

To What Extent Is a Highly Successful Men's NCAA Division II Cross Country Coach Humanistic? A Case Study

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The purpose of this case study was to investigate the coaching philosophy of a highly successful men's United States National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) division II cross country coach and determine to what extent his stated philosophy and actual coaching methods were humanistic. For the past 13 seasons, the participant coach's men's cross country team has finished either first or second at the NCAA division II national championships. In-depth semistructured qualitative interviews of the participant coach and three of his athletes were conducted in addition to eight overt naturalistic training session observations. All data were triangulated to generate themes to determine if the stated coaching philosophy and actual methods were congruent with the humanistic philosophy. The findings indicated that the coach was for the most part humanistic in regards to individualization, but was not humanistic in relation to open communication and collaborative decision-making with athletes, or a process-orientated definition of success. Implications of these findings include what may be the most effective coaching philosophy for men's NCAA division II cross country running through examining a highly successful coach in the discipline.

Keywords: distance running, track and field, athletics, coaching philosophy, humanism

A coaching philosophy is a personal creed, set of values, or basic principles that guide a coach's thoughts and behavior in practical coaching situations (Hogg, 1995; Huber, 2013). Establishing a coaching philosophy may lead to more successful coaching through providing program direction, assisting in making more fair and consistent decisions, and minimizing the probability of yielding to external pressures when confronted with ethical dilemmas (Martens, 2012). No two coaches have the same exact philosophy (Huber, 2013). Coaching philosophies range from authoritarian (i.e., autocratic) to democratic to humanistic and all coaches fit somewhere on the continuum between authoritarian and humanistic (Mundra, 1980).

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An authoritarian philosophy is a “command and control” approach where decisions are made by the coach without athlete input and a clear separation is evident between the “subordinate” (i.e., athlete) and coach (Scott, 2014). Conversely, with roots from humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1951), the humanistic coaching philosophy is a cooperative process between coach and athlete, incorporating individual athlete differences and abilities, with the aim of ultimately creating an emancipated, self-regulated, flexible, and self-efficacious athlete (Lyle, 1999). In this paradigm, decisions are made collaboratively with the athlete through shared power and negotiation. While several past authors have described humanistic coaching in great detail (Hogg, 1995; Lyle, 1999; Lombardo, 1987; Sage, 1978), Huber (2013) has outlined seven principles of this athlete-centered philosophy, including: (a) athletes set and evaluate goals, (b) coaches have a positive regard where athletes are valued as human beings (not just athletes), (c) athletes are motivated and excited through personal involvement of the coaching process, (d) interaction between athlete and coach is common where athletes are encouraged to provide input, (e) athletes are provided decision-making opportunities and have the freedom to disagree with the coach, (f) the coach exhibits congruence where inner thoughts reflect authentic honest behaviors, and (g) the coach is empathetic to the athlete’s athletic and personal feelings.

Humanistic coaching can be considered worthwhile because it promotes whole-person development (Bennie and O’Connor, 2010; Falcão, Bloom, & Bennie, 2017) and has the potential to stimulate the necessary qualities of self-determination, self-control, and individuality (Lyle, 2002). Likewise, self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) states that an individual’s motivation is derived by the drive to fulfill three primary psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy where feelings of competence and autonomy facilitate intrinsic motivation. It is likely that a coach operating through a humanistic philosophy may facilitate athlete feelings of competence through assisting the athlete in achieving athlete-driven goals, nurturing athlete feelings of relatedness through having a close interpersonal relationship between athlete and coach, and athlete feelings of autonomy as the coach provides the athlete with opportunities for decision-making. However, while no empirical research could be found which empirically examines humanistic coaching through the lens of SDT, studies reveal that elements of humanistic coaching are associated to positive outcomes in sport.

Supporting athlete autonomy (i.e., facilitating athlete decision-making) is a key characteristic of humanistic coaching (Lyle, 2002). Past studies reveal that autonomy-supportive coaching can positively predict intrinsic motivation (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007) and self-determination toward the sport (Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura, & Baldes, 2010), which can correlate to the intention to be physically active in the future (Almagro, Sáenz-López, & Moreno, 2010), and can increase feelings of competence (i.e., need satisfaction) (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009). In addition, athletes with low perceptions of autonomy may be more susceptible to feeling emotionally and physically exhausted from their sport involvement (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2008). Congruent with characteristics of SDT, the humanistic approach to coaching is a person-centered philosophy where the focus is process-oriented as the athletes are empowered to be individuals (Lyle, 2002). When a collaborative process is used between athlete and coach, athlete motivation is likely to be maintained, thus reducing dropout rates (Huber, 2013).

