INTRODUCTION

In recent sport psychology scholarship, researchers have become increasingly sensitive to the influence of cultural phenomena on various important aspects of contemporary professional sport (Duda & Alison, 1990; Ram, Starek, & Johnson, 2004). Within a context of increasing international mobility of players and coaches (Maguire, 1999), a 'cultural turn' (Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010) in the study of sport psychology has highlighted the importance of understanding cultural factors influencing contemporary experiences of elite athletes, many of whom now perform within multicultural teams, or train and compete in culturally diverse environments. For instance, according to the latest International Basketball Migration Report (CIES Observatory, 2013), in seasons 2010/11 and 2011/12, the FIBA (International Basketball Federation) registered more than 6,500 international transfers of basketball players, with an increase of 6 per cent between these two seasons. 45.2% of transferred players were Americans, the vast majority of whom (76%) went on to play in Europe during the most recently completed season (2012/2013).

As such, a key area of focus for researchers within the newly emerging field of 'cultural sport psychology' (Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009) has been on the experiences of migrant players, as well as their (non-migrant) teammates and others, such as coaches, with whom they interact both on and off the field of play. A growing body of literature – mostly conducted by North American scholars working within North America – has identified a number of important issues, such as challenges for immigrated athletes after relocation (Schinke, Yukelson, Bartolacci, Battochio, & Johnstone, 2011), their adaptation strategies (Battochio, Schinke, McGannon, Tenenbaum, & Yukelson, 2011; Schinke, Michel, Gauthier, Pickard, Danielson, Peltier, Pheasant, Enosse, & Peltier, 2006) and experiences of acculturation in new environments (Schinke & McGannon, 2014).

Within this developing research literature, the impact of cultural differences on coaches' work experience within diverse teams has been examined in a small number of studies (Duchesne, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2011; Schinke, 2011; Schinke, McGannon, Battochio, & Wells, 2013). Such a focus on coaches' perspectives is considered vitally important for this body of work, owing to the central role coaches play within professional teams and the

responsibility they often have for helping migrant athletes to adapt to their new working and living environments (Schinke, 2011).

While these findings have collectively illustrated a range of important issues for consideration, to date the work in this area has almost exclusively relied on North American-based samples. Ironically, this obscures the complexity of cultural difference, as multi-cultural environments are likely to develop and be experienced in different ways within various national locations. Indeed, cultural sport psychology emerged partly in response to the need for greater diversity in the production of sport psychology knowledge, which tended to mostly reflect the experiences of white Western (male) researchers and practitioners working among groups of Western athletes (Ryba et al., 2010; Ryba, Stambulova, Si, & Schinke, 2013).

In this sense, the present study, which was conducted as part of the author's doctoral programme, sought to further knowledge within the small but rapidly developing cultural sport psychology research on migrant athletes by extending the research base outside of its traditional North American home. Drawing on data collected from a series of small-scale, qualitative case studies of professional basketball teams, the research aimed to provide exploratory insights (Creswell, 2007) into the experiences and perspectives of coaches working in multicultural teams within three Central European countries – an as-yet under-researched area in this newly emerging field of study. While the wider research project which this paper derives from included investigating both coaches' and players' experiences, a specific focus on the perspectives of coaches is chosen here, due to the importance of coaches' roles in multicultural teams, as outlined above.

METHODOLOGY

Epistemological position

This study was conducted from an interpretivist epistemological standpoint (Atkinson, 2012), which takes for granted that individuals experience and make sense of reality in different ways, and that researchers cannot easily determine objective 'truth' about other people's understanding of the world. Thus, rather than attempting to quantify and objectively measure the perceptions of others, research conducted within this paradigm

relies mostly on qualitative methods, which help to build up detailed, individually-specific descriptions of how particular people make sense of a given phenomenon. This was considered particularly appropriate for the present study given its exploratory nature and empirical focus on perceptions and experiences.

