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# Role Discovery: Uncovering the Expectations of the Coach and the Millennial Athlete in NCAA Division I Athletics

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ROLE DISCOVERY: UNCOVERING THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE COACH AND THE  
MILLENNIAL ATHLETE IN NCAA DIVISION I ATHLETICS

by

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B.A., Graceland University, 2015

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Science

Department of Kinesiology  
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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Approved by:

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Millennial Generation is the center of numerous discussions regarding their unique characteristics when compared to previous generations (e.g., Baby Boomers, Generation X). The Millennial Generation refers to anyone born between 1982 and 2004 (Hoover, 2009), and coaching millennial athletes has become a popular topic among coaches from the youth setting into professional sports. The world of athletics, along with coaching practices and the preferences and expectations of the athletes is rapidly changing. NCAA Division I athletics is known in the United States for some of the most talented athletes in the country and winning is a priority for Division I institutions. In order to create a winning athletic program, it is important to involve coaches who create an athlete-focused environment to help increase the team's chances of winning championships. The role of the coach is to teach, motivate, and prepare athletes to perform at their best, and it is imperative for the coach to learn how their athletes prefer to be coached to get the best results. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the current research on coach-athlete relationships, coaching leadership styles, and communication with Millennials to explore the differences in expectations of both the athlete and the coach in a Division I college athletics program.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Coaching Behavior and Leadership Styles**

Coaches play a large role in developing a cohesive relationship with their athletes. Knowing the types of leadership and how they impact a group is an important aspect to discuss when trying to develop a successful organization. According to Bass (1999), there are three types of leadership styles. These are Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, and

laissez-faire. Transformational Leadership instructs the individual to lead with “charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration” (Bass, 1999, p. 11). Transactional Leadership leads through, “... clarifying subordinate responsibilities, monitoring their work, and rewarding them for meeting objectives and correcting them for failing to meet objectives” (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 787). Lastly, laissez-faire is the ultimate failure to manage or lead (Bass, 1999; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Bass (1999) suggests that the most effective leaders are both Transformational and Transactional. Taking in to account that Transformational Leadership behaviors are positively correlated with reaching a positive outcome and group-satisfaction, while Transactional Leadership provides a clear understanding of roles and the reward behind successes of fulfilling that role. Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) also mentioned that there can be an autocratic approach, which is explained by subordinates not having the ability to make decisions for the group. In contrast, a democratic approach to leadership is to allow the people being managed to be involved in the decision-making process.

By adapting a leadership style that fits their team, coaches can help promote the best results out of their athletes. Alvarez, Castillo, Molina-Garcia, & Balague (2016) performed a systematic review of 28 articles that studied Transformational Leadership within physical activity and sport across nine countries. Transformational leadership has been shown to positively impact the well-being, meet basic psychosocial needs, and increase performance of the athlete (Alvarez et al., 2016). A coach that is focused on being a transformational leader increases motivation by constantly challenging their athletes, serves as a behavioral role model, and inspires athletes to solve problems that are unique to them and their sport. They also realize and take into consideration differences among their athletes, and coach each athlete according to

their specific needs. Transformational leadership also creates a vision that helps improve team task cohesion and improves the athlete's performance individually, which in turn helps with team success (Alvarez et al., 2016). An effective coach is responsible for realizing the different needs of each athlete, developing a training plan, and establishing goals that motivate the athlete individually and the team collectively.

Partington and Cushion (2013) investigated the behaviors of 11 male professional youth coaches who were working with the English Football Association Premier League Centre of Excellence. Their coaching practices provided a gap in deliberate practice behaviors. Partington and Cushion (2013) found that the coaches incorporated a large percentage of instructional and positive feedback, but the coaches relied heavily on previous coaches' practice strategies. The coaches studied stated that they wanted to create an environment to develop players who are decision-makers, but when asked how to do so they were unable to clearly answer. The coaches often recalled that they used practice tactics based on their previous experience and coaches who are involved in the older ranks. The coaches also wanted to create an athlete-centered learning approach but could not support theories behind why it was an effective approach to coaching (Partington & Cushion, 2013). This research on current elite-level coaches emphasizes the importance of quality coach education based on evidence and researched-based practice. Improving coaching education through current and available research will create an optimal practice and performance climate for coaches and athletes to create a winning atmosphere. Education for coaches should include the application of researched coaching practices and the practical effectiveness behind the current research. Knowing the practical effectiveness of a coaching practice and explaining to the athletes the rationalization of the practice will increase

the trust between the coach and the athlete. This is becoming more important due to the shift in the generational needs that are becoming apparent in the Division I setting.

### **Coach-Athlete Relationships**

A positive coach-athlete relationship is a delicate phenomenon moderated by closeness, co-orientation, and complementarity (Jowett, 2003). The feeling of closeness relates to the like or dislike of an individual, and respect and trust are vital aspects of a quality athlete-coach dyad. Co-orientation is largely reliant on communication, which allows the coach and athlete to share thoughts and experiences with one another, and complementarity is the compatible behaviors displayed by the coach and the athlete working together (Jowett, 2003).

