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An investigation of a formalized mentoring program for novice basketball coaches

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The purpose of the current study was to investigate a formalized mentoring program for novice basketball coaches, and to consider what factors that affect its to its effectiveness. Twelve purposefully selected mentors and 36 mentees who enrolled in an introductory coaching education course in Singapore participated in focus group interviews. Results indicated this program was a unique and positive learning experience for both the mentors and mentees. It helped the mentees become more competent and confident in their coaching style, knowledge, and behaviors. The program also enabled mentors to demonstrate useful pedagogical knowledge and skills, and to engage in meaningful self-reflection practices. All participants felt this program should be adopted by other sport associations in their country. Suggestions for improving the program were also forwarded.

KEY WORDS: Career development, Coaching, Mentoring, Motivation, Self-determination theory.

Researchers examining coaching development have classified learning experiences as *formal* or *informal* (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2006; Werthner & Trudel, 2006). Nelson and colleagues defined *formal* learning experiences as training that occurs in a structured setting under the guidance of a certified instructor. Examples of formal learning include coaching classes, clinics, or certification programs. The acquisition of coaching knowledge through formalized programs has become an important research topic in the field of coaching science (Sullivan & Gee, 2008; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006;

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Werthner & Trudel, 2006). While scholars have emphasized the importance of formalized coach education programs, research results have indicated that many coaches have mixed feelings about their value and effectiveness (Erickson, Côté, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Gilbert & Trudel, 2004; Lyle, 2002; Nelson et al., 2006; Schinke, Bloom, & Salmela, 1995). Moreover, although many coaches felt they acquired knowledge about their sport and a basic understanding of sport science and pedagogical practices from attending coaching clinics, they also felt that much of the information they acquired was already learned from other sources (e.g., university classes, Internet) or was non-transferable to actual coaching scenarios. Although the results should be viewed with caution, the relatively low impact of traditional coaching education programs cannot be overlooked (Cushion et al., 2010).

In Singapore, the Singapore Sports Council (SSC) and National Sports Association (NSA) are the main organizations responsible for training and certifying coaches to serve the sports industries. Their training usually involves lectures and practical sessions. In order to become a certified coach, participants must pass theory and practical tests which are usually held over a short period of time ranging from two weeks to two months. There is little opportunity for participants to apply the theories learned in practical coaching settings, especially considering that the learning curve for such formal learning can be steep and challenging for many of them.

Nelson and colleagues (2006) defined *informal* learning experiences as education that takes place outside the standard school/classroom setting. This may include personal athletic involvement, self-directed learning, or other experiences with little or no guidance from instructors. Previous studies have found that expert coaches participated in a variety of informal learning experiences that assisted their career development (e.g., Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Erickson et al., 2007; Schinke et al., 1995). These experiences helped them adopt training exercises and tactics from individuals who coached them while they were athletes and/or young coaches. These experiences also helped shape their philosophies and values.

Depending on how it is structured and delivered, coach mentoring could be characterized as either a formal or informal method of learning and development. *Mentoring* has been defined as a non-familial, non-romantic relationship (Bloom, 2013) that emphasizes guidance, support, and facilitation (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004). Mentoring involves a relationship in which an experienced individual has a direct and personal impact on the development of a less experienced individual (Bloom, 2013). Mentors personally commit their time for the personal and professional development of their protégés (Bloom, 2013). Although empirical literature on mentoring in

coaching is limited, scholars from around the world have identified many positive outcomes that resulted from mentoring (e.g., Bertz & Purdy, 2011; Bloom, 2013; Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998; Cushion, 2006; Jones, Harris, & Miles, 2009). Mentors can help their mentees improve their identity, competence, confidence, and increase their exposure and visibility by expanding their networks. Moreover, a sample of expert coaches said that mentoring was their most important career development factor (Bloom et al., 1998). Unfortunately, there was no structured path for finding a mentor coach, and it often happened because of luck, chance, and/or personal persistence (Bloom et al., 1998). As part of a concerted effort to elucidate the benefits of mentoring in the coaching domain, the present study examined the impact of a formalized mentoring program for novice coaches.

In the last several years, the definition of coaching has moved away from a skills and performance focus to an emphasis on self-empowerment (Rolfe, 2013). Researchers have felt there are more similarities between mentoring and coaching than there are differences (Gray, 2013). This modern perspective is demonstrated by the merging of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, the International Coach Federation, and the Association of Coaching to create the Global Coaching and Mentoring Alliance (Gray, 2013). Despite the similar functions that mentoring shares with other relationships that involve a teaching and learning component, such as coaching, there are some differences between a mentor and a coach (Clutterbuck, 2004; Ragins & Kram, 2007). A coach focuses on skill development and improved performance, while maintaining a great deal of control over the direction of the relationship (Clutterbuck, 2004). Mentoring centers on the potential and capacity of the learner, and is typically a longer-term relationship with the goals and expectations constantly evolving through the developmental process (Clutterbuck, 2004).

