

ELITE AUSTRALIAN BASKETBALL COACHES' KNOWLEDGE AND
APPLICATION OF MENTAL SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study had three aims: (1) develop an understanding of the baseline mental skills knowledge of elite Australian basketball coaches; (2) describe how this mental skills knowledge is used; and (3) establish where gaps exist in the mental skills knowledge base of elite Australian basketball coaches. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight elite basketball coaches, their responses were transcribed verbatim, and subsequently content analysed. Participant coaches were provided with a *Sport Psychology Related Themes* checklist early in the interview process to stimulate discussion. All three aims of this study were at least, partially achieved. The coaches in this study demonstrated substantial mental skills knowledge of sport leadership, communication and team building, and identified motivation, concentration, decision making, goal setting, confidence, and team cohesion as important mental skills in basketball. Participant coaches, demonstrated less or incomplete knowledge of imagery, self-talk, emotion, arousal and anxiety management. The majority of coaches do not intentionally teach mental skills to their athletes. Nevertheless, some coaches organise training drills to expose their athletes to aspects of decision making, anxiety management, communication, concentration, and leadership. Based on the findings of this research I recommend that greater attention is given to more systematically integrate sport psychology theory and practice into basketball coach training in Australia.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
AIMS OF RESEARCH	4
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	5
CHAPTER 3: METHOD	15
PARTICIPANTS.....	16
PARTICIPANT SELECTION.....	16
MATERIALS.....	17
PROCEDURES	17
<i>Interviews</i>	17
<i>Transcription Process</i>	18
DATA ANALYSIS	19
<i>Transcription Review</i>	19
<i>Data Organisation</i>	20
<i>Data Interpretation</i>	21
RESEARCH TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	22
<i>The Researcher</i>	22
<i>Credibility</i>	23
<i>Transferability</i>	23
<i>Dependability</i>	24
<i>Confirmability</i>	24

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	25
THE COACHES' DEFINITIONS OF MENTAL SKILLS.....	25
KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION OF MENTAL SKILLS	29
<i>Communication</i>	30
<i>Leadership</i>	34
<i>Motivation</i>	39
<i>Concentration</i>	44
<i>Anxiety</i>	46
<i>Decision Making</i>	51
<i>Goal Setting</i>	54
<i>Confidence</i>	58
<i>Team Building and Team Cohesion</i>	61
ADDITIONAL GAPS IN MENTAL SKILLS KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION	63
<i>Assistance from a sport psychologist</i>	65
CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION.....	68
KEY FINDINGS AND BROADER ISSUES.....	69
LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH.....	72
FUTURE RESEARCH.....	72
REFERENCES.....	74
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM	79
APPENDIX B: INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS FORM.....	80
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FORM.....	81
APPENDIX D: SPORT PSYCHOLOGY RELATED THEMES (CHECKLIST).....	82

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The coaching model. Reproduced from Cote et al (1995). 9

DEDICATION

Heartfelt thanks to my wonderful wife Jenny for her love, support, tolerance, personal sacrifice and sage advice always. Undertaking further studies was not Jenny's preferred course of action for her unsettled spouse. Nonetheless, she supported me in every way possible, including watching over and guiding our three wonderful children during those times when I was less able to participate as many fathers might. To Jess, Lachlan and Kieren, you are each so wonderful, and in some small way, I do trust that the pursuit of my dreams can inspire each of you to do the same, preferably a little earlier in your lives than your father. To my deceased sister Annette, your passing reminded me that the time is now, as our lives are too precious to regret what might have been. Fiona, my eldest sister, thanks for always listening, supporting my family through some challenging recent (mis)adventures, and providing the safety net to allow me to start and proceed with my Master's study. Finally, to my beautiful and inspiring sister-in-law Judith, we never expected you to leave us so soon, we miss you dearly, and hopefully I too can become more considerate of others, as you were, with such humility and grace.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Elite coaches possess extensive knowledge of their sport and generally understand the athletic skills required to excel in competitive sport, and strive to impart this knowledge to athletes. Typically, this knowledge relates to, physical attributes, technical skills, and tactics required for an athlete to succeed. The mental aspects of high level sports performance have been widely documented in the sport psychology literature (eg., Morris & Summers, 2004; Williams, 2006). Yet, the extent that knowledge of the requisite mental skills understood by coaches is relatively unknown. In addition and in a related manner, coaches are being challenged to acquire increasing levels of expertise in the sports sciences (e.g., biomechanics, exercise physiology and sport psychology).

Early research in sport psychology tended to be cloistered within the confines of university precincts with a largely theoretical focus. Consequently, there lacked a practical or applied aspect to early sport psychology research. In an article entitled *About Smocks and Jocks*, Martens (1979) encouraged his peers to leave their laboratories (and smocks) and to venture onto the playing fields and into the gymnasiums to observe the real behaviour of and the challenges faced by elite and aspiring athletes (jocks). In so doing, these academics would likely encounter the real world practices of professional and elite coaches. In recognition of a perceived need to adopt a more practical orientation, members of the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity established the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) in 1985. Four years later, the AAASP launched their publication, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*. Sport psychology emerged from the physical education and human movement departments

of universities in the 1970's to being an applied science by the 1980's. The popularity of sport psychology grew (Browne & Mahoney, 1984; Greenspan & Feltz, 1989) especially for elite athletes competing at premier events such as the Olympic Games (eg., May & Brown, 1989; Salmela, 1989; Nideffer, 1989) and World Championships.

In the past 10 years there has been a sharp upswing in the sport psychology literature regarding the psychology of coaching (e.g., Walsh, 2004; Gilbert & Trudel, 2005; Chelladurai & Turner, 2006). Applied sport psychology is focused on “identifying and understanding psychological theories and interventions that can be applied to sport and exercise to enhance the performance and personal growth of athletes” (Williams & Straub, 2006, p. 1). In the applied context, coaches in working with athletes necessarily deal with issues that are fundamentally psychological or mental skills related. The psychological topics that coaches need to appreciate include, the “workhorses in the applied sport psychology canon” (Andersen, 2000, p. ix) comprising, relaxation, imagery, goal setting and self-talk. Coaches and athletes invariably need to appreciate and understand the relationship between performance, well-being and, competitive anxiety, concentration and attention, confidence and communication skills and team harmony (Williams & Straub, 2006). To date, no researchers have investigated the extent that coaches understand and implement mental skills with athletes. Similarly, researchers have not examined potential gaps in the knowledge of elite coaches regarding mental skills, hence the need for the current study.

More specifically, the current research was designed to not only examine the mental skills knowledge of coaches but moreover, how this knowledge is applied

with athletes. Mental skills knowledge was assessed by conducting semi-structured interviews with elite coaches. Coaches were recruited for this research based on a combination of criterion, that is, experience, professional status, age, and gender. The purpose of the interviews was to construct an understanding of themes and issues related to the three research aims (see below).

This present study is significant in several ways. Primarily, the results of this study will inform the broader understanding of how elite coaches acquire and utilise mental skills knowledge. A number of researchers have examined the general knowledge of coaches (Gilbert & Trudel, 2000; Walsh, 2004) while another study was used to explore whether after receiving mental skills training, tennis coaches were able to incorporate this training practically in their regular coaching (Gould, Damarjian, & Medbery, 1999a). It appears, however, that researchers have not directly examined mental skills knowledge of coaches or issues akin to the general aims of the present study. In addressing the aims of this study a practical perspective was unearthed regarding how elite basketball coaches define, prioritise, implement and value mental skills in the context of their overall coaching programs. As a consequence, sport psychology practitioners will have access to material that explores the interface between mental skills and coaches. Consequently, inferences may be drawn regarding the potential role of sport psychology educators in coach training programs regarding acquisition and use of mental skills. The results of the current study could be used with basketball coaches to facilitate a better understanding of the issues that contemporaries grapple with in managing mental skills issues in coaching.

Aims of Research

The general aim of this research was to examine the knowledge base of elite Australian basketball coaches regarding mental skills and how this knowledge is applied. The specific aims of this study were to: (a) develop an understanding of the baseline mental skills knowledge of elite Australian basketball coaches; (b) describe how this mental skills knowledge is used; and (c) establish where gaps exist in the mental skills knowledge base of elite Australian basketball coaches.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is ample empirical evidence to support the argument that mental skills are linked to performance in sport, particularly with elite athletes. For example, there is substantial qualitative data (Orlick & Partington, 1988; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery & Petersen, 1999b) linking the application of learned psychological skills and successful performance of Olympic athletes. According to Weinberg and Williams (2006) the consistency of mental preparation may differentiate elite athletes. Meyers, Whelan and Murphy (1996) provided more definitive support for the link between psychological skills and athletic performance. Their meta-analysis research examined 90 individual studies. Meyers et al. found moderate to large positive effects on athletic performance for psychological interventions including; goal setting, mental rehearsal, anxiety management, cognitive restructuring and attentional focusing.

Implementation and training of psychological skills in sport is frequently managed by trained and accredited sport psychologists. Yet sport psychologists are few in number in comparison to the number of athletes competing at various levels including national and international competition. While sport psychologists are trained to work with athletes of all levels, the reality is that many athletes competing at lower levels may not have access to sport psychologists for a number of reasons. Nonetheless, a broad range of athletes may either wish to, or need to develop mental skills applicable to their sport. Arguably, sport psychologists need to utilise other means to communicate their knowledge and to teach mental skills to reach the broader athletic community.

A potential intermediary person to teach mental skills are sports coaches. Smoll and Smith (1998) explain the central role coaches fulfil in an athlete's development, particularly for young athletes. Most coaches will strive to establish productive learning environments where sports skill acquisition is enhanced and prosocial attitudes and behaviours are encouraged. Smoll and Smith provided practical advice about how these objectives can be implemented through coach training workshops. Similarly, Brewer (2000) believes the role of a coach includes fostering an optimal team environment, practising sport specific psychological skills, teaching general mental skills and undertaking training in sport psychology. Brewer emphasised the need to integrate mental skills into the coach's and athlete's repertoire.

Sport psychologists have not researched or documented the mental skills knowledge of elite coaches. It is only in relatively recent times that sport psychology researchers started to examine the knowledge of coaches, and coaching behaviours. Gilbert and Trudel (2004) examined the frequency of coaching research articles being published in English language journals. They determined that approximately 11%, 29% and 60% of coaching related studies were published in the 1970 - 1981, 1982 - 1989, and 1990 - 2001, periods respectively. Subsequently, data was collated regarding the substance of these coaching studies (i.e., behaviour, cognitions, and characteristics), methodology (quantitative or qualitative), data collection processes used, participant types, and gender distribution. Perhaps, this recent interest in coaching related issues by sport psychologists is long overdue from the context of how central coaches are to the development and success of athletes.

With the surge of recent interest in the psychological aspects of coaching, perhaps the time is right for preliminary research into more specific aspects of coaching behaviours. For example, there is a gap in the sport psychology literature regarding coaches' knowledge of mental skills, how mental skills are implemented with athletes, and gaps in the knowledge base. Gilbert and Trudel (2004) contend that "there is relatively little on coaching knowledge and attitudes" (p. 396). Similarly, Abraham and Collins (1998) observed that "the research base in the area of knowledge assessment in coaching is limited at best" (p. 68) and the tasks and prerequisite knowledge constituting coaching expertise have never been identified (Cote, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russel, 1995). Developing extensive knowledge (Bell, 1997; Tan, 1997) over many years is one fundamental precursor to achieving coaching expertise. Furthermore, according to Abraham and Collins, an elite coach must possess expert knowledge in at least two domains, one specific to coaching, and the second domain relating to their sport. Regarding sport specific knowledge, Woodman (1993) described the physiological, psychological, technical and tactical categories of knowledge a coach must address as they aspire to positively influence the development of athletes. Regardless, "it is often the application of that knowledge and methodology through individual flair that separates the excellent practitioners from the others" (p.6).

Cote et al. (1995) studied the knowledge of expert gymnastic coaches and consequently, proposed a systematic model of expert coach knowledge. This coaching model provides "a conceptual framework for explaining which factors are most important in the coaching process" and can be used to "explain how expert coaches utilize knowledge" (p. 13). The Cote et al. coaching model includes three

primary inputs: (a) the coach's personal characteristics, (b) the athlete's personal characteristics and level of development, and (c) contextual factors, with all inputs feeding into a central coaching process hub. This central hub includes the coach's mental model of the athlete's potential, derived from the coach-athlete interaction in the context of training, organisation and competition. The proposed coaching process effects the coach's outcome goal of developing athletes. The Cote et al. coaching model (see Figure 1) was initially derived from inductive analysis techniques particularly grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The formulation of these input and output components was preceded by a detailed distillation process that organised the qualitative research data, first into a number of meaning units, then to properties, and finally, into various categories.