To improve communication between the coach and athlete, coaches need to make themselves available outside of their sport. A qualitative study was conducted by Hoffman et al. (2009) looking at the preferred coaching qualities of nine millennial male and female basketball players at a Division I institution. They found that the athletes wanted a role model outside of their sport. If the coach connects with players outside of the sport, then it was suggested by the athletes that they would trust the coach more and increase effort because they would work harder for someone they trusted. The athletes also explained that they expected the coach to have a clear expectation for the athlete in what role they play for the team (Hoffman et. al., 2009). This requires the coach to be an effective communicator to establish roles for each athlete on their team. It is important for coaches and athletes to establish a quality connection to reach common goals and create a fluid working environment.

To more closely examine how a quality coach-athlete dyad could be disrupted, Kristiansen, Tomten, Hanstad, and Roberts (2012) conducted a case study on two elite female athletes, one of whom was an elite winter sport athlete, and the other a summer endurance sport



athlete, and found that a lack of communication, openness, and a difference in setting achievement goals served as a risk factor of a dysfunctional coach-athlete relationship. The two elite female athletes were interviewed about their transition from being nationally recognized for their talents before joining the national team to becoming a part of the national training program. The authors concluded that the sudden change from the enjoyment of deliberate play and passion for the sport to joining a team that was only focused on performance also contributed to a lack of trust in the new coaching staff. Both athletes experienced a lack of cohesion between themselves and the coaches with the training plans they were being put through and this resulted in several injuries and illnesses. This study offers a parallel into the possibility of the dysfunction of an athlete playing at the high school level and entering a Division I athletic program. The switch from high school athletics to the Division I level provides new challenges for athletes. The transition into Division I athletic programs may be difficult because of the different expectations placed on the athletes by the coaches. Misasi, Morin, and Kwasnowski (2016) looked at differences in coaching styles of Division I and Division II athletics. The researchers have provided insight in to how the dynamic of the coach-athlete relationship may change as athletes progress into a more competitive environment like a NCAA Division I program.

Misasi, Morin, and Kwasnowski (2016) found that Division I coaches acted more authoritarian compared to Division II coaches. They were also less likely to provide rationale behind their coaching decisions to their athletes. This is important to consider when discussing the coach-athlete relationship in the Division I setting due to the expectation of the athlete to not question the coaches' decisions. The coach expects the athlete to trust the coaches' judgement without discussion and may lead to mistrust and dysfunction within the coach-athlete relationship if a common vision is not established. The change in playing culture from the high

school or club level to a Division I athletic program that is more focused on performance can often increase pressure and alter the motivation in the athlete. To help keep motivation high, establishing clear roles for the athletes can create a sense of understanding between the coach and the athlete, and can create a sense of unity in working for and accomplishing a common goal. Jowett (2016) also suggests that an effective coach-athlete relationship consists of establishing leadership roles for the athletes based on the backgrounds of each person on the team to create successful relationships in a winning team. This allows the athletes that are a part of the team to take ownership for their part in achieving their team and personal goals.

### **Autonomy-Supportive Climates and Motivation**

One of a coach's main responsibilities is to mentor athletes to perform to the best of their abilities. To do this, coaches need to make sure that the athletes' basic psychological needs are met. Basic psychological needs consist of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, according to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and fulfilling these needs are necessary to ensure psychological growth, well-being, and integrity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy is referring to the person's feeling of having control over their actions, and the belief that they have the driving force behind those actions. Competence is the belief that an individual can interact with their environment and reach a positive result along with believing they are able to avoid an unwanted event. Relatedness is the feeling of being connected and accepted. When one's psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are met, then motivation is impacted positively. According to SDT there are two types of motivation, which are extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation is moderated by rewards and punishment and has not been found to be the most effective way to increase and maintain motivation across educational and sporting domains. Intrinsic motivation is the internal desire to continue an activity because

of the challenges and enjoyment that an individual may experience through participating in that activity. Ryan and Deci (2000) propose that people are born with “intrinsic motivational tendencies” but intrinsic motivation is quickly altered by social and environmental pressures. These social and environmental factors may largely impact an individual’s internal drive to participate in an activity. The sporting context may include financial rewards or cost, pressure from peers or family, and expectations of the coach especially when the competition is more advanced.

Mageau and Vallerand (2003) constructed a motivational approach, known as an autonomy-supportive climate, based on research within educational and sporting contexts for the coach-athlete relationship that further explored these connections. The researchers determined that there are three domains that control a coach’s autonomy-supportive behavior and they include personal orientation, coaching context, and athlete behavior and motivation. Coaches that expect their athletes to respect their authority tend to adapt a controlling behavior by operating on a reward and punishment basis. This type of coach-centered approach acts on extrinsic motivation primarily and decreases the internal motivation of displaying effort and the desire to play by the athletes. The coaching context also impacts the coaching culture. In the NCAA, the pressure to win is generally considered to be at its highest at the Division I level. The coach is focused on the pressure of creating a successful program to keep their jobs. The stress of producing a winning team elicits a controlling behavior by trying to control all aspects of the team to win, which is detrimental to an autonomy-supportive climate. The coach-athlete motivational model is also dictated by the way the coach perceives the athlete’s behavior and motivation. If the coach perceives the athlete to have decreased motivation, they are more likely to exhibit a controlling behavior to increase their effort. This alters the athlete’s focus from the

intrinsic desire to play and perform within that sport for themselves and focuses on performing for their coach. When the coach sees the athlete underperform, they are more likely to mistrust their athletes with the expectations that they place on them. This causes the coach to focus more on the errors and less on the positives exhibited by the athlete. The athlete experiences less confidence in their abilities and then becomes so focused on their coaches' expectations that their focus and motivation on that task is altered, which decreases performance (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