While no empirical evidence could be found that reports that humanistic coaching results in superior athlete performance, evidence exists which indicates that athletes may prefer a democratic or humanistic paradigm (Cuka & Zhurda, 2006; Høigaard, Jones, & Peters, 2008; Parker et al., 2012), particularly among female (Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004; Lindauer, 2000) and individual sport athletes (Lindauer, 2000; Witte, 2011). Many empirical studies have noted humanistic tenants when reporting on the characteristics of highly successful, elite or professional coaches' coaching philosophy and leadership styles. These include supporting athlete holistic (i.e., on- and off-field life skill) development (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Karpel, 2006; Schreiner, 2013), emphasizing a process-oriented method of learning and improvement as opposed to a win-at-all-costs attitude (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Hartman, 2015; Karpel, 2006; Schreiner, 2013), stressing strong coach/athlete relationships and communication (Miller, Lutz, & Fredenberg, 2012; Schreiner, 2013; Welsh, 2010), striving for athlete empowerment via decision-making opportunities (Welsh, 2010), demonstrating care for individual athletes (Hartman, 2015), and striving for continual coach self-improvement through life-long learning (Schreiner, 2013). However, much of this past research on coaching philosophies has relied on self-report data collection techniques such as coach interviews or variations of the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS: Chelladurai & Selah, 1980), which assesses autocratic and democratic (i.e., a characteristic of humanism) coach behavior. However, coaching methods may not always match the coach's stated philosophy (Garringer, 1989; Lyle, 2002; Martens, 2012).

Jenny (2007) has suggested that the humanistic coaching philosophy may be the most effective approach for distance running¹ due to its highly individualized nature of tracking training responses for each athlete. Past empirical research with Scottish elite distance running coaches revealed that the coaches were humanistic regarding having close interpersonal relationships with each athlete, supporting holistic development, having an athlete-centered process-oriented definition of success, individualizing goal setting and training sessions, and collaborating with athletes on program planning (e.g., race schedules, training session dates/times) (Jenny, 2016a; Jenny, 2016b). However, many of these coaches were not humanistic regarding individual session planning as half dictated individual workouts to their athletes, which may have led the majority of coaches perceiving their athletes were dependent on them for their training schedules and nearly half of the athletes reporting they would not feel comfortable writing their own workout schedule (Jenny, 2016a).

Humanistic methods may be more natural for distance running coaches working within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The NCAA (2016) is comprised of 1,121 colleges and universities, 99 voting athletic conferences, and 39 affiliated organizations that organize the many collegiate athletic programs in the United States and Canada. Three of the sports which include distance running events are cross country, indoor track and field (5,000 meter event), and outdoor track and field (5,000 and 10,000 meters events). As the NCAA places an increased emphasis on both athletic and academic excellence, coaches at colleges or universities within this competition structure may be more prone to humanistic methods of holistic development as minimum academic standards are required for student-athlete eligibility. Moreover, Lindauer (2000) investigated preferences for specific coaching behaviors of male and female athletes competing at the

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse utilizing the Modification and Revision of the LSS questionnaire. Results found that the sample NCAA Division III track and field athletes (including distance runners) preferred democratic coach behavior significantly more than baseball players, while basketball, softball, and wrestling athletes preferred autocratic coach behavior significantly more than track and field athletes. In addition, in a single case design, a successful men's NCAA Division I (DI) cross country distance running coach was found to be humanistic regarding having close coach/athlete relationships with open communication, collaborative decision-making with athletes concerning most program areas, and defining success as striving for individual athlete potential (Jenny & Hushman, 2014a; Jenny & Hushman, 2014b; Jenny & Hushman, 2014c). However, he was not humanistic in relation to communicating more with the best (i.e., top eight) runners on the team and dictating interval and tempo workouts independent from athletes that appeared to correspond to the majority of athletes feeling dependent on the coach for effectively planning training schedules.

Investigating the methods taken by successful coaches may assist others in developing an effective coaching philosophy (Wooten, 2003). To that end, Lyle (2002) has noted that more naturalistic, field-based studies researching the methods of successful coaches are needed. Moreover, Jenny and Hushman (2014a) has suggested that future research may explore whether the varying divisions within the NCAA may be more conducive to humanistic coaching. Thus, much of the past literature has relied upon self-report techniques and no past studies have focused on coaches within the NCAA Division II (DII). Moreover, this study is unique because it utilizes arguably the most successful men's NCAA cross country coach in history. Therefore, through the multiples measures of coach and athlete interviews, training session observations, and artifact collection, the purpose of this study was to investigate the extent the stated coaching philosophy and actual coaching methods of a highly successful men's NCAA DII cross country coach was humanistic. The research questions which guided this study included: (a) What tenets of humanistic coaching does a highly successful men's NCAA DII coach incorporate into his personal coaching philosophy?, and (b) Which humanistic strategies does a highly successful men's NCAA DII cross country coach use in his coaching methods?

Method

Methodology

The exploratory nature of investigating a personal coaching philosophy required a qualitative approach. The single case methodology included purposive sampling of arguably the most successful men's NCAA cross country coach across all divisions in the United States. From 2003 until present, the participant coach's men's cross country team has finished either first or second at the NCAA DII national championships. A single-case design was chosen as the present case was representative (i.e., bound within men's NCAA DII cross country) (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and unique (i.e., highly successful coach), which allowed for in-depth rich, thick description of the phenomenon through multiple data collection perspectives (Yin, 2009). Moreover, the ontological (participants form their own realities) and

epistemological (subjective participants' views matter) assumptions within this study were guided through a constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2016).

