunity and time to experiment, make mistakes and learn their trade in relatively low risk yet high responsibility and autonomous positions.

Discussion

The aim of the research was to provide a representative profile of the personalities, practices and developmental journeys of these Serial Winning Coaches to aid recruitment and development of prospective high performance coaches. Within this bigger picture, this paper focused specifically on the practices of SWC and their path to success. Whilst efforts have been made to elicit common themes and general trends, no two coaches from the sample are the same, and it is important to recognise that, perhaps, a large part of their success lies in their individual characteristics. Notwithstanding, the results offer a composite philosophical and operational framework, which guides SWC's practice, and identify key developmental milestones that can contribute to more informed recruitment and development in the future.

SWC and their athletes highlighted four central areas of significance in their work: a well-developed personal

philosophy, a compelling and clear vision of success, the need to pull together the right people and manage them effectively, and the creation of an optimal environment where these people can thrive and thus realise the vision. In their developmental journeys, SWC spoke about the early developmental experiences that significantly influenced their coaching, the discovery of an early desire and aptitude for coaching, their thirst for knowledge and a relentless and purposeful quest for self-improvement and victory. All these elements were supported by a striking ability to maximise chance and opportunity. Through the answers to the specific research questions, however, the study unearthed a number of underlying themes, which seem to have influenced the coaches' developmental journey, as well as their approach to their day-to-day work. These will be the focus of the discussion.

SWC have spent their life in an unrelenting pursuit to enhance human development: their own, their athletes', and anyone's impacting athletes' performance. SWC are fundamental contributors to athlete development and to the coach-athlete-performance relationship (Cushion, 2010; Lyle, 2002; Mallett, 2010) and thus, performers in their own right (Frey, 2007; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, & Chung, 2002; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). As a result, they play a double role in so far as their own development is central to their athletes'. The way SWC approach this dual mission appears to revolve around a key operational principle we have termed *driven benevolence* (DB; Figure 3).

DB can be defined as the purposeful and determined pursuit of excellence. This drive hinges on an enduring and balanced desire to considerately support self and others; DB is based on, and underpinned by, a well-established and coherent personal philosophy that is enacted through genuine care for others while ensuring their optimal development as individuals and as coaches and athletes. A grounded philosophy also provides the orientation, stability, and consistency necessary for effective evaluation and decision-making. As a result, DB affords the coach the cognitive and emotional elasticity needed to considerately, yet proactively, make tough decisions that affect other people (mainly, but not exclusively, athletes) for the benefit of the overall outcome, both in the short- and long-term. Finally, DB protects the coach from the distractions generated by the unpredictable and emotionally-charged elements of the high performance environment. This protective layer fosters the longevity needed to secure repeated success