An autonomy-supportive coaching climate allows for satisfaction of all three basic needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and relates to increased motivation, improved psychological well-being, and an improvement of self-concept in both skill and performance (Felton & Jowett, 2013). Felton and Jowett (2013) surveyed 300 millennial-aged athletes, who participated in club, university, regional, national and international competition. The athletes were given questionnaires that measured coach-athlete relationships, sport climate, coaches' controlling behavior, need satisfaction, subjective vitality, elite-athlete self-description, and positive and negative affect. The researchers were interested in studying the relationship of coaching behaviors and basic psychological need satisfaction. The results of this study found that a strong coach-athlete relationship with the presence of an autonomy-supportive coaching climate achieves competence need satisfaction. Felton and Jowett (2013) also discovered that controlling coaching behaviors decreases the feeling of competence. Felton and Jowett (2013) concluded:

Therefore, in order for the coach to create an environment in which the athlete can satisfy their basic needs, the coach must allow the athlete to feel that they can openly contribute to training sessions and have input into what they do. Correspondingly, athletes'

perceptions of the quality of the coach-athlete relationship were found to positively predict satisfaction of the competence and relatedness needs (e136).

By allowing the athletes some control over their own practice and improvement, the three basic psychological needs are met, and the perception of the coach-athlete relationship also improves. Coaches can increase motivation by allowing the athletes to provide input in solving problems within practices, and the coaches should act as a facilitator for those ideas. The athletes are more likely to provide more effort towards the execution of the coaching strategies if they are a part of developing that plan.

### **Communicating with Millennials**

The research comparing the communication styles of different generations in sport is lacking; therefore, this review of literature is based on research within the occupational and educational settings to explore the way millennials want to be communicated with by their members of leadership. The pros and cons of the Millennial Generation has been discussed widely in popular media contexts. millennials are thought to be lazy, self-entitled, and disloyal to the organizations they are a part of and do not value work as highly compared to other older generations (Myer & Sadaghiani, 2010). In contrast, millennials are team-oriented, have a desire to make an impact within their organizations, and possess a need for constant contact from their mentors to feel connected to their jobs (Myer & Sadaghiani, 2010). Myer and Sadaghiani (2010) also argue that the heavy involvement of the parents of Millennials to strive for success at a young age has created a desire for millennials to look to their supervisors for constant praise and feedback. The parents have created an environment of not allowing their child to explore their own path and has created a context where millennials are always looking to their leaders to provide a road map for them to follow but to not micromanage them. Walden, Hwa Jung, and

Westerman (2017) were interested in researching job engagement, organizational commitment, and employee communication and its effects on employee-organization relationships of the Millennial Generation. They surveyed 539 Millennial-aged individuals to find out what would help the employee-organization relationship. The results showed that the sharing of information, both about the organization and individuals' performance, and communication concerning the organization's current status is strongly correlated with job engagement and organizational commitment.

“Ensuring that the overall system of communication within an organization leads to an adequate flow of information and focusing on employees' individual communication needs strengthens employee's commitment to the organization and sets the stage for longer-term behavioral intentions.” (Walden, Hwa Jung, & Westerman, 2017, p. 44)

The findings of this research suggest that millennials have a strong need for being included with the current operations and status of the team they are representing to be feel connected with their mentor and peers. The more information provided to the members of the team allows for increased collective efficacy knowing that their work is directly impacting the group. Millennials want to know how the organization is doing and providing sufficient information regarding their organizations' success and failures, will lead to organizational commitment. Providing frequent feedback to everyone enhances what role each person plays within the organization while hearing that the work that they do is appreciated.

Within educational contexts, researchers Goldman and Brann (2016) wanted to know what type of behaviors educators would exhibit to increase motivation within a learning environment. They provided an open-ended survey defining Self-Determination Theory and explained the three psychological needs that make up Self-Determination Theory (i.e.,

autonomy, competence, and relatedness). The researchers asked the 119 Millennial-aged students in college to write ways an instructor enhanced their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy was nurtured by asking the students how they learn and structuring the class around the students' learning preferences and asking the students how they preferred to be assessed. Educators were also promoting autonomy by allowing students to share their opinions in open discussions and providing different assignment topics for the students to pick from. Instructors were able to support competence through providing feedback both written and orally, providing praise in front of their peers, allowing students to teach each other topics when a concept is not fully grasped, and showcasing how they compared to a class average. The students reported that if the instructor used humor, encouraged working as a group, and being available outside of class time to talk about the subjects in the class increased relatedness among students. If the instructors also showed that they care, told stories of their own experiences with the content, and spoke to the students as colleagues as opposed to subordinates then their relatedness needs would also be met. Regardless of the setting, the Millennial Generation wants to be constantly reminded of the role they play within the organization. Millennials want to be recognized, encouraged, and want to provide their input to the organization to improve the current processes in place to help impact their peers and mentors in a positive way.