Participants

The research sample in this study was purposive, given that the perspectives of particular groups (coaches/athletes experienced in multicultural sports teams) were of interest to the research. Although the wider project included a sample of 35 athletes, the sample discussed in this particular paper consisted of six professional basketball head coaches (all of them were White males) working within the Czech Republic, Germany and Latvia. Four coaches worked with male teams, and two coaches worked with female teams (see Table 1, below). All participants were professionals with at least 5 years of experience, and were working in teams competing in the highest leagues of their respective countries.

Professional teams were chosen as the research sample because they commonly employ international players, whose presence was essential for this research. However, because of their professional level, it was very difficult to contact the teams and establish the relationships necessary in order to conduct this research, an issue discussed elsewhere in the literature on high-level migrant athletes (Elliott, 2012; Elliott & Weedon, 2011; Magee & Sugden, 2002), and the reason for the relatively small sample size.

In order to protect their identity, and due to the sensitive nature of some of the information disclosed, all participants in the study remain anonymous, with all identifying information – including age, nationality, and years of experience – removed for the purposes of protecting confidentiality. The coaches are identified in this paper using the names provided in Table 1, below, which also identifies the gender and national location of each coach's current team.

Table 1

Name	Country of current team	Gender of current team
CO1	Latvia	Male
CO2	Latvia	Female
CO3	Germany	Male
CO4	Germany	Female
CO5	Czech Republic	Male
CO6	Czech Republic	Male

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were used in order to explore participants' knowledge, feelings, and understanding of the impact of cultural differences within teams in their coaching experiences. This type of interview was chosen because of the control over the conversation that participants can have. In this case, the conversation tends to be relatively flexible and can be adjusted according to the interviewees' responses (Howitt, 2010), but remains somewhat tied to the interviewer's own interests. This was important to do, as while open-ended interviews are often chosen for exploratory research due to their ability to gather richer qualitative data and more overtly foreground the perspectives of interviewees, these tend to be significantly more time-consuming, and each interview in this study was conducted under time pressure due to the coaches' professional commitments and the limited access to these elite-level teams which the author was able to achieve. Also, the coaches in this study expected the researcher to ask direct questions – presumably because they were used to being interviewed in such a way by media professionals. As such, a semi-structured approach was deemed an appropriate method for this particular sample and research aims. The interviews lasted from forty minutes to one hour, and were individually conducted by the author in Czech, Russian and English languages, to suit the coaches' preferences.

At the beginning of each interview, all of which were conducted within the respective teams' training centres, participants were informed about the research aims.

They were reminded about the anonymity of the research, about the possibility of not commenting on any question that was uncomfortable and about the absence of 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Oral informed consent was taken prior to beginning the interviews. The participants were then asked a series of open-ended questions about their experiences of coaching multicultural teams and their relationships with foreign players, which were derived from the issues identified within the literature outlined previously, as well as the researcher's experiences arising from a similar, previous study conducted as part of her masters' programme (AUTHOR). Although the current findings cannot be widely generalised, the value of this qualitative research lies primarily in the specific, up-close empirical findings and themes developed in this particular context (Creswell, 2009).

Immediately following the conclusion of the interview process, each interview was transcribed verbatim, translated into English by the author, and later analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), which allowed for the categorisation of data from the interviews based on common, reoccurring topics that arose throughout the study, rather than the exploration of the data on the basis of a previously-determined theoretical framework. For the current study, six steps of thematic analysis, outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), were used: 1) transcription of verbal data and familiarisation with them; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes which unite initial codes; 4) reviewing themes on the basis of emergent patterns; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) producing the final written report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the fourth and fifth phases of data analysis, three overarching themes were identified in the interviews regarding coaches' work with multicultural teams. These included: the importance of value differences (with particular respect to 'individualistic' and 'collectivistic' cultural approaches); the influence of race/ethnicity in coach-athlete relationships; and the formation of ethnic subgroups within teams. Each of these themes contributes towards revealing the coaches' experience in working with multicultural teams, highlighting some specific problems and strategies used for handling them.