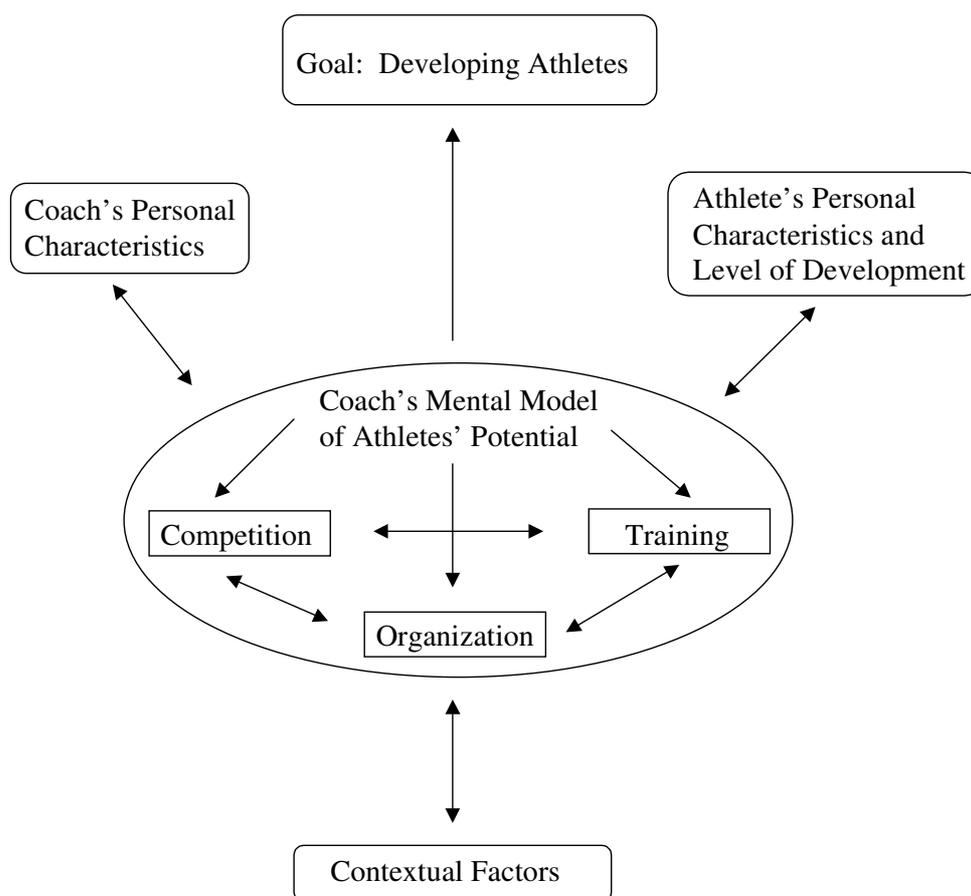


Figure 1. The coaching model. Reproduced from Cote et al (1995).

Gilbert and Trudel (2000) examined the validity of the coaching model (Cote et al, 1995) in a single-case team sport. Their research participant was a male Canadian university ice hockey coach, with extensive experience both as a coach and ice hockey player. The findings of this research provided general support for the six components of the coaching model, with some discrepancies and variations emerging with lower level category data. For example, a new category was identified and labelled as 'Intervention Style' in the Competition component. Furthermore, the participant coach demonstrated a preparedness to encourage non-sport related aspirations for his athletes. This person focused development was a reflection of the combined personal and sporting development of athletes according to this particular

coach. Hence, Gilbert and Trudel asserted that coaches focus on more than athletic prowess and performance. That is, personal development and healthy daily functioning of the athlete is a focus for many coaches too. They also acknowledged the need for additional studies in various sporting contexts to corroborate the validity of the Cote et al. coaching model.

More recently, Walsh (2004) investigated knowledge domains required at the elite level of coaching. Twenty coaches of elite junior athletes that participated in a diverse range of sports were represented, and a gender balance of coaches was maintained. Participant coaches identified four knowledge domains. The first domain was sport discipline knowledge, incorporating sport specific skills, strategies, tactics and sport science. The second domain was sport pedagogy knowledge, inclusive of planning and organisation, the learning environment, and understanding gender differences. The third domain, contextual knowledge relates to the internal and external environment that influences coach decision-making. Personal knowledge was the fourth domain and comprised knowledge of self, including self-confidence and self-awareness. Walsh has identified the knowledge required for individuals to develop as expert coaches. This knowledge is consistent with and adds to the coaching process described in the Cote et al. (1995) coaching model. The Walsh study represents a recent example of the trend toward examining and deconstructing the many specific aspects of coach knowledge.

The acquisition of appropriate and extensive knowledge is a fundamental element for expert coaching (Cote et al, 1995; Bell, 1997; Tan, 1997). Yet, as Cote et al. suggest, coaches exist to assist athletes, not simply to acquire knowledge. Cote et al. explained through their coaching model how a coach contributes to an athlete's

competence and indirectly, to positive performance outcomes. The athlete must be taught how to apply these competencies in their pursuit of excellence (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Hence, the application of knowledge by expert coaches (Woodman, 1993) is essential to achieving exceptional athletic performance.

The Olympic Games is an opportunity for elite athletes to demonstrate exceptional performance. A study by Gould et al. (1999b) is particularly salient as a range of factors were examined associated with success levels of teams competing in the 1996 Olympic Games. The aim was to analyse whether mental skill strategies, and other factors including physical, social or environmental effected the performance of these Olympic athletes. Eight US Olympic teams participated with four of these teams meeting or exceeding their pre-competition expectations and four teams failing to achieve their pre-competition expectations. Focus group interviews were conducted with two to four athletes from each team, and each team's coach being interviewed separately. Major factors that were perceived to facilitate positive outcomes for successful teams included; team-based residency training programs prior to competition, crowd support, support of family and friends, mental preparation, focus and commitment. The major factors noted by less successful teams as explanations for their below expected performance, included; planning problems, team cohesion concerns, lack of experience, travel problems, coach issues, and compromised focus and commitment. While these results have use, it is worth noting the retrospective nature of this research and potential vulnerability to bias through either negative or positive recall, depending on the results achieved. Furthermore, there are many reasons to explain athletic performance at the Olympic Games, yet this study was primarily focused on mental aspects only.

There are a number of published articles in the sport psychology literature associated with coaching and teaching of mental skills. For example, Gardner (1995) discusses the usual role of a sport psychologist within a team environment as including establishing positive relationships with athletes, coaching staff, sport medicine professionals, and team management. In these circumstances the sport psychologist provides mental skills training to the athletes, with the approval of the athletes' head coach. Gordon (1990) also emphasised the critical need for a strong working relationship between the mental skills consultant and the coach, to facilitate the creation of a positive environment where relevant mental skills can be learned. A different model was used by Brewer (2000) in describing how as a coach he was able to embed the delivery of sport psychology skills as a routine part of physical practice, and achieve awareness and retention of these skills. Yet, Brewer is a trained sport psychologist and, thus would possess psychological skills knowledge far beyond the baseline knowledge of most coaches. Nevertheless, Gallagher (1999) confirmed that the majority of US collegiate swimming coaches he studied implemented psychological skills training with their athletes. These coaches conducted psychological skills training on average every week and training included; goal setting, relaxation, arousal regulation, imagery, self-talk, concentration, and motivation.

Some coaches are introduced to the theory and practices of mental skills yet fail to actively impart this knowledge to their athletes. This was apparent when the Gould et al. (1999a) study consulted with coaches of elite junior tennis players in the United States. They reported that many of these coaches did not use the mental skills training information provided to them. Gould et al. suggested these coaches needed

an improved understanding of the mental skills content and guidance to increase their confidence to teach mental skills. Perhaps these tennis coaches did not perceive the teaching of mental skills as a priority for their junior athletes. Chelladurai and Doherty (1998) have questioned the allocation of time for psychological skills training and suggested that some coaches may avoid mental skills training because of their lack of knowledge and confidence in implementing these skills with athletes. Coaches may need additional opportunities to learn techniques to teach mental skills.

Other sport psychology researchers have detailed their mental skills work with coaches and their athletes, across various sports. Namchai (1998) worked with a number of Thai coaches and tutored them in a range of applied techniques including goal setting, stress, anxiety and arousal management, relaxation, imagery, confidence, and attention and concentration. Smoll and Smith (1998) presented a detailed description of a training program for coaches and emphasised the value of establishing a positive learning environment where the range of athletic competencies, including mental skills, can be acquired, practised and mastered. Despite a recent increased interest in the academic study of coaching (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004), there remains a dearth of research examining the breadth and depth of coaches' knowledge of mental skills, and how they apply this knowledge with athletes. The link between knowledge and practice (e.g., scientist-practitioner model) is regularly acknowledged in the sport psychology literature, with one informing the other. Further, it is apparent from the many studies cited by Gilbert and Trudel that coaches possess a great deal of knowledge. Quite possibly, coaches know much more than they can tell (Polanyi, 1967). Nonetheless, the extent of coaches' mental skills

knowledge and how this is utilised with athletes has been largely ignored by sport psychology researchers to date. Accordingly, opportunities exist to more fully investigate and address these knowledge deficits.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Creswell (1998) suggested that qualitative research is undertaken using one of five broad methodologies. These methodologies are biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. More recently, Fassinger (2005) reviewed grounded theory (GT) methodology in some detail. Fassinger asserted that GT “holds as its core tenet the construction of theory out of lived experiences of participants, and as such, it integrates theory and practice in ways that few other approaches can boast, constituting a methodological exemplar of the scientist-practitioner model” (p. 165). The techniques of GT appeared the most appropriate for this study. Other methodologies were rejected for various reasons: biography has an individual focus whereas I was interested in a collective voice for the current study; phenomenology is concerned with the everyday lived experience of a group of people and hence is more appropriate for a broad perspective; ethnography is best suited to investigations that have a cultural focus, finally, case study is a holistic and context sensitive (Patton, 2002) approach, and while being a potentially useful method to examine my central research questions, its applicability is more appropriate when studying an individual rather than a group.

The scope of this study, as characterised by the aims, was limited to describing coaches’ knowledge and activities regarding mental skills. The limitations of a minor thesis required the scope to be circumscribed. Single interviews with a small number of coaches precluded the pursuit of a more systematic and detailed investigation. Accordingly, this research was an exploratory study only; no objectives were set to develop discrete theories although various themes have been elicited. The methodology used in this study is, therefore, best described as

exploratory content analyses, nonetheless, GT techniques were used, such as, identifying appropriate participants (purposeful sampling) and fine tuning interview questions (theoretical sensitivity). Furthermore, the basic analytical strategies of GT such as open (label, categorise and notate) and axial (establishing connections between categories) coding were used to organise and analyse the data collected. More generally, the analytic induction method was used, to create explanations from the data and allow “ideas to emerge from the data as they are collected” (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1996, p. 248).

Participants

Eight elite Australian-based basketball coaches participated in this study, consisting of six males and two females. For the purposes of this study, participants were considered elite coaches if their teams had competed at the international or national level, or competed in one of Australia’s professional leagues. These professional leagues include the men’s National Basketball League, the Women’s National Basketball League or competitions associated with the second tier Australian Basketball Association. The age range of the participants spanned approximately 40 years, while years of coaching experience ranged between 14 - 40 years. With one exception, all coaches played competitive junior and senior basketball. Several coaches played at the elite (international or national) or sub-elite (semi-professional) representative level.

Participant Selection

A list of potential participant coaches was compiled based on the selection criteria noted above. Prospective coaches were contacted via e-mail or administrative personnel at the relevant organisation. An “Information for Participants” document

(see Appendix B) was provided to each of these potential participants at this recruitment stage. Of the 18 coaches sent information about the proposed study, eight coaches agreed to participate. Once coaches provisionally agreed to participate in this study, a covering letter was sent to each, including a consent form. Interview dates and locations were then confirmed.

Materials

Initial documentation provided to each coach included a cover letter, a participant's information document and a consent form. Interview materials included a one-page interview guide (see Appendix C) and a checklist of "Sport Psychology Related Themes" (see Appendix D). An audio-tape recorder was used and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Word processing files created were exported into a Microsoft Access™ relational database for subsequent analysis.

Procedures

Interviews

Interviews were the primary and exclusive means of data collection used in this study. All interviews were arranged at a time and location as mutually agreed. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and ranged in length from 60 to 90 minutes. In the first instance, informed consent was sought from each participant. Next, a brief overview of the interview process was outlined and initial participant questions answered. The interview process started with rapport building questions to explore the coach's basketball playing and coaching background, including why they chose to pursue coaching. Thereafter, each coach was asked to explain their understanding of the term mental skills and how mental skills are important in basketball. Almost all the coaches responded tentatively and had considerable

difficulty in providing fluid or informative views of mental skills. My supervisor and I had anticipated that many participant coaches would struggle to respond in a fluent and conversant manner. Accordingly, the Sport Psychology Related Themes checklist sheet (see Appendix D for details) was presented to each coach to examine for two minutes. By presenting the informants with the checklist, the subsequent conversation was energised and coaches were able to quickly identify specific mental skill themes to pursue. Thus, the substantive part of the interview was, therefore, focused on those topics identified from the checklist as being of significance to each coach. Additional probing questions were used to gain further understanding of each coach's knowledge of mental skills and how they structure training and game day in relation to mental skills. Finally, several structured questions were included to elicit the coach's knowledge and practical approaches to particular issues including; competition anxiety, dealing with losses and injury, poor performance due to psychological reasons, dealing with negative mindsets, sustaining success, and maintaining team cohesion. At the conclusion of each interview, the coach was given the opportunity to add further comments they believed were relevant.

