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Coaching Relationships With Walk-On Athletes

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COACHING RELATIONSHIPS WITH WALK-ON ATHLETES

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COACHING RELATIONSHIP WITH WALK-ON ATHLETES

BY

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I would first like to give honor and respect to Lord and savior Jesus Christ without him known of this would be possible. Secondly, I would like to dedicate this to my mother Pamela Hunt and Aunt Darlene without them it would have been extremely difficult to accomplish this task. I would also like to send dedicate this to all my family and friends for keeping me focus in my hardest times. This has truly been a tremendous experience. Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Stacey Sowards who words will forever be embedded within me, “You do not want a thesis to sit on your brain so get it done.” When she said those words in her qualitative words, it really inspired me to keep moving forward.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover what communication practices coaches used on walk-on athletes and to determine whether the coach was successful or unsuccessful from the athletes' perspective. 15 present and former walk-on athletes who played for The University of Texas at El Paso football team served as the participants for the present study. In order to obtain data, the researcher interviewed the walk-on athletes using the phenomenological approach (Sparks, 1993) which utilizes open-ended questions to find out what kind of experience(s) the walk-on athletes shared in relationship to their coach. Results suggested that six major themes surfaced from the interviews of walk-on athletes: *Presence, Connection, Building/Destructing, Imperfection, Crippling their Desires, and Management Strategies*. These themes indicated the relationships corresponding to the communication the athletes shared with their coaches.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Today's collegiate athletes have two fixations: to conquer the game in which they participate in and to develop a fruitful lifestyle beyond sport. There are two types of athletes: the walk-on athlete, who often struggles with communicating and earning respect, and the scholarship athlete, who can tend to receive more praise. This study seeks to bridge the gap in literature on the effectiveness of coaching in the case of walk-on athletes by analyzing their experiences in relation with their coaches.

Statement of the Problem

Although winning is considered highly important and extremely relevant to the competitive eye, it should not be the ultimate factor when measuring a coach's success. Researchers who study coaching effectiveness seem to think otherwise; they are more concerned with analyzing the behavioral patterns of winning coaches (Bloom et al., 1999; Tharp & Gallimore 1976; Sutcliffe, 2011; Cushion et al., 2001). These studies hypothesize that if a coach were to emulate these behavioral patterns, they too will be successful. However, these studies fail to show the effect that the coach has on student athletes, particularly on walk-on athletes. This research seeks to address the above-mentioned gap in literature on walk-on athletes vis-à-vis their coaches. In order to obtain a more complete understanding of what makes a coach successful or unsuccessful, one needs to study the experience that walk-on athletes share with their coaches both during mentoring and physical training.

The Purpose

The purpose of this study is to bring to light the communication strategies coaches use on walk-on athletes, particularly focusing upon whether the coach creates successful relationships with these players. Walk-on athletes are those athletes who were not recruited by coaches at the universities and colleges which they attend, but tried out in order to join their school sports program. During try outs, these athletes must display above average talent in order to have a good chance at making the team. It is important to note that these athletes do not receive any funding from athletic sports programs; they typically have to pay their own way through school. This research uses a phenomenological research method to obtain information about walk-on athletes in order to determine what makes a coach's relationships with them successful or unsuccessful.

Significance of the Study

There is relatively limited research on what communication strategies coaches use with walk-on athletes and whether they are successful in cultivating fruitful relationships with student athletes. The majority of the past research suggests that the success of coach is only measured by their winning percentage. Scholars who use the behavioral approach to coaching argue that if one emulates the behaviors of winning coaches, they too should be successful. Camire and Trude (2012) propose that the success of a coach goes beyond the traditional values of winning. They believe that improving the different aspects of athlete-coach relationships -- teaching life lessons, improving academics, and encouraging self worth -- will make them successful in the holistic sense. However, none of these studies attend to the potential differences between walk-on athletes and scholarship athletes, which can play a major role in how students are coached. When reviewing these studies, it becomes abundantly clear that research tends to focus on scholarship

athlete. One could only assume that the athlete interviewed were all part of the same collegiate team, and that they were on scholarship.

The findings from this study seek to bridge the gap in literature on the effectiveness of coaching walk-on athletes. This project can help shed light on the way(s) coaches should communicate with their student athletes in the future. This study may also help coaches understand what athletes expect from them, which ultimately might impact competitive success.

Given the dominant, narrow understanding of coach effectiveness, there is little to no research that studies the communication strategies coaches use with walk-on athletes. Thus, the following review of literature will focus on two dominant trends in studies of coach effectiveness: the behavioral approach to winning coaches, and the relationships between athlete and coach. These two sections serve as a foundation for this study's efforts.

In view of the fact that successful coaches are only deemed successful if they have a high winning percentage this should serve as the window to questioning because winning does not necessary contribute to teaching athletes how to be better people. Furthermore, existing literature shows that the most common behaviors of winning coaches are instructive. Instructive behaviors refer to the information or message sent by the coach and retrieved by an athlete or a team, which could occur during or after a skill (Bloom et al., 1999; Tharp & Gallimore 1976; Sutcliffe, 2011; Cushion et al., 2001). Research continuously confirms that if a coach were to emulate or copy these winning behaviors they too could become a successful and thriving coach.

Current research provides a vast deal of awareness of what winning coaches do and how they impose their wisdom. However, it remains unclear how coaching philosophies and behaviors affect the coach-athlete relationship. Gearity's (2009) study suggests that several questions about the behavioral approach of winning coaches remain unanswered. He asks "Did

the coach's behavior have the intended effect on the athlete? How did the coach's use of instruction, praise, scolding, ect, affect the athlete, the team?" (Gearity, 2009, p.18). Answering the aforementioned questions should determine if a coach is successful or not. Researchers studying coaching effectiveness are more concerned with analyzing the behavioral patterns of winning coaches, rather than focusing on the impact of coaches on student athletes. In order to get a more complete definition of what makes a coach successful or unsuccessful, we should look beyond a coach's winning percentage and behavior and focus on the relationship between coaches and players.

In recent studies on coaching effectiveness, researchers have begun to focus on the relationship between athletes and coaches. It is important to note that the following studies used two methods for obtaining their data: focus groups and interviews. Scholars cautioned that, while most adults felt comfortable speaking with the interviewers on a one-on-one basis, adolescents struggled during questioning. Once researchers applied the focus group method, which allowed multiple subjects to be interviewed at one time, adolescents became completely relaxed and confident to answer questions. It is also necessary to add that the studies were three different topics: athletes' preference of their coach (Beck, 2009; Gearity, 2007; Lattin, 2009), the strategies coaches used in their programs (Duthie 1986; Foldesi, 1986; Lyle, 1986), and the importance of applying life skills to sports (Camire & Trude, 2012; Camira & Trude, 2013).

Furthermore, literature on athlete-coach relationships suggests a few critical questions which this study seeks to further in the context of walk-on athletes: What makes a coach successful? What communication strategies and techniques do coaches use to maximize their athletes' abilities? How do coaches determine if an athlete is successful? And, finally, does the traditional value attached to winning ultimately determine the coach's success?

Based on the previous studies on athletes and coaches relationships, it was evident that the athletes knew how important it was to build and maintain a respectful and healthy relationship with their coaches, which sometimes involved in-depth conversations with them on multiple occasions. Athletes also discussed how it is vital for team success that coaches monitor their negativity and work on being more encouraging and positive. It was shown in the studies of Beck (2009), Gearity (2007), and Lattin (2009) that athletes responded quickly and stayed motivated to come to practice and attend games when coaches used positive language. However, if the coach used disrespectful, hurtful, and aggressive language, players preferred staying in the dorms. The athletes in these studies felt that coach involvement in sports and personal-related situations was critical for individual and team success; they wanted coaches to be a part of their everyday lives. In Becker's (2009) study, athletes indicated that successful coaches should be a "players-coach" - someone who always kept their athletes motivated even when the odds were against them. Athletes in Camire and Trudel's (2013) study explained how successful coaches gave a sense of belonging and always encouraged positive thinking. The athletes also explained how the coach taught them to focus on transitioning the same patterns and behaviors they had learned from sports because it would make them better active learners and listeners in different areas and fields.

A number of investigators have attempted to acquire coaches' views on the psychological characteristics important for athletes to thrive and be successful. For instance, a recent survey by Butryn, Giacobbi, Roper, and Whitney (2008) assessed coaches' insights on qualities vital to an athlete's success. Ten NCAA Division 1 coaches participated in the study: five males and five females. According to the study, coaches described how it was highly important to develop the athletes on the college level. One coach emphasized why it was necessary, stating, "Many of

times their gifts are God given in high school but once they get to our level that word commitment, that word accountability, and responsibility whether that be academically, socially, or athletically because to progress it's going to take a lot of effort on all those areas" (Butryn et al., 2008 p. 169). It is evident that coaches' feel that it is essential for the athletes success that they develop the athletes not only physically but mentally as well. In both Duthie (1986) and Lyle (1986) studies, they illustrate how the coaches' position is to serve as the leader, someone who can develop the athletes and to assist them in any way possible.

The literature has addressed these dynamics between coaches and student athletes, but do the same relationships adhere between coaches and walk-on athletes? As this project demonstrates, walk-on athletes are often underrated by coaches as well as scholarship athletes. According to testimonies of walk-on athletes in this thesis, coaches sometimes belittle these athletes, making them feel undeserving and hopeless, and adding stress to their already complicated lives. It is important to note that some of these athletes not only juggle sports and studies, but also work part time to help support themselves financially. It is these experiences that this study seeks to address. To this end, the thesis will be broken down into the following chapters.

This study will focus on the relationship between athletes and coaches. The primary question is: What communication strategies and techniques do coaches use on walk-on athletes? The following research questions support the primary question:

RQ1: How do walk-on athletes perceive their roles in collegiate athletic teams?

RQ2: How do walk-on athletes perceive their relationships with their teammates and coaches?

RQ3: How do their perceptions influence their success as college athletes?

RQ4: What role does communication and mentorship play in these roles, relationships, perceptions, and success for these walk-on athletes?

Chapter Two provides a review of research and literature on coaching. The literature review explores and covers coaching effectiveness from multiple perspectives. Chapter Three includes the research design, methods and procedures used in conducting the study. To get a better understanding of the tools used in this study this chapter contains data collection and data analysis procedures.

Chapter Four contains the findings from the study, which were organized in multiple themes that had emerged from the data. Finally, Chapter Five presents a review of the study, a summary of the findings, and a discussion connecting the implications of this research to relevant literature in concluding, the fifth chapter gives recommendations for future sports research.

Chapter 2

Literature of Review

This literature review will be separated into two sections: behavioral approach of coaching, and the relationship between a coach and an athlete. In the behavioral approach section, research will be focused on the behaviors of winning coaches. The researchers involved in these studies used a similar but reconstructed instrument that was first designed to measure classroom success in the educational system between teachers and students. The re-modified instrument, or Arizona State University Observational Instrument, helped researchers analyze the behaviors of coaches. The original instrument, which first surfaced in Tharp and Gallimore's (1976) study, contained 10 major categories: instructions, hustles, modeling-positive, modeling-negative, praises, scolding, nonverbal reward, nonverbal punishment, scold/reinstruction and other. It is important to understand that each researcher might have reconstructed (ASUOI) as it relates to their particular study.

The second section of the literature review will cover the relationship between coaches and athletes. This section seeks to understand what kind of relationship coaches and athletes share with each other. Some researchers hypothesize that athletes will plateau without the help of successful coaching. These studies often used one-on-one interviews and focus groups. While the following literature discusses winning coaches' behaviors and the relationship between athlete and coach, what it fails to adequately address is the interaction between walk-on athletes and coaches.

Behavioral Approach

Amazed by the great success of Coach Wooden, Tharp and Gallimore (1976) ventured away from the education system to study the UCLA basketball coach in his element. Coach Wooden is said to be the greatest teacher of basketball. According to Tharp and Gallimore (1976), “we were confident that we had found we had selected a master teacher to study” (p. 122). The researchers developed their 10 category coding scheme within 8 practices. The scholars explained that Coach Wooden did not speak for more than 20 seconds, and he was easy to code because of his short responses and quick whistles. Past research illustrated to the examiners that instructive comments are more frequently used than scold and praise. The results from the study illustrates the behaviors Coach Wooden used during his practice sections: Instructions 50.3%, Hustles 12.3%, Modeling Positive 2.8%, Modeling negative 1.6%, Praises, 6.9%, Reproofs 6.6%, Nonverbal punishment 8.0%, Other 2.4%, and Un-codable 6.6%. Twenty-five years later, the researchers organized a follow-up project. In Tharp and Gallimore’s, 2004 study, they discussed how Coach Wooden’s practice remained intense scolding and instructing happened at the same moment.

