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DESCRIBING THE DIVISION III CHRISTIAN STUDENT-ATHLETE:
A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY

by
Chris H. Hummel

An Abstract

of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Exercise
and Sport Sciences at
Ithaca College

May 2000

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Greg A. Shelley

ABSTRACT

The attitudes of Christian student-athletes remain relatively unexplored. This study qualitatively described the attitudes of NCAA Division III Christian student-athletes. Subjects ($n=5$) participated in a semi-structured interview that followed an interview guide format. The author explored each athlete's attitudes in the areas of competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury. Subjects were student-athletes that met the criteria for being a Christian (i.e., affirmed their Christian faith) by answering yes to the following three questions: 1) Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? 2) Do you believe Jesus Christ died for your sins? and, 3) Have you devoted your life to Jesus Christ? Data were content analyzed for emergent themes utilizing a phenomenological methodology and results were reported in relation to common themes across participants. Six common themes were identified. The common attitudes expressed by the participants indicated that Division III Christian student-athletes relied heavily on their faith during sport participation. Examples included the use of prayer to cope with frustration, enhance attitude, calm anxieties, and lessen injury disappointment. The participants also expressed how their faith positively influenced their motivation to perform their best, as well as to serve and glorify God through their performances. Participants further expressed a desire to be a leader, both on and off the field, and considered themselves to be role models on their teams. Finally, the participants perceived a separation (i.e., lack of cohesion) between themselves and their non-Christian team members.

DESCRIBING THE DIVISION III CHRISTIAN STUDENT-ATHLETE:
A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the
Graduate Program in Exercise
and Sport Sciences
Ithaca College

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Chris H. Hummel

May 2000

Ithaca College
Graduate Program in Exercise and Sport Sciences
Ithaca, New York

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS

This is to certify that the Master of Science Thesis of

Chris H. Hummel

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Exercise and
Sport Sciences at Ithaca College has been approved.

Thesis Advisor:

Committee Member:

Candidate:

Chair, Graduate Program
In Exercise and
Sport Sciences:

Dean of Graduate Studies:

Date:

May 2, 2000

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Third, I would like to thank Wendy M. Binkley, without whom this thesis would have taken two or three times as long to complete.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to:

My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: With whom all things are possible.

Clifford, Lynne, Todd, and Lori Hummel: My family, who has given me all the love and support a son and brother could ask for.

Christian Athletes: Those I have met and seen in my life have inspired me to view and play sports with an enhanced Christian understanding.

Howard J. R. Binkley: I bet Grandfather is getting a kick out of being part of a master's degree.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Religion and sport appear to have little in common. Specifically, religion has been defined as a shared set of beliefs and rituals focused on the ultimate concerns of human existence; birth, life, suffering, illness, tragedy, injustice, and death (Coakley, 1994). In contrast, sport has been defined as a recreational activity, specifically involving a game, competition, or the like that requires the use of the body and mind; utilizes rules; aims at fun or play; can be informal, formal, or corporate/professional (Prebish, 1993). Although different, religion and sport have a unique interplay in American culture. As a result, the relationship between and study of religion and sport has begun to attract greater attention (Hoffman, 1992).

Even with the aforementioned definitions of religion and sport, individuals often have their own unique view of both. When religion and sport are examined in relation to one another the task of defining them becomes even more difficult. Sociologists have even claimed sport to be a form of religion (Hoffman, 1992; Prebish, 1993). In fact, for many individuals in the United States, sport has become a religion (Coakley, 1994), providing the same spiritual needs and desires as a formal religion. Christianity, with a worldwide population of 1.7 billion, has been the religion most often studied in relation to sport (Coakley, 1994; Microsoft, 1998). Through the early 1900's, the Christian church considered sport participation to be a sinful waste of time (Coakley, 1994). But during the early part of the 20th century, the Christian church began to recognize the increased use of sport as a religious experience, leading to the formation of religious organizations with direct ties to sport (Prebish, 1993). It appears that the utilization of

sport in modern times parallels the use of pagan rituals for Christian festivals during medieval times.

In 1954, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) was founded "to confront athletes and coaches and through them the youth of the nation, with the challenge and adventure of following Christ and serving Him through the fellowship of the church." (Prebish, 1993). Other organizations like Athletes in Action (AIA), founded in 1974, and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), founded in 1851, were established for similar reasons. Membership in these organizations became a subject of discussion for many sport sociologists (Coakley, 1994; Hoffman, 1992; Prebish, 1993). In fact, at least one researcher has attempted to describe the attitudes of AIA members (Stevenson, 1991, 1997).

Attitude has been defined as a state of mind or manner showing one's feelings or thoughts (Guralnik et al., 1987). Attitude has also been described as the product of an athlete's beliefs, desires, experiences, and upbringing (Eagley & Chaiken, 1993). Stevenson (1997) described the beliefs and experiences (attitudes) of elite (college, national team, and professional) AIA members by claiming that Christian student-athletes enter competitive sport with a certain belief structure. But a conflict arises when a difference exists between a Christian athlete's values and the values of those he or she interacts with during competitive sport. Stevenson (1997) described this as a culture conflict (value conflict) and hypothesized that the athletes were members of AIA as a means to deal with such conflicts.