Transcription Process

Every interview was transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word™. Content accuracy was verified with proof reading first and then checked by listening to the audio tape in conjunction with the transcription. Corrections were made as required. In addition to reviewing each transcript with my thesis supervisor, a copy of the transcript from their interview was sent to coaches for member checking.

Data Analysis

The intention was to review and organise the data into clusters of meaningful units for subsequent interpretation. This organisational approach was consistent with the epistemological orientation of constructionism, where “truth, or meaning, come into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). The constructionist approach differs substantially from the traditional scientific method linked to objectivism where the truth is embedded in “meaningful entities independently of consciousness and experience” (Crotty, 1998, p. 5). The basic principles of the constructionist method as represented in grounded theory were used, whereby the analysis of data can produce meaningful themes. This initial grounded theory data management method included content analysis, in terms of identifying and coding themes derived from data, and establishing relationships between these themes.

Transcription Review

After the completion of the first two interviews, my supervisor and I reviewed the transcript and the related interview process to ensure that relevant information was being elicited. A similar review also took place after the completion of the next three interviews and it was then agreed that I would proceed with the remaining three interviews. Consistent with the principles of grounded theory, the constant comparative method of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was applied throughout as transcripts from each interview were examined. In due course, all transcripts were coded, analysed and reviewed in specific detail.

Data Organisation

All eight interviews were initially stored as verbatim records of each session. The first step in preparing data for analysis was to convert paragraphs from each transcript file into a table and use extra columns to allow tags to be inserted. These additional tags included a coach ID (identifier) number (eg., 1 to 8), a coach or interviewer tag, a line number tag and an initial topic tag summarising the substance of that paragraph (eg., “meaning of mental skills”, “anxiety”, “confidence”, etc). The next step was to sort data by removing all interviewer text, check spelling, and consolidate as one data file to facilitate further data organisation. Paragraphs were split and separately tagged, when a paragraph represented data relating to more than one discrete topic. Finally, a new column was added to the consolidated data set, whereby a brief and paraphrased summary was included for every tagged paragraph.

The data was then imported into a Microsoft Access™ relational database. Microsoft Access™ enables the consolidation of information and enables the data to be examined in numerous ways. For example, raw data relating to a specific topic can be displayed for each coach, all data for each coach can be displayed by topic, or all summary information for each topic or by individual coach can be presented. Data can also be searched with queries and different reports and multiple views can be generated. Nevertheless, further data organisation was required to facilitate additional analysis. An inventory of key mental skills themes was identified from the content tagged by topic. This included consolidation of topics into discrete themes (e.g., the topics of “awareness”, “attention”, “managing distractions” and “focus” was consolidated under the higher order theme of “concentration”; similarly, content stored under the topic of “desire” was included under the theme of “motivation”).

Finally, every transcript was perused and relevant transcribed text was cut and pasted and included in a new table accompanied by the new designated theme tag. Cross-references to coaches were retained in this new data table for audit purposes. This new table of data was created to allow the clustering of related topics as higher order themes, to allow data interpretation to proceed in an integrated manner and to simplify the on-going constant comparative analysis required.

Data Interpretation

Data was interpreted with reference to the research aims of this study. Specifically, the data recorded as mental skills themes represented the collective mental skills knowledge base of the participants. Similarly, this data set contained the coaches' conversations regarding how they applied their mental skills knowledge with teams or athletes. Gaps in this mental skills knowledge base were inferred in three primary ways. Key mental skills not discussed by a coach (e.g., imagery or arousal management) indicated a potential gap in their knowledge base. Second, some coaches self-disclosed their lack of mental skills knowledge in relation to specific topics. Finally, gaps were highlighted where I perceived limited conceptual knowledge of key mental skills, or a flawed or compromised application of these same mental skills in practice.

Data interpretation started in the interviews, whereby probing questions were frequently used to “drill-down” for more information. As data was subsequently organised in the database, interpretation continued as topics were first identified, related text assembled, and themes established. Finally, data included and acknowledgments articulated in this thesis reflect my interpretations of the most important aspects of the data.

Research Trustworthiness

Morrow (2005) refers to the importance of trustworthiness in qualitative research in relation to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Morrow compared these concepts to corresponding quantitative terms such as internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, respectively. These qualitative research trustworthiness factors are discussed below. Furthermore, Morrow emphasises the need for the researcher to make “one’s implicit assumptions and biases overt to self and others” and “this is particularly important when the interviewer is an ‘insider’ with respect to the culture being investigated or when he or she is very familiar with the phenomenon of inquiry” (p. 254). Accordingly, I provide details below regarding myself as the researcher and to provide a context to explain my interests and involvement in this study.

The Researcher

I have chosen basketball coaching as my research context partly because of my personal experience and passion for basketball coaching where I possess substantial knowledge. I would thus, describe myself as a basketball insider. As a graduate psychologist, I plan to work with basketball players and coaches, thus this research should also inform future work. Furthermore, in my future professional activities, I plan to pursue opportunities by integrating performance psychology skills into management, teaching, and coaching disciplines. Accordingly, the insight gained in this thesis may complement and inform other aspirations. Finally, I am 46 years of age, I have worked for many years in large organisations, and I believe my life experience and maturity proved advantageous as I interacted with these highly credentialed coaches.

Credibility

Patton (2002) suggests that the credibility of qualitative research depends on three distinct and related elements; rigorous method, the credibility of the researcher, and a philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry. The method used in the present study was consistent and to an extent standardised for each of the eight interviews, all audio data was transcribed, and later, organised and analysed as a whole. Efforts were made to identify the convergent and divergent ideas of each respective coach, to do “justice to the integrity of unique cases” (p. 546). Therefore, for every salient theme identified, the related narrative from each coach was clustered in the database for subsequent analysis. Given my background in basketball including coaching, I was able to understand jargon and basketball terms related to contexts described by the coaches. Nevertheless, my competence as a researcher and interviewer was less definitive and was largely based on my recent academic training. Taking a qualitative inquiry perspective was attractive given my desire to explore basketball coaches’ knowledge.

Transferability

Transferability “refers to the extent to which the reader is able to generalize the findings of the study to his or her own context” (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). I do not assert that this study’s findings will necessarily generalise to other settings, although I would expect a degree of generalisability across basketball coaching contexts. This study provides a window into the knowledge that elite Australian basketball coaches possess of mental skills and use of this knowledge in their coaching. I believe the sample of coaches interviewed is a fairly representative group of elite Australian basketball coaches. The findings are likely to be of interest to the coach-participants

specifically and broadly to the Australian basketball coaching community.

These findings are probably of some general interest to sport psychologists and students in training to become sport psychologists.

Dependability

Dependability is associated with the fundamental principle that “the way in which a study is conducted should be consistent across time, researchers and analysis techniques” (Gasson, 2004, p. 94). A competent researcher could repeat the data collection process using the interview materials developed. Similarly, the data analysis process could be repeated in accordance with the method described above. All interviews in this study were conducted in a relatively consistent way, with regard to procedure and content.

Confirmability

Confirmability “is based on the acknowledgment that research is never objective” (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). “There is no value-free science” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 4). Nonetheless, the findings of a study “should represent, as far as (humanly) possible, the situation being researched rather than the beliefs, pet theories, or biases of the researcher” (Gasson, 2004, p. 93). I have tried to achieve a degree of separation between participant data and my thoughts, preconceptions, and biases in the findings presented below. Findings are presented first as participant quotations or coaches’ paraphrased conversations, followed by interpretations of that data. This approach allows the reader to distinguish between the meaning inherent in the data collected, and my interpretation of that same data.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three sections are presented below in this combined Results and Discussion chapter. The first section includes data regarding participant coaches' definition of mental skills. Coaches provided their thoughts regarding the meaning of mental skills, without prompting. The second section details the coaches' responses after they had examined the Sport Psychology Related Themes checklist (see Appendix D). This second section includes data pertaining to the coaches' knowledge and application of mental skills in their coaching. Further, this second section presents and discusses key themes such as, communication, leadership, motivation, concentration, anxiety, decision making, goal setting, confidence, team building and team cohesion. Data is presented for each theme in terms of coaches' knowledge, and application of the theme, accompanied by my interpretations. My interpretations include discussion of potential gaps in both knowledge and application by coaches. The third section is used to describe additional gaps in the knowledge base of these coaches. Many of these participant coaches self-disclosed about mental skills they were less familiar with.

The Coaches' Definitions of Mental Skills

“What does the term *mental skills* mean to you” was the first research question asked in each interview with participant coaches. Despite receiving the “Information for Participants Form” (see Appendix B) already, most of these coaches struggled to define the term *mental skills*, succinctly or with conviction. Nevertheless, each coach provided their perspective of what the term mental skills meant to them. Collectively, these coaches demonstrated substantial knowledge about mental skills yet some were not able to articulate this knowledge in convincing

ways. This gap between what coaches knew and what they could explain was apparent throughout this study. The coaches in this study generally emphasised cognitive aspects in their attempts to define *mental skills*. For example, one coach summarised mental skills as being able “to approach the game in a thoughtful way”. Other coaches described mental skills as “understanding and being able to interpret the game”, having the ability “to put in place something you’ve learnt before” or simply, “being able to run the plays”. Further cognitive features of mental skills were described as “a knowledge of the fundamentals of the game, where the priorities are, who’s the catalyst to make things happen” and the capacity to recognise “all elements that you need to be conscious of”. Similarly, another coach explained how athletes are encouraged “to think...to...help them understand what they’re trying to achieve” while another asserted that “to learn fundamental skills you need the mental skills to do that”. Essentially, these perceptions of mental skills were vague and superficial and largely amounted to descriptions of the tactical aspects of playing basketball.

Focus, concentration, and coping with distractions, were other common topics identified as indicative of mental skills. Athletes needed to be “mentally prepared” and to be aware that their opponents are “out there to disrupt what you want to do”. Athletes need to be “very focused on what they are doing” and “focused on the task”, and thus, “able to perform in those situations”. One coach expected the athletes “to have the ability to block things out” and when “things aren’t going your way....be able to switch off that”. This coaching group thus, emphasised concentration as a primary exemplar of a mental skill among elite athletes. This understanding of concentration as a mental skill in the basketball context is most

likely consistent with how sport psychologists would regard the aforementioned quotes. Accordingly, concentration was a mental skill that the majority of coaches identified with and were able to link to basketball coaching. Some coaches alluded to other aspects of psychological functioning, where emotion and overt behaviour interact with cognitive processes. Being able to cope with and adapt to pressure in sport was one example discussed. One coach asserted that players are required to “adjust to the climate of the game, the emotions, the physicality, the environment”, if they are to “cope with the pressures that are associated with high level sport”. Athletes are regularly challenged to deal with competitive pressures. A coach explains that to succeed in these circumstances, an athlete must “be able to stay poised and play with a lot of composure”, and as they execute their competition routines, “do it calmly”. The best athletes need “to be able to rectify that situation you may find yourself” in, to overcome, and ultimately succeed. Coping was one mental skill discussed by several coaches only, and not mentioned by others. Clearly, not all coaches recognise, value or emphasise the same aspects of mental skills.

Mental skills may also include knowledge that can be used to optimise the interactions between coaches and athletes, and among athletes. For example, one coach considered mental skills in terms of “an ability to understand the players” and to “understand their personalities”. Perhaps some players “may not be as stable away from the game as others”. This acknowledgment suggested that coaches with reasonable skill at recognising the various personality traits among members of their team might benefit, as they work to establish and maintain a coherent group. To succeed in any elite sporting arena, athletes are expected to have the “mental

discipline...to play this game” and if that game is a team sport, “they’ve got to stick together” if they are to achieve their collective best. As a coach better understands their athletes, they become more able to implement flexible practices and tactics that complement the individual and collective qualities of the players on their team. This approach is consistent with another participant coach who advocated effective relationships with their players as predictive of success, and behaved accordingly. Yet not all coaches chose to discuss mental skills in such terms.