Similarly, in order to capture what made Coach Tarkanian a successful basketball coach at Fresno State University, Bloom, Crumpton, and Anderson’s (1999) study used a systematic observation approach, which past researchers believed illustrated to others viewing the same series of events would agree with a description of the recorded data. According to the scholars, it states “systematic or direct observation has historically been used in a wide range of domains such as anthropology, psychology and in the classroom in the 1960s” (Bloom et al., 1999 p. 2). In addition to the observation instrument being used in the classroom, it was later introduced into physical education settings to investigate what coaches were doing in relation to their athletes.

These instruments measured the thinking process of the coach, and also revealed critical strategies coaches used in relation to their athletes. Before the instrument could be used to measure the strategies resulting in Coach Tarkanian's success, it had to be modified to work properly. Based on the study, the researchers had three trials that they carried out. These tests trials were created to establish whether it was necessary to record the length of practice that lasted three hours. The researchers determined that fatigue began to set in during the final hour so they only recorded the first 2 hours. Furthermore, one behavior was connected to humor while the other was an uncodable behavior. According to the scholars results of the coach winning behaviors were as follows: "Tactical instructions 29.0, Hustles, 16.0 Technical instructions 13.9, praise/encouragement 13.6 general 12.0 scolds 6 uncodable 2.8, modeling 2.2 criticism/ reinstruction 1.6 humor 1.0 nonverbal punishments 0.6 and nonverbal rewards 0.3" (Bloom et al., 1999 p.165).

For decades, the English professional youth coaches were said to be some of the best in the world. In order to observe just how successful these winning coaches were in relation to their athletes, researchers Cushion, Christopher, and Anderson (2001) took on the assignment by using the Arizona State University Observational instrument. The researchers studied eight English coaches who participated in the study by being recorded for 135 minutes. According to the researchers seven of the fourteen categories were designed specifically to measure the behaviors of the coach: pre-instruction, post-instruction, questioning, physical assistance, positive modeling, and negative modeling. The other behaviors were said to be difficult to measure so the researchers decided to combine them: non-verbal praise and non-verbal scolding. Before the study could begin, researchers felt it was important to have a trial run. The research resulted in over 1,000 minutes observed and approximately 1,134 behaviors recorded. Individual

behaviors were constituted accordingly: instruction measured at 29.7%; intervals of all manners were 23.72%; praise made up 14.76% of behaviors; silence, positive modeling, and negative modeling were the least commonly used behaviors (Cushion et al, 2001). In this previous study, it showed that the coach used a high volume of instruction; however, it does not indicate how the athletes responded to the coach behaviors.

Additionally, Cushion, Jones, and Potrac (2007) studied the behaviors of top-level professional English soccer coaches within the practice environment. Again, the researchers used The Arizona State University Observation Instrument (ASUOI). The instrument was used to collect behavior data from four coaches during three phases of the given season. The purpose of this experiment was to address the neglect by providing a season long quantitative description and suggested interpretation of the coaching behaviors of the top-level English soccer coaches in the practice environment. The results showed a total of 15,723 behaviors recorded from the coaches under study. The behaviors closely related to instruction (pre-instruction, concurrent instruction, questioning, physical assistance, positive modeling, and negative modeling) accounted for nearly two thirds of all the coded behaviors (59.84%). Praise to scold ratio showed 23:1, silence measured 14.54%, praise measured 14.54%, and management accounted for 6.17%.

Sutcliffe's (2011) study analyzed the coaching behaviors of experienced English independent school team sport coaches within the practice environment. The Arizona State University Observation Instrument (ASUOI) was revised using a process closely related to Brewer and Jones (2002), which was designed to improve the validity and reliability of observations. The modified observation instrument was deemed eligible to collect data for the unique behaviors of three independent school coaches within a specific school environment suggested by Sutcliffe (2011). The revised model was then used, to observe the coaching

behaviors of 3 IAPS school team sport coaches. The new tool was made up of 22 categories that would best illustrate the coaches behaviors during their practice sections: pre-instruction, earning intention, concurrent instruction, concurrent feedback, concurrent feed-forward, post-feedback, post-feed-forward, praise at skill attempt, closed question, open question, coaches' model, learners' model, negative model, learners model negative model, hustle, praise general, scold general use of humor, management observation, conferring, and uncodable.

After reviewing and evaluating the behavioral approach to winning coaches (Bloom et al., 1999; Tharp & Gallimore 1976; Sutcliffe, 2011; Cushion et al, 2001), it is evident that the studies only focus on winning percentages of the coaches. This illustrates that the key component to being an effective and successful coach is to win as many games as they can in their particular sport. These studies also identify that if a coach were to emulate the coaching behaviors of these winning coaches they too should be as successful and effective as them. However, what these studies do not determine is how the athletes perceive their coaches. In Gearity's (2008) study, the researcher raises some insightful and critical questions about the behavioral approach of winning coaches. He asks, "Did the coach's behavior have the intended effect on the athlete? How did the coach's use of instruction, praise, scold etc., affect the athlete, the team?" Furthermore, winning, though important and relevant in terms of competition and success of a program, should not be the ultimate factor when measuring a coach's success. Researchers who studied coaching effectiveness seem to think otherwise, as they are more captivated with analyzing the behavioral patterns of winning coaches. In order to get a more complete definition of what makes a coach successful or unsuccessful when coaching athletes, this study will attend to factors beyond a coach's winning percentage and their behaviors. It will question what kinds of relationships constitute a successful coach. In recent studies on coaching effectiveness, researchers have

focused on the relationship between athlete and coach. The following section seeks to frame a few critical and important questions: what makes a coach successful?; what communication strategies and techniques coaches use to maximize their athletes abilities?; and how do coaches determine if an athlete is successful?

Athlete-Coach Relationship

Some might believe that great leaders are born great, but they're not. The truth is in the details, the sacrifice, and the desire to master a craft of brilliant magnitude. If coaching is that unique craft, how does a coach strengthen their leadership skills among athletes? One of the most important values to developing and strengthening great leadership qualities among athletes is the development of their own coaching philosophies, which takes time and experience. However, there are only two coaching philosophies: espousing a largely humanistic approach embodying a central concern for the personal growth, and a performance-based philosophy, which overtly values competitive success (Lyle, 1986). Every coach has formed and developed their philosophies. These philosophies are developed by reflections of deeper values that shape attitudes relating to life, morals, the rights of individuals, and the place of sport in society. According to Lyle (1986):

A coach translates these values and beliefs into a reasonably coherent set of principles covering the implementation of process and what should be emphasized within it. The coaching philosophy will be reflected in his behavior towards the athlete. (p. 9)

Developing a coaching philosophy that relates and appeals to athletes is important when trying to structure a team or unit. However, if the philosophy that the coach uses is not perceived by the athletes in a positive manner, the team will eventually collapse. According to Duthie (1986), "If we agree that the principal function of a coach is to assist the athletes or teams to improve

performance in a given sport we then may see the ways to achieve conceptual and hence material control over such a process” (p. 202). Focusing on the development of philosophies is an important quality to understanding how coaches become great leaders, ultimately leading to a successful athlete-coach relationship.

Of particular importance to this study is the work of Butryn et al. (2008). Their article, entitled “College Coaches’ Views about the Development of Successful Athletes: A Descriptive Exploratory Investigation”, focused on the participation of ten NCAA coaches from a large southern eastern university. The coaches represented the sports of basketball, football, golf, swimming, diving, track and field, and soccer. Five of the coaches worked with women’s sports while the other five coached men’s sports. The selection of the participants was based on availability and the willingness of coaches to engage in the study (Butryn et al., 2008). The researchers used in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interview questions allowed all participants to fully elaborate on their experiences coaching college athletes. According to the study, all participants were asked the following questions: could you tell me how an athlete improves or makes progress in your sport and could you describe your experiences coaching athletes who have made a lot of progress and developed his or her skills while on their teams and describe what it was like to coach that specific athlete (Butryn et al., 2008).

After the investigation, the researchers analyzed the data, which six higher level themes emerged: Developmental Considerations, Motivation and Competitiveness, Coach-ability, The Coach’s Influence, The Team’s Influence, and Miscellaneous Contextual Influences. Each section gave different examples of how athletes flourished during their careers. In the section of Developmental Considerations, coaches spoke about how athletes had a winning mentality when it came to improving their weaknesses. In the section of Motivation and Competitiveness, coaches

spoke about how their athletes stayed motivated and driven and always had strong work ethic. In the section of Coach-ability, the coaches explained how their athletes were students of the game and often asked questions. In the section of Coach's influence, the coaches' emphasized how important it was to have one-on-one meetings with their players. They often wrote their athletes encouraging notes to let them know that anything is possible. In the section of The Team's Influence, coaches expressed that it was vital that the players get along, and it was also important to keep competitive mindset throughout the team. Coaches expressed that the team should build each other up and always help if they could. Finally, in the section of Miscellaneous Contextual Influences, the coaches spoke about how the help of family members also motivated the players, and strong support from high school teammates and coaches helped build successful players (Butryn et al., 2008).

This research gives concrete evidence that the coaches wanted their athletes to succeed. They showed support for their athletes in various ways, such as giving them attention in the form of mentoring or leaving confident notes in their lockers. However, it was not evident what type of athlete was receiving the attention: walk-on athlete or scholarship athlete. This issue is important and needs to be attended to.

In Becker's (2009) study, the main objective was to determine and examine basketball players' experiences of being coached during a turnaround season. As a new coach embarks on a new team, one could not imagine the significance the coach had on his players. Newly hired coach proves to losing team that they could be winners. The coach during a turnaround season took team from a losing record of 14-17, which they finished fifth in their division to a winning record of 22-8, where they finished in first place. The researcher indicated that it was almost the same team from the year before minus two individuals.

Becker (2009) interviewed 8 players from the basketball team who also played on the team the year before the winning championship season. However, if athletes did not play on the team before, they were excluded. The interview guide consisted of four open-ended questions that were designed to capture the players' experiences of being coached during their turnaround season.. From the data, five themes emerged: (a) Experiences of Coach's Characteristics, (b) Experience of Coach's Philosophy, (c) Experience of His Coaching Style, (d) Experiences of the Practice Environment, and (e) Experiences of How Coach Influenced Us (Becker, 2009).

In the first major theme experience of coach's characteristics, the athletes captured the essence of the coach's sense of humor; the players emphasized how their coach always had them laughing throughout the day, and how he was very positive when he could have been negative. In the second major theme experience of his coaching style, the athletes' indicated how the coach came in with a set system, and he described how it was successful. The athletes reported that there wasn't any second guessing with him because he knew what worked for him and that made the players comfortable. The third major theme, experience of his coaching style, included three high level themes: He was a players' coach, his treatment towards us, and his coaching qualities. In the section of He was a players-coach, the athletes indicated that from the moment he arrived they knew that he was there for them. In the section His treatment towards us, the athletes spoke about how would treat them like young adults, and he always challenged them. Last section empathized on his coach qualities, the athletes described how their coach was always alert and ready to go; he always was focus so they to remain focused. In the fourth major theme, Experiences of the practice environment, the athletes illustrated how they just went to practice and had fun. However, the practice was always intense and they described how there was always a game-like atmosphere. The athletes also indicated how they dreaded going to practice last year.

The fifth and final major theme, Experiences of how he influenced us, was split into two sections: He influenced us as Individuals and he influenced us as a Team. The athletes spoke about how he made them feel important, which was very important since the players did come off several losing seasons. Athletes described how he gave history lessons to them, rebuilding traditions that they knew nothing about. The athletes also expressed how little things could make or break them. They described how their coach would hold team meetings in which he discussed what it would take to be great (Becker, 2009). It is evident from this study that this coach had instant success within his first year coaching. However, what this article does not indicate is which athlete was selected for the interviews: walk-on athletes or scholarship-athlete. How did the coach relate to the walk-on athletes and did the coach treat them any different from the scholarship athletes? Before one deems this coach successful, one should first determine if this coach implement equal opportunity within his philosophy.

The next article aimed to study the coach-athlete relationship from the point of view of the athlete, and to determine if coaches have had success or failure. The coach-athlete relationship has played a major role in Hungarian top sports (Foldesi, 1986). The methods for collecting data were questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. Foldesi (1986) suggests that, depending on branch of sport, the competitors' coaches have an important role in their athletes' success or failure. The results also depend on the way a coach imparts their knowledge and how their competitors accept it. This article discusses how even though coaches have the knowledge and experience, it does not always relate to the athlete or competitor. However, in the coaches' opinion, top athletes' mentality has changed since coaching has become a full-time profession: many of them are more aggressive, unfair and money oriented. Success for the athlete is based on living (Foldesi, 1986).