Participants

The primary participant of this research will be referred to as “Coach” throughout this study. Table 1 provides Coach’s background information. He was the head men’s cross country, indoor and outdoor track and field coach at a state university of about 3,500 students located in the United States mountain west region. Of note, while this study focused on the men’s team, he was the head women’s coach of these sports too. The men’s cross country team had 38 athletes ranging from 18 to 28 years old. At the time of the study, Coach had earned 29 “coach of the year” awards and 25 team national championships across all teams he coached. Coach had one female assistant coach who primarily assisted with the women’s teams and one male graduate assistant (GA) coach who primarily assisted with the men’s teams. Both were former runners of Coach at the current university—the GA was a 5,000 meter national champion.

Stratified random sampling was used to sample three athletes (one senior, junior, and sophomore each) for interviewing purposes with at least one season with Coach so that they would already be familiar with Coach’s philosophy and style. Varying levels of experience was selected (i.e., stratified) as Hogg (1995) notes that as athletes gain experience, more athlete autonomous methods are employed by the humanistic coach. Privacy was maintained through the covert coding of names (e.g., “Athlete 1”, etc.). Table 2 lists participant athlete demographic information.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board approval and participant consent were obtained before the study’s execution. The researcher immersed himself in the environment and

Table 1 Participant Coach

Age / Gender	48 / Male
Current Coaching Position(s)	NCAA Division II head men’s and women’s cross country, indoor track and field, and outdoor track and field coach
Educational Background	M.S. Exercise Physiology / Leisure Science
Personal Athletic Background	Competed in the 1988 USATF Olympic Trails in 5k; Personal best times: 13:48 (5k), 4:01 (mile)
Years Coaching Distance Running	24
Coaching Background	1 year cross country / track & field graduate assistant; 1 year interim head men’s cross country coach; 6 years head women’s cross country; 16 years combined head men’s and women’s cross country / track & field coach
Coaching Certifications	USATF Level 1 & 2 (Endurance, Jumps); USATF Level 2 Endurance Instructor

Note. USATF = United States of America Track and Field

Table 2 Participant Athletes

	Athlete 1	Athlete 2	Athlete 3
Age in Years / Nationality	29 / British (English)	21 / American	21 / French
NCAA XC Eligibility	Senior	Red-shirt Junior	Sophomore
Years Distance Running	6	9	8
Years Coached by Participant Coach	2	4	2
Focus Event(s)	10k	5k & 10k	1500m & SC

Note. SC = 3k steeplechase

attended the team's early-season mountain training camp during the precompetition training cycle. Data collection involved interviews, observations, and artifact gathering.

Interviews. Two one-hour semistructured interviews were conducted with Coach. In line with the constructivist paradigm where subjective participants' views matter, a semistructured interview schedule underpinned by the literature was chosen because it allowed topics to be discussed more openly while permitting participants' the ability to express their opinions and ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002). The coach interview schedule began with the grand tour question (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of "What motivated you to become a coach?" Then, questions were asked surrounded the following five areas: (a) coaching philosophy, (b) ambitions and goal setting, (c) coaching program/process, (d) coach/athlete relationships, and (e) definition of success. Similarly, one interview with each of the three participant athletes were conducted each lasting approximately 45 minutes. The athlete interview schedule started with the grand tour question of "What motivated you to become a distance runner?," and then delved into the same coach topics all in regard to the participant coach. Interviews were recorded with a digital-audio recorder and later transcribed verbatim.

Observations and Artifacts. Eight overt naturalistic field observations occurred employing the narrative method of recording and describing coach/athlete interactions as they occurred (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2015). Naturalistic observations were used to move beyond self-report data collection techniques to observe Coach implement his coaching methods in his natural environment and determine whether his stated philosophy was congruent with his methods. What participants make and use which can assist in answering the research question are considered artifacts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The artifacts collected within this study are reported below in the findings.

The researcher, a former NCAA DII distance runner from a different university, occasionally took the "observer as participant" role (Merriam, 2009) as he participated in some of the easy and long run training sessions. These sessions often do not have much coach/athlete interaction and appeared to enable the athletes to act

more naturally during observations and interviews as they related to the researcher as a fellow distance runner. In addition, the researcher made a conscious effort to bracket personal past experiences and display reflexivity throughout the study while being aware of the biases (i.e., preference for being coached with humanistic methods) he brought to the research during all data collection and analysis through keeping a researcher's journal (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis. The qualitative data analysis strategy used included open coding, axial coding, and then selective coding as prescribed by Creswell and Poth (2018). All coding was performed through the use of the qualitative data analysis software *Atlas.ti version 6.2* (Scientific Software Development, GmbH, Germany). First, the qualitative data were analyzed through open coding where the data were coded for its primary categories and themes. Next, axial coding commenced where major open coding categories were identified as the core phenomenon and then the data were reanalyzed around these core phenomenon. Finally, selective coding occurred where findings were generated through the interrelationships of the major coded categories or themes. To assist with trustworthiness, the multimethods approach of triangulation was employed where multiple sources of data (e.g., coach and athlete interviews, observations, artifacts) increase the likelihood the findings are valid (Thomas et al., 2015). Moreover, interrater reliability was ensured by having an outside researcher organize the predetermined categories to see if the results were reproducible as well as use member checks to enhance the trustworthiness of results (Merriam, 2009).