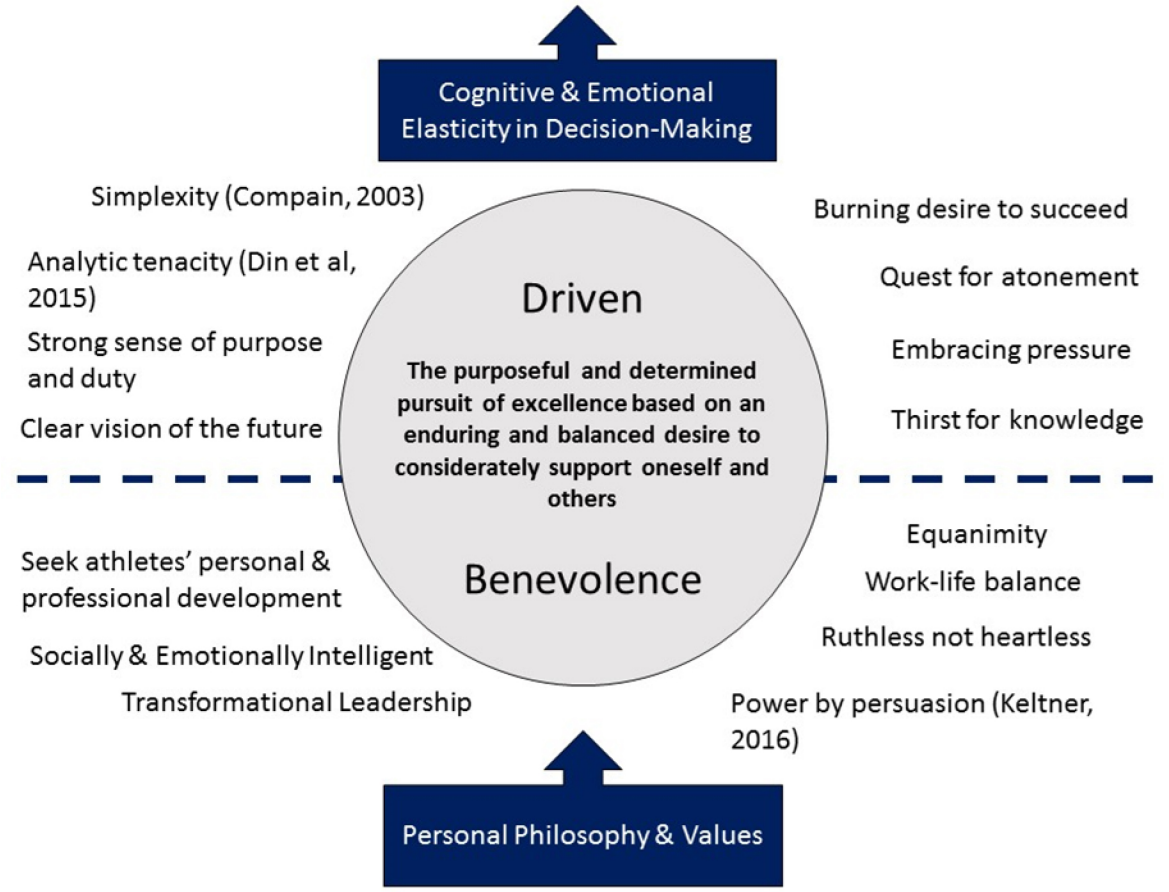

Figure 3 — Driven Benevolence

with successive generations of athletes. We will now explore in more detail how drivenness and benevolence manifest and impact coaches' practices and attitudes.

Drivenness

Drivenness encompasses the purposeful and single-minded pursuit of excellence. Previous research has identified the ability of the high performance coach to articulate a clear vision as central to their success (Din, Paskevich, Gabriele & Werthner 2015; sportscoachUK, 2012; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). This vision allows coaches to engage in a proactive and iterative planning and goal setting process (Côté & Sedgwick, 2003) fuelled by what Din and colleagues (2015) termed as analytic tenacity: 'a relentless engagement in analysis. . . the conscientious pursuit of incremental improvements' (p. 598).

SWC confirmed these findings and offered additional information as to how this takes place. Coaches in the sample consistently engaged in an exercise of 'seeing into the future' aimed at understanding the required elements of performance necessary to succeed. However, the resulting picture can be overwhelmingly complex, and SWC and their athletes emphasised that central to their success is the capacity to 'simplify complexity'. Simplifying complexity is the act of picking out, from myriad options, the key modifications to the way things are currently done that will guarantee the biggest return on investment from the limited resources at the disposal of coach and athlete. This principle echoes 'Simplexity Theory', which "may be defined as the combination of simplicity and complexity within the context of a dynamic relationship between means and ends" (Compain, 2004, p. 129).

Drivenness is also encapsulated by the steadfast sense of purpose and duty expressed by SWC. Concurring with previous research (Erickson, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Rynne & Mallett, 2012), coaches in our sample highlighted athletic experiences as central to their development. However, for SWC, this went beyond the previously reported heightened knowledge of the sport, and afforded leadership opportunities such as captaincies, and the personal kudos associated with being a former elite athlete. SWC described an unremitting personal quest marked by stories of unfulfilled ambitions as an athlete and driven by atonement (Mallett & Coulter, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). This recurrent personal narrative drove SWC to continuously strive for success. These coaches lived their coaching lives perched on a precarious balance between a grounded self-belief in their own ability based on previous achievements and work ethic, and a 'healthy' dose of reasonable self-doubt about whether they are good enough to win again (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). This 'serial insecurity' protected them from complacency and spurred them on to try to win again despite their previous frequent success. For SWC, the past did not matter and they "want to be great this year, not last year" (Coach 2).