### **Millennial Athlete Preferences**

There is very limited research on how the Millennial Generation differs from previous generations in an athletic context. The current research on coaching preferences does not explicitly detail generational differences in coaching expectations. The research that is on coaching preferences has been referenced within the age ranges of the Millennial Generation, born between 1982 and 2004 (Hoover, 2009) to be utilized within this study. Surujlal and

Dhurup (2012) surveyed 400 male and female millennial student athletes to see what types of coaching leadership styles they preferred. They found that males had a higher preference to an autocratic style of leadership compared to females, but males also wanted a higher amount of social support from their coach. Millennial female athletes preferred a higher amount of positive feedback, training and instruction, and democratic behaviors compared to males (Surujlal & Dhurup, 2012). The researchers also found that training and instruction alongside positive feedback were the most preferred coaching leadership behaviors. Although autocratic behaviors were preferred slightly higher by males, it is still found to be overall the less preferred coaching style for both male and female athletes (Misasi, Morin, & Kwasnowski, 2016; Surujlal & Dhurup, 2012).

Moen, Hoigaard, and Peters (2014) conducted a study on 120 elite athletes who participated in an individualistic sport and wanted to explore the satisfaction of coaching leadership behaviors along with the athlete's own perception of performance under the coach. The participants who had a higher satisfaction with their own performance progress rated their coaches high in social support, training and instruction, democratic behavior, and positive feedback. Training and instruction was rated the highest in performance progress. Athletes who were at the elite level preferred coaches to display a high level of social support, democratic behavior, and provide positive feedback (Moen et al., 2014). The current research of millennial athletes' preferences of coaching behavior establishes that to be an effective coach, they need to adapt their style to the athletes they are coaching rather than solely relying on their ability to coach the technical and tactical aspects of the sport. Coaches can increase motivation, better prepare the athletes, and increase performance if the coaching style lines up with the preferences of their athletes.



**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current study was to explore the expectations of both the coach and the millennial athlete in a NCAA Division I athletic setting with regard to coping with the stress of competition, motivation, and preparing for competition. The existing scientific literature has focused primarily on how athletes perceive coaching practices and how that effects various aspects of efficacy, perceived performance, and motivation. This study was designed to bridge a gap between what the coaches are expecting of themselves and their athletes, and what the athletes are expecting of themselves and their coaches in aspects of coping with stress, motivation, and preparation of competition. This converges the two viewpoints of the coach and the athlete to help establish clear roles in preparation, motivation, and coping strategies for competition.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

#### Participants

10 NCAA Division I head and assistant coaches and 25 NCAA Division I athletes were sampled for the current research study. Participants in this study were involved in the athletic programs of a major public university in the midwestern region. 12 coaches were asked to participate and 10 agreed to be a part of the study. The coaches sampled (age range from 35-57 years), had a minimum of five years of NCAA Division I coaching experience. There were five male and five female coaches who were included in the study. The athletes' ages ranged from 18-25 years old and all had participated in at least one competitive season at the Division I level. 35 athletes were asked to participate and 25 agreed to participate in the study. There were 10 male and 15 female athletes sampled. The players and coaches participating in the study did not have to be coaching or competing for the same sport. The participants included in this study were involved in men's and women's basketball, football, and volleyball.

#### Procedures

The participants in the study were recruited in person by a representative of the University's sports medicine staff (see Appendix A). The athlete participants of the study were recruited in person in the Lingle Hall and Boydston Athletic Training Rooms. The coaches were recruited in the Lingle Hall and Boydston athletic offices. The purpose of the study was shared to the participants and a confidentiality statement was provided (see Appendix B). This research study was approved by the Human Subjects Committee (HSC) of the major university. Before the subjects participate in the study, they filled out an informed consent form and provided withdrawal procedures (see Appendix B). An open-ended questionnaire was given to the

participants by a research assistant and the questionnaire was completed in a private room to provide confidential and private responses (see Appendix C). Two different questionnaires were used for the two categories of participants: coaches and athletes. Questions regarding the perspectives of the coach and the athlete on motivation, coping, and mental preparation are found in Appendix C.

### **Data Analysis**

The coach questionnaires were descriptively analyzed by the researcher to outline common responses among coaches to establish reoccurring themes about the coaches' belief of what their role is as a coach in assisting the athlete in aspects of preparation, motivation, and coping with the stress of competition, and what the coach thinks the athlete's role is in preparation, motivation, and coping with the stress of competition. The athlete questionnaires were descriptively analyzed by the researcher to discover common themes about what the athletes' beliefs are about their role in preparation, motivation, and coping with the stress of competition and what the athletes' beliefs are about the coach's role in assisting the athlete in the same aspects of competition. The findings of the study were then compared to see the differences and similarities of the beliefs of the coaches and the athletes on each group's respective role in the different aspects of competition.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

Results from the current study are presented below with the responses from the sampled coaches presented first, followed by the responses from student-athletes.

#### Coach Results

Question 1 of the questionnaire asked, “As a coach, what do you think is a coach’s role is in helping the athlete coping with the stress of competition”?

Four out of the 10 coaches surveyed stated that coaches should teach coping strategies to help manage the stress of competition. Two coaches stated their role is to prepare them for competition through repetition. One coach stated that the coach has a significant role in helping the athletes cope, or coaches should recruit people who don’t need help. One coach wrote that coaches should serve as a role model by keeping calm and collected. One response included that the coaches should optimize performance. The 10<sup>th</sup> coach did not complete the question.

Question 2 asked “What do you think is an athlete’s role is in coping with the stress of competition”?