Findings and Discussion

This study explored to what extent the stated coaching philosophy and actual coaching methods of a highly successful men's NCAA DII cross country coach is humanistic. The artifacts collected within this study included a list of team rules and goals created collaboratively by the team independent from the coach (Table 3), a training session plan posted to the wall outside the coach's office (Table 4), and a transcribed team's typical weekly training schedule (Table 5). Moreover, as seen in Table 6, findings revealed three central recurring themes: individualization, communication and decision-making, and the coach's definition of success. Each will now be discussed.

Theme 1: Individualization

A humanistic distance running coach must look at each athlete holistically, and all elements of program planning, implementation, feedback and evaluation must be highly individualized to effectively meet the entire needs of every individual runner (Jenny, 2016a). Essentially, the coach works in conjunction with the athlete to develop and implement "effective" programs to meet the needs of that individual athlete. The main areas for athlete individualization that emerged from the research involved training planning, motivation, individual goals, team rules and goals, race plans, and assessment of race performances.

First, training planning was individualized to some extent by Coach. Coach did not have a one-size-fits-all program where every athlete did the same workout.

Table 3 Team Created Rules and Goals Artifacts**Rules:**

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- 1) Listen to Coach
 - Ask upperclassmen first
 - Then, ask [the GA] or [the assistant coach]
 - Lastly, if unresolved, ask Coach
 - 2) No boozing, no partying
 - 3) Respect teammates
 - No shit talking about teammates
 - 4) Train smarter, not harder (or both)
 - 5) Wear [team sponsor] spikes/flats
 - 6) Try to be positive
 - 7) Be classy winners
 - No Letsrun.com (or any blog)
 - No shit talk
 - No retaliation or shit talking from [local rival]
 - 8) No other team gear
 - No rival gear
 - 9) Stay on top of grades
 - 10) Get your sleep, hydrate, shower
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Goals:

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- 1) Win [NCAA Division II] nationals
 - 2) Seven All-Americans
 - 3) Top three at [large invitational with NCAA Division I universities]
 - 4) Have two teams that could be top five at [NCAA Division II] nationals
-

Note. The men's team, without the assistance of the coach, created these rules and goals for the ensuing cross country season. According to the coach, the women's team typically has more academically-oriented rules and goals.

However, training plans were not done on a person-to-person basis, but were planned around the grouping of individuals. As evident in the training session observations and artifacts (Tables 4 and 5), Coach individualized cross country training according to 800 meter track runners, freshmen, "second years", and upperclassmen. He also considered what event the athlete would focus on during the track and field season. Coach varied the amount of running time for athletes as well as distances run across the groups. Coach explained that his track 800–1500 meter runners run 60–80 miles per week while the upperclassmen cross country runners run 80–110 miles per week. Coach also said he modifies his overall training plan according to the make-up of that current team's athletes:

Table 4 Sample Training Session Plan Sign Artifact

	Men	Women
800m Track Runners	50 minutes	45 minutes
Freshmen	55	45
2nd Year	60	55
Upperclassmen	65	60

*Everyone: 8 × 100m after.

Note. This Thursday workout sign was posted in the hallway. It was labeled “NCAA Day”. Rather than take Sunday as the NCAA-mandated one day of no coach contact with athletes as do many cross country teams, the coach designated this no-contact day as Thursdays. The coach simply posted the workout on the wall outside of his office and the athletes were expected to accomplish this workout on their own. However, these workouts are still done as a team with upperclassmen oversight.

Table 5 Typical Men’s Cross Country Weekly Training Schedule Artifact

Monday: AM—35–40 minutes easy running (upperclassmen), drills or cross training (freshmen and 2nd years depending on athlete); PM—75 minutes easy running.

Tuesday: AM—35–40 minutes easy running; PM—Moderate tempo, fartlek, or progression run.

Wednesday: AM—Off; PM—“Mountain Day” (drive 30–60 minutes east or west to mountains), moderate run 85–90 minutes.

Thursday: “NCAA Day”—team meets on own without coaches present—workout is posted to wall; AM and PM are the same as Monday.

Friday: AM—35–45 minutes easy running; PM—Tempo workout (6–8 miles).

Saturday: AM—35–40 minutes easy running (upperclassmen), drills or cross training (freshmen and 2nd years depending on athlete); PM—second easy run by upperclassmen only.

Sunday: AM—Long run (12–20 miles)—run as a progression where the top group builds from 6:30 mile pace on the last 10 miles to approximately 6:10 mile pace and total run is approximately two hours; PM—Off.

Note. This schedule is according to the GA coach. Morning (AM) sessions are typically held at 6:30 a.m. while afternoon (PM) sessions are held at 2:30 p.m.

I have a system of how I do things when I do them. Now depending on the kids that I have in the program every once in a while you might have a team that is full of 1500 meter guys. They're really fast. I will change it a little bit. And then sometimes you have a program that is all like 10k guys and so then I will change it a little bit there. Every year is a little different but it is always the same philosophy. It is always the same methodology.

Similarly, Jenny (2016a) found that the majority of elite Scottish distance running coaches exhibited highly individualized and collaborative coach/athlete program planning and training processes. However, Coach’s men’s cross country

Table 6 Primary Theme and Subtheme Findings

Primary Themes	Subthemes
1. Individualization	Training Planning Motivation Individual Goals Team Rules and Goals Race Plans Assessment of Race Performances
2. Communication and Decision-Making	General Communication and Decision-making Whether Coach allowed Free Expression of his Athletes The Process of Planning the Training Program
3. Coach's Definition of Success	Coach's Definition of Success for Individual Athletes and the Team Coach's Ambitions Coach's Self-described Coaching Philosophy

team size of 38 in the current study may not have permitted complete individualization, thus resulting in “training group” individualization. Due to time constraints, it may only be possible for a completely humanistic coach to coach one athlete, providing him/her complete undivided attention.