The value and benefits of mentoring for enhancing learning and career progression are more developed in non sport domains. Part of the reason may be that mentoring in non sport environments is typically longer in duration and less focused on immediate performance markers (i.e., wins and losses) (Clutterbuck, 1998). For example, mentoring in business has facilitated learning and improved career success, performance rating, salary, promotions, as well as psychosocial functions of employees (Kram, 1983; Parsloe & Wray, 2004). Compared to non-mentored employees, mentored individuals have reported higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational socialization, career commitment, opportunity, recognition, career success, career mobility, and self-esteem (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Corzine, Buntzman, & Busch, 1994; Day & Allen, 2004; Fagenson,

1989). Recently, Jones (2012) investigated the learning outcomes of a formalized mentoring program in the United Kingdom. Five mentoring dyads made up of experienced managers and mentee students with a postgraduate management degree were involved in a longitudinal study that lasted 17 months. The findings indicated that both the mentors and mentees benefited from this program. The advantages included the acquisition of knowledge about the organization and workplace culture and politics, improved interpersonal, communication, and goal-setting skills, as well as expanded social connections inside and outside the organizational setting.

Aside from the individuals who are benefitting from formalized mentoring programs, organizations also experience benefits that can improve the workplace environment and productivity. According to Clutterbuck (2004), businesses who implement mentoring programs experience improved employee motivation, communication, and planning. In a cross-cultural study on the impact of a formalized mentoring program on work commitment attitudes and career satisfaction among professional and managerial employees, Aryee and Chay (1994) reported improved career satisfaction and success for mentees who had completed the mentoring program. The authors outlined three recommendations when implementing a formalized mentoring program: 1) selection of mentors should be based on experience, achievement, and willingness to invest time and energy to guide others, 2) adequate time should be devoted to define and clarify the roles and expectations of the mentors and mentees, and 3) mentors and mentees should be involved in a matching process.

Despite the positive outcomes from mentoring in non sport settings, there is a lack of empirical research on mentoring in coaching which may be attributed to some unique barriers that exist in the sporting environment. According to Bloom (2013), these include the geographical size of most countries that make it difficult to standardize coach education training practices, a lack of funding for the training and development of mentors, a lack of time for mentor coaches to devote to their mentees, a lack of trust and working relationships between sport organizations and academic units, and perhaps most importantly, a lack of a standardized and empirically developed mentoring program for mentor coaches to follow. Singapore is a densely-populated Southeast Asian island city-state of approximately 5 million that might be able to overcome many of these barriers. More specifically, it has a small geographical area, an emphasis on structured coach education programs, active coaches willing to serve as mentors, and support and coordination from sport associations and the University. Moreover, the Singapore government recently invested a large sum of money that was intended to encourage its citizens to

actively participate in sports, and to use sport as a way to bring recognition and prominence to the country (Koh, Mallett, & Wang, 2011).

To our knowledge, none of the 76 Singapore NSAs have a formalized mentoring program in place to bridge the theory-practical learning gap. We rationalize that coaches can benefit from exposure to a formalized mentoring program, even though research from a global cross-cultural perspective, and more specifically in Asia, is scarce. Driven by the motivation to improve the local Singaporean sport coaching context and to understand the value of mentoring in sport coaching, the purpose of this study was to develop and implement a formalized mentoring program for novice basketball coaches. Similar to the results reported in non sport settings (e.g., Aryee & Chay, 1994; Clutterbuck, 2004; Jones, 2012), we anticipated that the formalized coach mentoring program would also produce positive outcomes for the mentors and mentees. The focus of our study was guided by the following research questions: What are the benefits of a formalized mentoring program for both the mentors and mentees? What skill(s) can both mentors and mentees develop that will improve their coaching knowledge and behaviors? What recommendations will emerge that could improve future coach mentoring programs?

Method

PARTICIPANTS

12 Mentors (1 female) and 36 Mentees (7 female) participated in this program, with 9 mentors and 27 mentees attending the post intervention focus group interviews. The mentors were purposely chosen based on the following criteria: a minimum of 10 years of coaching experience, currently coaching team(s), exceptional coaching achievements, and endorsement by an expert panel from the Basketball Association of Singapore (BAS) as among the best in their country using Côté and Gilbert's (2009) definition of coaching effectiveness. Their ages ranged from 31-75 years old ($M = 47.6$, $SD = 12.6$), with coaching experience averaging 18.8 years ($SD=12.3$). All of them had at least a Level Two basketball coaching certification (Level Three is the highest certification in the country). They were relatively successful basketball coaches at the school or club levels, including helping their teams achieve at least a top four position in national level competitions.