Four coaches stated that it is the athlete’s responsibility to ask for help with coping strategies if their coping strategy no longer works for them. Three coaches stated that the athletes should prepare for competition, which one coach included that the athletes should practice in similar stressful game-like situations. Two coaches believe that athletes should listen to coaching points about competition anxiety. One coach responded that the athletes should feel they have done their best in all aspects of competition.

Question 3 read “What do you think a coach’s role is in preparing the athlete for competition?”

Responses indicated that seven coaches believed that their role in preparing the athletes for competition is to train their athletes physically and mentally. Coaches do this by “developing mental toughness”, and developing players by “physical practice, outlining aspects of the competition the athletes can and can’t control.” Three coaches responded that their role is more to prepare the athletes for competition through “hours and hours of film study” and “put the athlete through repetitions to enhance learning.”

Question 4 asked “What do you think is the athlete’s role is in preparing for competition”?

Responses were largely split, as four coaches stated the athletes should have the right attitude for the mental and physical preparations and “use every practice to increase confidence and belief.” Three coaches expect the athlete to have complete commitment to the preparations of competition. These coaches expect the athlete to “take ownership of their own progress” and “take responsibility for what they want to accomplish.” Two coaches responded that the athletes should know the game plan for the competition. Athletes do this by “knowing assignments”, and “study film and focus in practice.” One coach did not answer Question 4.

Question 5 asked, “What do you think a coach’s role is in focusing the athlete’s motivation for competition?”

Five coaches believe it is their role to create a pre-game plan and keep the athletes focused on that plan to gear up for competition. Coaches need to “focus the attention pre-game” by “providing and reminding the team of controllable factors of the game and keep the athletes focused on what they can control. Coaches are there to “remind the athletes of why they are there” and “motivate a group to stay together.” Three coaches state that their role is to prepare a game plan for the athletes to follow. The coaches do this by “coming up with a plan to attack an opponent” and “presenting new information mid-competition to keep them engaged.” Two

coaches stated that it is their role to find what intrinsic and extrinsic motivators the athlete has to perform. The coaches stated that they need to “use those motivators to pull out the athlete’s best performance.”

Question 6 asked “What do you think is the athlete’s role in focusing their motivation for competition”?

Responses were again split, with five coaches reporting that it is the athlete’s responsibility to reflect on their own intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for competition. Athletes should “remind themselves of why they are competing, thinking of original purpose behind why they’re there and what they’re doing to accomplish their goals. They need to identify internal/external sources of motivation and use that to increase motivation.” Four coaches discussed that athletes should limit distractions. Athletes should “take care of outside stressors like school and injuries to where they can be focused in on training sessions. Fully engage in practice settings to practice in a stressful environment just like games.” One coach did not answer Question 6.

Question 7 asked “Do you consider coaches to be a part of an athlete’s social support system”?

Interestingly, nine out of the 10 coaches reported believe that coaches are a part of an athlete’s social support system. “Because of the amount of time athletes and coaches spend together, it is assumed by the coaches that coaches are part of a social support system. With the possibility of spending 4 or more years together, and the athletes being away from home, it is important for coaches to think of themselves as part of the athlete’s support system.” One coach did not consider themselves as a social support system for their athletes.

Question 8 asked “Do you think the millennial athletes have different needs from the coach compared with older generations”?

Results suggested complete agreement on this issue as all 10 coaches surveyed believe that millennial athletes have different needs from the coach. In the coaches' point of view, millennial athletes need to be communicated with differently. The coaches believe that their ability to cope is different, and that they have not been disciplined growing up, so they need to communicate with them in a different tone. Two coaches believe that they need to be praised more. One coach stated that "they need help with social cues, time management, focus, mental training, support, and praise. There is more talent, but their coping skills are decreased. So they need more emotional and mental training. They need less yelling and more praise promoting a supportive environment."

Question 9 asked "What are three mental aspects of competition do you expect to come from the athlete"?

Five coaches believe that it is vital for the athlete to be focused and concentrated. Four coaches reported aspect of competition the coach expects is emotional and arousal control. The other notable responses yielded that the coaches expected the athletes to have a strong work ethic (3), the ability to have mental recall (3), mental toughness (2), and positive self-talk (2).

#### Athlete Results

Question 1 of the questionnaire asked, "As an athlete, what do you think your role is in coping with the stress of competition"?

Results indicated that 11 out of the 25 athletes surveyed stated that it was their job to be able to regulate their own stress and control their emotions for competition. Four athletes talked to their teammates about the stress of competition to help cope. Two athletes expressed that if they needed additional resources for coping skills then it was their responsibility to reach out to find out ways to help them. Two other athletes try to distract themselves when they feel stressed

by listening to music or talk about things unrelated to sports. One athlete wrote that competition is a stress relief. One athlete stated that they do not get stressed about competition, and one athlete felt that it was their role to not show that they were feeling stressed about the competition to help control their teammates levels of stress about competing.

Question 2 asked, “What do you think is a coach’s role in assisting with coping with the stress of competition”?

Ten athletes indicated a belief that a coach’s role is to help motivate through speeches, provide positive feedback, and build confidence in their players. Seven athletes stated that the coach’s role is to prepare their team for competition. This includes preparing workouts, constructing a game plan, and preparing a lineup that is most effective towards the team they are playing against. Five athletes wrote that coaches should either reduce stress or not add additional stress to the athlete by allowing the athletes to have alone time. Three athletes thought that coaches should know each athlete and how they operate, to communicate outside of a sports world, and communicate through individualized consideration.