Motivation was an additional area where Coach attempted to individualize. He individualized motivation through talking about specific athlete goals and dreams with the athletes. Coach said he has a saying that “*you do not have to be asleep to dream.*” He described his individualized motivational techniques through the following scenario:

For different kids...let's get to where you can qualify for nationals, or you can be top three at conference, or you could be the national champion or...some kids they don't do well that way...You say to some kid: 'I need you to be in the top 10 at nationals.' For some [other] kid they think, 'Yeah!' Some kids think, "oh [no]." And so then with that kid, even though he is maybe quality enough of a person to do it you might just say, 'Hey I just want you to run with Joey. You stick with Joey and, god dammit, don't let him get out of your sight.'

These individualized motivational techniques were echoed during the athlete interviews. For example, when commenting how Coach motivates him, Athlete 2 noted: “*I am pretty close to my family and Coach is like: 'Your family is going to be here [at this meet]'...[Coach is] more personalized to what really pumps you up.*” Through knowing each athlete and what motivates them, Coach appears to use this knowledge to take the approach which is most effective for each athlete. This also is indicative of a close coach/athlete relationship, another characteristic of a humanistic philosophy (Jenny & Hushman, 2014a).

Likewise, individualized goal and team rule setting processes was also a part of Coach's program. Goals were individualized at both the individual athlete level and at the team level. Team rules were set by the team. According to Coach the processes includes the following:

At the beginning of the year...[we] sit down and set team goals. And then I have them set down some team rules. And then I ask the upperclassman to help me reinforce that. After that, probably over the next week, I sit down with almost every kid and say, 'hey I want you to write down your individual goals. I look at those, like put it on a note card, and then we schedule a little ten minute meeting and so we go through it.

Athlete 2 corroborated with this description and stated: “[Coach] is really aware [of my goals]. He makes us write down our goals every single year.” Individualized goals set by the athletes with collaboration with the coach are a paramount process in humanistic coaching. The coach must be cognizant of what the athlete wants out of the program to be most effective for that individual athlete (Jenny & Hushman, 2014c). Furthermore, allowing the team to set their rules is certainly a part of the humanistic paradigm. It shifts ownership of the team from the Coach to the athletes. The researcher-observed created team rules and goals can be found in Table 3.

In addition, Coach also sets individual race plans with each athlete before races. He explained:

Every travel weekend I sit down and I have an individual meeting with an individual race plan for every single kid. Sometimes it takes like four hours to do, but I will schedule four hours in say 10 minutes at a time we are going to go through it. If we are at a hotel I might start at six in the morning and go till eight and just try to get everybody through. I think that has been really highly successful for us...

However, although these race plans are individualized and done collaboratively with the athlete, as Athlete 1 noted: “[Coach] has the final say about what he wants you to do.” Coach stated:

Case in point, when [name of athlete] was a freshman we went to the national meet and...he didn't do what I told him to do in the prelim. And he was the last person to make it into the final. I scolded him pretty good. And he says, “Coach, that will be the last time.” And so I told him a kind of really crazy plan—aggressive kind of towards the end—and he damn near won the race. I think that it really made an impression in him that at the beginning he should trust me. . .

It seems that Coach feels he knows the correct way to race and wants the athlete to follow his plan. He does not want the athlete to make the final decision and learn by trial-and-error. Possibly Coach feels his athletes are not experienced enough to make these final decisions (Hogg, 1995), or maybe Coach feels because the athlete is only with him for four years that he cannot afford the time it takes for trial-and-error. However, it was not evident that Coach provides the senior (i.e., experienced) runners with any autonomy with race planning.

Coach also appeared to individualize assessment of race performances with each athlete. Athlete 1 commented that Coach does a “*group debrief after every race...and at the next race you might do a personal debrief on the last race.*” Coach described his process:

Typically on the bus ride home I sit in the front seat and the kids rotate coming to the front seat. And we sit there and we go through: ‘hey what do you think? Tell me what you thought about your race?’ And then I try to...see if they are being thoughtful and also fair to themselves. Because sometimes when they have a bad race they tend to beat themselves up really bad. So I have to differentiate sometimes between what is mental and what is physical and then say, “you know, next time try this, or “do this” or “think this.”

It appears Coach encourages self-reflection true to humanistic fashion. Likewise, Jenny (2016b) found that Scottish elite distance running coaches collaboratively assessed race and training results with each athlete frequently where the athlete’s personal interpretation of the experience was requested first before the coach gave his or her assessment. This strategy encourages the athletes to become critical thinkers of their own performance and not rely on Coach’s assessments, which may lead to a more self-regulated person.