The mentees ages ranged from 19 to 55 years old ($M = 31.5$, $SD = 10.7$). The mentees were all enrolled in a Level 1 coaching course in basketball. In Singapore, this requires 30 hours of contact time in the classroom and on court. The duration of the course is a month. All of the mentees were basketball players at one time, with their skills ranging from beginner to expert.

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the university's ethical review board to conduct the study. All participants signed a consent form and were reminded that partici-

pation in the current study was voluntary in nature. They were explained their rights to confidentiality, anonymity, and withdrawal from the study.

THE FORMALIZED MENTORING PROGRAM

The formalized mentoring program was embedded in a Level 1 basketball coaching program organized by the Basketball Association of Singapore (BAS). As part of the course requirements, each coaching course participant (i.e., mentees) was expected to spend eight hours of observation and hands-on sessions with his/her mentor on top of the coaching course. Prior to commencement of the mentoring program, groups of three mentees were assigned to each mentor.

The mentoring training program was developed by the research team based on mentoring literature from within and outside of the sporting domain. The project leader (PL) is an experienced basketball coach, coach educator, and administrator whose appointments and involvements have included Chair for FIBA Asia Coaches Committee and Chair of the Coaching and Development Committee for BAS. The PL has also lectured at the National Coaching Accreditation Program, which is under the purview of the SSC.

The formalized mentoring training program included a 2-hour introductory workshop conducted by the PL. The content included topics such as: (1) overview of mentoring, (2) mentoring strategies (e.g., communication and facilitation skills), (3) the art of observation and effective feedback, and (4) reflection and review. Early in the program, each mentor was visited at least once by the PL and a research assistant who video and audio recorded one of their mentoring sessions. The PL viewed the session with the mentor to ensure there was consistency in the method of delivery. The tape was also made available to the mentor for further viewing and reflection.

During the mentoring period, the mentors facilitated mentees' learning and understanding of the roles of a beginner coach. All sessions took place at the mentors' training facility or at competition sites for their team. Following each practice or game, there was opportunity for personal interaction between the mentor and the mentee, mostly to facilitate feedback. The mentors were also supported with a token financial allowance to compensate for their time and transportation costs when conducting their mentoring outside of the coaching venue. This also covered the costs of paying for lunches and dinners while discussing coaching issues.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Focus group interviews with the mentors, focus group interviews with the mentors and mentees were conducted separately to ascertain their perceptions of the mentoring program. Morgan and Krueger (1998) noted that focus groups were especially useful for exploration and discovery, particularly by encouraging individuals to investigate the ways in which they are similar or different from one another. Two members of the research team acted as the moderators and led the five focus groups (2 for the mentors and 3 for the mentees) (Madriz, 2000; Morgan & Krueger, 1998). Focus group size was kept to a maximum of 10 members per session in accordance with the guidelines established by Krueger and Casey (2000). The moderator encouraged the participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The focus group interviews took place between 1.5 to 3 months after the program was completed. Each focus group session lasted between 96 and 148 minutes and was held at the University. The

focus groups followed a semi-structured interview guide that consisted of opening questions, key questions, and summary questions. The interview followed a sequence of general to specific questions, which allowed the participants to gradually move deeper into the topic of discussion. Prompts were used to expand the explanation and understanding of each question (only some of the key questions had prompts). Both groups were asked opening questions that alluded to their athletic and coaching careers to date. Key questions for both groups included, "How would you describe the evolution of your relationship with your mentor/mentee from the beginning to the end of the program?", "What do you think you gained most from this mentoring program?", "What part(s) of the mentoring program did you find the most difficult or challenging?". The only significant difference in the interview guide for the two groups was that the mentors were asked about their coaching evolution and any previous mentoring experiences. Participants in both groups were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and they could respond freely whenever they had something to contribute.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The focus group interviews were transcribed, organized, and stored using the NVivo 8 (QSR International, 2008) computer software program. The mentor and mentee data were inductively and independently analyzed from one another using the "long table" approach (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). The long table approach began with the division of the text from each interview into meaning units, which are chunks of information that convey a specific meaning. A total of 272 meaning units emerged from the mentee data and 202 from the mentor data. These chunks of text were given labels, called codes. The researchers chose the names of the codes as being logically related to the data they represented. 42 codes emerged from the mentee data and 39 from the mentor data. Codes that were similar in meaning were lumped together in the next level of analysis resulting in a number of higher-order categories that explained mentoring from the perspective of both the mentors and mentees. Six separate categories emerged for both the mentor and mentee data. The frequency of responses in each category can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

A number of precautions were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and accuracy of the data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, the moderator (and member of the research team) completed an oral summary for the participants at the completion of each session, providing the participants with an opportunity to discuss the key ideas raised in each session. Second, a peer review took place at each stage of the analysis. A peer who was not a member of the research team examined 25% of the meaning units and matched them with a list of codes created by members of the research team. Any discrepancies were discussed until a common understanding was reached. Following this, the peer reviewer was provided with a list of categories and their definitions. The reviewer was instructed to place each of the 39 / 42 codes into one of the 6 categories he/she deemed most appropriate. The peer reviewer placed all the codes into the category that corresponded with the research team's original choice.