In Camire and Trude's (2013) study, the researchers wanted to document coaches' and athletes' perspectives on student-athlete development through participation in high school football. According to Camire and Trude (2013), "In Canada, over 750,000 students practice sport in this setting and according to School sport Canada (2012), the mandate is to: 'promote and advocate for positive sportsmanship, citizenship, and total development of student athletes through interscholastic sport'" (Camire & Trude 2013 p. 1). It is evident that students in Canada are benefiting from the way Canadians promote and structure their sports programs within the education system. It is estimated that the numbers will continue to rise for students being involved in extracurricular activities because of their successful formula. The research took place in a private high school in Quebec, Canada which enrolled approximately 1000 students. Although the private school offers and hosts a variety of sports such as basketball, volleyball, badminton, and soccer, it was football that was often mentioned for its positive atmosphere. To go into deeper detail, Camire and Trude (2013) explained the significance of choosing football as the particular sport they wanted to study:

During discussions, football was often mentioned for its positive as well as less positive attributes. On the other, proponents stated that high school football provided opportunities to reach out to a large number of students (teams are often comprised of over 50 individuals) and the sport has often been associated with the development of life skills such as dedication, discipline, and work hard. On the hand, detractors discussed how the sport is often linked with injuries and is reputed for promoting a chauvinist subculture of violence and aggression. Despite some of the drawbacks, administrators decided to provide the initial financial investment needed to start a football team at the school. (p. 42).

It is evident that the sport of football was chosen for multiple reasons: the majority of the student-athletes involved in extracurricular activities participated in the sport, football had been associated with development of life skills such as dedication and discipline, and the sport of football was known for its aggression, violence, and brutal career ending injuries. This project was established to help coaches promote student development. Nine coaches volunteered to be in the study and their coaching experience ranged from zero to seven years. Eighteen student-athletes volunteered for the study. The researchers used two methods to conduct their interviews: semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Camire and Trude (2013) noted that, “Focus groups were used with students because adolescents’ comfort level communicating with adults varies considerably and adolescents have been shown to be more relaxed and willing to share perceptions when discussions are held with peers” (p. 4). Past studies indicated to the researchers that focus groups were more suitable for student-athletes. It made adolescents more comfortable at communicating and illustrated their thoughts when speaking to adults when in the presence of their companions.

The coach portion of the study was composed of two sections: demographic information and information regarding their expectations for the season. The researchers asked questions such as what do you intend to coach the student-athletes, what is the mandate of the football program? The student-athletes were asked questions such as what made you (student-athlete) join the football team and did being on the football team influence your development as a person? After the interviews were analyzed, five themes emerged from the study. First, coaches’ developmental expectation for the season and students’ motivations to play football are explored. Second, coaches’ strategies to promote student development are examined. Third, participants’ views on developmental outcomes are provided. Fourth, the skill participants believe can be

transferred beyond football are examined. Fifth, the challenges faces by participants are presented. The final discussion illustrated how the student-athletes felt that football helped them create a bond with school. Football played a major role in the student-athletes social lives and gave them a sense of belonging. As for the coaches, they wanted to communicate to their student-athletes that there was more to football than just winning games. Football built discipline and helped the students become more organized on in off the field.

Camire, Forneris, and Trudel's (2012) project was to study and examine Gould and Carson's (2008) model of coaching life skills. The main objective was to capture how the coaches developed their strategies and philosophies of life skills at the high school level. It was equally important to understand how the coaches transferred their knowledge to their student-athletes in ways young men could understand and use. Camire et. al. (2012) felt it was important to explain the five components of model coaching which were developed in Gould and Carson's (2008) research. The first model was split into two divisions: internal and external assets. It is vital to understand that it is the athletes who help influence the coaches to promote life skills through their coaching philosophy. The second component dealt with the coaching philosophy, relationship skills, competence, and accessibility. The coach's philosophy is of great value since it is up to the coach to create a positive motivational environment for the athletes. Gould and Carson (2008) stated that:

Coaches can have indirect and direct strategies, which life skills develop. An example of indirect strategies could be when a coach creates a sport environment to try to eliminate risky behaviors from athletes and acting as role models by showing encouraging behaviors and attitudes. Direct strategies consist of purposely applying activities within the sport atmosphere, which promote life skills. (cited in Camire et al., 2012 p. 244)

In this section the researchers explain why it is important for the coaches to build a positive atmosphere for the students to thrive. Gould and Carson (2008) explained why implementing team building activities gave the students the chance to understand the importance of social skills beyond sport. The third component focuses on “why the development occurs and how it influences the development of the athletes” (Camire, et al., 2012 p. 244). One example used in this section focuses on stress management and communication. It explained why it is imperative to understand these elements because they can be applied in several different fields. The fourth component of the model focuses on two characteristics: positive and negative outcomes of participating in sport. Positive developmental outcomes of sport include improved health, educational success, psychosocial and emotional stability. However, a failure to develop life skills through sport can lead to negative outcomes such as physical injury, drug abuse, stress and negative attitude (Camire et al., 2012). The fifth and final component of the model discusses the transferability of life skills to non-sport settings. The authors explain that there is chance that life skills will not transfer. They state, “ there are a number of factors that plays a significant role in the youth’s willingness to transfer life skills perceived value of the skill, confidence in the ability to transfer, comprehension of transfer, and support/reinforcement for transfer” (Camire et al., 2012 p. 244-245). The following components illustrate why it is important for coaches to implement life skills into their coaching strategies; it helps to develop the athletes mentally.

This project centered around 25 five participants (9 coaches and 16 athletes). The method for the project consisted of 25 semi-structured interviews. There were several sports involved in the study that individual and team sports. Interview guides were developed in English and French for both the coaches and athletes. The interview guide for the coaches consisted of six sections, demographic information, coaching learning, coaching practice, influences of coaches

on youth, and support. Results proved that coaches did develop the student athletes. Coaches emphasized how they would speak to athletes in a way that was understandable and comprehensive. They also spoke about the importance to teaching social courtesy and practicing being respectful. On the other hand, student-athletes explained how their coaches would teach life skills. They talked about how their coach would tell them that it is necessary to respect any opponent of theirs and to treat them as they would want to be treated (Camire et al., 2012).

Lattin's (2009) study was to examine the nature of interpersonal communication between female intercollegiate coaches and African American female athletes through aggressive communication. The researcher decided to use phenomenographic approach, which is a scientific research approach that seeks to describe the different ways individuals have understood a particular phenomenon. By performing this method, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, which lasted over a three-month period. The researcher's sole priority during this investigation was to gain knowledge of aggressive communication from female intercollegiate coaches toward their African American female athletes that might increase uncertainties in their interpersonal relationship. Each interview was audio-taped and lasted approximately 2 to 3 hours. From the interviews and investigation six descriptive categories were constructed how African American female athletes perceived aggressive communication from their female coaches: threat, debt, negative esteem, aversive stimulation, activation of impersonal commitments, and activation of personal commitments.

In the section of "threat," athletes expressed how the coach would threaten them by taking away athletic scholarships or given them extra workouts and early practices. In the section "debt," the athletes illustrated how the coach often made them feel like they owed them something. The athletes described what the researcher interpreted as "negative self-feeling." In

this section athletes illustrated how their coach belittled them making them feel bad about being who they were. The next section, entitled “version stimulation,” athletes discussed how the coach would make them run laps even when it was a small and minor mistake. The final theme or category was entitled “activation of impersonal commitments.” In this section, the coaches often questioned the athletes about their commitment to the team, and it affected the athletes’ mindset and desires. The descriptive categories that emerged from the study supported the notion that verbally aggressive communication practices are frequent and memorable aspects of the communication process between female intercollegiate coaches and African American female athletes.

Gearity’s (2009) study explored athletes who experienced poor coaching. The researcher used qualitative methods to obtain his data. Individual interviews served as the only source of data. The interview began with a phenomenological oriented question (open-ended and non-leading), “Tell me about a specific time you experienced poor coaching?” Follow-up questions probed the participant’s reported experience. Each interview was taped and lasted for 30-85 min. If the participant didn’t offer new information the interview was deemed complete. Following the meetings, the interviews were analyzed and transcribed using existential phenomenological methods. The first iteration of data analysis involved drawing out the smallest meaningful units, known as meaning units, of each participant’s response. For example, one of these meaning units was, “I just feel like she [coach] really didn’t know me” (Gearity, 2009, p. 76). During the second iteration, which involved clustering similar meaning units into sub-themes, this meaning unit was categorized under the subtheme “not there for athlete.” During the third and final iteration of data analysis, all sub-themes were compared and clustered across all transcripts to create the themes characterizing the participants’ experiences of poor coaching. Once the work

was completed and transcribed, the researcher and researcher team sent a three page summary of their findings to the participants. The summary gave the meaning of the themes and sub themes. This gave the participants a chance to question the researcher findings. During the exploration of the experience of poor coaching, 33 coaches were said to be poor coaches. These coaches came from many different sports and many different levels of coaching. The highest level of coaching came from MLB and the NFL. The lowest level of coaching came from NCAA- D1. The average participant talked about 2 coaches and the experience they shared with the coach. Five major themes derived from the present study: Not Caring, Uncaring, Unfair, Inhibiting, and Coping (Gearity, 2009).

After reviewing the relationship between athlete and coach, it is evident that athletes want to establish a genuine and authentic relationship with their coach. Athletes also want a coach that would communicate with them in a positive and encouraging way. Although they knew that a coach could not be perfect, it was important to them to have a coach who would refrain from using vulgar and aggressive communication (Beck, 2009; Gearity, 2007; Lattin, 2009). Athletes felt that it was important for individual and team success for coaches to not only play a role on the field, but off the field activities as well. In Beck's (2009) study, athletes illustrated that for a coach to show signs of being a successful coach one should be a players-coach, someone who always motivates and keeps the athletes eager and ready to learn. Furthermore, according Gearity's (2009) study, one athlete stated, "a good coach puts in the effort which makes you want to put in the effort. My coach and I had good relationship. Even though he is not coaching me now, we still keep in touch" (Gearity, 2009, p. 83). In order for coaches to be successful they should form and build a bond with their athletes. Butryn's et al. (2008) described one particular way they maximized their athletes' success: The coaches often met with their athletes

individually. This gave the athlete and coach time to address any issues or to see what was expected from the athlete or the coach. It ultimately helped strengthen their athlete-coach relationship.

Building on maximizing athletes' potential, coaches in Camire and Trudel's (2012) study described why it was important to promote life skills in their coaching regiment. The coaches felt it was vital for the development of their student-athletes to implement the teaching of life skills in their coaching philosophies. Coaches felt like discipline, respect, and dedication could transfer in other areas besides the world of sports. The following studies shed light on the importance of the relationship between athlete and coach. It also resulted in better motivation from athletes, built stronger and powerful teams, and in some cases it created team success. However, what these studies fail to do is identify and distinguish whether these athletes being interviewed at these universities and colleges are walk-on or scholarship athletes.

This study aims to address the above mentioned gap in literature regarding the relationship between walk-on athletes and coaches. The method chosen for this study is interviewing 15 walk-on athletes from the University of Texas at El Paso Football Team. Following Gearity (2009), this study utilizes Existential Phenomenology, which focuses on the world as lived by a person not disconnected from others (Luijpen, 2009). This theory is suitable for the present research because it gives the participants the chance to discuss their experience in which they lived in relations with the coaches.

Chapter 3

Methods and Procedure Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of collegiate athletes, particularly former and present walk-on athletes who played for the UTEP Football team. This study seeks to obtain information from these athletes to see what communication strategies and techniques coaches used on them and to ultimately find out whether their coaches were successful or unsuccessful. This chapter describes the methods and procedures used to conduct the study. It is structured into the following sections: Research design sample, method, procedures, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

Consistent with Gearity's (2009) study, this current paper uses Existential Phenomenology as the primary instrument to carry out this research. According to Luijpen (1959), "its presence is generally called 'experience.' It is important, however, that this term be understood in the broadest possible sense. For, without raising question what the essence of experience is, it should be clear that there are many ways experiencing which places us in determined reality" (p. 6). Luijpen (1959) explains that there are various ways to capture the essence of the experience lived, however, the truth can only be revealed if the question is formulated accordingly. Since the purpose of the study was to obtain the essence of the experience that the walk-on athlete encountered amongst their coaches and to see what communication strategies they used, it was the most suitable design for accomplishing that intent. It is also relevant to add that past researchers who studied relationships between athletes and coaches had success when using the Existential Phenomenology Theory.

Sample

15 former and present walk-on student athletes' from the University of Texas at El Paso football team participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 20 to 25. Each athlete had at least fifteen years of total football experience that could have included youth little league football through the high school level. The researcher met with graduate assistant coaches at their football facilities and discussed the plans for the project, which was to find out the communication strategies coaches used when coaching walk-on athletes. The coaches were given guidelines which the athletes had to follow in order to participate in the study. The athletes were also asked to have been a walk-on athlete for a minimum of one semester. Once the coaches authorized the criteria, the contact information of the players was given to the researcher, which included phone numbers and email addresses. Athletes were also reached through social media accounts such as Twitter, Facebook and any other media outlet that was available. The selection of participants was based upon the availability and willingness of athletes to participate in the study. Throughout the investigation, efforts were made to protect the confidentiality of all participants. 15 total athletes engaged in the study. 6 of the athletes were from the Greater Houston Area, 4 were from Dallas, Texas, 5 were from California, and 1 was from Cleveland, Ohio and 4 were from El Paso. 9 of the 15 athletes were African-American, 4 of the 15 athletes were Hispanic and 2 athletes were Caucasian. Each player agreed to have their quotes in the current study, 12 of the athletes were past players who played for four other head coaches and a number of different position coaches. The coaches who gave me permission to carry out the study no longer work at the university and have retired from coaching. Since the players are walk-on athletes, the coaches really do not keep tabs on them. The other two athletes had left the team when the current coach released over twenty-five players from the team, so they do not know what players I used during the study.