Theme 2: Communication and Decision-Making

Collaborative coach/athlete decision-making which encourages self-regulation is a hallmark of the humanistic philosophy (Lyle, 2002). Humanistic coaching involves a close communicative interpersonal relationship between athlete and coach. Decision-making is shared with the athlete so that the athlete has a sense of control (Hogg, 1995; Lombardo, 1987). This athlete involvement and developing understanding of the coaching process and its related decision-making would assist in developing what Cross (1991) cites as the ultimate goal of a humanistic coach—an emancipated, self-disciplined, adaptable and self-confident athlete. Communication and decision-making subthemes were evident in the data in the following areas: general communication and decision-making, whether Coach allowed free expression of his athletes, and the process of planning the training program.

When asked whether he has athletes make any choices or whether there are any decisions that are made collaboratively with athletes, Coach stated the following:

I don’t appoint captains or anything like that. But...I let leadership arise wherever it may and...I have those kids come in and I coach them to say some of the stuff that I want them to say – like enforcing positive attitudes and lifestyle and things.

According to Coach, the few decisions that are made with any of the athletes (e.g., locations to run, where to eat as a team) are made with the team-generated captains. Athlete 2 stated that team decisions are usually made “*through coach or...captains...Coach doesn’t really nominate captains...Decisions are made by leaders on the team. Everybody just kind of follows them – upperclassmen.*” However, a more directive approach is taken with these captains where they are seen more as subordinates taking orders rather than mutually respected equals. Relating to

decision-making with athletes, Coach stated: “*The trick to this whole thing is getting 18 to 22-year-old kids to do what you want them to do and make them think that it was their idea.*” Coach wants the athletes to feel in control, but does not want to actually give any control away to the athletes. Athlete 1 noted:

Coach is mainly of the opinion that he’s been doing this job for over two decades now and the program has had a lot of success and a lot of athletes have got better so I think he wants to reinforce the fact that the program does work and so there is really no reason for us to adjust what is going on.

Parker et al. (2012) found that “generation Z” athletes prefer coaches that involve the team in decision-making. While not humanistic, Coach’s strategy of using team-generated captains as a conduit of superficial team decision-making input appears to be effective within this environment as the athletes may still feel they have some control in team decisions. Moreover, relating to communication with Coach, Table 3 lists the team generated rules. “*Listen to coach*” was the first rule. It appears the athletes felt compelled to list this as the first rule, which may have been seen by them as most important as it was listed first. Furthermore, the team wrote in the rules to “*ask upperclassmen first,*” “*then ask [the GA] or [the assistant coach]*” and “*lastly, if unresolved, ask coach.*” Not in line with humanism, Coach was listed as a last resort which does not support an openly communicative environment with Coach and his athletes.

This organized line of communication may have been developed as a necessity due to the large size of Coach’s men’s team. Decreased communication with runners who are not the best (i.e., nonvarsity) runners on the team has been noted in the literature with other NCAA cross country coaches. For example, McCue (2009), who chronicled his experience as a “walk-on” (i.e., nonrecruited) runner for the highly successful University of Colorado NCAA DI cross country team, noted that head coach Mark Wetmore unabashedly informed the team that he must spend more time with the top runners as there were over 30 athletes on the team. Wetmore (as cited by McCue, 2009, pp. 79–80) stated:

We have more than 30 of you here and if I sat down to talk with each of you every day for three minutes, that would add up to almost two hours of my time and I don’t have that kind of time in my day for everyone...I am going to give the majority of my time to those who run on varsity or are challenging for the national championships.

Jenny and Hushman (2014a) found similar results with an NCAA DI cross country coach who communicated more with the top eight runners on the team. In the current case, at least a system was in place where athletes could be heard, even if it was not with the head coach.

A humanistic coach provides free expression to their athletes to improve communication between athlete and coach. However, Coach said he does not allow athletes to speak their mind in a team setting because he felt “*sometimes that can be considered disrespectful.*” Coach continued by stating: “*In a program where we have so many I think that you have to somewhat keep that in. I don’t want to say it is a dictatorship, but boy, it is not a democracy.*” Athlete 1 stated: “*I think free expression comes in through the team captains. They’ll occasionally have a*

meeting with coach and if there's any issues they will bring it up with him." This is an obvious deviation from the humanistic philosophy. It appears Coach feels he must maintain order with his large team by not allowing athletes to speak their mind. It is unknown whether Coach would take the same approach with a smaller number of athletes. In a study comparing coaching styles and winning percentages, Pratt and Eitzen (1989) found that an authoritative and rigorous (i.e., how much the coach demanded from their athletes) style with a low tolerance for insubordination was no more effective than a democratic style within high school boys' basketball. Nonetheless, it appears it may be more difficult to be humanistic in a large team setting where many opinions are present. Further research is needed in this area.

Furthermore, Coach did not comply with humanistic methods regarding the process of planning the training program as he does not collaborate with his athletes. He stated: *"I sit down and make an annual plan...I have a system of how I do things [and] when I do them."* Regarding training workout planning, Athlete 2 stated: *"Overall it is more of a dictatorship. We just listen to what [Coach] has to say."* Athlete 1 concurred and provided a rationalization as to why the athletes so easily concede to Coach: *"[Coach] has a reputation and he's got proven success over many, many years...On the whole, Coach sets training...He tells us what to do and we do it."* It was evident within the observations that the athletes were not involved in training session planning as the athletes did not know what the workout was going to be directly before the session, particularly before "harder" (i.e., tempo or interval) workouts. These results correspond to Jenny and Hushman (2014b) and Jenny's (2016a) findings where NCAA DI and Scottish elite, respectively, distance running coaches were found to dictate individual training sessions to athletes. In both of these studies, evidence emerged that this resulted in a dependency on the coach for training plans. Because the athletes are not involved in training planning, they might lack the self-confidence to write their own sessions should the need arise (e.g., during summer training outside of the academic school year) (Jenny & Hushman, 2014b). However, it is possible that through the athletes putting complete trust in the coach with a successful past history, little self-doubt is experienced during performances. Unfortunately, if a poor result is experienced, a blame culture on the coach may occur as the athlete does not possess any shared responsibility of collaborative training session planning.