Value Differences

First of all, one of the most common issues identified within coaches' interviews was the difficulty posed through a difference between individualistic and collectivistic cultural orientations between immigrated and local players. The individualism-collectivism dimension is often used to reflect widely held beliefs, norms and attitudes common to any given cultural group (Triandis, 1996). For instance, North American and Western European cultures, which are said to be more individualistic and more self-oriented, promote self, autonomy and the encouragement of individual needs over group needs. On the other hand, collectivistic societies such as, for example, many Asian countries, emphasise collective needs, cooperation, conformity and personal modesty.

Whenever approaching such theoretical generalisations, one should be very careful with their potential for over-simplification and stigmatisation, as differences among members of the same group can be greater than those supposedly existing between different groups (Hanrahan, 2011). Also, any given individual belonging to a particular cultural group should not be used as a criterion to characterise all of its members, in order to avoid 'sensitive' stereotyping (Andersen, 1993), as scholars approach each person on individual bases (Kontos & Breland-Noble, 2002). Therefore this categorisation (individual vs. collectivistic) can be perceived as somewhat simplistic; however, this distinction was mentioned by all coaches in some way and therefore cannot be ignored in this research.

In this respect, the interviewed coaches all mentioned that they prefer a team-oriented or collectivistic approach, which urges players to cooperate at a high level and share possession of the ball, and generally prefer strong team performance instead of stand-out individual action. Therefore, players from the North America, who were perceived to prefer an individual playing style by the coaches, were considered to disturb the idealised team atmosphere. According to three of the interviewees:

For the team it's crucial to have team players. Americans can lead the team very good, but very often they just forget about the team and try to play the whole game as there is no other players [in their team]. That makes the others [teammates] quite angry, it's not what they are used to. (CO5)

It takes some time for them [American players] to realise that they need to pass the ball. They want to have it all the time, sometimes just for the sake of having a ball, to be the main focus of the team. (CO2)

When the individual goals take over, then the problems start to begin. If someone is not playing for the team, but for themselves. (CO3)

This tendency for migrant American players to persist with an individualistic orientation was widely reported by coaches. According to one coach, having several players all performing in this way could prove particularly problematic:

For many Americans it's important to have that feeling of… they matter, or they are very important, they are almost the star, without the bad connotation. So in our case, I've sometimes felt like it's not a good thing to have too many Americans on the team. Last year we had seven, too many, yet now we still have six or five at this point. But that can be a problem because they tend to want to play that first violin. They want to be in the driver's seat sometimes. (CO3)

Coaches largely attributed the individualistic orientation of American players to their cultural background and education or training which they had received at home, and in this sense, working with Americans was considered notably different to working with other migrant players:

It is different if you have a Serbian player or American player, just how they have learnt the game, you know. The former Yugoslavian school of basketball is very well known, very successful in the world and they tend to have different experience, how they have learned the game of basketball… In the States, of course, it's completely different… So when these players come together, you have to find of course a common ground and common language to be successful, eventually. (CO3)

The coaches reported two strategies they would apply in their practice in order to deal with these value differences. The first strategy involved recognition of the individualism of American players, supporting their self-esteem and a need to take leadership roles, whilst at the same time trying to teach them to adjust to their team role allocated by the coach. For instance, many players with individualistic orientations wanted to regularly feature in

their teams' starting line-up in order to feel a greater degree of efficacy. One of the coaches describes his strategy of communication with American players that he was using as a substitute:

…is very important with Americans too, to start, to be in the starting line-up of a game, instead of coming off the bench. I have one player who understood by now, that even though he comes off the bench, he still is gonna play thirty minutes, even thirty-five minutes, out of the forty minutes of one game. So this is still helpful, very helpful for the team, even though he doesn't start off in the game. (CO5)

Coaches frequently noted that American players' individualistic orientation, and behaviours arising from this, could negatively impact upon the local (i.e., non-migrant) players, who could be made to feel side-lined by the arrival of foreign 'star' players. Therefore, some of the coaches tried to make both sides of the team (local and immigrated players) adjust to this situation:

It is very important to talk with players, to teach new guys [Americans] to respect our team culture. But also to teach local players, especially if they have never played abroad, that they [foreigners] came here to make us stronger. Very often [local] guys feel that Americans come here and dominate the team, so everyone has to play by their [Americans] rules now. Yes, it happens, but it's my job to make all of them play by my rules as a coach. (CO6)

Extending from this, the second strategy used by coaches when addressing differences between individual and collectivistic value difference involved trying to change the attitudes of individualistically-oriented migrant players. By explaining to them the importance of the team game and being a part of a successful team, such coaches aimed to re-orient their migrant players to place less importance on their personal roles and successes:

I was telling them [American players] that when we are just a bunch of individual players, then it's very easy to break us, one by one. But if we are a team, then we are all together, and it will be difficult to break us. I thought they knew this story, but it was new to them. So I told it again, so they can remember. (CO6)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of the coaches described American players' individualism as a problem, with only one of them mentioning any positive impact:

The American player helped us a lot, because she had this experience and patience. She was trying to build the others' confidence up, make them respond… she took responsibility and made some team meetings and talked about the practice situations so that everyone had more energy, she was really caring. (CO4)

It is possible that the gender of the player has an important role in this case; while the present research sample is not big enough to establish generalizable trends, this does remain a possibility which might make for further research in the area.

Overall, it can be suggested that individual and collectivistic value differences – or at least, perceptions of these differences among coaches – are evident in this European sport context and can influence relationships between coaches and athletes from different national/cultural backgrounds (Schinke, 2011). Coaches' strategies largely focused on leading immigrated athletes to change and adapt to existing cultural norms within their teams.

Working with Black players

With a significant number of their migrant players coming from the United States, and a large proportion of those players being African-American, several coaches mentioned the special impact of working with Black players in a predominantly White social context. Ethnic background is an important factor in coach-athlete relationships; for example, according to some of the previous studies in this area, Black players bond better with Black coaches, expecting to receive a higher degree of empathy from the coaches of the same race (Jowett & Frost, 2007), and also are more likely to experience incivility from White head coaches (Cunningham, Miner, & McDonald, 2013).

In this respect, it was not uncommon for the interviewed coaches to point out that concerns over race/ethnicity could interfere with coach-athlete relationships, as well as team cohesion overall, as race became an important factor alongside cultural differences in framing the experience of working with a multicultural team. According to one coach,

It's very hard with Black [American] players. Their mentality is difficult. They don't want to train at full blast… There is always a problem in their head, they love marijuana. I personally don't like their attitude 'I am the best'. If you really want to work with Black players, you have to be well prepared and have good information. (CO6)

Such racial stereotyping regarding the 'laziness' or 'bad attitude' of black players has been described elsewhere in the literature, among other stereotypical expectations, such that black players have 'natural' athletic talent (Burley & Fleming, 1997; Jones, 2002), which can lead to Black players being perceived by coaches purely as performers rather than rounded individuals (Anshel, 1990). These stereotypical attitudes were reflected in another coach's account of working with Black players:

Black players can be very good for the team, quickly bring results, raise the attractiveness for the team among the fans, but they [Black players] lose the interest to the training very quickly, thinking that they already know better how to play, or even that they are too good to train hard. (CO5)

While many European coaches generally saw American players' individualism as a problem for their teams regardless of race (as outlined above), a perceived difference between Black and White players nevertheless created an assumption that Blacks were more difficult to work with. Difficulties in working with Black players can also be discussed through the communication process that can be different for athletes from Black communities. According to previous studies (Lawrence, 2005; Orbe, 1994), there is an assumed need for Black Americans to communicate with other Black Americans who are expected to have better understanding of their particular problems or situations. Also, some Black American players can lack experience of interaction with non-Black populations, and have to learn how to integrate within a majority-White group by 'trying different strategies, learning from past mistakes, and constantly putting themselves in risky and awkward positions' (Orbe, 1994, p. 291). In this respect, Orbe (1994) noted that Black Americans prefer to distance themselves from non-Black Americans, especially when that person is male and/or in authority, which can be perceived as intimidating. Keeping a distance from

the White coach and being intimidated can be negatively perceived by a coach who is not aware of this particular phenomenon.