Results

The following section elaborates on each of the six themes that emerged from the analysis of the mentee data (definition of mentoring

TABLE I
Categories and Codes with Frequencies as Expressed by Mentees

| Categories and Codes | Total |
|---|-------|
| <i>Definition of mentoring from mentees</i> | |
| Definition of mentoring from mentees - experience/achievements | 53 |
| Definition of mentoring from mentees - guidance | 7 |
| Definition of mentoring from mentees - mentor-mentee relationship | 10 |
| Lifetime mentor-mentee relationship | 11 |
| Mentor-mentee age gap | 19 |
| | 6 |
| <i>Mentoring attributes</i> | |
| Mentor- commitment | 6 |
| Mentor- providing feedback | 2 |
| Mentor - providing guidance | 2 |
| | 2 |
| <i>Coaching - what</i> | |
| Definition of coaching - commitment to athlete | 58 |
| Definition of coaching - role model | 7 |
| Coach passion | 5 |
| Athlete discipline | 5 |
| Athlete individual differences | 3 |
| Coaching different skill levels | 5 |
| Teaching - injury prevention | 11 |
| Teaching - life skills | 1 |
| Teaching - technical knowledge | 10 |
| Teaching - fundamentals | 2 |
| Teaching - hands-on learning | 8 |
| | 1 |
| <i>Coaching - how</i> | |
| Coaching career | 34 |
| Coach-athlete relationship | 8 |
| Coach collaboration | 8 |
| Coaching certification | 7 |
| Technology | 9 |
| | 2 |
| <i>Benefits of being mentored</i> | |
| Acquiring- fundamentals | 67 |
| Acquiring- athlete psychology | 2 |
| Acquiring- coaching style | 9 |
| Acquiring- hands-on learning | 14 |
| Acquiring- innovative thinking | 10 |
| Acquiring- observational learning | 5 |
| Acquiring- technical knowledge | 10 |
| Acquiring- time management | 14 |
| | 3 |
| <i>Program improvements from mentees</i> | |
| Program improvements - > 8 hours | 54 |
| Program improvements - addition of coach observation | 4 |
| Program improvements - mentor-mentee matching | 2 |
| Program improvements - multiple mentors | 19 |
| Program improvements - preparation | 4 |
| Program improvements - scheduling | 12 |
| Program improvements - job opportunities/security | 6 |
| Conflict of interest | 5 |
| | 2 |

from mentees; mentoring attributes; coaching – what; coaching – how; benefits of being mentored; program improvements from mentees), followed by the six themes that emerged from the mentor data (definition of mentoring from mentors; coaching knowledge and skills; coaching ath-

TABLE II
 Categories and Codes with Frequencies as Expressed by Mentors

| Categories and Codes | Total |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Definition of mentoring from mentors</i> | 31 |
| Mentor – guidance | 8 |
| Mentor – role model | 2 |
| Mentor – commitment | 1 |
| Mentor – confidence | 1 |
| How to mentor | 9 |
| Mentee – observational learning | 5 |
| Mentee – feedback | 4 |
| Mentee – discipline | 1 |
| <i>Coaching knowledge and skills</i> | 39 |
| Sharing – experience | 11 |
| Teaching – coaching style | 9 |
| Teaching – fundamentals | 9 |
| Sharing – values | 6 |
| Sharing – ideas/opinions | 2 |
| Teaching – technical information | 2 |
| <i>Coaching athletes</i> | 23 |
| Athlete – life skills | 4 |
| Athlete – individual differences | 6 |
| Athlete – feedback | 4 |
| Lifetime coach-athlete relationship | 4 |
| Athlete – discipline | 3 |
| Athlete – encouragement | 2 |
| <i>Program benefits</i> | 38 |
| Lifetime mentor-mentee relationship – deliberate | 11 |
| Coaching career | 8 |
| Lifetime mentor-mentee relationship – incidental | 6 |
| Advancement of sport | 5 |
| Preparing new/young coaches | 3 |
| Program impact | 3 |
| Mentor as career | 2 |
| <i>Mentor growth and development</i> | 39 |
| Acquiring – new ideas | 10 |
| Acquiring – personal skills | 6 |
| Acquiring – technical knowledge | 2 |
| Coach collaboration | 12 |
| Coaching experience | 7 |
| Internet | 2 |
| <i>Program improvements from mentors</i> | 32 |
| Program improvements – applicability | 1 |
| Program improvements – > 8 hours | 4 |
| Program improvements – coaching certification | 4 |
| Program improvements – scheduling | 7 |
| Program improvements – coach-mentor matching | 7 |
| Program improvements – preparation | 9 |

letes; program benefits; mentor growth and development; program improvements from mentors). The quotes have been assigned a number ranging from 1 to 36 for mentees and C1-12 for mentors in order to protect the participants' identities.