Method

Thorough one-on-one interviews were used to explore what techniques and strategies coaches used with walk-on athletes. The interview questions allowed each participant to fully elaborate on his experience of being an athlete on the University of Texas at El Paso football team. The researcher created interview questions based on studies within effectiveness of coaching and by engaging in discussions with the lead advisor on the researcher's committee. These steps were taken to ensure that the primary research questions were answered. Consistent with methods used in Maxwell's (1996) study "interview questions in practice should contribute to answering research questions" (Maxwell, 1996, p.74). The following questions were asked to each participant:

- Explain your experience as being a walk-on playing on the University Football Team.
- Do you believe that walk-on athletes get treated differently from scholarship athletes?
- How do coaches assist walk-on athletes who have dealt with family tragedy?
- How does race play a factor in developing and enhancing walk-on athletes' ability?
- How does a parent feel when they give up their parental rights to a coach?
- How does a walk-on athlete cope with a coach who does not share the same ethnic background as the athlete?
- What makes a coach successful and does it overlook the traditional rule of winning and losing?
- What strategies do coaches use to promote self-efficiency in their athlete? What happens when athlete arrives to their particular sport and finds out that he or she is not the only superior talent?
- How can a coach minimize the stress level of athlete that not only plays the game for

their selves but for their families as well? What communication strategies are coaches using to guarantee that their walk-on athletes are having fun?

- When athletes feel that they have chosen the wrong university, how do the coaches handle the situation with the athlete?
- If a coach is falling short of his goals and expectations for the team, when is it appropriate to head in a different direction?
- What strategies do coaches use to guarantee that their athletes are not only performing on the field, but they are also achieving academic goals?
- What drives athletes to keep giving 100% effort on a losing team?
- There are certain athletes who will never get a chance to play in actual game, but they never give up or let up. What motivates these athletes to keep playing the sport?
- What type of restrictions do coaches give to their athletes to keep them out of harm's way and if not followed, what are consequences?

Once participants had the chance to fully elaborate during their interview questioning, follow-up questions were utilized to add additional support on the participants' experience of being a walk-on athlete and to obtain more information concerning the relevant issues that arose throughout the interview sessions. Example of probes included: "Have you had other experiences regarding being a walk-on athlete"? "Can you give me more details of your encounters of being a walk-on athlete"?

Since the researcher was a walk-on athlete himself, he experienced a few hardships as well like coaches not giving him a fair opportunity or witnessing scholarship players belittling walk-on athletes once they found out their status on the team. However, the researcher believes that his walk-on experience was well worth it because it made him stronger person. Months

before data was collected or obtained from athletes, the researcher met with his advisor and sample questions were discussed and written. These inquiries were utilized to obtain valuable information concerning student-athletes, particularly walk-on athletes, and discuss their personal experiences while playing for the football team. Further information will be collected to determine whether their coach are successful The questions were developed after researching online journals, articles, and books within effectiveness of coaching. Before athletes answered questions, sample questions were discussed and analyzed with the lead advisor to make sure that they were adequately written and gave the researcher the best chance at answering the primary research questions. In Gearity's (2009) study, he discusses why bracketing was an imperative tool to acquire in his research paper. He states:

By bracketing one's experiences and bias, the essence of athletes' experience of what makes a coach successful that were developed from the applicants seen with ultimate clarity, fettered by the researcher's encounter. During the analysis of data on athletes of what makes a coach successful, the researcher evaluated those findings with those derived from the bracketing interview to guarantee that the researcher bias was not shaping the analysis. By using the bracketing interview approach, this methodology assisted to ensure the truthfulness of the findings during the investigation. It was vital to the study that the researcher should compare the responses of the participants' to ensure that the themes identified derived from participant' perceptions rather than been shaped or altered by the researcher's biases. (p.52)

Similarly, Chan, Fung and Chien (2013) discussed why the bracketing interview method should be used; however, they note the method should only be used on the researcher, not the participant because it is their lived experience.

Procedure

After seeking and securing IRB approval from the University of Texas at El Paso, the researcher asked former walk-on athletes who once played football for the University of Texas at El Paso to participate in the study. For current athletes, the researcher made sure to first contact the coach since the season was still in progress. It would be rather difficult to interview them due to their demanding schedule. The coaches approved the study, but wanted to make certain just what the researcher was investigating. The researcher explained to the coaching staff that purpose of this study was to explore what communication techniques and strategies coaches used on walk-on athletes' through the experience of players. They were also informed that having a few of the athletes participating in this study would help add to the rather minuscule research on coaching effectiveness and possibly help coaches build on some of their strengths as mentors by improving communication tactics. Once the coaches granted permission for the study, the researcher explained that the athletes had to have at least 15 years of football experience which could include little league football through high school level and must have been a walk-on for a minimum of one collegiate semester. Student-athletes who met the criteria were contacted via email and phone calls and invited to participate in the study. The emails and phone calls informed the athletes about the purpose of the study.

All participants were briefed that in participating their responses would be confidential through the use of pseudonyms and by changing any identifying comments upon transcription of statements. They were also aware that at any point they wanted to forfeit participation in the study they would not be penalized in any way. The researcher also answered any remaining questions the participants had about the study and their cooperation in it. He made it clear to the participants that their participation was strictly voluntary and that there would not be any

consequence if they decided not to participate. If any prospective participant remotely indicated that they were not interested in participating in the study, the researcher immediately stopped pursuing that candidate and anything they recorded would be deleted at that exact moment. Moreover, the researcher briefed all participants that they needed to have an authentic interest in participating because it was imperative for them to provide truthful answers for the study to be meaningful.

In order for this study to transpire, all participants had to sign consent forms which answered the following questions: what was the significance of this study, why this project should be researched, who would be protecting the information collected. More importantly, it displayed personal contact information of the researcher which gave the participants permission to contact the examiner whenever they felt it was necessary. This form gave vital information explaining to the participants if at any point they wanted to remove themselves from the research it was possible and would happen immediately. The researcher explained that if any information could not be coded to ensure confidentiality and privacy the information would be removed entirely from the project. In order for the participants to be relaxed and comfortable, the interviews occurred at their residence. The researcher also brought snacks and beverages for the participants since there was a chance that interviews would take longer than what was expected.

Data Collection

Interviews lasted between 20 and 50 minutes, with the average interview taking 26 minutes. More importantly, the researcher felt that it was appropriate and beneficial to the study that each participant be interviewed at the comfort of their homes. All data collected was analyzed by the researcher. The phone device was equipped with security application that had a

number lock to protect the data. For more precautions, once the interview was finished and transcribed, it was locked away in the researcher's place of residence. Then the researcher analyzed all transcripts, each transcript was read individually to gain more knowledge of the data. The first iteration of data analysis involved drawing out the meaning units. These tagged meaning units were grouped into thematic categories, which the researcher labeled according to the studies within the literature review consisted to the works of Cote (1993).

All participants who volunteered for the study were hand delivered a copy of the interview transcripts and a brief summary of the interviewer's observations. The student-athletes were instructed to read the transcripts and summaries carefully in case of any wrongdoing. The transcripts were the exact words of the participants and summaries consisted of what categories the quotes had surfaced in; it also had a note that thanked them for participating. Based on the research, the open-ended responses were examined by the participant then placed in meaning units and organized using manual methods (Cote, 1993). There were ten tag meanings that surfaced and then they were later grouped into thematic categories by comparing tags with similar meaning that the researcher felt best captured the quality of the topic during the interviews. In summary, different methods were used to reduce threats and verify the research results (Sparks, 1989).

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover what communication techniques and strategies coaches used on walk-on athletes and to also determine if the coaches' were successful. Phenomenological interviews were used to investigate 15 collegiate football walk-on athletes at the University of El Paso. These former and present athletes were asked to express their experiences of being a walk-on athlete on the football team in relation with their coaches. Data were analyzed using existential phenomenological methods. Seven major themes emerged from the experience of walk-athlete shared in contrast with their coaches.

The findings and results of the study are presented in this chapter. Athletes who participated in the study and the coaches they discussed were also represented in the section. The researcher provided pseudonyms and coding to not directly link athletes to any personal information.

Walk-on Athletes in Relation to Coaches

15 walk-on athletes participated in the current research. These athletes were chosen based on their willingness to participate in the project and more importantly, their collegiate football status as a walk-on athlete. It was imperative for this project that the athletes ranged between the ages of 20 to 25 because at these ages the athletes were not seen as freshmen, but as young adults who were familiar with the football program. Nine of the athletes identified themselves as Africa-American, 4 athletes identified themselves as Hispanic, and finally two identified themselves as Caucasian.

Since all athletes represented the sport of football, which has the majority of walk-on athletes and coaches at the university, the researcher felt extremely confident that this would be

the most fitting way to obtain data. As a result, the participants discussed over 22 coaches, which meant that some participants spoke about more than one coach. However, it is important to add that a few athletes played some of the same positions which meant that they spoke about some of the same coaches. For instance, Aaron had two encounters with two different coaches, while Kenny only focused on one coach. Of those 16 coaches, 14 coaches were position coaches and 2 were head coaches.

This section seeks to understand what communication strategies and techniques coaches used on walk-on athletes and to ultimately determine if the coaching staff was successful; results indicate that six major themes emerged from the participants' experience of being a walk-on athlete. The following themes are listed below: *Presence Connection, Building, Destruction, Imperfection, Crippling their Desires, and Management Strategies.*

Theme 1: Presence Connection

“The head coach does not play a major role on the team. When I am playing in the game, I should feel my coach heart beat in my chest, but I don’t” -Brandon

Brandon gives an example of not being coached, which most athletes discussed during their interviews. Walk-on athletes described a successful team as being motivated and competitive. The participants used words such as moving and empowerment to express what they should feel when they are in the presence of their coach. In this section, three traits surfaced: poor *instructions* given to them on techniques related to their positions, *different ways to teach same concept*, and the ability to teach both *mentally and physically* about the proficiencies and techniques needed to instruct successfully.

Poor Instructing. Work-on athletes stated various ways the coach was a poor instructor, which included forgetting to explain to walk-on athletes when individual position practice were

going to take place. In this case, athletes were confused about where to go and what time they were supposed to meet. The athletes also spoke about how the instructions of their coaches were often confusing and misleading. One participant stated, “They will say one thing and want us to do another.” This quote was said in relation to “individual position time,” which is a form of practice where position coaches work with their athletes individually. A recurring factor in this section dealt with motivation and competitiveness; it was something that the walk-on athletes felt was important. As a whole, many of the athletes felt like the coaches’ instructions were unclear and unattainable. Brandon spoke about how he was unclear of the coaches teaching methods:

The coach does not play a major role on the team. When I am playing in the game, I should feel my coaches heart beat in my chest; he should be a part of me, and I should be a part of him. However, I did not feel his presence at all. I should not feel like my coach is absent especially during a game. If it was not for self motivation, I probably would not be playing for the team. The head coach is the father of the team and if the father is not present than everybody does whatever they want. As far as coaching goes, I was confused during the game like I was not prepared to play in the game.

Some of the participants felt that there was a lack of effort with the coaching staff as a whole. They discussed how often the coaches seemed baffled. One participant stated, “There are two images in the mirror, one is the coach and the other is the athlete. Show me a bad coach, and I will show you a bad player.”

There was one participant who spoke about a time when the coaches thought that the seniors should serve as the coaches at practice. He stated:

During the off season, we would have several stations and at every station we had different running assignments. When the coaches were out there, everybody seemed to be

working hard pushing each other being competitive. We were learning. Well, one day after stations, the coaches told us that the senior leaders were going to run the stations, and they were going to be in the stands watching. Everyone at first thought it would be a fun way to build team unity... The seniors began screaming at players and getting into their faces. They would be screaming and pushing us. It even got [physical]. The coaches should have known better.

The athletes admitted during the investigation that the coaches were trying to do something new and innovative to unite the younger and older players, but it did not work out at all. In fact, athletes identified it as being a sign poor coaching. The walk-on athletes felt like there were different communication strategies coaches could have used to motivate the players rather than letting them conduct practice. A positive way to encourage the athletes is to answer questions they might have had after practice concerning different techniques they needed to apply to their position.