In this study I deliberately used the term “mental skills” in preference to the term “psychological skills”. My supervisor and I believed that the coaches included in this study would more readily relate to the mental skills label. Despite this, few of the coaches in this study described mental skills in a manner akin to how sport psychologists would. Sport psychologists themselves appear to understand the term “mental skills” in different ways. Surprisingly, the sport psychology literature does not include a universally agreed definition of mental skills. An understanding of what constitutes mental skills can only really be inferred from the many published papers that describe the type of work sport psychologists carry out in a range of sport settings (e.g., Botterill, 1990, May and Brown, 1989). Mahoney, Gabriel and Perkins (1987) developed a scale *Psychological Skills Inventory for Sports* (PSIS) that measured a number of psychological skills used by athletes. The psychological skills measured included anxiety management, concentration, self-confidence, motivation, mental preparation, and team emphasis. Vealey (1988) referred to psychological skills as including arousal management, attention control, decision making, goal setting, positive self-talk, stress management, and time management. More recently, the *Ottawa Mental Skill Assessment Tool* (Durand-Bush, Salmela & Green-Demers,

2001) was developed to measure how athletes use goal setting, stress reactions, fear control, relaxation, activation, focusing, imagery, mental practice, mental planning, confidence and commitment. These various measurements demonstrate a number of components that constitute fundamental mental skills. The coaches in this study acknowledged some of these key psychological skills when asked to define mental skills. Most of these topics, however, were not identified until they were explicitly presented to coaches during their interview. Drawing conclusions based solely on the data collected in response to the first interview question is premature. Nonetheless, the relative vagueness of these coaches' attempts to define mental skills indicates substantial gaps in knowledge and a fundamental lack of understanding what constitutes mental skills.

Knowledge and Application of Mental Skills

The presentation of the Sport Psychology Related Themes checklist sheet to each coach proved to be pivotal in virtually all the interviews. Many of these participant coaches appeared relieved as they perused this checklist of familiar topics. From this point interviews gathered momentum, as interview participants choose sub-topics for discussion. Thus, the focus of the interview immediately shifted to mental skill topics of most interest to each coach. In subsequent data analysis, the various mental skill topics discussed by each of the coaches were distilled into key mental skill themes. As such, the coaches in this study identified communication, leadership, motivation, concentration, decision making, goal setting, confidence, and team building and cohesion as important mental skill themes in their coaching.

The results of the participant coaches' knowledge and application of key mental skill themes are presented below. First, a short introduction is provided to summarise the relevant aspects of the coaches' data. Some data is presented in this introduction, as appropriate. Second, the core data is presented, including representative quotations. Third, I acknowledge and discuss gaps in this knowledge base, as a consequence of my interpretations of the data. Throughout, I have embedded discussion of issues deriving from the data.

Communication

Communication was a predominant mental skill discussed by all coaches in this study. Communication serves multiple purposes including; transmission of the needs of the coach to each athlete, the management and coordination of team skills, maintaining energy and intensity within the team, and comprehension in relation to listening. Coaches acknowledge both verbal and non-verbal communication types, and the roles of each. Despite this, a number of communication considerations were not discussed by these coaches, including the role of trust and respect, the effects of emotion, and how individual differences among athletes may influence positive communication outcomes.

All eight coaches emphasised the importance of effective communication. For each coach, it is an integral part of their basketball programs. It is "the key to how we all succeed in life", how you "sell your philosophies to your players", and these skills "become very important because they can have a profound influence on the players' attitudes to the game, to the coach, to the team". Communication is the "key to any good organisation and if you don't have that then things are certainly

going to start to deteriorate”. These coaches have highlighted

communication as a fundamental skill required by all people, not just athletes.

The coaches in this study expressed several views regarding the primary purpose of communication. For one coach, there is the need to “always harp on ... the things we want to emphasise ... and on a consistent basis, so we get data into their brains and it becomes one of their habits”. Similarly, “communication is about did they understand it, has my communication got through to them....have they tried to put it into practice...” and if “there was a breakdown in that communication ... was it my delivery or his perception of it...” Another coach explains from the athlete’s perspective, “they have to talk between themselves otherwise they’ll crash into each other” while running plays or practising. Team cohesion is dependent on this talk. Furthermore, in terms of modifying the mood or raising arousal among a playing group, it was asserted by one coach that “you can create intensity through noise more so than you can through physical intensity”. At the coach-athlete interaction level, one coach values the need for superior listening skills, so you “listen and you take on board other people’s opinions, don’t rush to evaluate them, and you get back to that person with a result or an outcome”. These coaches have highlighted the dynamic aspects of communication as a fundamental aspect of learning, team cohesion, and the positive management of relationships with athletes.

A number of these coaches acknowledged different mediums of communication, including verbal and non-verbal (described as “body language” or “physical”) communication. One coach’s training sessions and break-down drills take into account that “some people prefer to see things on the floor, some people prefer to read things, some people prefer to watch”. Most coaches actively present

and communicate information through video clips as part of their competition preparation while one coach uses cue words to communicate discrete concepts or plays during games when time efficiency is critical. Communication can be used to condition players to observe and pay attention to the coach's instructions, for example, so that they "know in front of everybody that they were the particular one that let the group down" and this "makes them accountable" in the future. For accountability purposes you can "encourage them ... reinforce what they've done...(and) make a note of it in front of the whole group". There is also the aspect of the coach being "in a position of power" where "they know that as soon as my voice is raised that it's time to take (pay) attention". These coaches use several means of applying communication skills to achieve constructive performance outcomes. Hence, the diversity and complexity of communication perhaps warrants dedicated research, as a specific mental skill with wide ranging implications in coaching.

In this study, the communication styles used appear to serve the motives of the coach, as they seek to implement their codes of conduct, game-plans and management of team dynamics. These coaches appeared to use communication as the means to either successfully deliver information to their athletes or to manage the athletes' behaviour. Conversely, the interviews with coaches elicited no evidence that generic communication skills are intentionally taught to their athletes in explicit and structured ways. Rather than each coach recognising the need to improve the communication skills of their athletes, as they might with physical skills such as agility, shooting baskets, and playing one-on-one defence, these coaches tend to perceive communication skills as attributes that support their focus on outcomes.

Nevertheless, most coaches are time constrained and not strategically integrating the teaching of communication skills into routine physical training is understandable. Furthermore, the data from the present study indicated a predominant “coach talk – player listen” culture among coaches. Perhaps this *top-down* communication style may be the most effective strategy in a team environment, where the coach controls the type, the content, and the direction of communication. Nonetheless, knowing whether the teaching of communication skills for its own sake to athletes would deliver enhanced performance outcomes is a moot point. The more salient point is whether this group of coaches has contemplated that prospect.

Communication appeared to be a “safe” topic for these coaches to discuss. Having been a coach for many years, these coaches have substantial experience as a communicator to draw on. Collectively, these coaches exhibited a sound appreciation of the principles of communication. Nevertheless, there were some emphases missing from these discussions. Trust and respect were not noted as significant features required to optimise the quality of coach – athlete interactions. There was minimal acknowledgment given to how the diversity and varying backgrounds among athletes might affect the style of communication required to enhance comprehension and learning. The role of emotion in communication was not discussed, yet negative emotion may for example, compromise the coaches intentions regarding communication in terms of team cohesion, learning skills and executing new plays, and hearing and implementing instructions during a game. Finally, minimal focus was given to listening skills, and in part, this was explained above in the context of the power relationship between the coach and athlete.

Leadership

The coaches in this study explained many perspectives relating to the role of leadership in basketball. These coaches explained how communication was linked to leadership. According to these coaches, leaders teach, encourage, reassure, collaborate and negotiate, doing so through active communications. These coaches also described how leaders possess strong decision making skills and work actively to help others. Coaches use training drills and the assignment of on-court responsibilities as ways to develop leadership skills among their athletes. As new athletes are considered for recruitment, coaches will factor in the leadership attributes of that prospective team member. Yet these leadership discussions did not include other aspects of leadership including the role of expertise and power, ethics and morality, and social skills required to be an effective leader.

Athletes can demonstrate leadership through both their verbal and non-verbal communications. They will “put the ideas forward” during pre-season planning and be prepared to “make speeches” at appropriate times. Another coach explained how leaders emerge at training as the coach simulates various last-minute game scenarios. The coach requires the players to consult with team-mates to agree on appropriate offensive or defensive strategies in response to these training simulations. Players have “got a very short period of time to decide and so you identify those leadership skills in the way that the players will react to each other”. Leadership among athletes is often apparent via non-verbal communication behaviours. These leaders can communicate powerful and effective messages to their peers and the coach through their actions. For example, leaders are those “still going 100% at the end of the day”, they will be the “guys hustling, someone diving for the ball...showing great

leadership”. Leadership is “not necessarily who comes up with the big play”, it is “what they do, not necessarily what they say” and “it’s how they carry themselves all the time ... off the floor more so than on the floor”. For many of these coaches, it seems that leadership equates to setting an example for others to follow. Nevertheless, exemplary non-verbal behaviour is expected of all aspiring athletes. What they do is how they achieve success, however, what they say may be just as valuable in terms of leadership.

Several of these coaches focus on leadership in terms of decision-making, including both on-court and off-court decision-making. On court, the best athletes are those “who make excellent decisions”, have “those abilities to make decisions under pressure” and “take on the responsibility to win”. “Strong leadership in the game of basketball is so important” to avoid those situations “when you’re under pressure ... everybody goes individual and the team falls away”. Players can choose to set “a good example for the rest of the team”, be “role models” and strive to be one of the mature players committed to “teaching younger players” about the game. It seems that athletes may demonstrate leadership either intentionally or accidentally, in accordance with the data presented above. Decision making, thus, is just one part of the overall concept of leadership, defined by Northouse (2004) as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3).

Some of these coaches “believe you can teach leadership”, with respect to leadership characterised by enhanced decision making ability. These coaches run break-down drills and practise simulations at training that develop and enhance player’s decision makings skills. Furthermore, leadership skills are nurtured by the

coach involving prospective team leaders in “scouting decisions, pre-game decisions” and encouraging “those people who have been prepared to negotiate and find some common ground” to establish collaborative relationships with the coach. Perhaps many of these coaches create the circumstances for leadership to emerge from within their teams. In this way, leadership is taught through experience. Yet, an athlete striving to be a leader must “decide” to respond positively as opportunities to influence others arise.

Athletes may demonstrate leadership by encouraging and reassuring their team-mates. During basketball games “you can have huddles ... where you can ... get the group together ... a good strong leader will ... reassure the team ... talk to them and motivate them...”. Off the court and at training also, some players will struggle from time-to-time and the “senior players can see that and talk to the players about it” and “give them some confidence”. One coach explains that “you’ve got to feel comfortable with the group before you can really start to assert ... yourself”. Nevertheless, encouragement and reassurance may assist the performance of the leader’s team, and so the experienced leader may simply be “protecting their investment” in the team by behaving in this manner.

Several coaches believe leadership is a requirement for all their athletes. One coach encourages “everyone to be a leader and have a go” while another coach explained “the term we use for leadership is a helper mentality, so within the group they all become leaders”. These athletes, “need to be able to interact and mix with society and be normal” so “how they behave ... how they carry themselves” is an integral part of the character of a good leader. This coach referred to the helper mentality in an on-court context. For example, “Billy makes Joey look better, then

everyone looks better, and then everyone get rewards”, in terms of winning and selection into other elite teams and programs. Conversely, an inability to help other team-mates achieve can be detrimental to those unhelpful individuals. For example, one potential NBA (National Basketball Association) prospect failed to impress at his selection tryout in the United States. The feedback from the NBA coach to the player’s Australian coach was emphatic. The NBA coach advised that “what we were looking for, was something different ... he didn’t show us he had the ability to help make someone else better”. Some athletes may be oblivious to this irony where the “leader is able to realize his or her dream only if the others are free to do exceptional work” (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p. 199).

For several coaches, leadership skills are developed, taught, and encouraged by repeatedly drilling game-like scenarios at training. Under these simulated situations, players are divided into two teams, with minimal time remaining on the game clock. Players are required to make their own preparatory decisions as a group independent of the coach, play, and the coach will provide feedback afterwards. “Unless the players are drilled at making decisions, in the different circumstances that can occur, to expect them to do that, you know suddenly, is fanciful, so the leadership skills are taught”. Under these practice circumstances “there are certain people that step up ... there are other people ... that are more than happy to look to other people to lead”. One coach reports this method as being “one of the best ways we’ve found at developing leaders ... sending them off on their own device and over time leaders come out of the group”. This again highlights the need for coaches to provide the environment so potential leaders can emerge and positively influence their fellow team-mates.

The coach participants highlighted team appointments and team role assignments as a means of developing leadership skills among athletes. For example, the appointment of a team captain directs that person to participate in leadership tasks, such as public speaking and mentoring younger players. Similarly, key playing positions assigned to team members such as point guard or centre require that individual to demonstrate leadership, where “there’s certain responsibilities laid out” by the coach to successfully fulfil those roles. Furthermore, for incumbent team leaders adapting to a new coach, there is an opportunity to enhance their leadership credentials by working collaboratively and productively with the new leader, the coach. As one coach explains, “if we both want this to work and we both want to achieve our goals, it is about us finding some neutral ground and helping each other”. Hence, it is important for coaches and team leaders alike to develop special relationships, if they are to achieve their shared aspirations.