Attitudes of Christian student-athletes are likely influenced by many factors. The beliefs and values of friends, family, teammates, and teachers might greatly influence

athletes' attitudes. Similarly, a student-athlete's religious faith, specifically his or her Christian faith, might also be an important influence in the formation of attitudes. While this relationship between faith and attitude might be true, little research exists to support such a claim.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe Division III Christian student-athletes' attitudes across several aspects of sport participation, and in the process examine the value conflict outlined by Stevenson (1997). The participant's attitudes in the areas of competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury were explored.

Scope of the Study

This study was conducted to describe Division III Christian student-athletes' attitudes across several aspects of sport participation. Participants ($n=5$) were student-athletes at Ithaca College and at least 18 years of age. Each participant responded to either a recruiting flyer (Appendix A) placed in the Hill Center Athletic Training Room or a recruiting visit by the primary researcher to the Ithaca College Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) weekly meeting. A recruiting statement (Appendix B) was read to each interested individual. Each participant, if still interested, affirmed his or her Christian faith prior to participation by answering yes to the following three questions:

- 1) Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?
- 2) Do you believe Jesus Christ died for your sins?
- 3) Have you devoted your life to Jesus Christ?

Following his or her affirmation statements, each participant was interviewed utilizing a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C), created for this study and

called the Sport Attitude Questionnaire. Each interview was conducted in a private office and lasted approximately 45-55 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis followed the phenomenological methodologies outlined by Shelley (1999).

Benefits

The present study has potential benefits for many involved in sport. First, the participants of this study might benefit as a result of a greater awareness of their own sport beliefs and behaviors in relationship to their Christian faith. This awareness might lead to enhanced understanding of relationships with coaches and teammates. As a result of this greater understanding, resolving conflicts between Christian values and sport values (value conflict) as described by Stevenson (1997) might become easier.

Second, this study provided a rare look into the attitudes of Christian student-athletes in relation to their sport involvement. This might help sport psychology consultants, coaches, teammates, or others who might interact with Christian student-athletes. Sport psychology consultants might gain insight into the possible conflicts experienced by Christian athletes and their resultant attitudes formed during athletic participation. As a result, sport psychology consultants might be better prepared to counsel and facilitate conflict resolution strategies with Christian athletes.

Finally, coaches and teammates of Christian athletes might benefit by becoming aware of the influences and pressures they might exert on their Christian athletes and teammates. Also, if team members and coaches do not recognize the unique needs and concerns of their Christian teammates, conflict and resentment might result. This conflict

and resentment, if left unresolved, can lead to negative consequences in relation to team cohesion (Carron, 1984).

Delimitations

- 1) This study included only Ithaca College Division III student-athletes participating during the 1998-1999 seasons.
- 2) Only Ithaca College Christian student-athletes answering yes to the three recruitment (affirmation) questions were allowed to participate.
- 3) Only five Christian student-athletes participated representing three intercollegiate sports (track and field, football, soccer).

Limitations

The following limitations were noted:

- 1) The results were limited by the truthfulness of the participants' responses to the interview questions.
- 2) The results might be limited in generalizability to Division III Christian student-athletes.
- 3) Results were limited to the qualitative phenomenological methodologies used in this study.

Definition of Terms

- 1) Attitude- a state of mind or manner showing one's feelings and thoughts (Guralnik et al., 1987). Attitude is the product of an athlete's beliefs, desires, experience, and upbringing (Eagley & Chaiken, 1993). Attitude encompasses an individual's perceived beliefs, feelings, experiences, emotions, and thoughts.

- 2) Bracketing- method by which the researcher puts aside his or her own personal values and beliefs in regards to the experiences under investigation, and focuses on the participants' responses only (Patton, 1990).
- 3) Christian- one who acknowledges Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior, believes Jesus died on the cross, and has devoted his or her life to Jesus Christ by following His commands (1 John 5:1-12, Revised Standard Version).
- 4) Common Theme- a description of a common attitude (belief, experience, or emotion) across participants.
- 5) Higher Order Theme- a description of an individual student-athlete's attitude (belief, experience, or emotion) in relation to a specific outlined aspect of exploration.
- 6) Phenomenology- the study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses (Husserl, 1962).
- 7) Qualitative Research- research involving the attempt to describe or interpret some human phenomenon, often using the words of selected individuals (Patton, 1987).
- 8) Rigor- deals with one's development, adherence, and accuracy in identifying the problem, designing the research, and analyzing the data. It requires objectivity, and conciseness on the part of the researcher (Shelley, 1999).
- 9) Semi-Structured Interview Guide- a list of questions, topics, or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview (Patton, 1990). The interviewer is able to expand or ask other pertinent questions (i.e., probe) throughout the interview process depending on the direction of the interview.