MENTEE

Definition of mentoring from mentees. The mentees used phrases such as leader, teacher, and experienced/successful elder to describe the meaning of mentoring. Many of their thoughts centered on an experienced coach developing a personal relationship while guiding a novice coach in his/her growth and development:

My definition of a mentor is a person who will guide me along in my learning process. I believe the program is useful because sometimes you do not know if you are right or wrong. Having someone give you guidance helps you to learn from your mistakes and see things from a different perspective. (32)

I find the relationship part is very important. If you are attached to a good mentor, you can disclose your inner emotions and how you feel about the things they allow you to try out. To find a good and close mentor, the interpersonal relationship is very important. (22)

Interestingly, some mentees felt this relationship extended beyond the program as the bond between mentor and mentee developed:

My mentor and I talk about many things and we will go out for coffee or tea to discuss. This kind of relationship between us is very helpful. We did not just depend on the 8 hours of the program. There has to be a personal touch between the mentee and mentor. (32)

Mentoring attributes. The mentees liked when the mentors provided feedback and guidance to them. The mentees felt most engaged when the mentors expressed an interest in their future:

You can see the mentors are willing to be part of this program. I think that is the most important thing. They really wanted to make full use of the 8 hours and teach us things that were invaluable. (25)

In a two-hour session, my mentor would coach the first hour and a half, and then he would ask me to help teach shooting for the last half an hour. After the session, he would correct me by telling me what I taught correctly and what I taught wrong. (23)

Coaching – what. The mentees spent a considerable amount of time discussing the knowledge they acquired from their mentors. Mentees learned how to meet the needs of each individual athlete while maintaining a team atmosphere, as well as how to communicate and teach fundamental basketball skills effectively. “To me, coaching is nurturing the younger generation in basketball skills, passing on the correct knowledge, tactics, and correct way to train and prevent injuries. As a coach, we should be responsible for their sports skills and health.” (22)

The mentees also learned that basketball could be used as a vehicle for teaching athletes life skills such as communication, teamwork, discipline, and focus:

It is important to teach coaches who are dealing with younger children how to manage their relationships with other people because basketball is a team sport. When we go out into society, we need to work with others. We have to teach them how to work with others effectively. They need to learn communication skills. (26)

In parallel with teaching life skills, mentees learned that their main responsibility as a coach was to help athletes as individuals. “As a coach, you are not only teaching the athletes how to play, you are also teaching them who they are. Therefore, it is more than just being a teacher. We are building the players physically and holistically.” (20)

Coaching – how. The majority of the mentees believed that obtaining a coaching certification was paramount to progressing in their coaching careers. They understood that coaches must continually seek innovative ways of acquiring and sharing knowledge:

On a personal level, I wanted to learn more about coaching. Everyone has their own coaching skills and sharing with other coaches is good for everyone. It’s good to enrich your knowledge in what you want to do as a coach. Professionally, I do not have any certification here in Singapore. Therefore, having a Level 1 gives me an edge when I am presenting myself as a coach. (29)

In relation to this program, several of the mentees described the specific techniques used by their mentors, including the use of technology:

My mentor would video record the games and we would analyze each specific player’s worse and strong points. She would burn the CD for each of us so we could see what was wrong in the game. She would ask us to write down the team’s strong points and what each individual player’s weaknesses were so that we knew where to improve. (10)

Benefits of being mentored. The mentees learned technical knowledge, athlete psychology, innovative thinking, and time management skills from their mentors:

I learnt from my mentor that we have to manage our time, such as how much time you can use for a particular drill during the training period. You have to monitor the time correctly and not take too long on one training drill. Otherwise it will be pointless. (15)

My mentor always emphasized fundamentals. I try to be more creative in coaching the fundamentals. I will create very short fundamental drills that are inno-

vative and creative. It helps to keep the team focused. Otherwise, they will feel that the training is not fun. (18)

Several of the mentees benefited from observing their mentors ran practice sessions but the majority of them appreciated feedback from their mentors after they were observed coaching in either practices or competitions:

It is a chance for us to try out what coaching is like in a school environment. I think it is critical to have a taste of what it is like. A lot of things can be read from books but how the players react, good drills, and the ways they are executed are invaluable. We can always coach each other in the coaching clinic but we are working with children in the real world. (25)

Through this hands-on learning process mentees developed their own personal coaching styles:

The way the mentors speak to their players is also something we can learn from. During my time as a player, some coaches just yelled at us because they thought that was the way to get the message across. Many of us would be so fearful of the coach instead of hearing the instruction. Through mentoring, we can learn how to conduct ourselves as a coach. For example, speaking to the players, instead of yelling. What you say and how you say it is very important. (26)