New players are expected to exhibit leadership skills. It may be that “they’re probably not sure where they fit in but we want them to make an impact and to be an impact player you have to be a leader”. The recruitment process affords coaches the opportunity to select athletes who demonstrate leadership qualities. One coach investigated what the potential new recruit would “bring to the group, how did they interact with groups they were in before ... (and) finding out what they’re like off the court” by consulting with the prospect’s former coaches. This coach used the recruitment process as an opportunity to infuse additional leadership resources into the existing group, whether to maintain or enhance the prevailing status of leadership in that team. In this way, leadership may become part of the environment, a culture

that pervades that team, and may be reinforced by the role model behaviour of the coach and the leading athletes.

Leadership appeared to be a comfortable and valued topic for these coaches. Nonetheless, there were a number of perspectives absent from discussions of this theme. Murray and Mann (2006) believe “leadership is the art and science of influencing others through credibility, capability, and commitment” (p. 110). Yet these coaches did not acknowledge these aspects of leadership. The exercising of power or influence by a leader was not discussed. Further, in the context of leadership, no comments were made regarding ethics, morality, team morale, the use of humour, or how leadership behaviour may have changed over the recent generations. Finally, no explanation was provided regarding the appropriate social skills necessary to be a leader in basketball.

Motivation

These coaches had a range of views regarding motivation. Some coaches explained in detail the characteristics of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. One coach emphasised the word “desire” and how possession of desire was absolutely fundamental for any elite athlete aspiring to reach the peak of their sport. Other coaches highlighted the shortcomings of gimmicks or inspirational speeches and instead focused on those processes that could develop their athlete’s motivation. Some coaches suggested that motivation was the athlete’s issue and where that was lacking those athletes should not be playing at the elite level. Gaps in the knowledge base for these coaches related to understanding the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Several coaches discussed aspects of extrinsic motivation. One coach referred to “my motivational talks” and how that would communicate to the athletes “what is required of them to play at our level”. Another coach advised that some players “need a little bit more praise, a little bit more encouragement than the next person” from the coach to perform at their best. A different coach explained that “it’s my duty, my responsibility to always motivate ... always looking for different ways and different things that can motivate a side”. For this coach, “it’s like the smart kid in the class, they need new challenges ... so I’ve got to come up with new challenges ... that motivate them”. At the professional level, another coach explained that it is about money, at least initially. “Money ... just give me more money.” Each of these four coaches demonstrated an understanding of how external factors affect the motivation of their athletes. Furthermore, each coach acknowledged their role as an external factor.

The fundamental reasons that motivate athletes to play their sport may change over time. “There’s a sort of scale of motivating factors that players will respond to depending upon their age, their group, their experience and the level of competition.” One coach explained that for the young child, it starts with getting a uniform. They may wear their uniform to bed with pride. Next, it may be social factors, like a meal at the local take-away with the team after training. For the rising professional athlete, it becomes about money, and winning. Incentive is required to spur these players on. Without incentive “other than what the players manufacture themselves ... they’re not going to climb Everest ... they’ll be able to see it but they won’t necessarily be able to climb it”. This coach has alluded to the dynamic interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for an athlete. Over time, for the professional or elite

athletes particularly, extrinsic motivation emerges as a major driving force to complement the intrinsic motivational factors that energised the athlete in their early development years. Yet for many elite athletes, once various extrinsic goals are achieved, such as the accumulation of substantial wealth, it may be predominantly intrinsic motivation that sustains the athlete in the latter part of their athletic career.

Other coaches emphasised the characteristics of intrinsic motivation. As one coach stated, “you’ve got to self-motivate yourself, if you can’t ... you’re not going to be around very long in competition”. Similarly, another coach explained that motivation was not a problem for them, since they enjoyed the game and remained passionate about it. For one other coach, motivation was encapsulated in the word “desire”. “Without that, everything else is irrelevant, because if you do not have the desire to compete, to play and to improve yourself, you can have the greatest natural skills... it’s not going to work.” As this coach explained, these athletes with desire are quite easily identifiable, they are the one’s diving at loose balls, encouraging their team-mates, and showing leadership skills, during games and at training.

Some coaches explained that motivation is an outcome achieved by appropriate intervening processes. While one coach does not “believe in having a transistor stuck to their ear or an amplifier stuck to their head... to win a game”, this same coach asserts that “motivation comes from your training and your concentration and knowing what you’re supposed to be doing”. Another coach questions the benefits of supposedly inspirational pre-game speeches and instead is concerned with appropriate preparation and clear instructions. Those athletes will “be able to execute ... enjoy what they’re doing, they’ll score points, they’ll get rebounds, they’ll run, they’ll have fun ... so that’s part of their motivation”. These explanations of

motivation are inclined to focus on the perspective of the coach rather than the realities of the player. For this reason, they do not necessarily communicate the essence of motivation. That is, the motivation of an athlete is affected by many intrinsic and extrinsic factors, each of which interacts in complex ways.

Several coaches recognised that “motivation is different for everyone” and that “everyone has different reasons for doing things”. You “just need to channel those reasons into making sure that everyone is headed in the same direction for the same goals”. “All sorts of things can be intruding on the player’s ability to perform to their optimum level” and sometimes there are “little barriers there that need to be cleared away before you get the real thing”. These individuals may “need specific personal goals set for them” to work through these difficulties, to achieve their personal best.

There were clear differences among these coaches regarding how they respond to the motivation levels of their athletes. Some coaches assumed the responsibility for contributing to the on-going motivation of their athletes. For these coaches, motivation can be treated as a process that requires continuous renewal. Other coaches suggested that motivation is an outcome achieved through dedicated training and preparation, and enjoyable and successful competition. In this scenario, motivation as the outcome serves to positively reinforce those underlying training and preparatory processes facilitated by the coach. Nonetheless, at some stage this feedback loop may break down, and new energy may be required to inspire struggling or fatigued athletes. Some coaches were adamant that all athletes must be responsible for their own motivation. If they want to play basketball successfully, “especially at a senior level, they should already have taken care of the motivation

issue” and if not, “they shouldn’t be playing any more”. Similarly, “you’ve got to have the motivation to be the best you can possibly be to play at our level otherwise you’re just wasting everybody’s time”. Coaches who expressed what seemed to be fairly absolute views, may not fully appreciate, or are not taking responsibility, in directly influencing motivation levels of athletes.

These participant coaches use their knowledge of motivation in contrasting ways with their athletes. Effectively, three approaches were identified in this study. The first is the active, process orientated motivational style, where the coach actively seeks ways to inspire the athletes, through variety, by being energetic, and setting new challenges. The second approach treats motivation as the goal, achieved by mediating processes including training disciplines, concentration, dedicated preparation, clear game-day instructions and experiencing fun, joy and success, whereby the goals and processes interact to reinforce each other. The third approach is predominantly an intervention-free style, with the coach ceding responsibility for motivation to each of their athletes. From time-to-time, these athletes may be reminded of this responsibility by their coach but are largely left to “fend for themselves” with respect to their motivation.

These coaches demonstrated a reasonable practical understanding of the concept of motivation. Nevertheless, the starkest aspect of the knowledge gap for the motivation theme relates to how coaches apply this knowledge of motivation with their athletes. For example, this study cannot substantiate what guides those coaches who attribute the responsibility for motivation exclusively with the athlete. Nevertheless, this attitude suggests a lack of knowledge regarding motivation by some coaches. A more balanced and informed perspective exists with those coaches

who emphasise training, preparation and consequential success as the antecedents of motivation among their athletes. Those coaches however, who strive to actively motivate their athletes need to accommodate individual differences among their team members. Clearly, not all athletes will respond in a positive manner to the same motivational approaches of a coach. Accordingly, these motivational tactics may need to be modified to complement the motivational idiosyncrasies of each athlete.

Concentration

Coaches in this study discussed concentration, especially how to assess, teach, and enhance concentration skills. These coaches conceptualised concentration in terms of dealing with distractions, being aware, task focused, attention to appropriate cues, being able to make quick decisions, switching attention, and demonstrating mental toughness. Some coaches assess an athlete's concentration by how they respond to whistles at training, listening, eye contact behaviour, and timely and accurate responses to team rules and tactics during a game. Several coaches use various break-down drills and specific activities at training to enhance the concentration skills of their athletes. Through repetition, rewards and punishment, and the use of skills routines, athletes are conditioned to improve their concentration capacities at training, with the expectation of generalising skills learned to the pressure environment of competition.

Coaches were generally aware that managing distractions is an integral part of playing basketball. There can be "things that ... either internally or externally can influence the player's performance and their ability to focus on the mission at hand, whether it's just this time down the floor or for the whole duration of the game".

Coaches use a number of strategies to improve the concentration skills of their less attentive players. Disciplines at training include running to huddles in anticipation of the coach's feedback, maintaining eye contact with the coach when they speak, and singling out players by name if and when that player's attention wanes. Team drills used to enhance concentration include using a number of balls at once for shooting and other skill development, practising free throws while fatigued, applying penalties for missed shots, or switching arbitrarily and rapidly between offence and defence as directed by the coach. These drills have "the distractions there for a reason" so that "their training becomes harder than what it is in the game situation" and "they're concentrating on what they're doing". Simulated distractions at training were viewed as helpful provided they equate to the many types of distractions encountered during a game. These coaches tend to use physical drills and punitive tactics to enhance the concentration skills of their athletes. However, a more structured cognitive approach may be warranted to teach these athletes how to manage distracting thoughts and maintain their required task focus throughout a game. Self-talk is one such method that could be used to assist athletes to stay on task.

Most of these coaches use drills at training to develop the task focus skills of their athletes. As explained by one coach, "most of the drills that we get into ... (are) to train them to think that way". A second coach acknowledges that players in the game "are under pressure ... have to make quick decisions ... make good decisions ... the ability to concentrate and focus on something is of vital importance". A third coach explained that "if they are not concentrating as it happens, and then you react, it's too late ... your awareness has to be very good" and therefore "having the mental

toughness with the concentration, being ready to do it”. This task focus is exemplified by the free throw shooting drill arranged by a fourth coach at the end of training as players are fatiguing. This coach’s athletes are encouraged to make their free throws or else further physical work is meted out as punishment. “So there’s a reason they need to lock in and ... it comes back to concentration”. Athletes are trained to lock in this concentration as they use a shooting routine that manages both their breathing and anxiety and hence, increases the prospect of a successful free throw. This fourth coach was unique among this coaching cohort because he was able to talk about links between concentration, breathing and anxiety. Overall, most coaches in this study have piecemeal understandings of concentration skills and techniques.

Concentration and the related theme of focus are well described collectively by these coaches, many of whom implement strategies at training to enhance the concentration abilities of their athletes. There are however, a few gaps apparent in consideration of the data collected. For example, while there was a brief reference to anxiety, arousal and imagery, these three key areas were not acknowledged as of significant relevance or directly linked to concentration. Thus, a crucial knowledge gap exists among these coaches regarding concentration. As a consequence, many of these coaches may be less able to instruct athletes in the art of concentration to cope with demanding and stressful competition scenarios.

Anxiety

All coaches in this study were asked directly about competition anxiety. Most of these coaches explained the symptoms of anxiety in athletes and a number of coaches explained their methods to mitigate the effect of anxiety on athletic

performance, through counselling, reassurance, relaxation techniques including controlled breathing, and simulation drills at training. The general responses from these coaches suggested gaps in their knowledge base regarding multidimensional anxiety, including knowledge of state and trait anxiety, and cognitive and somatic anxiety. These knowledge gaps have practical implications for coaches, as discussed below.

Collectively the coaches provided a broad perspective on the various symptoms of anxiety. These included worry, nervousness, aggression and anger, being uptight, jittery, scared, concern about making mistakes, tentative, “caught up in the moment”, overawed, and pumped tight. One coach described an international basketballer missing a crucial free throw by a significant margin, with his team trailing at the end of the game by one point. At this time, “somewhere in his head, the pressure got to him”. Likewise, another coach referred to a general game situation when “people (are) worried about getting ... their points ... as anxiety builds up, their composure goes down, and maybe their attempts at scoring may become more difficult”. A third coach acknowledged the irony of “when you play in a grand final you’re the most nervous ... and that’s the one we’re meant to enjoy the most”. Another coach explained, at these times when the outcome is highly valued, your “physical relaxation ... that’s important too that you don’t be in the situation where you’re so uptight about winning, you’re squeezing the game ... the other thing is you burn a lot of energy”. These characterisations of anxiety by these coaches have two prominent aspects. The first aspect relates to the perceived build up of pressure or tension in the body of the athlete. The second aspect is that the performance outcome is highly valued by the athlete. These two aspects encapsulate somatic and

cognitive anxiety, sub-types of anxiety with different symptoms that either separately or together can cause substantial performance decrements for an athlete failing to cope with the demands of competition.