Athletes also mentioned that the timing of instruction is poor. They identified that they received poor coaching when they struggled through exercises. One athlete explained how he would often get thrown out of exercises because the coach said that he was not doing certain activities correctly. The walk-on athlete insisted that he was doing the same as the other scholarship athletes, but he felt since he was a walk-on the coach made it seem like it was always wrong. Another walk-on athlete even witnessed the coach joking and laughing around with other players explaining to them how he knew that another athlete was going to blow his assignment.

Athletes discussed how there were major concepts that were missing that they thought their coaches should have focused on like life skills and educational values. Reid explains how his coach failed in this regard:

I could not honestly think of one time when my coach talked to me about any life values. It was when I tore my ACL and he said quickly, 'you going to get surgery because you are going to need it to live a normal life outside football.' It is important to get that surgery. I thought maybe he would come to me in more concerned manner like how you feeling about the surgery. This never occurred.

During one interview, Derrick talked about how one of his teammate's coaches developed a competitive mindset which led to good grades in the classroom. Derrick explains:

My friend's position coach came up with the phrase "straight violent." What he meant by that was the intensity you bring to the football field you should bring into the classroom as well. He felt that if you could dominant on the field of play you can dominant in the classroom. The violent attitude can never change. If you go into both fields with that "straight violent" attitude you have no choice but to come out on top. Even when he left UTEP, his players still had that attitude. My coach never really had nothing creative to say it was just something simple like hope you take care of your grades. (Derrick)

Similarly, while expecting their coaches to teach educational values some athletes found the coaches were not successful at this particular aspect:

Often as athletes, we come across coaches who only focus on winning football games, and they often neglect to promote educational values, which is very important for eligibility reasons... I feel that UTEP could do a better job at promoting academic growth. Sometimes we do grade checks that we suppose to give to our teachers. It would be nice if we had mentor meeting with our position coach and discuss are weekly reports and up-coming projects that we have not begun working on. (John)

Furthermore, James explained how his coach pretended to be concerned about his studies and

how he really frustrated him. He stated:

My coach never really talked about grades unless it got to the point of no return. What I mean by this is when the school feels like it is only up to the teacher to decide if they will drop me from the course or keep me in the class. At that point, my coach acted all concerned. He says things like, “did you talk the teacher, and have you emailed them yet.” I mean come on don’t you think I have done that by now.

Another athlete spoke about grade reports and how his coach never did anything in private, he states:

It seemed like the coach always wanted to make us feel uneasy. There was nothing he did in privacy. He would just call out my grades in front of everyone. I did not have the best grades... why would he do that to me? It does not make any since... I know these are my teammates but there are some situations that should remain private. (Brandon)

Walk-on athletes discussed how grades do play a major role within sport. They expressed how some coaches did make an effort to communicate to athletes how important grades were and how they could transfer the same values they used in football in classroom. However, other walk-on athletes discussed how coaches would use grade reports as another way to embarrass them in front their teammates.

Different ways to teach the same concept. In this section, athletes perceived their coaches as being simple-minded and unsuccessful at adapting to the variety of athletes this sport contains. Aaron shares an encounter with his coach trying to teach everybody the same way to kick field goals and why it didn’t work for his teammates or himself:

The Special Teams’ Coach was trying to get all of us to kick the ball the same, which is impossible because we all were built different. I was stronger in my legs, so I could

actually generate more power in fewer steps, but he insisted that I try to take more steps.

When I did take more steps, I kicked the ball further, but I was not making any field goals.

We were in season that is why I was really frustrated ... I had been kicking this way since

I had been in high school.

The walk-on athletes stated during the interview that they understood what the coaches were trying to convey in teaching them techniques and knowledge, but there were problems with the way they communicated that information. The athletes felt that coaches used abusive words, Braxton explains:

In football, we watch a lot film, and everybody loves to come up with the correct answer. It makes coach believe that you have been studying and going over your playbook, but when you get something wrong, the coach would go crazy slamming his hands on the desk, and screaming. Coach would say, "Fuck, how you don't know which side of the ball the will linebacker lines up sometimes you are such a dumb ass." It makes me feel like I should not ask him anything at all.

Coaches were perceived as disrespectful and discouraging by the walk-on athletes when dealing with way to properly teach mechanics. A few of the athletes discussed how negative their coaches would react when they made mistakes during film study and during practice situations. Reid stated during the investigation that his coach could have just said, "Hey man keep your head up when you are tackling instead of saying, god damn it son. I just do not like the feeling of being told off especially by a man I have tons of respect for." Athletes wanted coaches to be more respectful to them and practice better communication habits which would lead to greater success for the team.

Mental and physical is equally important. Finally, walk-on athletes perceived their

coaches as confused and bewildered about certain elements that it took to being a successful coach. While describing why the coach had failed as an instructor many of the walk-on athletes spoke of lack of understanding of the position they were coaching. Freddy gave a great example of his experience:

Since I was in high school, I played running back. The position is very demanding... You have to know so much. It is not just about running the ball but blocking and foot work when you receiving the ball or blocking. It was nice to have a coach who played the position as well it really helped because I know he understood what it was like because he played the position. Once I got to college, my position coach played a punter; I knew he was great because he was selected to the All-American Team. He was a good coach when it came to showing us film, but when it came to him being active, he struggled through it. I'm not saying that you have to have played the position to coach it, but it really helps with teaching. It makes the coach seem more aware.

Reid discussed how his coach was not familiar or confident with the position he was coaching. He states, "as far as coaching defensive linemen, he was not really sure what he was doing because he played safety and cornerback all through his career. It is different hand techniques that go into playing defensive linemen. I do not understand how he is going to make better, or keep me motivated."

The importance of being knowledgeable was evident in coaching certain positions. Having a clear understanding of the position and how to coach it played a major role for the athletes. It was evident that if the coaches and players played the same position at one point in time, the athletes would have a better understanding of what the coach was teaching instead of being confused. Walk-on athletes perceived coaches to be good coaches, but unknowledgeable

about technical and tactical skills of the sport. Coaches were also perceived as being complacent about the athletes stuck in their unsuccessful habits and not willing to adapt to the game and how it changed.

Theme 2: Building

“My coach gave me a chance when it seemed like nobody else was in my corner.”

Henderson

A few of the walk-on athletes explained during this part of the study how the relationships with their coaches developed early when they first reached the university. Some of the athletes explained how being a walk-on from El Paso had its advantages: local media showing up on campus to interview them at practice, high school coaches going to college games, and having support from their families. This support played significant role in being a walk-on from the city. Furthermore, these players also spoke about a bond that connected them to their coaches, which could make not only the coach successful, but the players as well. Isaac gave his experience of positive coach influence:

I had it different from other walk-on athletes who were not from the city because I got the chance to go to camp as an incoming freshman. At camp, we had a chance to develop a relationship with the coaches. We were there for couple of weeks, so by the end of camp coaches knew everyone's name. I felt like I was on scholarship even though I was not because everything was paid for at camp: housing, food, and athletic gear.

De'Anthony gave a similar experience about participating in camp. He states, “Camp was different from what I expected because you hear so much leading up to it. But, it was a not that hard. There were a lot of team building activities everybody got a chance to speak with their

coaches' outside of practice. The conversations were not serious at all." One of the walk-on athletes indicated to the researcher how he was not recruited like some of the other big names but it seemed like he had a lot of support here in El Paso. Domingo explains:

I was a pretty good player here in El Paso but not like some of those other big name players, but the city supports its local football players when we walk-on to UTEP. I remember once after practice, I was working off the field the reporters asked me for an interview. I felt big time because he had just finished talking to the starting quarterback. I had not accomplished anything, and I was getting interview. He said my name I was smiling. Even the scholarship players were asking what he wanted.

This section indicates that walk-on athletes from the city sometimes have better opportunity at being successful on the UTEP Football Team.

Theme 3: Destruction

"You only had success because you were in with the two's and three's. He was basically telling me that I was not good enough to play with the One's or starters. [pause]

Sometimes I thought he was right." Greg

As for the other walk-on players, they spoke about coach influence differently. They illustrated that the coaches were uncaring. They were seen in this manner because they would put their own well-being ahead of the walk-on athletes. The coaches also neglected these players emotionally. Athletes expressed how they wished their coach had a personal interest in their well-being. It was apparent that the coaches were egotistical, and they rarely made any time for these walk-on athletes. In response to their coaches being uncaring, they felt they were on a

deserted island because they always felt alone and had no coach. There were two recurring ways that the athletes perceived their coach as uncaring: *coach self-interest* and *neglect of players*.

Coach Self Interest. Athletes spoke of their coach as being more concerned about their own achievements than looking out for the betterment of the team. They explained how it was normal for coaches to boast about their accolades and the things they needed to get accomplished. Athletes discussed that the coaches were overly driven to win, rather than focusing on the development of the players. The word egotistical surfaced a few times when the players described their coach. Alfred stated how he felt the coach failed at being caring:

My coach feels like he knows everything. It really gets on a lot of the players' nerves. I remember once the head coach was talking about how if we felt like we were not getting much playing time we should discuss it with our position coach. Players from different positions were asking their coaches' for more playing time some of the players were being rewarded more playing time, but my coach was like you really think because the head coach made those commits that I am going to be giving more playing time to players who do not deserve it. He went on to say if you want to bring it up to the head coach go ahead because he is going to agree with me. We have been in this business for more than 20 years together.

Athletes described their coaches as being all about themselves, and that they often made poor decisions that were not necessarily in the best interests of the team. It was as if the coaches were puppets hanging by a string that the boosters controlled. Rather than doing the right thing that could ultimately help the team, they usually bow down to the boosters and the bosses in the athletic department.

Terrell spoke about coaches playing a player who was not that good, but given ample

opportunities because he was on scholarship and had to be giving seniority. He was never in shape, always whined about doing conditioning, and the coaches would just put up with his lazy behaviors. This bothered many of the players on the team:

During spring practices, the coaches hyped up the thought of spring workouts. They said spring ball is the perfect opportunity for any backup players to get playing time. I felt like I really had a chance to make a push for the top three running-backs even though I was a walk-on. I was better than my competition. I averaged almost nine yards a carry and made sure that all my blocking techniques were good as well. I knew I was doing a great job because other coaches from different positions were coming to me saying how they were hearing nothing but good things about me. At the time, I was completely motivated and eager to stay on top of my game. However, after spring ball was over, my position coach had a meeting with me, and he told me that he thought I did a great job during the spring, but then he stated that when the coaches have their meetings, and they say you should put him in the game more. He states to them how he is not going to put me into the game because I am un-coachable. I always felt that aggression towards me because I walk-on, he did not have to keep me on the team. If he felt that I was un-coachable, he could have cut me from the team; it was not like they were paying for my schooling. It was just his way of holding me back from maximizing my potential. It is funny how all the other coaches saw something in me, but my own position coach who is supposed to be in my corner didn't care about me. (Josh)

These coaches were described as being egotistical and rude to their players. The walk-on athletes often stated that the coaches should be more prone to change and more humbled because they had not experienced a successful season in several years. The athletes illustrated that it should

not matter if someone is a walk-on athlete or on scholarship; the best player should play.

Neglect Players. Many of the athletes talked about self-motivation and why it was detrimental to their success. Self-motivation described by walk-on athletes is what drives them to stay motivated, and it is what pushes a person to break through any obstacles standing in their path. Athletes described some of their techniques to continue to strive for excellence with or without the coaches. They perceived their coaches as uncaring because they neglected to build a relationship with their athletes. The athletes took this as a sign that coaches did not really care about them as person. If the players did have conversations with their coach it was something quick like *how are you doing*, and it would always result in a one word response from the coach or the player. The athletes said that most of the coaches were funny in charismatic way, but there was not anything that really stood out that made the players want to establish a coach-athlete relationship. They mostly view being around their coaches as mandatory. It was evident in interviews that the athletes had no choice but to show up to any event hosted by the coaches due to playing time and remaining on the team. In this section athletes frequently spoke about how they often thought about giving up football and just focusing on their academics.

Other athletes talked about nutritional habits and why it was important for them:

It's hard to think of what life would be like without football but even harder to think what life would be like without the friends I made from football at UTEP. It's the team unity that really stopped me from quitting. It was not the coaches who once begged me to come out to El Paso to play football for UTEP. Honestly, they could care less. It was the once strangers, who I met four years ago, who kept me from giving up. It was them saying forget the coaches' keep playing and win a conference championship with us. I don't want you to miss out on that. To be completely honest, I received more coaching from the

athletes than I did from the actual coaches. I am glad I continued to play that year because we made it to a bowl game. It was the first one in eight years.

Similar to Zack's near quitting experience, Freddy speaks of his encounter with the coaching staff that was not present when he needed them:

I didn't want to quit. I love football, but I was dealing with off the field issues. I had no one to talk to, and my coaches' acted like they cared, but deep down inside, I know they did not care. I went up to the coaches' office and talked to him and he said well if you feel that this is the best thing for you to do; it is okay. That was it nothing else. I thought maybe they would give me a call to check on me, but they didn't.