My mentor taught me communication skills. For example, you have to explain certain terms to the team before you communicate the drills to them. So it's the way you communicate with your players that maximizes their understanding of the certain drills or techniques you are going to teach them. (32)

Program improvements from mentees

The mentees provided suggestions for improving future mentoring programs. They stressed the importance of matching the mentors and mentees. While most mentees were happy with their matched mentors, some felt they were not ideally matched because of differences in level of coaching, personality, or coaching style:

Maybe before the mentoring program starts, the mentor and mentee should sit down and discuss the objectives. This did not happen. I executed the drills and my mentor gave me his advice. Maybe we could tell the mentors what we are looking for and see if they can help us on that. (34)

For me, the important thing is who is chosen to be your mentor. Yes, I learnt technical stuff, however, your mentor also needs to be able to guide you emotionally and psychologically. (24)

Several mentees would have liked the program to be longer than the allotted eight hours. The mentees felt it would help develop a more personal relationship with their mentor:

This mentoring program was very good but the improvement will only come with the continuity of the program. The 8 hours we did is for our lesson. It is just 8 hours, but if we go on, there are so many things you can learn from each other. (29)

MENTOR

Definition of mentoring from mentors

Mentors focused on their relationship and roles with their mentees. With regards to the mentor-mentee relationship, they emphasized the importance of guiding the mentees, serving as a role model, and being available as a resource throughout their entire coaching careers. C7 said, “to me, mentoring is guiding someone. To be a person for them to fall back on for advice when they face difficulties as a coach.” C5 said, “at least they have a role model to follow, to see how to start the training, how to organize, and how to manage the students.”

‘Guide’ is one of the words that define mentoring. [In the future], if they have questions they still can ask us so that we can guide them throughout their coaching experiences. Some of the mentees still call me to share their experiences and to check on other matters.

Coaching knowledge and skills

Before progressing to more advanced strategies and skills, most of the mentors stressed the importance of teaching athletes fundamental basketball skills. They suggested that young coaches may not always be proficient in teaching these skills and they viewed this program as an excellent way to share that knowledge with their mentees: “I find that younger coaches can’t train the fundamentals and skills well enough.” (C1)

The mentees would have this idea that all basketball players should already know all the fundamental skills and wonder why are we still drilling them on these basic skills. Many think they are here to teach the players how to play 4 v 4 or 5 v 5. (C4)

In addition to teaching their mentees how to coach fundamental skills, they also emphasized the importance of coaching style, communication skills, and delivering the technical information clearly and effectively. As C8 stated, “I also shared instructional strategies so that they would have better timing, flow, or even voice projection. Some of them do not know how to communicate to the whole team in general.” C9 also shared, “I sometimes

see younger coaches entering the industry and they shout at players. I feel that this is not right and hope I can share ways to approach players.”

Coaching athletes. As they accumulated coaching experience, many mentors evolved from focusing on skill development to an approach that involves developing their athletes’ personal skills such as discipline, respect, and teaching good values:

When I started coaching I wanted to share all my knowledge about basketball to my students. Later on, I realized the most important thing was to discipline the players well. Basketball itself is not about telling them how to play; it is how to behave, how to be disciplined. (C4)

For me, coaching is more about imparting values and skills when I am dealing with youth. I hope they will be able to progress in basketball but since they are in school, they need to learn the values of sport. (C8)

Teaching athletes discipline was particularly important to the mentors. They believed that discipline was the most important characteristic to become a good basketball player and a good student:

There is no point if they can behave very well on the court, but they don’t have the discipline in the classroom, or outside beyond the court. ...For me winning or losing is nothing; it is the character that counts, after they graduate, what they have learnt. ...The school didn’t want the students to just be good basketball players. They wanted the players to behave and be disciplined, to have good knowledge, so after they graduate, they can take what they learnt with them. This is what I am trying to share with the new coaches. (C4)

Program benefits

The mentors supported the program and believed it was an excellent way of raising the standards of basketball and other sports in Singapore by having more skilled and united coaches across the country. In addition to providing much needed coaching knowledge and information, it is also a way to reach young coaches early in their careers, when they need the most support and guidance: C4 explained, “We are helping the mentees become more prepared. At the start of their coaching careers they are going to encounter a lot of problems.”

The mentors emphasized that the continuation of the mentor-mentee relationship following the program is also critical. In some instances, the mentees deliberately sought out their mentors for help and guidance. In

other instances, the mentees saw their mentors at games and competitions and updated them on their coaching. These long-lasting relationships within the Singapore coaching community should promote further coach collaboration and a closer-knit community:

One of my mentees is now an assistant coach for a certain school, so I still see him around. We actually happened to see each other recently and we started to chat and share information. It is hard for us to meet up because we are actually quite busy at this time of year because our schools are having competitions. (C4)

Some of the mentors suggested creating an organization of professional mentors to serve as a permanent resource for all coaches. According to C2, “maybe SSC can set up a group of mentors, as another kind of career, for coaches to become good advisors for new coaches. The new coaches would have somebody to turn to when they have some difficulties.”