In contrary to Anshel's earlier (1990) interviews with Black players, which claimed that coaches are largely not interested in their players' free time, some of the coaches in this sample were actually worried about the free time activities that Black players might choose, and explained how it can influence the appointment of the potential player to the team:

We specifically select American players to have a good character. It's a coach's job. Whether he [a player] likes to go out, is he married and has kids. Because usually Black players come to Europe and go out to bars, having lots of attention from girls. We don't need that. (CO1)

This finding connects with Solomon and colleagues' (Solomon, Wiegardt, Yusuf, Kosmitzki, Williams, Stevens, & Wayda, 1996) study regarding the different expectations that coaches have of athletes from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and how this can influence coaches' instructions and support to the players. Overall, the present study revealed that coaches in this Central European sample remain under the influence of certain racial stereotypes, and often lack sensitivity to the sociocultural and individual needs of Black players. Therefore, educational programs focused on understanding diversity would be useful for coaches working in such circumstances.

Formation of ethnic subgroups within teams

A further finding of this study concerns the formation of subgroups within multicultural teams. After his appointment to a culturally diverse basketball team, one of the coaches found that the team consisted of several, hierarchically-arranged ethnic subgroups (Greenfield, Davis, Suzuki, & Boutakidis, 2002) which had a fairly negative impact on team relationships, with almost no constructive communication between members of each group:

In one team in Poland I had four Americans, two Lithuanians, one player from Montenegro, one from Macedonia, two Serbians and around four to five Poles. I came to the club in the

mid-season, and they had groups in the teams. Poles hated Americans, because they couldn't speak their language. Americans hated Poles, thought they can't play basketball. Two Lithuanians were aside, they didn't know what to do. Serbians made their own Balkan gang of all the players from former Yugoslavia. (CO1)

Within this particular example, American players were convinced of their superiority to other players, while members of the various different groups often failed to constructively work together. Their perception of unequal status led to conflicts in the team between the immigrated and local (Polish) players, as well as wider inter-group tension which, according to the coach, drastically undermined team cohesiveness and resulted in the team constantly losing games. Indeed, the formation of subgroups based on ethnicity is not uncommon in culturally diverse groups (Sidanius, Levin, Rabinowitz, & Federico, 1999) and has been reported to adversely impact on wider group communication and team relationships (Panteli & Davison, 2005), while leading to conflict based on racial/ethnic grounds (Greenfield et al., 2002).

Similar problems were reported by other coaches, and in order to deal with the issues posed by the formation of ethnic subgroups within their teams, some chose to isolate or remove certain players as a way of overcoming the divisive consequences of such social fragmentation. One coach, who had a problem with an insular and uncooperative subgroup formed by players of the same nationality, chose to break up this group by taking one of the players off the team:

I had it few years ago, they [players of this nationality] *spent all of their time together, during the training and after it ... I kicked one out* [of the team] *to break their group, and it all got better.* (CO6)

A similar strategy saw coaches pre-emptively preventing the formation of such subgroups while selecting and appointing new players. Some of the coaches described working through background checks of potential new migrant players before signing a contract, in order to find better-suited players that would fit within their current team:

Before selecting a new [foreign] *player, we always try to find out about personal side of the player. It can be very strong individual player, but I always collect information about how did the player communicate with other teammates. And if there were any problems, then we don't need such player. We'd rather take a player who is maybe slightly worse technically but will be good for the team.* (CO2)