Theme 3: Coach's Definition of Success

Opposed to the customary model where the final results and winning indicate success, within the humanistic philosophy the process of development is emphasized and the attainment of individual athlete goals designates success (Danziger, 1982). The primary topics in which the coach's definition of success were revealed included Coach's definition of success for individual athletes and the team, Coach's ambitions, and Coach's self-described coaching philosophy.

First, all of the interviewed athletes provided responses that fell within humanistic ideals when they stated that they perceived Coach's definition of success for them personally was to *"achieve my potential"* (Athlete 1), *"be a good teammate [and] do my best"* (Athlete 2), and *"reach my goals"* (Athlete 3). Coach said that if he *"could add something to a kid that maybe they could do something greater*

than maybe they could have done without me” would define success for himself as a coach. These responses emphasize a humanistic process-oriented framework.

Conversely, Coach’s definition of success for the team was product-oriented. He stated outcome measures rather than fulfilling athlete potential when describing his short-term and long-term aims for the program—“win [cross country] nationals...[and] try and win track titles.” Similarly, all participant athletes felt that Coach’s definition of success for the team centered on the outcome goal of “winning nationals.” Athlete 1 stated: “I think success for him is winning and nothing else. Unless we are the first team at a meet then we haven’t achieved success.” Coach also stated one of his prime ambitions as a coach is “winning Division II nationals.” He continued: “here it is almost like if you didn’t win people would say it wasn’t a good year for you. Honestly it is that expectation. Likewise, all four team goals created by the athletes listed in Table 3 are outcome measures such as winning the national championship and attaining All-American status instead of process-oriented aims (i.e., all athletes running a personal best time at nationals, running even splits, etc.).

It is not surprising that a coach who is notorious for winning is also focused on winning. In the humanistic paradigm a coach’s ambition is to fulfill athlete potential and outcome measures such as winning championships would be secondary. While winning is most often a factor in coaching, the focus on striving to have all athletes achieve their personal bests may or may not lead to winning and fulfilling athlete potential would be the primary concern of a humanistic coach. However, it is important to note that winning and development are not always contradictory. In Coach’s environment, the talent level of his athletes may lead to outcome measures if it is perceived that if his athletes run to their potentials they should win the national title. In addition, external pressures from his college or athletic director may nurture more of product-orientation for goals rather than a process-orientation.

Furthermore, when asked his opinion on the two following sayings: “winning is the only thing” or “winning is not everything,” Coach responded by stating:

I think that it somewhat gives us a little bit more success to say: ‘It’s okay to think winning is okay.’ If you shy away from it then it is hard to do it because you never put your back against the wall. Why do some people fight harder than others?

It appears that Coach believes that de-emphasizing winning in humanism’s definition of success could cause lower athlete performance. It is certain winning is of supreme importance to Coach’s program and his aforementioned attitude toward it may be a significant factor in his teams’ past successes. These findings correspond to Jenny and Hushman’s (2014c) study of a successful NCAA DI cross country coach who also ascribed to the humanistic values of striving for individual athlete potential, but was extrinsically motivated by winning NCAA national championships, concluding that it may be difficult for coaches in this environment to include at least a portion of their definition of success in outcome terms. Future research might investigate a potential correlation of outcome-oriented definitions of success compared with performance success.

Lastly, Coach described his coaching philosophy, including the principles, values and beliefs which underpin that philosophy, as the following:

I want to maximize the abilities of all of my athletes to their utmost potential...I believe that great things can happen no matter where you're at or who you are. I believe sometimes we have some kids that maybe other people look over...so development of talent – and talent not just being physical, but you've got to think [that] the 8 to 10 inches above the kids' shoulders as the greatest talent God gives them...So I think developing and maximizing their talents to be the best person, the best athlete they can be.

Coach's description would certainly be humanistic displaying concern for the individual to be the best person and athlete they can be—a defining feature of humanistic coaching. However, when asked to rate his coaching philosophy on a scale of one to ten where “one” was autocratic/dictatorship and “ten” was democratic/humanistic, Coach stated, “four or five.” He rationalized his response by saying:

I think that I try to listen. And I think that it is important to listen...I think a coach that doesn't listen is really missing out on learning about...what makes their kids tick and...what is important to them...But I also think that...if everybody comes here to practice and then [I] say, 'Hey, what do you guys want to do today?' I don't think that great teams come out of that. And so I wouldn't even say it is 50/50. I'd say it is just one tick to the...I don't want to be thought of as a dictator.