For Question 3, athletes were asked “What do you think is your role in preparing for competition”?

Eight athletes wrote that it was their role to be physically prepared. One athlete wrote “pushing myself hard in practice, conditioning, and weight lifting helps me perform confidently in competition.” Another athlete explained that it was their role to “treat every day like a championship game and competition will come easy.” Seven athletes wrote that their role in preparing for competition is being physically and mentally prepared for competition. Five athletes discussed that their role was to be mentally prepared. This included responses such as, “set goals and devise a game strategy before the game so I can be confident in my execution”



and “being focused and prepared. Knowing what I need to do and not worrying about things outside my sport.” Lastly, four athletes thought it was their role as leaders to help motivate their teammates.

Question 4 asked, “What do you think is a coach’s role in assisting with preparing for competition”?

Nine of the athletes surveyed reported that it is the coach’s job to provide a good quality scouting report and to provide good coaching to come up with a game plan to put the athletes in a position to be successful. 9 athletes want quality training and instruction from their coaching staff. 7 out of 25 athletes also think it is important for the coaches to be confident in their players’ ability and to motivate them.

Question 5 asked, “What do you think is your role in focusing your motivation for competition”?

Ten out of the 25 athletes surveyed indicated that it is their role to self-motivate or motivate their teammates. Four of the athletes stated that their role for focusing their motivation was to make sure they had a positive attitude and positive energy towards the competition. Three of the athletes believe that they are supposed to get focused and stay focused throughout the competition. Three athletes also stated that it was their role to stay positive have good energy in all situations. Two athletes included that it was their role to set goals for themselves and teammates to focus on result of winning the competition. Two responses included not letting outside factors affect their motivation for competition, and one athlete stated they needed to go over the game plan for the specific team they were competing against.

Question 6 asked, “What do you think is the coach’s role in focusing your motivation for competition”?

There were two common themes that were apparent in the responses to this question. 12 out of the 25 athletes indicated that the coach's role with focusing motivation towards competition is to keep the athletes focused on the game ahead of them and to construct a game plan to prepare them for the upcoming competition. The other common theme is for the coach to instill confidence within their team and the players. 10 athletes believe it is the coach's job to remind the players of the amount of work they've put in for themselves and for the team and to help them realize their potential to beat their opponent. One athlete adds that the coach's role is "knowing how to talk to each player to get them to practice hard. If they don't work hard or know the game plan, they shouldn't play. Their lack of motivation and coach's lack of noticing throws off team chemistry on the court. Coach should also use specific drills and a variety of them to help change contexts of practice and allow players to stay motivated, not bored." One athlete stated that the coach should be there for moral support. One athlete indicated that the coach should make sure the team has alone time before the competition. Lastly, one athlete stated that the coach should "make sure we have ample rest".

Question 7 asked participants, "Do you consider coaches to be a part of an athlete's social support system"?

Only two athletes do not consider coaches to be a part of an athlete's social support system. One athlete said sometimes, and another said that they considered some to be a part of their support system while others were not. The remaining 23 athletes do believe that coaches should be a part of their social support system because of the amount of time the athletes and coaches spend together. Their belief is that it is important for the coach to be a part of their lives outside of their sport because it would build trust between the athlete and the coach. The athletes

also believe that if the athletes felt closer to the coach then it would help with player interaction, increased confidence, and improve player-coach communication.

Question 8 asked, “Do you think the millennial athletes have different needs from the coach compared with older generations”?

Five out of the 25 athletes reported that they did not think that millennial athletes have different needs comparatively with older generations. One of those athletes stated that it comes down to the relationship quality of the coach and athlete. Another one out of the five who said no wrote that the support from the coach should be the same regardless of what generation the athlete is. The athlete should feel like the coach has their back and that the coach should be their motivational supporter. The remaining 20 of the sampled athletes did say that millennial athletes had different needs. Further explanations included that millennial athletes demand more out their coach as a whole. Millennial athletes desire more constructive criticism, positive feedback, and are more sensitive to the way their coaches communicate. Athletes also explained that they thought the athletes expected more of a relationship with the coaches and wanted to know the why and how behind the coaching practice, and not just settle for the idea of following coach’s expectations without questioning them.

Question 9 asked, “What are three mental aspects of competition do you expect to come from the coach”?

Ten athletes expect the coach to be positive and encouraging. Seven athletes recorded that the coach should bring a sense of hard work, dedication, and tenacity. Six athletes believe that the coach should be tough or bring a sense of toughness to the athletes. Confidence and sense of belief in the athletes was also highly reported with six. Six athletes also believe it is important for the coach to be provide energy, excitement, and passion to the competition. Being

prepared for competition was also highly reported with four responses. Two athletes believe that the coach should provide constructive criticism, and focus was also reported twice. The following responses were also included: honesty, trust, loyalty, consideration, comfortable, accountable, reasonable, calming, and anger.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to explore the expectations of both the coach and the millennial athlete in a NCAA Division I athletic setting with regard to coping with the stress of competition, motivation, and preparing for competition. The existing scientific literature has focused primarily on how athletes perceive coaching practices and how that effects various aspects of efficacy, perceived performance, and motivation. This study was designed to bridge a gap between what the coaches are expecting of themselves and their athletes, and what the athletes are expecting of themselves and their coaches in aspects of coping with stress, motivation, and preparation of competition. This converges the two viewpoints of the coach and the athlete to help establish clear roles in preparation, motivation, and coping strategies for competition.