Drivenness has an additional benefit for the coach. The high number of potential stressors faced by high performance coaches is well documented (Altfeld, Mallett & Kellman, 2015; Bentzen, Lemyre & Kenttä, 2016; Chroni, Diakaki, Perkos, Hassandra & Schoen, 2013; Frey, 2007; Olusoga et al., 2012, 2014; Thelwell et al., 2008). SWC described pressure and the resultant stress as a fundamental part of the job. Moreover, they indicated that a key to dealing with pressure and stress effectively was to embrace it, relish it and be grateful for the opportunity to "still be in the fight" (Coach 2). Despite their success record, SWC had also experienced defeat and disappointment. However, a strong sense of direction and purpose in both the personal and professional aspects of their practice was identified as crucial in the process of tolerating and overcoming painful losses or failure to achieve the desired goal. The ability to put results in perspective coupled with an enduring sense of responsibility to athlete, programme and even country, allowed SWC to get over the personal loss of pride that follows a defeat and focus on the necessary steps to improve the outcome in the next competition. Supporting aspiring high performance coaches in this process appears paramount.

In addition, this study brought to the fore the need for the coach's vision and mission to be underpinned by a long-standing personal philosophy and world-view. Vallée and Bloom (2005, 2016) underscored the relevance of a coach's philosophy and values in guiding coach behaviour. For SWC, a well-established personal philosophy acted as a reliable navigation device in the changeable terrain of high performance sport. It provided a built-in compass that facilitated course-plotting and decision-making. A coach's philosophy, in this case, acted as a guide that allowed SWC to ensure that their actions and the programme remained within desired humanistic parameters expressed by coaches and athletes: an explicit athlete-centred stance; the espousing of high moral values; and the emphasis on a positive, yet relative, work-life balance.

Benevolence

Directly linked to the coaches' philosophy and values, benevolence describes the centrality of the desire to do good to others in the work of SWC (Mallett & Coulter, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Indeed, these coaches displayed a genuine and caring manner in the way they strived to support athletes not only professionally, but also personally. Kellet (1999), in her study of professional Australian Rugby League coaches, described them as having an honest aspiration to nurture their players as people. Vallée and Bloom (2005) found a similar attitude in successful Canadian college basketball coaches. More recently, Din et al. (2015), examined the behaviours of medal-winning Canadian Olympic coaches and found an equal yearning to treat athletes as people not as commodities. All the above evidence points, therefore,

to the relevance attached by successful high performance coaches to being fully invested in the personal development of their athletes and to seeing them as people first and athletes second. This is not incompatible with the SWC's unwavering yearning to win and succeed. Moreover, SWC's motivational profiles created from their reported strivings (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016) may indicate that, perhaps, a well-adjusted mix of agency (i.e., doing things for their own benefit) and communion (i.e., trying to benefit others) provides an optimal equilibrium that promotes coach and athlete thriving (also see Mallett & Coulter, 2016).

Benevolence also plays a role in the way SWC approached relationships and power. The quality of the coach-athlete relationship has been highlighted as a key factor for performance (Jowett, 2007). In line with previous research (Din et al., 2015; Gavizzi, 2015; Norman & French, 2013), athletes in our sample viewed their coaches as espousing an athlete-centred approach that prioritised the needs of athletes and teams above those of themselves. In comparison with other coaches, SWC were described as highly ethical and trustworthy, emotionally and socially intelligent, compassionate, considerate, and caring, and portrayed as dependable and stable. All of the above contributed to the generation of a climate that created a strong sense of belonging and social identity, and where athletes felt respected, cared for, and generally at ease. For the most part, athletes reported that this environment allowed them to concentrate on the task at hand and to train and perform to the best of their ability. In light of research conducted by Gould and colleagues (2002) indicating that the inability of the coach to connect and build trust with athletes is one of the major reasons for athlete underachievement at the Olympics, healthy and respectful coach-athlete relationship are of paramount importance.