One walk-on athlete explained that the coaches were not there for him when he needed questions answered regarding practice, but the coaches often rushed off the field. Davy explained:

I was having a lot of trouble identifying the person I was supposed to block when the defense would send either the safety or linebacker on a blitz. During the play, I would always get something wrong. I would bring it to his [coach] attention after practice was over, and he would just say "we will watch it during film, and we will correct it then. He stated, "You can't play for me if you can identify who is coming on a blitz." I always left practice knowing that I was going to get yelled the next day.

One participant gave his experience with being a walk-on the team and the struggles that he dealt with his position coach:

What I put into the program I didn't get out. My position coach did not know how hard I had been working or the things I had accomplished... He [coach] did not know things I was dealing with in my personal life because he only paid attention to the players he brought in... The coach was only interested in the athletes who had a full ride

[scholarship]. The walk-on athletes are just walk-on athletes, so it's the scholarship athletes who are keeping the coaches paid [employed].

Walk-on athletes felt like sometimes it is not even worth going out to practice because it never turned out the way it was supposed to, as Josh explains:

Coaches give out scout team awards every week to the best player on scout team. The scout team is made up of first scholarship players and walk-ons from all levels. What they do is get the team starters ready for the next team... They say the best player gets it, but most of the time it is the scholarship-athlete who gets it. There were times I knew I was going to get it. They always most of the time give it the scholarship to boost his self-esteem. But deep down I knew I deserved it.

Participants in this section illustrated that developing their bodies is a key component to building a strong and healthy team. One of the participants gave a clear example of how he felt about the developmental habitat:

The coaching staff tries to take care of the players in a physical sense, but they often fall short of their expectations. For example, there are three meals throughout the day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Of those three meals, our meal plan only covers one, so we have to come up with money which we don't have to make up for the meals we weren't receiving from our scholarship. The coaches are supposed to minimize our stress level, but sometimes I feel like they are piling on more stress. I can think of at least twenty universities that feed their athletes three meals per day. That is why we continue to get hurt year after year. Although injuries are associated with the physical game we play, some of the injuries could be minimized by eating better and eating more. (Christopher)

Often at UTEP, walk-on student athletes get overlooked and forgotten because of the title

of being a walk-on. A walk-on is an athlete who has not earned a scholarship through the university, but who plans to acquire one and is given a chance to try out for the team. It is not mandatory that once an athlete arrives to the team they would be rewarded a scholarship. A scholarship is only obtained if the coaches' feel the athlete should be rewarded benefits, then the athlete will receive an athletic scholarship. However, there are some walk-on student athletes who do not have scholarship but travel with the team. To get a better understanding of what these walk-on athletes have to endure on many occasions, two of the participants shared their experiences, Irvin explains:

Every week the coaches have scout team player of the week. The coaches give it to the player they felt like did the best job the week leading up to the game. The scout team is made up of first year scholarship players and mostly walk-on players. There was one week I felt like it was mine, but week after week, I felt sick to my stomach because I never got the award. They would always give it to scholarship player... I mean it is a pity thing because they give it to the scholarship athlete just to keep him forgiving on the team thin for having to serve on the scout team. I remember made a long touchdown at practice. I went up to the coach I said hey coach look out I am going to get that scout team player of the week. He just looked chuckled and walked off. That week another scholarship athlete got it.

There are times when some of these walk-on players have the gift to play at the highest level but their coaches hold them back just because they have that ability to control their outcome. They make them feel like they do not deserve to be out on the field with some of the players they recruited:

I walked on to the UTEP football team. I felt that I had just enough talent as the other

players, and it showed. I made plays when the team needed it, but I never got full support from any of the coaches. There were times when I was left out. Coaches would cater to the scholarship players and not to the walk-on athletes. I understand that they have money invested in those players, but they can still lend us a hand to... There isn't a meal plan for us walk-on athletes. I wish I had one meal a day like some of the football players do. Instead I have to hear some of my teammates complain about having to eat at Luby's. They should be thankful for having meals, which some of us are not receiving. It is a different story for me. Often, I had to be short on my rent just to make sure I was eating right... I beat up my body day in, day out, so I feel like I should have a decent meal waiting for me after practice. It shouldn't be the way it is because we all are a part of the same team. I've read information on articles from other universities, and they state how they make sure all hundred and fifty football players eat well. (Irvin)

Similarly to Irvin, Marcus was a walk-on who felt like the coaches could have done a better job with trying to get walk-on's some type of meal plan for all athletes. He shares his reflection:

It is rough at UTEP being a walk-on. I feel that most of the coaches' feel like we can afford to pay for our own food because we pay for school. A lot of us are not from El Paso, so we don't get to ask our moms to make dinner for us... The food that we eat comes from our pockets. It would be nice to receive some assistance, but we don't. There is coach [ex coach] but we still address him as coach; he really cared about all of us athletes, and I remember him telling me, I wish we had food for you guys to eat. Well in the summer, most of the football players received jobs working for the coaches. I made sure I went straight to him because I knew he was head of all the food. He told me all I had to do was serve the athletes, and I could eat afterwards. He is great guy and with his

help, I put on some good weight that summer.

Theme 4: Imperfection

“ My coach always talks about how he is going to get me more playing time in front of the other receivers because he sees how hard I been practicing... It always ends up the same I’m left sitting on the bench watching the game from there.” -Spenser

There are thousands of athletes who are talented, but they fail to achieve relationships with their coaches, which can play a major role on what they bring to the team. It is said that athletes who do not develop relationships with their coaches will not maximize their potential. Participants explained during this part of the study how it is important for the coaches to understand the athlete. A majority of the walk-on athletes perceived their coach as being unfair, while a few of them felt that they were reasonable. The athletes who perceived their coaches to be reasonable described them as being open-minded and did not care about whether they were walk-on athletes or scholarship athletes. One of the participants named EJ describes why he felt that his coach was reasonable, “Even though I was not on scholarship, my coach always gave me a chance. He was always coaching me to do better and to work harder. Some players get lost in the system and never have a chance fulfill the dreams. But my coach never lets anybody fall through the cracks.” Another participant gave different evaluation of why he felt his coach was reasonable, Christopher states:

I don’t have clear answer to why the coaches do what they do... I’m not a coach, and I don’t feel like it is up to me to pass judgment. All I could do is pray on the situation and hope it goes my way... My job is to try my hardest when called upon and remember that I can only control what I can control.

When illustrating about the coach being unfair, athletes spoke about how the coach would do

unnecessary things that never helped the team performance. They felt it was in their best interest not to rely on them.

Three consistent traits emerged from the participants interviews which focused on the coach being unfair. Coaches were described as being *disloyal* because they lied constantly; the unfair coach played his *favorites* and were unjust in their treatment of the athletes; and the unfair coach used *unsympathetic* and *cruel communication*.

Disloyal. Athletes expressed painfully about how they had been lied to by their coaches which sometimes occurred before players arrived at the university. These lies mostly centered on playing time, recruiting process, eligibility, and grant and scholarship money that turned out to be false information:

It's funny how this recruiting stuff goes -- they build everything up no one ever tells you truth about anything. Well when I got here, they had all these gloves and visors for the helmets neatly placed out; they had my jersey with my name on it and the number I liked. However, once I got there, I had some random jersey number, and I could not get a visor unless I got a note from the doctor saying I had eye problems. [pause] I just wish they could have been honest about certain things. I still would have come because I really liked the school. (Davy)

Players also spoke about how their coach always rambled about football being a team sport and how every player is equally important whether they are a starter or a player on the scout team. This was not true because there were times the coach would remove players out of the team meeting if they did not travel with the team:

Well, this happened after we had lost a close game to Tulsa. We all went to the meeting like we would normally do. However, coach came in pissed, and he started talking about

how everyone fought hard during the game then he just paused and said, “If you did not travel with the team this conversation no longer concerns you guys can go do whatever it is you need to do.” Here he is always preaching about football being a team sport and he tells us we have to leave why because he lost a tight game. He would have not done that if we would have won the close game or even blown them away. It would have been a big celebration. The team demeanor is very phony; it comes and starts from the coaches. The players who asked to leave were walk-on athletes and members on the scout team.

(Marcus)

Many participants spoke of times where the coaches would yell and scream just to impress other coaches who were in their area:

He would constantly yell, and scream, and shout for no reason. One of our periods lasted for 5 minutes, and he yelled the entire time. Now, we all look at it as comedy; it is seldom we take him serious. We all know that it was for show; he was just trying to impress the people who came out to watch practice and the people from the media. (Brandon)

Favoritism. Several athletes discussed in the investigation how their coaches were unfair by constantly playing their favorites, feeding to all their attitudes and egos. The coach always slanted the rules for them by giving mild punishments and a lot more freedom. The walk-on athletes indicated that scholarship players were the favorites. They could talk to the coaches in any way and there would not be any punishment for it:

Coach lets players get away with talking crazy to important people in our program. Once we were in the fitness room and, the fitness instructor told one of the athletes to do 25 more weighted sit ups because he had stopped after he did 15. The player told him no. I’m not doing anymore because I didn’t stop, but he did stop I was right there. Other

players on the team were like just do them, so we could move on. The head trainer was like then get out my gym if you do not want to do what I asked you to do. He was like cool I'm leaving because I'm not doing them no matter what you say. The next day he showed up with some silly apology that his position coach made him give to the head trainer and to the team.

During the investigation, one of the athletes admitted to being one the coaches' favorites. The athlete spoke about better opportunities and extra generosity that were given to him by his coach. In further detail, Kenny explains:

Being a coach's favorite, honestly, went both ways. I mean my coach would give me the chore sheet, and he would have me split up everything between the other plays in my position. That was my chore was just split the chores up. That was cool, but on the other hand, the coach would give me all the praise and glory while the other players would get scolded on a constant basis. I used to do things wrong on purpose like take too many steps and my coach would still say good job. The next player would come up and do the right thing and coach would say you didn't right watch the guy do it ahead of you... Since I'm senior, I stay after practice talk with the rookies and let them know just keep fighting through.

Athletes discussed how the coaches would cater to their favorites. There were numerous situations that the walk-on athletes talked about that really focused on just how bad coaches wanted to win, even if it meant playing athletes who clearly had no respect for the system:

Football teams are made up by 110 plus athletes. So there are always going to be a few sour apples on the team. However, there were some players who would steal from their teammates and talk back to the coaches. They still got more playing time than I did. If I

remember correctly these sorry coaches recruited 13 black players and 10 of them got sent home before they completed their first year. Yeah they made it through entire football season and they shipped them back home. I always wondered if the coaching staff was too scared to send them home during the season... They were afraid that they might lose too many games without them. Hello, we had four straight losing years. I think the coaches are too afraid to play the people who really care about the team. I'm black too but damn some things are just wrong. (Shawn)

It is apparent throughout this section why these athletes perceive their coaches as unfair. The athletes noted that coaches would try to make them believe that they weren't good enough to get any playing time. At times, the players would believe it to be true. Quinton speaks passionately about encounter with the coaching staff:

I did not play that much at UTEP, and I know in my heart that I deserve to play. A couple of players on the team, I had played with like Curtis he played Receiver at my school and AJ played on my little league football team. I have to say nothing had changed since those days; I just got better. I was in those meetings in the spring, yet I was not going to the institution at all. That is how bad they wanted me. I was told by the coaches who were recruiting me that I should just go ahead and leave my junior college early and move out to El Paso there would be a scholarship for me by the end of the spring. I balled out the entire spring but no scholarship. I continued working hard bringing down my forty time and working on my craft but nothing. I started to believe that maybe I was not good enough. It wasn't until I heard it for myself from the mouth of my own coach. It was not until my senior year, I would get what was owed to me after two long years. The coach called my last name first series of the first game. I went in at left corner and they had two

receivers lined up two to the short side of the field. The ball was snapped, and I backed paddled just a tad because we were playing cover 2. I pressed and jammed my receiver and let him go and the running back was running a swing route out the back field. My eyes' was on the quarterback. Once the quarterback went to into his release motion, I was in the running back grill and I delivered a bone-crushing hit, and I could hear the crowd screaming eh ,eh! My hit was the answer to the coaches who failed to recognize that I had talent. The hit sparked the first bowl run in 4 long dry years. I was blessed to have teammates who really cared about me.

Unsympathetic and Cruel Communication. Athletes perceived their coaches' to be unsympathetic and cruel. They often spoke about coaches diminishing their character by using harsh, horrible language instead of praising them. Coaches sometimes neglected to tell their athletes what they do wrong. The coaches would normally focus on the negative things rather than praising the positive things, "I can't do anything right in his eyes" (Courtney). The athletes often complained about their coaches using aggressive languages towards them. They also admitted during the investigation that the coaches often made them feel like less than a man. To shed light on how cruel coaches would be, Courtney states:

It is hard to get the attention of coaches, but the easiest way to get it is by messing up. You can hope to God that he might not see your mistake, but trust me he will every time. Once you mess up, there goes your practice or game time. It is so hard to do everything right but best believe when you do something wrong, he will be all in your face screaming and yelling jerking your helmet around.