Overall, the responses from the coaches indicate a belief that the athletes should already have an internal sense of motivation and drive within them to continue to improve every day. Coaches expect the athletes to come with an unrelenting work ethic day in and day out to work for them and their teammates. Coaches believe that it is their job to prepare practices and look at game film of other teams to help orchestrate a winning team. This aligns with previous research showing that the athletes need training and instruction to improve their competence for the sport and their competition (Moen et al., 2014; Surujlal & Dhurup, 2012). One possible reason for this finding is that knowledge of the game and how to prepare for competitions from a tactical standpoint may be perceived by coaches to be the main reason why they have been able to obtain a job at a Division I institution. Therefore, these may be perceived by coaches as being the primary objectives of their jobs.

The overarching theme of the responses by the athlete is that the student-athletes at a Division I institution are looking for a motivational role model in a coach. The athletes included in this study are looking for individualized consideration within their coaches' training plans. Athletes are looking to constantly be engaged with their coach, and the athlete is expecting a relationship with that coach that reaches beyond the sport they are involved in. The athletes within this study are looking at coaches to be motivational and provide a sense of confidence within them and to be constantly reminded of the work that they have put in to get to where they are. Athletes are also looking to their coaches to provide a game plan and to help them envision where their commitment could take them. The athletes do expect the coach to prepare their team through proper practice and game execution, but they are looking to their coaches to help motivate and create passion within their team to prepare their athletes for competition.

This represents the largest discrepancy between the coaches and athletes in the results of the current study. The coaches' responses suggested that they are largely focused on the training and instruction aspect of coaching, while the athletes' results indicated that they are expecting not only training and instruction, but they are also expecting more motivation and a sense of belief from their coaches. The athletes are expecting the coach to help build confidence, motivate, and provide more positive feedback to ensure a highly-motivational environment rather than just a well-structured practice. The coaches state that most of their job consists of mental and physical training for their athletes but does not lend for additional insight for what they specifically do to achieve those goals. The coaches are expecting that the athletes are motivationally well-prepared and do not need much confidence promoting behaviors that impact their drive to perform. The coaches expect the athletes to already have a sense of confidence and drive to carry out every aspect of their game and succeed without much provocation from the

coaching staff. From the perspective of the coach, the athlete should already have a mental training program but if it is not effective any more than the athletes should reach out to them. This requires the coaching staff to be more approachable and available for their athletes to talk to their coaches about the struggles of mentally preparing for competing. This is consistent with the Hoffman et al., (2009) study specifically looking at the Millennial Generation and their expectation for their coach. Millennials heavily weigh their performance on consistent feedback from their organizations and have a strong need for constant communication (Walden, Hwa Jung, & Westerman, 2017). The role of the coach is constantly changing within the sporting environment and it is vital for the coach to improve on their athlete's mental aspects of competition.

The athletes and coaches sampled for the study as a group, both indicated that the millennial athletes do need "more" from their coaches. The coaches stated that athletes need more praise and direction comparatively to other generations and the athletes realize that they require more positive feedback, and the what, how, and why behind the coaching practices. The NCAA Division I level is a highly competitive environment, therefore, it is common for the coach to exhibit controlling behaviors due to the results determining their job security (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). If the coaching staff creates more of a controlling environment, then the athlete's autonomy suffers, which is detrimental to intrinsic motivation according to the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Exhibiting controlling behaviors as a coach can transform an athlete's intrinsic motivation into more extrinsic-based motivation. The coaches want to harness their athletes' intrinsic motivation but if they are coaching in a coach-centered approach based on rewards and punishment then the athletes are performing for their coach and other extrinsic factors and not for themselves. If the student athletes are requiring more

explanation and asking more of the coaching practices, then that may lead to a dysfunction within the coach-athlete relationship if the coach does not share the rationale behind the coaching practice.

The role of the coach needs to change for the coach to continue to be successful at a high level. To increase buy-in from their team, the coach needs to be available and relatable to the athletes (Hoffman et al. 2009). The role of the coach has changed, along with the expectations of their athletes. It is important for the coach to develop a relationship with their athletes to let the athletes know that the coach has their best interests in mind. When coaching expectations and clear roles have been agreed upon, the process of building a cohesive working relationship is easily met. Millennial athletes may make different demands of their coaches by looking to them for a constant reminder of confidence, motivation, and positive feedback. The impact that the coach-athlete relationship has on performance is becoming more important now that the athletes are expecting more out of the coaching staff than to teach the game and prepare them for competition. Athletes want to be known outside of their sport for them to feel connected to their coach. This increases the amount of trust the athlete has that their coach holds their best interests in mind and will help build a stronger coach-athlete dyad. Millennial athletes are needing to have individualized consideration and are willing to compete for a coach who is not only qualified to instruct them but who care for the athletes as individuals.