Given the same question, the participant athletes generally concurred with Coach's self-assessment and rated Coach's philosophy as a five (Athlete 1), four (Athlete 2), and three or four (Athlete 3). Coach acknowledged the importance of being humanistic through relaying the significance of two-way communication with his athletes. Nevertheless, he did not see himself as totally humanistic. By his response it was obvious that Coach struggled with the term “dictator” with the negative connotations that it can bring. For example, he further stated:

I think that when people think of dictators they think of Hitler...they think of Castro...I'd like to be more like a John F. Kennedy or like a Martin Luther King-type person that is really strong willed, that has this overpowering thing, but that also is...more eloquent and gets people to come to: 'This is the way it should be done...This is the light.'...versus like thinking, 'Oh, do it or I'll kill you.' And so I think I listen, but at the same time am [not] going to compromise...what I feel...

Coach realized that he wants command of the program with some input from his athletes, but feels that he knows the correct way to accomplish the program goals. It could be argued that his standpoint takes a “high and mighty” position in that he is above his athletes. A humanistic coach would feel like he could learn from his athletes and it is uncertain Coach would feel the same way. Coach summarized his coaching philosophy and his feelings toward communication and decision-making with his athletes by stating:

There are many roads to Rome...And Coach _____ said to me one time: 'One of them is paved.' And so I'd like to take the paved one...I feel like we've done it so many times and had so much success that this is the road to take and if

we deviate too much to the left or the right of it then it gets kind of sketchy whether we are going to win or not, or whether we will have success or not. And so it's not hard for me to try to convince kids that this is the road...And so I am more of a four than I would be a six [when rating my philosophy]

Again, Coach feels like he knows what to do and will not accept much input from his team. Of note, also not within the humanistic paradigm, Coach comes back to winning as supreme importance and equates success to winning. He concludes his statement by admitting that he is closer to having a dictatorial philosophy than a humanistic one and defends his philosophy with his winning record.

Limitations and Future Research

A larger sample of coaches and athletes as well as interviews with other stakeholders (e.g., assistant coaches, athletic directors, etc.) would have strengthened the results. Moreover, an extended observation period across several or all phases of training may be implemented within future studies. In addition, while evidence exists that female or individual sport athletes may prefer humanistic methods (Beam et al., 2004; Witte, 2011), future research could investigate men's versus women's coaching philosophies of NCAA cross country coaches or a comparison of philosophies between individual and team NCAA sports. Finally, generalizability of the current study's results to all other coaches and specific coaching environments must be heeded with caution.

Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this case study was to explore to what extent the coaching philosophy of a highly successful men's NCAA DII cross country coach is humanistic. It was found that the participant coach was humanistic regarding individualizing most aspects of the program, but exhibited the nonhumanistic characteristics of noncollaborative coach/athlete communication and decision-making with a mostly outcome-centered definition of success.

While many implications were highlighted within the discussion, the major implication of this study is that investigating the philosophy of a highly successful coach may assist in identifying the most effective coaching philosophy for coaches within a similar environment (i.e., NCAA DII men's cross country). However, obviously, contextual factors must always be considered (e.g., athletes' experience levels, team size, standard of athletes, cultural environment, available resources, administrative support, etc.). Examining successful coaches may help any coach in developing, defining and/or improving his or her personal coaching philosophy (Wootten, 2003).

In the current study, the participant coach highly individualized athlete motivation, goals, race plans, assessment of race performances, and team rules and goals. However, training plans were stratified across four categories of athletes: 800m track runners, freshmen, second year runners, and upperclassmen (see Table 4). The size of the team in this case may have impacted the practical ability to individualize training plans for each athlete. Coaches operating within similar environments may consider a similar strategy.

Moreover, in general, the participant coach did not have open and direct lines of communication with each athlete, with program decisions primarily being made independently by the coach. Again, this appeared to be a result of the large team size as well as the coach's firm opinion that he knew what was necessary for success and collaborating with the athletes was not necessary. However, an established "chain of command" communication technique (i.e., upperclassmen—GA—assistant coach—head coach) was implemented by the team which did appear to provide a voice for each athlete. Other coaches may try to emulate this method.

Still, past studies with distance running coaches have found that in areas where coaches are authoritative, athletes may not develop feelings of competence which could impact their ability to self-regulate independently from the coach, particularly with distance runners being dictated all harder intensity (e.g., interval, tempo) workouts (Jenny, 2016a; Jenny & Hushman, 2014b). Similarly, in the current case, the participant coach did not collaborate with his athletes when planning the training program. This may have created an athlete dependency on the coach for training schedules. However, it is still uncertain whether the performances of the athletes were impacted when these dictatorial methods were employed in this area of the coaching process.

Lastly, the participant coach defined individual athlete success in process-oriented terms (i.e., fulfilling individual potential), but felt outcome measures (e.g., winning national championships) must be emphasized for the team. Due to the coach's repetitive success on the national stage and having the athletes capable of winning, winning was an expectation. It appears that an effective coaching strategy may be emphasizing individual athletes striving toward reaching their potential as they aim for team outcome success (i.e., All-American status, national champions, etc.).

Note

1. The term "distance running" in this case refers to the following men's United States NCAA sports and events: cross country running (where competitions are held between 8,000–10,000 meter distances), indoor track and field 5,000 meters, or outdoor track and field 5,000 meters or 10,000 meters.

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