These coaches use a number of methods to control the potentially adverse performance consequences of anxiety. The most common method is to counsel the athlete by reassuring and supporting them. Other ways of dealing with anxiety and pressure include the provision of clear instructions, focus the athlete on positive thoughts gained from good practice, and encouraging them to “have the confidence in yourself and your team-mates ... you’ll make the right decisions and the opportunities will come”. Coaches consciously remove or ameliorate the source of anxiety for some athletes in pressure situations. Rather than focusing on the outcome of winning, the coach may call the play and that becomes the player’s focus. Effectively, this is a distraction by having the player focus on strategy. For example, “let’s get the ball, don’t lose it in the turnover, let’s lose it in the shot ... if it’s a good shot and we get it up, we hit, we win, great, we lose, we take them to a shot ... that’s it”. This cognitive reframing of an otherwise anxiety provoking situation is a clever coping strategy that focuses the anxious athlete’s thoughts away from potential failure to the execution of a potentially successful play.

Anxiety and relaxation are mutually exclusive. Accordingly, an anxious athlete is usually encouraged to relax, sometimes through controlled breathing. One coach explained that “they’ve got to be able to learn to relax ... the only way I know how to really relax in that situation is breathing properly ... you breathe ... you settle yourself down”. For another coach, “it’s just so important that players learn to control their breathing”. This could be as part of a free-throw shooting routine when

you can “suck it in, let it go out, suck it in, let it go ... take the full time you’re allowed when the ball’s put in your hand by the referee”. Anxiety can peak when a basketballer is attempting free throws in a close game yet a conscious focus on controlled breathing seemingly works to rapidly reduce physiological arousal. Some coaches use game-like drills at training to simulate the anxiety provoking circumstances experienced by some athletes during competition. In this way, these coaches aim to condition anxious athletes to cope with competition anxiety. During these simulation drills, the coach “would try and focus the person on two or three particular goals so that their mind’s not rushing around trying to make sure they do everything”. These drills are repetitive and the athlete is reassured and provided with clear direction by the coach.

Another coach discusses free throw shooting at training as an anxiety prevention strategy rather than as skill training. “From under 10’s onwards ... I always try to explain to them ... you’re now in the final of the Olympic games ... the scores are level, you’ve got to make this. So every time you go to the line, you’ve got that sort of experience ... knowing how to deal with that sort of pressure.” Furthermore, “simulating pressure in your mind ... the preparation for the most important shot of your life ... to decide whether you’re going to win or lose has already been experienced thousands of times in practice.” This approach assumes that an over-learned skill is less vulnerable to anxiety at times when the successful execution of that skill is most imperative. I suggest, however, that the research into choking in sport (e.g., Baumeister, 1984; Hardy & Mullen, 1996; Beilock and Carr, 2001; Wang, Marchant & Morris, 2003) concludes that over-learned skills are susceptible to the consequences of competition anxiety. Admittedly, this coach added

that this on-going practice is “in order to build up a level of confidence” and so, the benefits are seen to derive from the confidence that accrues from hours of free throw shooting practice rather than anxiety management per se.

From the data resulting from the interviews with coaches in this study, there are some notable gaps in their knowledge-base regarding anxiety. No specific references were made to the transient (state) or more permanent personality based (trait) aspects of anxiety. Where state anxiety occurs it may be related to inexperience or immature mental skills development, while a generally anxious personality type may chronically display signs of anxiety, irrespective of their skill level or experience. When coaches are aware of the fundamental differences between state and trait anxiety, their interaction with athletes might be modified accordingly at times.

None of the coaches in this study explicitly acknowledged the concepts of cognitive and somatic anxiety. Some knowledge of the principles of cognitive and somatic anxiety could be beneficial to a coach in two direct ways. The first is that each type of anxiety can affect the performance and the behaviour of the athlete in different ways. Second, the treatment or management of each anxiety sub-type can differ. Cognitive anxiety includes worry, negative thoughts, and fear, and may disrupt an athletes’ intellectual functioning such as decision making, concentration, and self-belief, whereas somatic anxiety relates to physical symptoms such as nervousness, increased heart rate, and sweating. Somatic anxiety may disrupt an athletes’ fine motor control and can accentuate cognitive anxiety in the event of performance decrements. While both cognitive and somatic anxiety may respond positively to similar treatments like imagery, relaxation and breathing techniques,

specific anxiety symptoms may require targeted interventions including positive self-talk, cognitive behaviour therapy, or meditation.

Decision Making

Decision making in basketball is a broad topic. Decision making may apply to the coach, to the athlete, to specific team strategies, to individual task execution, to off-court choices, and so on. Most coaches in this study considered decision making in the context of athletes executing the coach's game day instructions. Nevertheless, at least two coaches focused on the decisions required of the coach, in the pre and post season, throughout training and preparatory activities, and on the game-day. Other coaches acknowledged the dilemma of balancing the conflicting interests of individual player development with the desire to win. These conflicts may emerge when coaches are recruiting new team members in the pre-season, disciplining athletes at training, or managing court time for players during games. Athletes too have broader decisions to make, including "where they want to go in their career". Regardless, most coaches are concerned with the decisions an athlete makes during a game, especially at crucial stages and in pressure situations.

Highly skilled basketball players may be characterised by their superior decision making abilities, whether these abilities be innate or taught. One coach explains that "we've done a good job of teaching when the players have a good knowledge of the number of options that they can have in regard to making a decision about a certain play, both offensively and defensively." Players may possess "the ability to play at least three or four passes ahead of the game". These skilled athletes have the capacity to orchestrate team-plays and create opportunities for team-mates. They learn to recognise specific cues in the game and consequently,

“they do make very quick reads of the situation”. They are able to assess a dynamic situation and see “the whole picture” very quickly, and decide on an appropriate course of action. Many of these skills are taught with repetition, for example one coach said, “provide instructions so the players are really well educated to ... not only what you do, how you do it, but why you do it”. As another coach emphasised, “Winning games ... relies on ... good decision making skills”. Accordingly, these competent athletes develop efficient decision making abilities that can withstand what was described as “duress and pressure and noise” apparent during important games.

Several coaches in this study explain how athletes will make decisions during a game that may or may not reflect the instructions and training provided by their coach. As one coach explained, “some care has to be taken in regard to what the instructions were in the first place”. This same coach conceded that “if we haven’t done a good job in teaching ... that player’s decision might be different to yours because they’re seeing different things”. A second coach acknowledged that this pattern may continue unless the coach helps “them to understand ... what I believe is the right decision and why” and provides them with some insight into “what the next step or next couple of steps in that process may have been”. Another coach favours a less prescriptive structure and believes you can “allow the player their freedom to make choices ... and from their basic movements they’ve got to take the ball to where the action is”. This coach explained this as a process of “virtually handing over a lot of the responsibility back to the players and a lot of coaches don’t like that”.

Several of these coaches intentionally teach and enhance the decision-making skills of their athletes through competitive drills at training. One coach describes their method as “teaching by guided discovery”, involving development of “a structure and methods of play to help the players identify what the options are”. These players learn about “some things that you can do ... the outcomes you can expect ... what’s your choices and how to do it”. More specifically, coaches at training use break-down drills, simulated game situations, or walk-throughs of offence and defence to highlight options and choices available to athletes. The basics of the break-down drills “teach them how to play and feel the game” while the game simulations “encourages and enhances people’s decision making skills”. Walk-throughs will allow athletes to “know what they have to do” and “so hopefully your more experienced players over time ... have a good little file in their head and know what we’ve got to do in certain circumstances”. These coaches consistently linked decision making with the acquisition of knowledge, hence decision making in the context of basketball can be a learned skill.

Several participants explained how coaching involves frequent decision making. As Chelladurai & Turner (2006) asserted, “all the actions carried out by a coach involve decision making, which is defined as the process of selecting an alternative from among many choices to achieve a desired end” (p. 140). Consistent with this decision-making emphasis, several coaches explained the challenges they faced as they worked to resolve and reconcile the many competing factors required to manage a successful team. For example, one coach explained how “the development process, you could almost say was risking winning games, but that was the decision that I made”. Yet, some coaches did not acknowledge the decision making

difficulties they faced but focused instead on the decision-making skills of their athletes. The practice methods used by many of these coaches to develop decision-making skills are designed to teach athletes to make correct choices under conditions of duress and time constraints. These decision-making drills are practised repetitively.

The repetitive practice approach used by coaches is predominantly a motor learning emphasis that is used to develop the decision making skills of athletes. Accordingly, decision making skills may be more closely aligned to motor skill learning than mental skills acquisition per se. Perhaps the emphasis missing from the data collected in this study is, how are motor skills compromised by inadequate mental skills? Yet, in the context of decision making, rather than the athlete being a poor decision maker with good motor skills, the cause of diminished performance may be related to attention, anxiety or arousal. Nonetheless, with the current study I did not specifically address the coaches' thoughts regarding the relationship between motor skill performance and mental skills.

Goal Setting

Some coaches in this study recognised goal setting as a worthwhile process. They explained the role of short and long term goals, the need to integrate goals into each training session, and the value of establishing goals that were achievable and measurable. Some coaches described their goal setting procedures in the pre-season, setting team and individual goals, and the subsequent and related processes of prioritisation and review. Nonetheless, goal setting did not appear to be a high priority for all these coaches. Several coaches in this study appeared to lack

fundamental knowledge regarding goal setting processes for athletes and may avoid goal setting as a consequence.

According to the sport psychology literature, goal setting can be a purposeful activity. For an athlete, it “gives them focus each week”. During the season, team members can monitor their progress against key performance indicators such as shooting percentages, number of rebounds, and turnovers. This goal setting process “becomes important in regard to the grand plan ... where we’re going to be and how you’re going to get there”. One coach explained goal setting in the context of being “most at pains to constantly try to improve yourself”. This same coach explained how an athlete was “constantly setting goals for himself ... wanting to get stronger and faster and did something about it”. As another coach explained, goal setting involves working with athletes to establish a “foundation of good technique first ... then good practice with good technique” will lead to advancement and progression. Athletes who do so will usually have “a better future in the game”. Alternatively, without appropriate goals and good technique, athletes “make no progress and become disillusioned”.

Goal setting involves a number of factors and considerations, whereby goals are achievable, relevant, time phased, and their attainment can be managed and measured. For one coach, “setting achievable goals in a period of time becomes very important”. Furthermore, this coach stated that “if you’re able to set achievable goals and have some measurement of how you are progressing, then the chance of you achieving those goals in the long term ... it’s much, much better”. Nevertheless, goals are not just long term. Goals are applicable at training and built into every training task, so “every drill (is) specific to the game”. Specific skills practice will

also contain goals. Further, these goals can be broken down into more manageable tasks. For example, as explained by one coach, “we’re going to shoot some free throws ... we want to make at least 8 out of 10 ... we’re going to have 50 free throws ... do them in banks of five ... the five in a row is usually not a formidable task”. Another coach explained how “each of our training sessions will have one or two points or three points of emphasis ... each day you try and build up a little something ... put in your repertoire ... when it comes time for a game ... you’ve got a lot of things you can fall back on.”. A few coaches described in limited detail how they facilitated goal setting. One coach explained that goal setting was “something that we focus on from pre-season where we’ll sit down and nut out our long term and short term goals, team goals and individual goals”. This coach gets “the girls to fill out a sheet at the start of the year to set down five short-term and five long-term goals”. Each of these goals would be reviewed with the coach half way through and at the end of the season. Similarly, for another coach, goal setting occurred “at the beginning of the season ... it would be up to the group ... (to) decide ... out of ten goals ... what plans we were going to put in place to achieve those ... (and) prioritise perhaps the top three or four”. Likewise, other coaches embedded explicit goals into their training programs, including doing “short sharp drills to keep people’s minds sharp”, making all drills specific to scenarios arising during a game, and aiming to achieve, as another coach explained, the “good practice makes perfect” outcome.

Coaches set goals and implement them as activities in the training schedule of their athletes. Some of these coaches, however, recognised the need to review and revise these goals, particularly at the individual level. As new players join a team,

they may need to adapt to a new role and so, new skills may need to be learned. Goal setting can facilitate this learning. For example, one player needed to “be able to defend the smaller players ... create some range on the shot ... work on his left hand, he needs to dribble the ball ... we needed to make some adjustments”. This athlete’s progress was being monitored on a weekly basis. For another coach, the progress of the athletes and the attainment of team goals are reviewed at a weekly team meeting. Nonetheless, despite some of these references to a review process, there was very minimal explanation of how these coaches reviewed and revised goals during the course of a season, for individuals or teams. In many teams coaches and players are likely to collect and review key performance indicators including statistics from games. Individuals may know what they are striving to improve yet may not necessarily formally document these as goals. Similarly, many of the coaches in this study may be informally facilitating goal setting among their athletes.