Removing potentially problematic players, whilst taking care to only employ team-oriented, sociable and cooperative newcomers from abroad, was thought by such coaches as these to be a successful strategy for preventing divisive subgroups from forming. Meanwhile, other coaches dealt with this problem differently, with strategies emerging around attempts to find some common ground or common goals for all the players, in order to build a more integrated team with a stronger mutual identity. One coach explicitly discussed the need for diverse groups of players to learn to communicate with one-another, rather than isolate themselves within their own exclusive, ethnic clusters:

…you have Germans, Americans, Serbian, we had a Polish player here, and then it's… it does start to become difficult, but it becomes also more challenging for the players themselves, especially when they keep to themselves and don't talk to their other teammates… And then when you try to [make them] *communicate, you have to find common ground there, so this is really an obstacle also for them, or a big challenge that they have to master. And I believe that's a very important thing.* (CO3)

In order to help their players find such 'common ground', several coaches suggested that encouraging their team to socialise together outside of training was an effective method for helping establish positive relationships between players of various national backgrounds. It was broadly considered that building greater social bonds within their teams would ultimately improve cohesiveness overall:

Foreigners always keep together. Not only on the training, but in their free time. Often happens, that Americans stay aside… I give my captain a task to gather the team and go to watch a movie or do something else together. Things like that help to keep the team's chemistry. (CO2)

[During] *pre-season, when we prepare for the first game and we usually have a span of seven weeks, or we bring the players in earlier before their first game, so they get to know each other. They get to know the coach, the philosophy, tactics and all that, but also very importantly each other. We do certain things like practice camp, where they're sitting on top of each other for eight days and no family, no friends, so they're really forced to interact.* (CO3)

Additionally, team goal setting was seen to be important for establishing cohesiveness among multicultural teams. According to Martin, Carron and Burke (2009), team goal setting is considered to be one of the most effective interventions for team-building in any team, and was seen by the interviewed coaches as a particularly important means of overcoming divisions between players of differing ethnicities. As the coaches worked on finding common goals for their teams as a means of bridging the apparent divides between their players, they reported witnessing positive changes in teams' cohesion. For example, coach CO1, who was appointed to a team with several, hierarchically-arranged subgroups, had experience of playing abroad in several teams inside and outside Europe, and had started to work towards building effective rapport with each group in his current team by stressing each player's positive contribution and unique role within the team. This included, for instance, stressing the importance of the migrant players in the team, and setting them the goal of inspiring their teammates:

When I came to the team, the first thing I had to do is to make a team out of them. I've spoken with Americans a lot, telling them that we play here to win, that maybe all the other players are not that good, but that's the reason we bought you, so you can teach everyone to play better, not to humiliate them. It worked, and after a month or two we started to win. (CO1)

Therefore, while hierarchally-arranged ethnic subgroups could potentially cause rifts within teams and lead to a lack of communication and cohesiveness, the coaches reported various strategies as being successful in overcoming this problem. By removing particular players as a way of disbanding exclusive 'in-groups', or avoiding appointing players who

might exert a divisive influence, coaches could solve such problems by managing their team personnel. Alternatively, efforts aimed at building greater social bonds between players, as well as the use of goal-setting techniques, could help them to establish greater cohesion without the need for altering team rosters.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the emergent body of research in cultural sport psychology, focusing on the functioning of multicultural teams and coach-athlete relationships (Duchesne et al., 2011; Jowett & Frost, 2007; Schinke et al., 2013). The aim of the study was to explore basketball coaches' experiences of coaching multicultural teams. Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis allowed describing coaches' experience in working with international athletes and the most common problems they faced.

Firstly, coaches' responses indicated the importance of the differences between players drawn from individualistic and collectivistic cultural backgrounds (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), which principally manifest as issues arising when coaching individualistically-oriented American players on teams in Europe composed predominantly of local players with a collectivistic approach, which was broadly shared and supported by the coaches. This difference led to some conflicts in teams between local players and coaches on one side, and immigrated players on another side. The interviewed coaches used two strategies in order to improve the situation in their respective teams: strategies to reduce the effects of those differences, and strategies to reduce the differences themselves. The gender of the athletes might have had an influence in the conflict arising out of individualistic and collectivistic approaches on teams; while the sample size here is too small to confidently identify any relationship in this respect, it is recommended to include athletes' gender as a variable in further studies of this phenomenon.