This study has furthered the limited research on the Millennial Generation in the athletic context, however, is not without limitations. Gender was not taken into consideration when the results were analyzed. This provides additional areas of research on the different expectations of a current male or female coach interacting with a male or female millennial athlete. The sample size is limited; therefore, these results are not generalizable to all Division I institutions. Further



research including a larger sample size and different regions of the United States would provide a more impactful presence within the current research. The questionnaire and results did not specify which sport the subjects were involved in. Future research should include gender differences and how that may impact the expectations of the coach and the athlete. Different sports lend the opportunity for expectations for the role expectations for the coach and athlete to be different and should be researched further. The current research study yielded responses from coaches and athletes from sports such as football, men's and women's basketball, and women's volleyball. Further research would benefit by including all sports within the NCAA Division I setting. Future research should also explore the differences in responses of team and individual-based sports.

The results of this research study indicate that there is a disconnect between both the expectations of the coach and the athlete in the Division I setting. This finding suggests that coaches and athletes should establish clear roles and expectations for each other to build a strong cohesive relationship that is focused on a common vision of developing the best talent in NCAA Division I athletics.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A**  
**Recruitment Script**

We would like to invite you to participate in a research study to research the differences of beliefs of millennial athletes and their coaches in respect to assisting with coping, preparation, and focusing athlete's motivation for competition. You are being asked to participate due to your involvement in NCAA Division I athletics. This study involves a questionnaire that will take approximately 20 minutes to fill out, and preparation is not required. The questionnaires will be filled out in the Lingle Hall and Boydston Center Athletic Training Rooms, and handed into a member of the Sports Medicine staff at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

If you would like more information on the study please contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

Kurt Van Kuiken

Graduate Student of Kinesiology

Southern Illinois University

(913) 963-6336

kurt.vankuiken@siu.edu

## **Appendix B**

### **Informed Consent Form**

Dear potential participant,

My name is Kurt Van Kuiken and I am a graduate student in the Department of Kinesiology at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. You have been selected to be a potential research participant for your involvement in NCAA Division I athletics. The purpose of the research is to research the differences of beliefs of millennial athletes and their coaches in respect to assisting with coping, preparation, and focusing athlete's motivation for competition. You will be asked to fill out an open-ended questionnaire asking about your current beliefs on coping, preparation, and athlete motivation for competition. The questionnaire will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete. To be able to participate in the study, the participant will have completed at least one competitive season with a NCAA Division I institution, and is currently an active participant on an athletic team at a NCAA Division I institution. Participating in this study is voluntary, and by providing your signature at the bottom and the completion and submission of the questionnaire indicates that you are voluntarily consenting to participate in this study. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your responses will be discarded. Your confidentiality will be maintained by a number assigned to your questionnaire, and your name will not be used in the research study. Your responses will be kept in a secure location, and the questionnaire will be destroyed upon completion of the study. The researcher and Dr. Julie Partridge will be the only individuals that will have access to your questionnaire. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect your identity.

If you have any questions please contact,

Dr. Julie Partridge

Associate Professor of Kinesiology

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee.

Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)

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Signature

Date



Dear potential participant,

My name is Kurt Van Kuiken and I am a graduate student in the Department of Kinesiology at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. You have been selected to be a potential research participant for your involvement in NCAA Division I athletics. The purpose of the research is to research the differences of beliefs of millennial athletes and their coaches in respect to assisting with coping, preparation, and focusing athlete's motivation for competition. You will be asked to fill out an open-ended questionnaire asking about your current beliefs on coping, preparation, and athlete motivation for competition. The questionnaire will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete. To be able to participate in the study, the participant will have coached at least five years at a NCAA Division I institution and is currently an active coach on an athletic team at a NCAA Division I institution. Participating in this study is voluntary, and by providing your signature at the bottom and the completion and submission of the questionnaire indicates that you are voluntarily consenting to participate in this study. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your responses will be discarded. Your confidentiality will be maintained by a number assigned to your questionnaire, and your name will not be used in the research study. Your responses will be kept in a secure location, and the questionnaire will be destroyed upon completion of the study. The researcher and Dr. Julie Partridge will be the only individuals that will have access to your questionnaire. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect your identity.

If you have any questions please contact,

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Signature

Date

## Appendix C

### Athlete Questionnaire

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

1. As an athlete, what do you think your role is in coping with the stress of competition?
2. What do you think is a coach's role in assisting with coping with the stress of competition?
3. What do you think is your role in preparing for competition?
4. What do you think is a coach's role in assisting with preparing for competition?
5. What do you think is your role in focusing your motivation for competition?
6. What do you think is the coach's role in focusing your motivation for competition?
7. Do you consider coaches to be a part of an athlete's social support system?
8. Do you think the millennial athletes have different needs from the coach compared with older generations?
9. What are three mental aspects of competition do you expect to come from the coach?

### Coach Questionnaire

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

1. As a coach, what do you think a coach's role is in helping the athlete with coping with the stress of competition?
2. What do you think is the athlete's role is in coping with the stress of competition?
3. What do you think a coach's role is in preparing the athlete for competition?
4. What do you think is the athlete's role is in preparing for competition?
5. What do you think a coach's role is in focusing the athlete's motivation for competition?
6. What do you think is the athlete's role in focusing their motivation for competition?

7. Do you consider coaches to be a part of an athlete's social support system?
8. Do you think the millennial athletes have different needs from the coach compared with older generations?
9. What are three mental aspects of competition do you expect to come from the athlete?

**VITA**

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Research Paper Title:

Role Discovery: Uncovering the Expectations of the Coach and the Millennial Athlete in

NCAA Division I Athletics

Major Professor: Dr. Julie Partridge