Athletes expressed that when the coaches used vulgar language towards them it was solely to determine whether the athletes really wanted to be there. They frequently said that the coaches

meant well, but it always came out negatively.

The athletes expressed during the investigation that the coaches used words like fragile and phrases such as soft as cotton to show how soft athletes were. However, one of the athletes spoke about how his coach even crossed the line when he called him fragile:

I had to battle back from an ACL injury. I know I wasn't ready to return to the team in 6 months. The team doctor said that I had some complication during my surgery. He said that I could be back within 8 months. I told my coach what happened and he was like okay. Mr. Fragile see you on the field in 8 months. I felt furious, and let him know exactly how I was feeling. I said I had done everything right rehab and all the training and you couldn't even say I can't wait to have you back on the field... He had a way of getting under your skin, and sometimes I wished he would just either get fired or find another job. (Davy)

It is not often that players say anything back to the coaches after the coaches lash out at them. However, it was evident in this player testimony that the coaches should know when they are out of line. One athlete said there is certain way of handling the situation with a coach let them know that they felt disrespected without using harmful words -- kill them with kindness:

My coach often used vulgar language to get his point across. At times, I thought it was funny when he heard him yelling at other players, but the tables turned once he started screaming at me. I could deal with his cursing and him rambling in my face. The problem was when I saw my teammates and coaches laughing and pointing towards my way. [pause] If it had happened in his office, I don't think I would have worried too much about it since we would have been alone. But, it didn't happen that way; it was embarrassing. (Courtney)

Theme 5: Crippling their Desires

“I often feel stuck in the same place like no matter what I do I stay the same I think I was a lot better when I was high school” Henry

Walk-on athletes were aware of missed opportunities that were lost when dealing with their coaches who continued to hinder them. They perceived their coaches to have held them back from growing in their abilities ultimately blocking and altering their development. Patrick felt obligated to speak about his coach who once won a national championship.

I don't know how he was back then, but he had to have been pretty good coach to have won The Rose Bowl Championship. If he had been half the coach he was then, we would have gone to more than one bowl game in my four years. Every week he gave out medals even when we lose; that was just stupid. He didn't grow from his own experiences so how does he expect us to grow.

From the investigation, athletes perceived their coaches to be hindering in two consistent ways. If it was during the game or at practice, coaches were perceived to be *detracting*, causing confusion throughout the team. With the lack of praising and encouragement from the coaching staff and failing to win more than four games per season, players also perceived their coaches to be *demotivating*. Athletes often found it hard to leave their locker room, terrified that they might suffer another embarrassing loss.

Playing with our emotions. Participants stressed to the researcher how their coaches made the game difficult by hindering their abilities to focus. The mode and tone of the players were already established before the game. However, the coach thought it is okay for him to change the way we took the field. Shawn described how his coach had disrupted the flow of the pregame:

It was the first game of the season, and we all had already said how we were going to

take the field. Our head coach said that it was okay and that we could come out differently. It was going to be the seniors coming out first followed by the juniors and so on and so on. We were getting the line ready when coach burst in the door saying we don't have time for all of this; we have a game to play. The main purpose of it was so that one of the moms could get a picture of all the athletes according to their class rack. He messed that up and had a lot of us pissed before ball was even kicked off.

One of the athletes explained how a poor decision by the coach caused a missed opportunity for the team to attempt a field goal to tie the game before halftime:

After we had just got into field goal range, coach was trying to rush out the field goal team right before halftime to tie the game at 10. We had no more timeouts left, and there were only ten players on the field with 15 seconds counting down. He called me to go out there to be the eleventh player. I ran out there and he pulled back and said hold on where is Williams because I didn't practice field goal team during the week; they couldn't find him, so they told me go ahead. Time was ticking and by the time the ball was snapped the clock had already hit zero. It should not have mattered if I had not practiced with the field goal team because it was an emergency situation. I've been playing football for years. I know what to do: punch the insider man, block the outside man. (Roderick)

Players discussed how it was very distracting when their coaches' would change things up right before the big game:

I had not been eligible for a full year, but I fixed my grades and got a chance to suit out with the team. Even though it was a long shot for me to play in the actual game, coach would let me do the drills in the pregame warm-up. It was cool that the fans got to see me and everything. However, when we won a spot in the bowl game, it was time to warm up

and my coach was like only the starters are going to warm-up and do pregame drills. That really upset me because I put in my work during scout team every day, and I believed I had earned a right to participate with the team during pregame warm up. He didn't have a problem with me doing it during the regular season. Why does he want to change it up now?

Even at practice things seemed to confuse the coaches, athletes stated how coaches forgot their plans for practice:

We were doing our regular rituals at practice, and we were on period four when the head coach called all the other coaches up; they were standing in the middle of the football field and the head coach was just yelling at the coaches. We all were just standing around the entire team waiting for the coaches to all come back, so after fifteen min, and they all came back blowing their whistlers. They were yelling talking about start this practice over. This is bullshit. There is no intensity. What, they didn't notice that there wasn't any intensity before the coach called them over. It was a waste of time to start practice over.

(Mal)

Demotivating. Athletes discussed how their coaches were dispiriting and inconsiderate during their careers at the university. At times, the athletes expressed that football seemed to more of an occupation rather a particular sport. The players made it apparent that it was important and vital for team success to mix fun with football. Athletes used words such as despise, detrimental, damaging, destructive, and harmful when describing the coaches' failure to motivate:

It is difficult to think that I have played for this team 3 years and we still haven't one more than five games. We have not had a successful season yet. My coach just walks around with this attitude like we are finally going to have a winning season. His behavior

is destructive; he is killing the team. He fires coaches all the time, but they are not the problem.” (Henry)

Athletes found it difficult to go to team meetings because they felt that the coach was not genuine and honest during his team speeches, Spenser states:

It was like a show we all of us would be sitting there all quiet waiting for him to walk in the door. If we mattered to him that much, why did the team always have to wait on his arrival? When he spoke it just went in one ear and out the other. It would be the same talk week to week. I don't think the other coaches believed him. He would say, “Guys that was a tough loss and we deserved to win, but we did not get it done. We have to look ahead and put it behind us.”

Athletes during the investigation felt that they would be better off firing and replacing the entire coaching staff. This would give everyone a clean slate, and most importantly, it would give the players a chance to earn the respect of their new head coach and his staff. Todd explains his reasons for feeling this way:

He called the wrong plays when we were on the goal line; he should have just run the ball. Instead of running the ball the quarter back ends up throwing an interception on the one yard line. At that moment I despised him, I know he did not throw the interception, but he should not have called the play. He could not call plays and his son could not either. It is family affair here; they should fire all of them together.

It's not a mystery when it comes to these athletes that they have an understanding of how a coach should behave. However, they are aware that being a coach is complicated and there is no possible way coach could be perfect:

I know coaching is not easy but own up to your mistakes. I never heard him admit to

making any mistakes. He would often blame losses on poor refereeing instead of owning up to poor coaching. As head coach, he should be able in willing to put assistant coaches in their place, but he never did. He always had their backs, but never had ours. (Davy)

Theme 6: Management Strategies

“I tried my best just to deal with the coach. I mean there was not too much I could have done anyway. I figured with the incoming freshmen arriving, he would have to pay attention to them and less on me.” - Mal

Ten out of fifteen athletes interviewed discussed how they could not cope with the coaching on the university football team. Walk-on athletes in this section expressed to the researcher that they would rather quit the team than deal with the coaching staff. As a result, they felt like their coaches were *wasting their time*.

Time wasted. It was evident in this section that athletes had a genuine love for the game and that they were determined to win their coaches approval. However, after dealing with their coaches’ lies and excuses, athletes decided that maybe they were wasting their time playing for the university. One athlete spoke of going through camp and training, but was tired of his coach’s excuses:

It became a joke to me... I went to all the summer workouts and camp, but nothing ever changed. The only reason they took me to camp was because I played one of those positions where they needed at least two more players in at a time. Someone always needed a break... I gave up altogether because it seemed like, no matter what, I was not moving up the depth chart. So I just gave up and stopped showing up.

Similar to previous athletes’ experience, Spenser illustrates how playing become too much to deal with:

You give your all, but players and coaches do not respect us. Coaches' treat us like we don't exist, and some players treat us poorly because we are not on scholarship... I had one player tell me what I had accomplished was pretty good for a walk-on. It just gets old.

I decided to focus on finishing school.

It is clear that these players want to be respected and feel wanted. However, even when it seems like respect should be given to these athletes, it is not achieved. Athletes discussed how maybe it would be different if they received a second chance at another school. Brandon gives his experience of moving in a different direction:

My coach got upset with me when I said that I had been talking to different schools in division two. But I didn't get why he was upset. He [coach] was not playing me... Started saying how he did not know I was serious about football. That is what I mean. How doesn't he know I'm serious if I moved 12 hours away to play at a school that is not even giving me money. That is why I wasn't hesitant when it was time to leave.

Athletes discussed how former walk-ons sometimes would get caught up in the mindset that these coaches owed them a scholarship. However, some athletes illustrated how they didn't care about being on a scholarship; they just wanted to travel and play in the games and if it meant that they would have to leave and attend different schools in lower divisions, it was worth it.

The previous section demonstrates that there were some athletes who could not cope with the coaches. They felt it was in their best interests that they move in a different direction, which resulted in some athletes quitting and other athletes transferring to other colleges. However, this section focuses on the athletes who were able to handle their coaches and the techniques they used to cope with them. It was evident in the investigation that over time the athletes learned

how to cope with stressful abuse that unsuccessful coaches were causing. After this analysis, two common techniques emerged: *depended on the encouragement of their teammates*, and *found hope through prayer*.

Encouragement from teammates. Forced to endure senseless behavior from their coaches, athletes turned to their teammates for help. All the athletes in this section felt blessed and honored to speak about their teammates who helped them in their darkest times. They also mentioned how their teammates never knew that they were helping them because they never mentioned their problems to them. Evident in the investigation, the athletes understood that football was a competitive sport and that every player could not be on the field at the same time, so it is imperative that the athletes support one another. Some of the athletes also concluded that their teammates gave greater support than their coaches did. Kevin spoke freely about his great experience with his teammate after arguing with his coach. He stated:

There were times when my coach would let me have it all through practice, and I would be frustrated all through practice. My teammates always made me feel better once we got into the locker room. Everybody would be joking and playing around. We used have to turf wars. Each war row was made up of 20 players, and we all were on the same team.

We would battle the others rows. It was really fun. It always got my mind off the coaches. Similar to Kevin's words, Anthony gives his own account of how important and special teammates are to him. He explains:

My teammates are special. They do not know how much they help me, but trust me, they do. They probably don't know it, but I depend on them. They are the ones who see how hard I'm working in the summer time when the coaches are not around. They encourage me to keep fighting when I want to say I'm too tired. It is them not the coaches I'm afraid

of letting down.

The friendships and companionships that are made on the team are evident. It showed throughout the investigation that the players were devoted to one another and they strived for the same goals. It was shown in this section that the athletes benefited from their teammates, and they were there for each other even when the coaches couldn't be. Andrew explains how his teammates stuck by his side when the coaches failed him. He explains:

It was the players who stopped me from quitting. It was not the coaches who once begged me to come out to El Paso to play football for UTEP. Honestly, they could care less. It was the once strangers, who I met four years ago, who kept me from giving up. It was them saying, "fuck the coaches" keep playing and win a conference championship with us. They didn't want me to miss out that opportunity. To be completely honest, I received more coaching from the athletes than I did from the actual coaches. I am glad I continued to play that year because we made it to a bowl game. It was the first one in eight years.

Found Prayer. In this section a few of the athletes explained to the researcher that they often used prayer to remain in a calmer state of mind when dealing with their coaches. The athletes stated whenever they expressed their problems through prayer it made their situations with their coaches seem smaller than they appeared. It helped them stay focused and remain positive through all the negativity given to them by their coaches. Prayer is found to be important and vital to these athletes in their quest to be accepted. Spencer gives his testimony of why it is imperative to him explaining, "When I really want to get away from it all, I go to church. There isn't anyone judging me at church; they accept me for who I am; it's good to have that once in a while." Additionally, Davy spoke about turning to prayer in order to get through his painful days that the coaches caused him. He explains:

I pray nightly and bless my coaches even though they cause me a lot of heartache. I know that God will see me through, and I will have my day soon. I will just keep praying, and it will happen; I'm certain that things will get better.

The investigation showed that many of the participants relied on faith to get them through some of their darkest circumstances, and they used this force to propel them forward and conquer their goals. One of the participants struggled to relate his message to me during the interview trying to hold back his tears, he stated:

I see a lot clearer when I turn to the Lord and ask him to guide through my darkest days. When I did my goal sheet this year, I stated if I get closer to God he will open up closed doors for me. I have to believe it not just say it. Mathew 6:9 is my favorite quote from the Bible.