The second theme concerned the (White) coaches' experience in working with Black players. Results confirmed the persistence of racial stereotypes among some of the coaches, including coaches' expectations of Black athletes (see Solomon et al., 1996) and perception of Black players as being lazy (Burley & Fleming, 1997). Coaches did not identify using any specific strategies to overcome the perceived difficulties of working across a racial divide, apart from preventing problems through not appointing a player that had a negative

reputation in previous teams – a strategy which was applied to all players, but with a particular emphasis on the assumption of potential 'bad' behaviour from Black Americans.

The third finding of this study concerned the formation of ethnic subgroups within teams, which supported the suggestion of Greenfield and colleagues (2002) that the presence of these types of subgroups can lead to cross-cultural conflicts within teams. Again, coaches used two strategies in order to deal with such issues; firstly, removing/avoiding bad influences (e.g., firing particular players) or working to overcome differences through team-building strategies (e.g., encouraging players to socialise together).

This study had several limitations. First of all, the sample size is particularly small, and is based on the very exclusive nature of elite, professional teams, which are generally closed off to the public and other external parties, including sport psychology researchers (Baillie & Ogilvie, 1996). Another limitation would be the language barrier, which is an almost inevitable difficulty of doing cultural sport psychology research overall, owing to the multilingual makeup of culturally diverse sports teams. Although the author was able to communicate with some coaches in their native language, and is fully fluent in each language used (Czech, English and Russian) in the study, during some interviews a language barrier potentially influenced the openness, trust and flow of the conversation - especially when the coaches were not speaking their native language.

Due to the small sample and sensitivity of the subject, any generalizations should be avoided when discussing cultural differences, and therefore these findings are not universally applicable, pointing to common trends within the sample rather than general truths. In this respect, one of the interviewed coaches stated: 'We don't have [problems based on] nationalities; we have a group of people who do mutual work – basketball. There are conflicts, but it's always personal, not because somebody is Polish or Russian, but because somebody is a bad person' (CO1). Despite this coach noting that the various problems identified in this paper had affected teams he had previously coached, his experience of working in multi-cultural environments was not always consistent. It is therefore important to note that such issues do not always occur within similar situations. Finally, the gender differences (as both female and male teams were included in the research sample) were not considered as a variable in this research, as the author wanted to concentrate on the coaches' experiences with international athletes overall without

stressing apparent differences between men and women. Nevertheless, it is recommended for future studies in this area to include gender as a variable as it may lead to some interesting observations.

The implications of the study include the importance of educational programs or workshops, first of all among the coaches, which might be focused on raising cultural awareness with particular respect to racial stereotypes towards Black American players. Such educational training programmes have already been suggested elsewhere (Schinke et al., 2006), and the results of this study reveal the on-going importance of such interventions. As the result of such training, coaches might also better understand and be aware of the time that is required for immigrated athletes to adapt to new cultural expectations and value orientations after relocation, and 'through ongoing reflective practice, informed by culturally sensitive education, effective coaching strategies can be facilitated' (Schinke et al., 2006, p. 447). Also, it is important to prevent interracial conflicts in culturally diverse teams by also educating players (both local and immigrated) about cultural differences and their influence on team relationships, so efforts can be registered from all sides – including coaches, immigrated players and local players. Finally, a further implication lies in developing team-building techniques in culturally diverse teams in order to improve team cohesion among heterogeneous and potentially divided groups of athletes.

Meanwhile, further studies in this area may expand the sample into other team sports, and also explore the impact of mediating variables, such as gender, which to date remains relatively under-analysed with respect to issues arising within multi-cultural sports teams. As the research base in this relatively nascent academic field continues to expand, practitioners and scholars alike will better understand the unique problems facing coaches working in such diverse environments, and thereby become better placed to assist them with recommendations for best practice.

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