Mentor growth and development. Many of the mentors felt they also benefited from participating in this program. Some mentors felt it was an opportunity to interact with young coaches and acquire new technical and tactical knowledge in their sport: “by participating in this program, the mentors would not be stagnant at a certain level. We are able to keep learning.” (C2)

In addition to gaining knowledge, many of the mentors internalized their positions as role models to younger coaches:

[This program taught me] to be more responsible because someone is going to look up to me. Now I am going to become a leader and a role model to my mentees, so I have to behave better and more responsible. Previously, we only had to answer to ourselves and to our schools. But right now, there are 3 or 4 mentees standing beside you, monitoring you because they are learning and wanting to learn more. (C4)

[This program taught me] self discipline, and also to be able to recall things that we have not used for a long time. As you talk and share with the mentees, you can recall things that you have not used for a long time. (C6)

Prior to the start of this program, none of the mentors had participated in a formal mentoring program. All of their learning or ‘mentoring’ was informal and came from peers, the Internet, or rival coaches. According to C6, “When we started off coaching, we would just borrow ideas and concepts from other coaches.”

For most of us, I believe our mentoring process was informal. ...When I was conducting my trainings, my coach was still around and she gave me advice and mentored me. After that, when I began coaching, my friends and other coaches gave me advice and shared ideas and thoughts that shaped the way I taught. (C8)

Program improvements from mentors

Almost all of the mentors alluded to scheduling difficulties and the problems inherent with only eight contact hours. The mentors strongly believed that the timeframe was not sufficient to form a meaningful relationship and attachment:

The time frame is not suitable because the NCAP course takes about one or two months, and they have to complete the attachment within that period of time. It was not easy for us to compromise. The time frame for the mentoring session should be after the NCAP, or the NCAP duration should be prolonged to about 3-6 months. ...And I think there should be more time given for the mentees when they are attached to the mentors. I don't think eight hours is enough to create an attachment. (C4)

The mentors felt that the program would be more beneficial to the young coaches if the mentees and mentors were matched based on their experience level and the level of basketball they are coaching. C6 suggested, "in terms of matching, organizers have to see what level the mentees are coaching at and attach them to a mentor who is coaching their level. This will be more appropriate for them."

The mentors believed this program was beneficial for all parties. The mentees had the opportunity to learn from a seasoned coach, who in some occasions learned something from his or her mentees. Additionally, they found the program to be a great way to learn more about coaching and that it could help them determine whether they were interested in pursuing coaching as a career:

I think it's important to continue the program. Most of us have picked up many things, so in one-way or another, they were our mentors too. I think it's important for them to have an official avenue to be attached to someone to experience this career. Especially if they are in transition, giving them the option of trying this out for three months, they can sense if they are really interested in this field or if this is what they want. (C7)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate a formalized mentoring program for novice basketball coaches and to consider what factors contributed to its effectiveness. The results suggest the mentoring program was beneficial for both the mentees and mentors, which is consistent with literature in non sport settings (e.g., Aryee & Chay, 1994; Clutterbuck, 2004; Jones, 2012).

The current mentoring program provided an environment that exposed the mentees to new coaching methods, knowledge, and experiences. It also helped build confident and competent novice coaches who would be able to apply their newly acquired skills to their own coaching situations. The program also enabled mentors to utilize their pedagogical knowledge and skills, and to engage in meaningful self-reflection practices. Engaging in these mentoring experiences also helped mentors improve their interpersonal and communication skills.

Despite the efforts of the International Council for Coach Education and various coach education programs and scholars in different countries, there has been a lack of scientific research on optimal ways of developing coaches. The little research that has been done focused primarily on the impact of factors such as past athletic experiences, coach education, and informally observing and interacting with other coaches (Jimenez, Lorenzo, & Ibanez, 2009; Schinke et al., 1995). Since the positive effects of mentoring have been repeatedly demonstrated and emphasized in non sport settings (e.g., Clutterbuck, 2004; Jones, 2012), one might have expected coach mentoring to be a focus in sport and coach-development research as well. However, the body of literature on coach mentoring is relatively limited, particularly in comparison to the amount of mentoring research done in non sport domains. The current study adds to the literature on coach learning and development by providing one of the first empirical accounts of a formalized mentoring program for novice coaches.