Chapter 5

Summary and Discussion of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover what communication techniques and strategies coaches used on walk-on athletes who played on the University of Texas at El Paso Football Team. The researcher examined the interviews by using the existential phenomenology, which is affiliated with finding the essence of a lived experience (Luijpen, 1959). This approach was chosen to analyze the interview techniques illustrated by Gearity (2009). A report of the findings and results are presented. This chapter also includes the discussion of those findings and conclusions.

Summary of the Findings

Athletes during the interview process spoke about their experience of being walk-ons in relation to their coaches. Participants during the interview discussed with the researcher that this was their first time speaking in detail concerning their coaches. Furthermore, as soon as the recording began and the first question was asked, participants became anxious and often asked the researcher to repeat questions because they didn't expect that the interview would intensify so quickly. Each interview lasted a minimal of 20 minutes, which suggests that all participants were answering the questions honestly.

Six major themes emerged from the interviews that expressed the athletes' experience of being walk-on in relation to their coach: *Presence Connection*, *Building*, *Destructing*, *Imperfection*, *Crippling their Desires*, and *Management Strategies*. The theme of *Presence Connection* detailed several ways the athletes perceived their coach to be unsuccessful at giving instructions and not individualizing teaching methods by not being well informed with the position they were coaching.

The themes of *Building/Destructing* began with a few of the athletes' speaking about their coaches and how they cared for them. They mentioned that the coaching staff took extra time to understand who they were outside of sports, asking them about life goals, and talking about their experiences when they were freshmen in college. Walk-on athletes also indicated how they felt like they were on scholarship because the coaches took good care of them. However, a majority of the walk-on athletes discussed that their coaches failed to provide comfort and support within their relationships. The athletes declared that their coaches were hardly there for them and had to resort to getting important information from other players. Coaches were more concerned with winning at any cost even if it meant compromising the team. Athletes also discussed how coaches boasted about their accolades and achievements.

The Theme of *Imperfection* represented the horrible and awful ways coaches treated the athletes. The players perceived their coaches as being dishonest; they often lied to them and spoke poorly of them behind their backs. The athletes also discussed how their coaches used unsympathetic and cruel communication when speaking to them. Coaches would often play their favorite players even when they were disrespectful to other coaches and teammates, which would often cause friction amongst the team.

The theme entitled *Crippling their desires* represented several ways coaches altered mental performance of athletes and other teammates: They separated team unity, they distracted, and they demotivated their athletes. Walk-on athletes also indicated to the researcher that even though they played in games they were still being held back because they had to wait until scholarship athletes received their playing time before they were put into the game.

The theme *Management Strategies* began with athletes who could not deal with their coaches. These walk-on athletes discussed how football wasn't fun anymore. Some individuals

felt like maybe it wasn't for them or they needed a second chance at another school. On the other hand, a majority of the walk-on athletes found different techniques to distract them from their coaches such as relying on teammates' support, seeking prayer and attending church functions.

Discussion

Walk-on athletes reported to the researcher that the coaching staff did use a high volume of instructions similar to the past researchers who analyzed observational patterns of successful coaches (Bloom et al., 1999; Tharp & Gallimore 1976; Sutcliffe, 2011; Cushion et al., 2001). A few of the walk-on athletes encountered coaches who gave great instructions. However, the majority of the walk-on athletes experienced instructions that were communicated inadequately and did not contain knowledgeable information that they could transfer to the position they played. Athletes also illustrated that when they received instructions from their coaches it was spoken to them in a disrespectful and harmful tone.

In some cases this study was consistent with the work of Gearity (2009) who specified that researchers who used the observational instrument indicated that successful coaches scolded their athletes, but it did not overshadow praising them. On the contrary, during this study, walk-on athletes' remarks indicated that their coaches also used a high level of scolding towards them, also used high level of praise towards scholarship athletes. The walk-on athletes explained that their coaches would scold them because they thought that it was the most efficient way to gain their respect and keep them motivated. At the same time, the walk-on athletes felt that scholarship-players tended to receive a majority of the praise because they had money invested in these players. In both cases, it caused the walk-on athletes pain and stress throughout their collegiate football careers, and in some cases it made them despise their coaches. Furthermore,

athletes were force to endure degrading communication and harsh language, which led to lack of motivation on the part of the walk-on athletes.

The findings of this study are also consistent with previous athlete-coach relationship scholarship (Beck, 2009; Lattin, 2008; Gearity, 2009), which explains negativity associated with using verbal aggression towards players. Athletes during the study spoke about how their coach would use harmful words to try to motivate them to perform at a higher level. However, it was shown in the study that majority of the walk-on athletes had a problem with their coaches using obscene language towards them. They spoke about how their coaches' tone of voice and the language they used did not 'will' them to want to do any better nor motivate them in any way. It caused embarrassment to the athletes and made the players uneasy around their coaches. In response, athletes no longer wanted to ask questions because the fear of being scolded. Athletes illustrated how coaches never pulled them to the side; they would yell and scream things so that everyone could hear them and chuckle and make inappropriate gestures. Athletes also reported that their coaches did not seem to care about the emotional damage they caused. Athletes expressed how they felt like the coaches were machines trained and built to act subhuman. One could draw the conclusion from the mentioned manners of the coaches that they frequently used these irrational behaviors because they thought this was the resourceful way to gain respect from their players.

Results from this study expand previous scholarship (Butryn et al, 2008; Duthie 1986; Foldesi, 1986; Lyle, 1986) by focusing on the importance of developing athletes mentally, as well as being there to assist in any way possible. The athletes made it known that it was vital to their success for coaches to develop a connection with them. However, coaches neglected to establish any relationship with a majority of these players. Walk-on athletes discussed how they

often felt alone and had no one to talk to in their time of need. Coaches were busy when it came to their problems. They often made time for scholarship athletes, but walk-on athletes were not given the same attention. It is likely that the reason the coaches neglected to make time for the walk-on athletes was because they were not on scholarship so they did not feel obligated to attend to their needs. However, it should not matter if an athlete is on scholarship or not because they are still an athlete on the team and all athletes' needs should be handled accordingly.

Past researchers seemed to only focus on the behaviors of winning coaches, indicating that winning is the only way to determine a coach's success. However, it was evident during the investigation that the success of a coach extends beyond the traditional values of winning and losing (Camire & Trude, 2012; Camira & Trude, 2013). By integrating life values into their coaching structure, young adults are given the ability to transfer life skills from the sports world to other fields. The athletes emphasized the importance of developing coach-player relationship. It was also apparent that athletes desired for their coaches to promote various ways of implementing life growth conversations in their coaching sections, as well as developing the athletes' mentally, which would have ultimately shown in their coaching support.

Looking back

Athletes were asked to talk about their experience with being a walk-on player in relation with their coaches. They explained to the researcher that they assumed that their coaches were going to be more knowledgeable when it came to educational and off the field issues. Athletes spoke of times when coaches would mentor scholarship players on projects they needed to complete in their college courses. However, mentoring walk-on athletes did not occur; they were often asked to leave the room so that the coaches could begin meeting with scholarship athletes. On arrival to the university, non-scholarship players felt that their coaches were going to be there

for them whenever they needed. Unfortunately, the athletes would later find out that their coaches were often unavailable, and they hardly spent time with them. It was shown in the study that walk-on athletes from El Paso built strong and secure relationships with the coaching staff. El Paso walk-on athletes felt confident in their journey with being walk-on players because they had support from their community. These athletes often were asked to go to camp and felt they were on scholarship because coaches took good care of them. One could assume that these local walk-on athletes had greater opportunities than the walk-on athletes from different states such as California and Ohio because of the support from the media, former coaches, and family members.

In many cases, non-scholarship athletes explained to the researcher how their coaches would not listen to them and it was typical for their coach to take the side of other coaches. As a result of this analysis, it is clear that coaches care more about scholarship athletes and their personal achievements than engaging in the process of building walk-on athletes both physically and mentally. A majority of the walk-on athletes experienced negative coaching throughout their college football careers due to the poor and consistent losing seasons. However, what was shocking during the analysis was the amount of negative encounters the athletes had experienced in relation to their coaches. Additionally, athletes mentioned various ways their coaches were selfish. It was apparent that walk-on athletes cared about the sport tremendously, in some cases more than scholarship players. Athletes during the interviews recalled painful experiences they shared with their coaches over several years. It was evident during the interviews that former walk-athletes never really coped with their dreadful memories; they would take long pauses and turn away from the researcher.

Although walk-on athletes were challenged mentally and physically during their careers at the university, a majority of them remained on the team; some transferred to other schools

because they wanted more opportunities. It was demonstrated during the analysis that athletes developed different techniques and strategies to deal with their coaches. Some of the athletes went on to play the game at a more competitive level. However, they all gained important knowledge from being a walk-on athlete in relationship to their coaches. They informed the researcher that because they dealt with so much turmoil from the coaches it made them more competitive. The experiences gave them an edge on the field and off the field: many stayed on course to graduate and remained confident when entering career fields. Many of the athletes coped with their coaches by developed strong friendships with teammates, while some started attending church to seek confirmation from a higher power that they were in the right place.

Conclusions

This research is important because it shows what kind of communication these athletes want to develop with their coaches, as well as, the communication they would like to eliminate in relation to their coaches. The relationship between athletes and coaches is not just essential to the team's success, but individual success of the athlete and coaching success as well. However, how could any of this be possible without the proper use of communication? It showed in the interviews from the walk-on athletes that communication and language was damaged between the athletes and coaches. Once that communication barrier is removed, the success of the team would be enhanced.

Scholarship athletes are superior to walk-on athletes because of the money that the university invested in these players. I believe that coaches are afraid to take the risk of giving a walk-on athlete propriety in the since that they could be more talented than the scholarship athlete and the recruiting skills of the coaches maybe be questioned. I imagine that coaches would rather lose with scholarship players than win with a few walk-on athletes. Because

coaches are proud people, they want to be the coach who recruited the top athletes, who spent the big bucks to get them to their university, so they give these individuals unlimited chances to prove themselves while pushing the walk-on athletes further away. To add to that, in the moment the scholarship player finally triumphs, they could say, "I recruited that person, he came off my board. I told you he would be great." This should not be the case but unfortunately it is. This is why walk-on athletes have to wait to enter the ball game after the scholarship player has graced the field.

Race and ethnicity also played a role in coaching communication strategies, according to the participants. Athletes discussed how they were used to having a coach of different backgrounds. They explained how even in high school it was always a low percentage of coaches who shared the same race and ethnicity as them. However, they thought about how if their coach did have the same background as them, it could have boosted their athlete-coach relationship because the coach would have shared some of the same experiences that they endured. If this were the case, they also felt that their coach would have cared for them a lot more than what was showed throughout their careers. I believe that it should not matter if the coach is of the same ethnic background if they are communicating positivity and being a role model for the team and the athletes individually.

My suggestions for improved coaching

Coaches should introduce walk-on athletes to the entire football team, as well as the coaching staff at a team function so that everyone knows that they have arrived along with the other student athletes. This communicates to the walk-on athlete that they do matter and that the coaches and other athletes are there to help and support them. I have experienced times where

coaches didn't know who I was and if I was on the team. It is a painful experience one that I would never want to go through again. I also believe that the entire football team should participate in a team evaluation, which will include questionnaire and a survey sheet. This suggestion will show the coaches first hand what their athletes are going through. Coaching athletes is a paid occupation, so coaches should be responsible for their behaviors and how they communicate to their athletes. They also should understand that changes have to occur within the team and relationships between players and coaches if not consequences and repercussions should be enforced.

I would also hope that the coaches would want to make changes within the team and the way they structure the team. This research could help them develop fruitful and positive relationships with their athletes on and off the field because this is not professional sport where winning is everything. This is college, which means that these athletes are still learning and developing so they need the proper guidance from the coaches in order for them to be successful in whatever it is that they want to pursue.

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Curriculum Vita

Cortland Blake Du Bose was born in Houston, Texas in the year 1987. Second child of Pamela Hunt and Robert Milton Du Bose, he graduated from Hightower High school in Missouri City as a member of the All-State Football Team of Texas. After Playing football at Rochester Technical Community College in Rochester, Minnesota and leading his conference in rushing yards, Cortland enrolled at the University of Texas at El Paso in 2008 with the dreams of playing on the university football team. While pursuing his undergrad, he participated on the UTEP football team as walk-on for three years. He also played on the Team that went to the Albuquerque Bowl Game in New Mexico. Once he earned his bachelors in Multidisciplinary Studies, Cortland worked full-time at Dillard's department store selling jewelry. Convinced that a bachelor was not enough, he reenrolled in the graduate program at the University of Texas at El Paso in 2011 to Communication.

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