Nonetheless, effective relationship building and maintenance is not only vital during episodic or relatively short-term coach-athlete interactions as it may happen during Olympic games or international competition. During their development phase, or at the beginning of an Olympic cycle, athletes require substantial amounts of time and investment to reach gold-medal performance levels. Likewise, for coaches to achieve repeated success they need to be afforded the opportunity to work with a variety of quality athletes and teams over a prolonged period of time. Therefore, the generation of functional, enduring relationships, and a reliable and stable climate of mutual respect and support seems to be a precondition for sustained success. Coaches' ways of working lead to reputations and these are shared amongst athletes. As Athlete 3 stated, "when you are happy is when you are going to perform better and also improve more". Given a choice, athletes are likely to disengage coaches that fall outside of this paradigm. As postulated by Chan and Mallett (2011), social and emotional intelligence becomes a preeminent requirement for high performance coaches.

An additional indicator of benevolence relates to the preferred leadership style of the coach. SWC and their athletes tended to share a common narrative in this regard, which signalled a preference for an empowering style of coaching based on the sharing of responsibility and decision-making with the athlete. In doing this, coaches aimed to build athlete resourcefulness, self-reliance and motivation. This is consistent with findings from previous research that positioned successful high performance coaches as operating within the parameters of transformational leadership (Din et al., 2015; Kellet, 1999; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Transformational leadership is defined as the development of the followers to higher levels of performance through inspiration and empowerment (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Rather than coercing athletes and staff into compliance, SWC made a concerted effort to subtly persuade them toward their point of view. Although coaches in our sample found themselves in very powerful positions by social structure and organisation (positional or legitimate power; French & Raven, 1959), their approach to leadership appeared more akin to what Keltner (2016) has described as the power paradox. Keltner's research has shown that power is built through other people's perceptions of yourself; i.e., their trust in you will make them receptive to your influence. Power is thus not imposed by the leader, but granted by the followers. This emphasises the importance of 'followership', the willingness to follow the direction and guidance of the leader partly because he/she is viewed as representing the best interests of the athletes (Haslam, Reicher & Plastow, 2011). Keltner's proposition explains and magnifies the value placed by SWC in developing athlete and staff belief in the persona, work and capacity of the coach as a precondition for an adaptive relationship/partnership.

It is however, noteworthy that, while seeking to be empowering and increase the levels of autonomy, responsibility, and motivation of their athletes and staff, coaches acknowledged that final decision-making power rested with them. Decisions were made, where possible, based on consensus and dialogue, but not by committee (Mallett, 2005). SWC made hard decisions aimed to improve performance and outcomes on a daily-basis and were comfortable with being accountable for the consequences of their actions. Athletes accepted this gracefully on the proviso that coaches tended to be considerate on their decisions, cognisant of the impact of these on athletes and clear in their communication strategies. SWC were ruthless, yet not heartless. Along these lines, SWC also stressed that they had no qualms in acting decisively (Din et al., 2015) when an athlete stepped out of line, or when they felt a sense of entitlement or complacency, which undermined their directedness, was taking root in an athlete or programme. In sum, whilst having a preferred balance point around more collaborative and transformational ways of working, SWC are adept at shifting along the leadership spectrum, from more directive to more collaborative attitudes and practices, and from more

transactional to more transformational approaches, to suit the context, situation, people and time-constraints. This cognitive and emotional elasticity allows them to, as highlighted by one of the coaches in the Vallée and Bloom study (2005), behave like a human chameleon.

Benevolence, however, does not stop with the athletes and staff. A novel and significant finding of the current study is the level of compassion and kindness SWC felt toward themselves. Previous research has shown that the high performance environment inherently contains a number of stressors and that coaches operate under considerable pressure (Olusoga, Maynar, Hays & Butt, 2012; Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees & Hutchings, 2008). Coaches had to find strategies to release pressure, positively manage the stress associated with their job, and normalise their very unique working conditions (i.e., constant scrutiny, reliance on results, long hours, time away, etc.). SWC reported and placed high value in having learned to keep a stable state of mind. They tried to avoid extreme emotions, feeling too high during the good times and too low after losses or disappointments. They also described their strategies to achieve this balance. For instance, making time for family, 'switching off' through hobbies and friends, and ensuring they remained in good physical condition were all mentioned. SWC were overall very philosophical and equanimous about their jobs and seemed to have acquired the necessary psycho-social skills to survive and thrive in this harsh environment (Longshore & Sachs, 2015; Olusoga et al., 2014). Remaining long in the game is the first condition to becoming a serial winner.