The novice coaches (mentees) in our program were exposed to valuable interactions with both their mentors and their fellow novice coaches (three mentees to a mentor) during the structured mentoring period. The themes derived from the interview data revealed that participants acquired a better understanding and appreciation of mentoring and its role in the development of coaching competencies. The mentoring program provided an excellent platform for mentees to discuss coaching issues with their mentors. It also helped them establish coaching networks with their peers with whom they could potentially share coaching practices after they graduated from the coaching course (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Wenger, 1998). Our study is one example where a learning platform can be created to enhance coach learning and development.

While there are many benefits of mentoring in sport coaching (Bloom et al., 1998; Jones et al., 2009), there are also challenges, some of which are unique to each country. In Singapore, research has found that senior/master basketball coaches were afraid to share their “sacred” knowledge for fear of losing an edge on their opponents, as well as concern for their long-term job security (Koh et al., 2011). However, the results of the present study found

that the structured mentoring program worked well for novice coaches in Singapore. The mentors appeared willing to offer guidance and support to facilitate the novice coaches' learning (Cassidy et al., 2004). Future studies might test the program at the high performance level where we speculate the results may differ.

An interesting finding from our study was that mentors emphasized the value and importance of teaching life skills to their athletes. Initially, the mentees were focused on acquiring technical and tactical basketball coaching knowledge from their mentors. On the other hand, the mentors took a great deal of time to explain the importance of incorporating life skills development into the young coaches' repertoire. The important role of the coach in facilitating the learning of life skills has been evidenced in the literature (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, & Föneris, 2009; Falcao, Bloom, & Gilbert, 2012; Gould & Carson, 2008). Our results further this line of research in a unique way by indicating that the perceived importance of teaching life skills may vary accordingly to coaching experience. More research is warranted to examine whether this relationship exists with coaches at different levels of experience. If it does, as we suspect, then coach education programs should include curriculum on teaching novice coaches about the importance of life skills training and how to do it.

While formalized mentoring programs may provide structured paths for finding a mentor coach and yield benefits for coach development, funding for training mentors might be a concern in some countries (Bloom, 2013). Interestingly, our results revealed that recognition by the national sport authority of a country can also be a main motivating factor for mentors wanting to be involved in the program. This finding is consistent with Self Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985), which suggests that individuals are likely to be self-motivated if the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied. In our study, all the mentors were trained by the PL on mentoring skills. The support and feedback provided by the PL subsequently made them feel competent in delivering their duties. In addition, the mentors were given the freedom (autonomy) to guide the mentees, with a basic structure and guidelines provided to them. Lastly, the mentors related well with the program and the PL as they recognized the importance of the program in developing quality novice coaches and the central roles they played. They actively engaged with the PL and provided valuable suggestions on how the program could be strengthened and improved, a sign of 'relatedness' in action. We therefore believe that SDT has the potential to guide the creation and implementation of a formalized mentoring program moving forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While positive outcomes emerged from our study, further adjustments will help strengthen future deliveries. First, the optimal number of mentor to mentee ratio should be reduced to one or two mentees per mentor. This ratio would ensure that mentors can manage their coaching assignments (as all of them are still active in coaching), as well as spend quality time working with their mentees. Second, careful attention should be paid to matching mentors and mentees (Aryee & Chay, 1994; Blake-Beard, O'Neill, & McGowan, 2007). As the initial stage of the formalized mentoring program relies heavily on relationship building, it is important to ensure that both mentees and mentors can connect and relate well by adopting the 'choice-based matching method' where mentees self-select a mentor with whom they feel a sense of connection, especially considering some want to coach elite sport while others prefer coaching youth sport. In other words, assigning mentors who have a similar career orientation and schedule is likely to result in greater success (Aryee & Chay, 1994; Blake-Beard et al., 2007). Third, both the mentors and mentees recommended lengthening the duration of the mentoring program. Lastly, the mentors should be involved in creating the mentoring training program to ensure consistency and greater ownership of the program.

While the present study shed light on the impact of a formalized mentoring program on novice coaches' learning, some limitations need to be mentioned. First, only Singaporean basketball coaches were involved in the study, so caution must be exhibited when generalizing these results to other cultures. Second, the amount of time that passed before the participants conducted their focus group interviews ranged from 12 to 14 weeks, a factor that may have impacted their recall and thoughts about the program. Third, the nominal sum of money that paid for lunches and dinners for the mentors and mentees may have influenced their thoughts about the program in general. Fourth, it is believed that some countries have mentoring programs in place for their most promising developmental coaches who are apprenticed as assistant coaches by their current national team head coaches. Rynne, Mallett, and Tinning (2006) reported that the nature of the job at the high performance level is highly contested. The fear of guiding/preparing someone who is likely to take over one's role/position has limited the quality of learning for assistant coaches. More studies are needed to help understand this relationship, as well as other issues associated with formalized mentoring programs from a cross-cultural and global perspective. As we continue to learn more about mentoring in sport, we hope that the positive benefits that

have occurred from mentoring in other areas of society (Clutterbuck, 2004; Kram, 1983) will be transferred to sport.

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