Coaches in this study did not demonstrate a consistent approach or common attitudes to goal setting. Some coaches approached individual goal setting in a structured way during the pre-season but less so in the competitive season. In the pre-season, some coaches involve their athletes in identifying team goals and then expect them to set their individual goals. Other coaches tended to leave individual goal setting to their athletes. Perhaps several of these coaches are not so familiar with the mechanics of goal setting and avoid it. Further, there was limited evidence that these coaches use specific goal setting methodologies with their athletes. Regardless, it appears that the majority of the coaches in this study avoid an active involvement in assisting their athletes to set, review and revise their individual goals throughout the course of a season.

Confidence

The coaches discussed many aspects of confidence, including how confidence was acquired, maintained and encouraged. Participant coaches believed that an athlete's confidence could be enhanced through good preparation, through repetition of tasks at training, being successful in competition, being aggressive when competing, and receiving reassurance from their coach. Some coaches asserted a relationship between the personality of an athlete and their confidence levels. Several coaches explained how an athlete's confidence could be boosted through counselling and by directing athletes to be task focused during competition. Some knowledge gaps were apparent in these discussions regarding confidence. The role of emotion and mood states on an athlete's confidence was not discussed. Similarly, positive self-talk was not mentioned as a potential means to moderate the confidence of athletes.

A number of coaches explain factors that contribute to the confidence of their athletes. By talking to, and reassuring their less confident athletes, one coach believes you can enhance their performance "if you ... let them have a good feeling about themselves". Attempting to seize the initiative in a competitive situation is another means of encouraging confidence. For example, "by saying we're the aggressors, we're taking the game to them, and then we're going to be in attacking mode and to do that we got to be a very confident group". Furthermore, some coaches believe that confidence is gained from the appropriate preparation of the team, where "confidence comes through practice and knowing what you're doing and then applying yourself to it ... it'll come". Similarly, "success breeds confidence and usually repetition breeds success, so ... it's a game of habits" where "the confidence

comes in the build up to the game”. For these coaches, confidence can be considered as both cause and effect, in terms of its relationship with success. This relationship is exemplified in the description of one exceptional athlete who “had unbelievable confidence, obviously from a repetition of successful things ... he did”.

The personality of an athlete was cited as a factor influencing that athlete’s confidence. For example, “he had that personality in him anyway, very extroverted, very confident but also very determined, and a great worker”. Another coach explained that mental toughness was linked with confidence where an athlete might acknowledge “yeah I had a bad one, but I’ll bounce back and have a good one”. For another elite athlete, the coach’s observation was that he “worked so hard and was so mentally focused on the game, that if he was open, it was down”. These two coaches have described a perceived connection between confidence, mental toughness and mental focus. Nevertheless, while a relationship may exist between these psychological states, mental toughness and mental focus are not synonymous with confidence.

Not all athletes have resilience or absolute focus. Some players are “constantly looking for approval whether it was the right shot” to take or are concerned with “letting their team-mates down or their coaches down”. In this context of tentativeness, these coaches have implied a relationship between confidence and other mediating factors including social approval and anxiety. These same coaches acknowledged specific behaviours that coincide with a range of confidence levels among athletes. These behaviours may not epitomise confidence but in a correlational sense, they may represent some of the causes or effects of confidence.

Coaches also discussed how they attempt to build confidence in their athletes in several ways both individually and collectively. At the individual level, one coach referred to the need to counsel and encourage the less confident athlete. Another coach spoke of the need to communicate clear instructions to their players whereby “if you’re taking the shots ‘cause that’s in your range, that’s in your ability to take them, just take them”. This is a task-focused approach that may assist an athlete to overcome uncertainty. Essentially, the coach is giving the athlete the ‘green light’ to follow their instincts. It may also be a method whereby the task becomes ‘mentally simplified’. Similarly, another coach explains that when a competent shooter is down on confidence, the advice provided is “that when all else fails, just spot the ring and shoot it”. At the team level, a task-focused approach is also used to deal with setbacks or experiences that might otherwise affect the collective confidence of the team. So for one coach “if you have a bad game as a group ... acknowledge it ... learn from it ... shake it off ... and still come out confident next time”. This coach explains the role of the team leaders when performance is not as desired, “they need to step up ... making the play ... that steamrolls a bit, you have a couple doing it and then everyone comes a bit more confident”. Several coaches emphasised the importance of confidence to the success of any team or athlete and “hopefully that’s learned through practice and training and it carries over” to competition.

There were aspects of confidence not discussed by this coaching group. For example, the interactive effect of success or failure on the sustained confidence of athletes was not explicitly outlined by any one coach. Duda and Treasure (2006) refer to the Bandura model of, performance accomplishment, vicarious experiences,

verbal persuasion, physiological and emotional states, and imaginal experiences as factors affecting the confidence of an athlete. Performance accomplishment was discussed in this study with respect to confidence, as was verbal persuasion. Coaches almost all used direct verbal persuasion to positively reinforce athletes. Vicarious experiences, emotional states, and imagery were not discussed by these participant coaches in the context of confidence.

Team Building and Team Cohesion

Team building and team cohesion were overlapping themes discussed in this study. Several coaches discussed their knowledge of team building and cohesion in terms of pre-season and in-season activities. Some coaches explained how individuals within teams, are expected to learn about each other, and establish tolerance for each individual's differences. Social activities were also used by some coaches to encourage and maintain team cohesion. Other coaches emphasised the need for a team focus, with individuals prepared to sacrifice their personal aspirations to achieve the team's goals. Team cohesion topics not discussed in the interviews included; team identity, trust and conflict resolution.

Team building and team cohesion were interrelated topics. Team building is represented as a limited, deliberate, and activity based phenomenon, whereas team cohesion is presented as a more pervasive concept. According to one coach, "team building starts for a basketball coach way before you get on the court". Team building may involve "camps out in the bush" or "constantly going out to dinner ... just enjoy themselves ... get to know each other off the court". This time spent together "is important with people developing and learning some tolerance for other people's ways and accepting that that person doesn't particularly like that".

Alternatively, team cohesion presents a challenge for some coaches.

Having established a team, and started the competitive season, new scenarios arise.

As another coach suggested, team cohesion is not an issue when the group is winning but “when you’re losing then all the skeletons come out of the cupboard”. This coach implies that such revelations may compromise team cohesion, adjustments may be required and “you’ve just got to try to balance that out as you go along”. For another coach, maintaining team cohesion may be “as simple as doing something different at training ... playing some fun games, rather than making everything so serious”. One coach acknowledged that sometimes hard decisions must be made in-season. For example, if expected behaviour is not being exhibited, “you’ve got to tell them pretty much that’s not tolerated” and “eventually if they don’t change ... their role would have to change”. Team building activity may set the team on a positive course initially but on going coach athlete interactions may determine the extent that the team remains cohesive for the duration of the season.

Maintaining team cohesion is a continuous and dynamic process. One coach explained how he tries to maintain cohesive team focus for the entire season. This maintenance is based on that coach’s concerted effort “to sell that team building philosophy to my players ... being willing to sacrifice their own wanting to get twenties and thirty points in a game ... to be able to win championships”. Further, this same coach explains how this approach requires players to share the load, resulting in winning “championships without having many people in the top ten of anything ... against teams that are like that ... it’s really hard to stop them, ‘cause you don’t know which ones are going to bob up and get it done”. This coach also reinforces the self-belief of players by not singling out individuals on offence where

it's never about "getting the ball to this player, it's all about you were open, why didn't you shoot it".

A variation on the team-orientated philosophy is another coach's emphasis on "the little things so everyone feels like they're really involved". Members of this team are encouraged to contribute and acknowledged when they do. When "you've got a bunch of little things happening ... it all kind of comes together ... the little things do make the big difference". By highlighting these smaller contributions, perhaps these behaviours are more often elicited and hence, the coach's behaviour directly enhances team cohesion. Another coach explains how a group is functioning as a team where "they have to work together and they have to cooperate to achieve an outcome". The participants in this study were experienced in managing teams and were mindful of the benefits of establishing and sustaining team cohesion. Orchestrating cooperative actions among their team members is a large part of what these coaches do. That is, these coaches teach a group of athletes how to work together to successfully execute offences, defences, and set plays during games, by working together productively at training, in the first instance. Many of these coaches explained how they build this team cohesion with their athletes. Nevertheless, there were aspects of team cohesion not discussed by these coaches including team identity, developing trust, and conflict resolution techniques.

Additional Gaps in Mental Skills Knowledge and Application

The coaches interviewed in this study discussed their knowledge and use of mental skills. Collectively, these coaches have demonstrated reasonable knowledge of the key mental skills in the specific context of elite basketball. Furthermore, participant coaches explained to varying degrees how this knowledge is applied with

their athletes, at training and during games. Some coaches intentionally integrate the teaching of mental skills, including decision-making, leadership, concentration and communication, into structured drills at training. Other coaches run similar drills without emphasising or consciously recognising the opportunities to reinforce mental skills training. There were other differences apparent between these coaches. While some coaches had an excellent knowledge of key mental skill themes, others lacked a fundamental understanding of the most rudimentary theoretical principles associated with key themes such as, motivation, self-talk, anxiety, arousal management, and imagery. Nevertheless, there is insufficient data to definitely conclude that these coaches lack this knowledge. The coaches in this study were asked to discuss topics presented on the Sport Psychology Related Themes checklist or responded to other questions posed during their interview. The interview process was not necessarily comprehensive and able to capture the breadth and depth of each coach's mental skills knowledge. Despite this, each coach had ample opportunity and time to express ideas about those psychological concepts presented to them.

A number of topics emerged when coaches were asked to identify a perceived lack of knowledge in specific mental skill areas. These areas included self-talk, anxiety control, physical relaxation and breathing, coping skills, emotion, mental rehearsal, and visualisation. The gap between knowledge and application was also apparent. One coach explained that "actually knowing what they are is one thing but actually teaching them is another". Self-talk was understood by some coaches and highlighted by several others as an area in need of more education. Anxiety control was not a significant subject for most coaches although several coaches discussed

ways of dealing with anxious athletes through a range of techniques including; counselling, video analysis, on-court instruction, breathing, and other relaxation techniques. No coach, however, explained the distinction between cognitive and somatic anxiety, and hence the need for differential treatment once identified. Similarly, there was a lack of understanding of the feedback loop between somatic and cognitive anxiety in high-pressure situations, and how coping skills could be used to address this interaction of anxiety symptoms. Clearly, the level of knowledge was at a rudimentary level and even with years of coaching experience did not expand to the intricacies of anxiety recognition and management. Perhaps such fine delineations are beyond the training these elite coaches have received and might indicate specialist knowledge more likely associated with a trained specialist such as a sport psychologist. Nonetheless, several coaches recognised the need to learn more about the theory and practice of coping. Knowledge of imagery, in terms of mental rehearsal, visualisation, and routines was a very clear differentiator between these coaches. In roughly equal numbers, these coaches knew very little, knew some, or knew a good deal about imagery and its related theoretical basis. For example, one coach referred to “a shooter when they're open ... they see it in their mind the ball going through before they shoot the ball”. Another coach explained an interest in mental rehearsal and visualisation while acknowledging they would be keen to learn more. Yet several coaches did not acknowledge the use of imagery in their coaching programs at all

Assistance from a sport psychologist

Additional mental skill themes were identified in the context of how a sport psychologist might assist these coaches and their athletes. Mental skills

acknowledged in this context included; motivation, self-esteem, confidence, social skills, self-belief, communication, and anger management. These acknowledgments implied a lack of specific knowledge from some coaches. Several coaches were enthusiastic about the prospect of acquiring new knowledge or expanding their existing knowledge. Some coaches recognised the need to refer their athletes to a psychologist when their own competence was restricted or to avoid a conflict of interest.

Some coaches explained how a sport psychologist could be used to support a coach and their athletes. One coach referred to the many challenges athletes face during their careers; “a sport psychologist being able to help players through those types of adversities” would be beneficial. Another coach described how sometimes you have “a lot of things coming at you ... you’ve got to be very careful things do not spiral downwards”. Under these circumstances, a sport psychologist can be useful by “keeping the players and coaches on track ... when you’re right in it yourself you don’t see the whole picture” and “so it’s good to have some other eyes there ... some other opinions coming in and helping out”. While this coach’s views may not be representative of the usual role of a sport psychologist, they are consistent with the concluding remarks of another coach. This coach explained that each professional coach needs a “coterie of people who can support the coach” and provide “counselling to relieve the tensions and all of the ogres that are real or unreal” associated with the “very precarious business” of coaching basketball in Australia.

Most coaches in this study have recognised the contribution a sport psychologist could make beyond performance enhancement and teaching mental

skills. For one coach “it’s just knowing how to deal with players in situations that might arise on an individual basis ... knowing where to send them to get the right help or to help them with their difficulties within my boundaries”. Another coach explained that “you’ve got to know what makes the player tick” and, therefore, “what motivates each of them to succeed, or why they are there and what they want to get out of it”. Ego is one of the biggest problems with some basketball coaches according to another research participant. Some egocentric coaches “think they’re so important they actually over-coach ... they forget to have a feel for the game ... (and) think that the game revolves around them”. Perhaps some coaches might benefit from psychological counselling, if only they were willing to do so.

CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION

All three aims of this study were, at least partially achieved. These specific aims were to (a) gain an understanding of the baseline mental skills knowledge of elite Australian basketball coaches; (b) describe how this knowledge is used; and (c) establish where gaps exist in this mental skills knowledge base. Data collected from interviews represents a substantial collective understanding of these coaches' mental skills knowledge. Nevertheless, some participant coaches were more knowledgeable regarding mental skills than others. For example, the full-time professional coaches generally demonstrated a more highly developed knowledge of mental skills. The second aim of this study has been partially achieved. Each coach was asked to explain how they applied their mental skills knowledge with their athletes. Coaches responded accordingly, to both set topics (e.g., anxiety) and to topics of their choosing. Nonetheless, the clarification of these applied methods was articulated less clearly by some coaches than others. The third aim of this research was achieved by direct acknowledgment from each coach regarding knowledge deficits and by comparing each coach's responses with contemporary sport psychology knowledge.

The coaches in this study responded to interview questions in various ways. Some coaches were more inclined than others to engage in discussion of mental skills. Response behaviour of coaches oscillated, topic by topic, from ignorance, resistance, evasiveness and defensiveness, to a genuine openness, sincerity, and a desire to learn. Due to the direct and premeditated focus on coach knowledge some coaches may have felt reluctance to respond candidly and openly at all times. In addition, because I only met the coaches on one occasion they may have been somewhat resistant to talking openly to me about some topics. Possibly, the

undercurrent of evaluating knowledge partially explains why the coaches gravitated to certain topics and may have avoided others.

Several coaches tended to deflect any perceived gap in their mental skills knowledge base as largely irrelevant to their capacity to function as an effective basketball coach. Perhaps this reflects a mind-set of “knowing enough” and no longer being sufficiently motivated to pursue and acquire new sources of knowledge. This is understandable for some participants who are essentially semi-professional coaches and may be preoccupied managing issues in their core area of competence or wider roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, a fundamental lack of knowledge or being less open to learning is a potential liability for any elite coach, thus defensive behaviour may also be masking some anxiety regarding this lack of knowledge. Quite possibly highly experienced coaches may feel particularly sensitive to recognising deficits in knowledge.

Key Findings and Broader Issues

Collectively, the coaches in this study possess substantial knowledge of mental skills and were often able to discuss how they apply these skills in the basketball context. Yet individually, this mental skills knowledge varied considerably. In broad terms, the most professional and elite coaches demonstrated the most knowledge of mental skills. Nevertheless, some of these elite coaches lacked in-depth appreciation of mental skill principles related to confidence, concentration, anxiety, emotion and coping. Furthermore, the less expert coaches in this study lacked mental skills knowledge in key areas such as imagery, arousal, anxiety management, motivation, goal setting, coping skills, and self-talk. This data supports the notion that elite basketball coaches in Australia might benefit from

opportunities to collaborate and share their knowledge of mental skills.

This collaboration could perhaps involve formal involvement in the development and enhancement of accredited coaching courses, and less formally in such professional development activities as peer group mentoring and workshops.

A broad question that is pertinent to the current study is, what should a basketball coach know about mental skills? In consideration of the data in this study, I recommend that basketball coaches in Australia be exposed to the theory and practice of the following mental skill themes: motivation, anxiety and arousal management, imagery including performance routines and mental rehearsal, positive self-talk, confidence, coping skills, goal setting, relaxation techniques, and concentration. Coaches should not feel that they need to acquire expert knowledge in such areas but feel confident in understanding and applying basic mental skills knowledge. The participants in this study have highlighted these mental skill themes as being relevant and of interest to elite Australian coaches. Presumably, these same themes would be of interest to other aspiring Australian basketball coaches. Nonetheless, these relevant skills ought to be assessed and framed in terms of their relative importance to basketball coaching. Furthermore, I believe that the coaches in this study have demonstrated considerable expertise in the areas of leadership, team building and communication, both in terms of their knowledge and their confidence in being able to teach and nurture these skills among athletes.

Basketball coaches require mental skills knowledge for at least two significant reasons. The first reason relates to teaching mental skills to athletes. Without substantial mental skills knowledge, a coach cannot satisfactorily teach these same skills. Furthermore, a coach may require additional training to transform

theoretical mental skills knowledge into practice, that is, to achieve behavioural change among athletes. A basketball coach also needs mental skills knowledge to perform successfully, at training and on game-day. An elite basketball coach is required to have a broad range of skills of various professions, such as, teacher, manager, counsellor, motivator, strategist, diplomat, public relations expert, and much more. Elite coaches are also role models, adept at dealing with the media, able to restrain their emotions, and manage stress. These many professional and related psychological challenges confronting a coach have not been examined in this research yet they exist nonetheless.

Participant coaches in this study and their peers might pursue mental skills training if it were more readily available to them. While this study did not audit basketball coach training, there appears to be scope to more actively embed sport psychology theory and practice into all levels of basketball coaching accreditation and service delivery forums in Australia. In so doing, the knowledge gaps apparent in this research could be narrowed. Elite basketball coaches in Australia should not be expected to deliver psycho-educational services to their athletes in the same way a sport psychologist would. Nevertheless, an awareness of these services and the underlying theory and practice are essential considerations for these elite coaches. With greater awareness of mental skills these elite coaches could make informed decisions about the breadth of sport psychology practices of relevance to their teams and athletes. Currently, there appears to be substantial confusion and some ignorance among these coaches regarding the role and value of sport psychology in their sport. This situation is unlikely to change until individual sport psychology practitioners

devote more time to nurturing professional relationships within the basketball fraternity.

Limitations of this Research

This research was limited by numerous factors. Being my first significant experience in carrying out a substantial research project, I have to an extent learned “on the job.” Hence, my inexperience as a researcher was a limiting factor. Furthermore, my research aims, questions asked, my interactional style, and time limits associated with the interview format may have constrained the data collection process. Similarly, some coaches may have been unable to articulate their tacit knowledge of mental skills, except in terms of instinctive actions. A degree of bias and prejudice may have affected my competence as a researcher in this study. My familiarity with the coaching history of many of the high profile participants in this study may have resulted in a less than consistent interaction with each participant during interviews. That is, in the presence of some of the more eminent coaches, I may have, for example, been less inclined to question their wisdom or probe their responses. Finally, the data collected from interviews provided a cross-section only of each coach’s mental skills knowledge. To expand the depth and breadth of these coaches’ knowledge, a case study approach could be used.

Future Research

In the formulation of this research, I have focused on the mental skills knowledge of Australian basketball coaches, and how this knowledge is applied. Coaches will be more competent if they possess mental skills knowledge to teach these skills to their athletes. Furthermore, coaches will be more effective if they can assess the existing mental skills of their athletes, and thus, identify which mental

skills need refinement. Accordingly, the target for the acquisition of mental skills is the athlete. It may be useful to examine those specific mental skills required to be a successful coach. These specific mental skills would focus more intentionally on the coach as a performer in their own right including the multitude of challenges, tasks, pressures, and stresses associated with coaching at various levels. Researchers might also examine coaches' openness to learning about and adopting new methods and technologies. As discussed previously, there was some indication that for some coaches, adapting to and being open to change is particularly challenging.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form for Subjects Involved in Research**INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:**

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study examining the mental skills knowledge of elite Australian basketball coaches. Coaches need a great deal of knowledge to succeed and some of this knowledge relates to psychological and mental factors. This study will seek to understand what these coaches know about such factors and how this knowledge is applied as they work with athletes.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, _____

of _____

certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study entitled:

“Elite Australian Basketball Coaches’ Knowledge and Application of Mental Skills”.

being conducted at Victoria University of Technology by:

Dr Daryl Marchant and Peter Trask.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Peter Trask

and that I freely consent to participation involving the use on me of these procedures.

Procedures:

- (a) One 60-90 minute interview at a location and time as mutually agreed between the participant (I) and the researcher;
- (b) Audio from this interview shall be tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis;
- (c) Possibly, participate in telephone or e-mail follow-up discussions with the researcher to clarify subject matter discussed during the interview;
- (d) All data recorded and transcribed shall be treated in confidence and secured, and no identifying material shall be subsequently documented or published.

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:Name:**Participant:** _____**Witness other than** _____**the researcher:** _____

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher (Peter Trask, on telephone 03 5442 3074 or e-mail at ptrask@optusnet.com.au). If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University of Technology, PO Box 14428 MCMC, Melbourne, 8001 (telephone no: 03-9688 4710).

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS FORM

Information for Participants

Title of Research

Elite Australian Basketball Coaches' Knowledge and Application of Mental Skills

Background

Expert and experienced coaches possess substantial knowledge about their sport and the process of coaching. Coaches are actively involved in teaching skills, tactics, and physical preparation. Mental skills and techniques such as arousal management, imagery, goal setting, concentration, positive self-talk, thought stopping and confidence assist athletes to perform at their optimum level, in competition, training, and life in general.

Aims of Research

In this study I aim to examine elite Australian basketball coaches' (a) current knowledge of mental skills; (b) how coaches apply mental skills knowledge with athletes; and (c) identify gaps in the mental skills knowledge base of coaches and the application of this knowledge.

Research Procedures

Eight to ten participant coaches will be invited to a 45-90 minute semi-structured interview. Audio from these interviews will be tape-recorded. Recorded data will be subsequently transcribed and analysed. In some cases, coaches may need to be contacted later to clarify content from their interview. Data collected will be consolidated and analysed to identify patterns, consensus and general themes. Results, findings and conclusions will be discussed and documented in the thesis of Peter Trask as part of a minor thesis relating to the Master of Applied Psychology (Sport).

Risks to Participants

There are no apparent and significant risks in this research. It may be that participants choose to divulge sensitive or confidential details during the course of the interview. However, given the assurance of confidentiality of data collected (see below) and the capacity of participants to choose what they divulge, the risks to participant's reputation, credibility or mental health appear to be low. Importantly, participants are free to withdraw from this research at any time, without penalty.

Participant Confidentiality

All participant coaches will have their identity protected in this research. Only descriptions of the collective coaching group shall be presented in the thesis document. Each coach shall be referred to via a pseudonym and no cross-references will be made to that pseudonym's coaching profile and background. All data collected will be treated confidentially and stored in a secure location. After a period of five years, all data will be destroyed.

Research Outcomes

This research may identify gaps in the knowledge base of elite basketball coaches in Australia. Accordingly, it may be possible to target future training and coach education programs to address these perceived gaps.

Further Information Required

If you require further information regarding this research, please contact one of the following:

Principal Investigator	Dr Daryl Marchant	daryl.marchant@vu.edu.au	(03) 9919 4035	0403 065 358 (Mobile)
Student Investigator	Peter C. Trask	peter.trask1@students.vu.edu.au ptrask@optusnet.com.au		
Victoria University	Secretary	Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research	(03) 9919 4710	9687 2089 (Fax)

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428 MCMC, Melbourne, 8001 (Telephone: (03) 9919 4710).

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FORM

Thesis: Interview Questions

Mental Skills: Definition	Psychological characteristics that influence the cognitive, emotional and behavioural functioning of an individual. For an athlete, mental skills may affect how well, or otherwise, they prepare, train, compete and recover. Mental skills help athlete enhance their performance as well as their enjoyment of participation.
Stage	Question
Rapport building	(a) Tell me about your basketball career and highlights. (b) Explain how you got into basketball coaching?
Knowledge	1. What does the term mental skills mean to you? 2. Describe how mental skills are important in basketball? Time to present the sport psychology themes list. Ask the participant to examine this list for several minutes and think about what any of these may mean to them as a basketball coach. Any questions they may have can be asked and answered at the end of this short period. 3. Tell me about any of the themes on the checklist that stand out for you? 4. Which of these themes are relevant to your coaching? Give the coach the opportunity to expand. May need to assist with further probes. Focus on a few only. Aim for quality in the discussion, not quantity. Avoid statements and leading questions that feed answers, especially if the coach asks for clarification.
Gaps	5. Which skills on the checklist do you have less knowledge about? Spend some time with probes, unpacking this knowledge, based upon the discussions thus far. 6. How could a sport psychologist assist a basketball coach? 7. What do coaches need to take their knowledge of mental skills to the next level?
Utilisation	8. Describe how a basketball coach can structure training to teach mental skills? 9. Describe how a basketball coach can use their mental skills knowledge on game day?
Potential Probes. Or use as final questions to elicit more information.	(a) What do you do if one of your athletes is adversely affected by competition anxiety? (b) How do you assist your players to deal with disappointment, losses or injury? (c) Can you provide examples when your team has performed poorly for psychological reasons? (d) How do you respond to players with negative mindsets? (e) How do you achieve and sustain positive thinking among your players? (f) How do you develop and maintain cohesion among your team? (g) Would you like to comment any further on mental skills from the coach's perspective?