Limitations and Further Research

Previous research into the practices of expert high performance coaches has had to grapple with the very important issue of sample selection. Specifically, defining expertise and finding suitable criteria for inclusion in the various studies have been major issues. Given that our study was based on success rather than expertise, we did not face this dilemma. However, a number of other limitations can be identified in the study design. For instance, our research sought a retrospective account of the coaches' practices and developmental journeys. Their own success could have tinted their memories to offer a fable-like account of their rise to the top and their day-to-day activities. Likewise, athletes were selected into the study through the recommendation of their coach and the condition that they had to have won a gold medal under the coach. These two elements could have created a bias toward speaking positively about the coach or selected athletes that were naturally in agreement with the coaches' ways of working and that, similar to the coaches, had success-coloured memories of their work together. Furthermore, due to the broad geographical spread and multilingual nature of the coaches and athletes, the authors did not conduct all the interviews. Instead, a network of local interviewers was trained by the authors to conduct the interviews in the coaches' locality and language. All interviews were subsequently translated into English. As a result, there is a potential 'lost in translation effect' that could have impacted on the reliability of some of the interview answers. Finally, despite efforts to obtain a more diverse sample, the majority of the interviewed coaches and athletes were predominantly white, western and male limiting the generalisation power of the findings.

As a result of the findings we propose some ideas for further research. First, conducting a similar study with a more diverse sample to include coaches and athletes from different cultural backgrounds and more female coaches would allow us to determine if the findings of our study are applicable across cultures. Second, to the best of our knowledge, a long-term ethnographic account (i.e., two seasons or more, or a full Olympic cycle) of the work of a Serial Winning Coach has not been conducted. This approach would afford researchers the possibility to observe coaches in their natural habitat and interact with them, and their staff and athletes in real-time. In this way, a more nuanced understanding of their work may emerge. An alternative to this very time-intensive research may be a combined design including time-lapse immersion, stimulated recall, and coach reflective journal analysis, which may provide a more nuanced picture of the work of high performance coaches. Similarly, no study has tracked the career progression of emerging high performance coaches. A longitudinal study following the developmental journey of a number of promising high performance coaches could elicit a map of the personality and experiential profiles that lead to success. Finally, the prominent role played by performance managers and directors in modern professional and Olympic sport has been recently investigated (Arnold, Fletcher & Molineoux, 2012; Arnold, Fletcher & Anderson, 2015; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011) and is potentially a generative field of enquiry in relation to sports coaching. The interaction and reciprocal influence between them and the high performance coach needs to be better understood to maximise its contribution to coach and athlete learning and development, and subsequent programme success.

Conclusions

In the present paper, we aimed to provide a representative profile of the practices and developmental journeys of SWC to aid recruitment and development of prospective high performance coaches (see Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016 for a full list of recommendations). In relation to their practices, four central themes were identified: a well-established philosophy, a compelling and clear vision of success, the need to pull together the right people and manage them effectively, and the creation of an optimal environment where these people can thrive and

realise the vision. With regards to SWC's developmental journeys, the findings highlighted the relevance of an early desire and aptitude to coach, an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and a relentless and purposeful quest for self-improvement and victory. Informing and guiding all of the above, the researchers identified a key operational principle termed as Driven Benevolence: the purposeful and determined pursuit of excellence that hinges on an enduring and balanced desire to considerately support oneself and others.

However, it is important to recognise that no two coaches from the sample were the same, and that, perhaps, a large part of their success lies in their individual characteristics. Notwithstanding this, the results offer a composite philosophical and operational framework, which guides SWC's practice, and identify key developmental milestones, which can contribute to more informed recruitment and development in the future. Most importantly, the outputs of the study offer a compelling account of the key features of the world of high performance sport coaching. These central elements of elite sport coaching, although interpreted and operationalised in distinctive ways by different coaches, represent a powerful reference point from which to understand this very unique environment and the required skills and attitudes of coaches to succeed within it.

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