- 10) Significant Statement- a response by the subject that pertains directly to the research questions and phenomenon being studied (Shelley, 1999).
- 11) Trustworthiness- the degree to which qualitative research is found to be believable. Each reader bases his or her level of trustworthiness upon whether the verbatim responses of the study's participants are consistent with the common theme described by the author (Patton, 1990). Within quantitative research this would be similar to the reliability, credibility, and validity of a study.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Attitude has been defined as a psychological tendency to act a certain way and is considered a product of an athlete's beliefs, desires, experiences, and upbringing (Eagley & Chaiken, 1993). Eagley and Chaiken (1993) further stated that attitudes could not be directly measured, but rather attitude measurement instruments could only help to hypothesize attitudes based on perceived beliefs, desires, experience, and behaviors. Yet, it might be possible to discover these beliefs, desires, experiences, and behaviors through in-depth interview analyses.

Hoffman (1992) stated that given the effect religion has on attitudes in other aspects of society; religion should also affect sport attitudes. Although this hypothesized religious influence has not been extensively studied within the field of sport psychology, sociologists have begun to examine the possible effects religious beliefs, values, and training have on sport attitudes. In order to better understand the relationship between religion and sport, specifically Christianity, a brief overview of religion and sport is provided.

Religion and Sport

A close relationship between religion and sport can be traced back to the ancient Olympic Games (Lee, 1981). Lee (1981) described the attitude toward athletic victory for the ancient Greeks as a means to attain immortality. Participation in the ancient Olympic Games was also considered a tribute to Zeus, a god of the Greeks (Lee, 1981).

Just as the Olympic Games had a close religious association during ancient times, the development of organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA),

the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), and Athletes in Action (AIA) has continued to nurture a close relationship between Christianity and sport during the modern era. This relationship has been recently explored in an attempt to describe Christian athlete beliefs and attitudes in sport (Stevenson, 1991, 1997), and will be discussed in more detail later.

Quantitative Measurement of Athlete Attitudes

Measuring attitudes is a complicated and difficult process. Researchers have used both quantitative and qualitative measures to assess attitudes in sport (Beller and Stoll, 1995; Stevenson, 1991, 1997). Quantitative research involves using measurement instruments that provide numerical results. In contrast, qualitative studies involve the use of interviews and open-ended questionnaires that produce results represented in words rather than numbers. Historically, quantitative research has been used more often than qualitative research (Patton, 1990).

Two types of quantitative methods, attitude scores and answer inventories (Patton, 1990), can be used by researchers to objectively compare and contrast athletes' responses. One of the most popular instruments of quantitative research is the Likert scale. Likert-scale instruments contain various questions and statements to which individuals are asked to respond in a multiple-choice format. Typically, these are anywhere from five to seven choices to choose from in relation to various questions. A five-point Likert scale might include the responses: (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) undecided, (d) disagree, and (e) strongly disagree. Each answer receives a number score. Scores for all the items are tallied to obtain a cumulative score. These cumulative scores

for each subject can then be compared across subjects. Several examples of quantitative research in the area of athlete attitude assessment follow.

Beller and Stoll (1995) created the Hahm-Beller Values Choice Inventory in the Sports Milieu (HBVCI) to compare attitudes of student-athletes with non-athletes at the high school level. The purpose of the study was to analyze the cognitive moral reasoning of both high school student-athletes and non-athletes ($n=1,330$). Moral reasoning was defined by Beller and Stoll (1995) as “the ability to systematically think through a moral problem taking into consideration one’s own values and beliefs while weighing them against what others and society values and believes.” In simpler terms, it means how someone uses values or principles to guide their own actions.

Each participant was selected from one school district’s entire high school population ($N=1,400$) within one of the largest school districts in the United States. Once a student agreed to participate, he or she was given a copy of the HBVCI in a group setting at school and asked to complete the inventory within a 45-minute time frame. The HBVCI consists of a five-point Likert-scale to assess levels of agreement in behavior across 21 sport situations. Issues such as fairness, honesty, respect, drug use, and responsibility are assessed within a sport context.

Beller and Stoll (1995) stated that a high score on the HBVCI would indicate that a subject used a high degree of moral reasoning. The researchers found that student-athletes at the high school level were less consistent, less impartial, and less reflective in moral reasoning than non-athletes. The results also indicated that high school female athletes had a significantly higher degree of moral reasoning than did male high school athletes.

Based upon HBVCI score comparisons, Beller and Stoll (1995) concluded that sport might not serve to build character in athletes, as many might believe. The authors hypothesized the difference in moral reasoning between athletes and non-athletes might be a result of the highly competitive nature of sport and the importance placed on winning at all costs. The researchers also concluded that this win-at-all-cost attitude is likely more prevalent in males, because females scored higher on the HBVCI. It was further suggested that this difference in moral reasoning might change as women's athletics receive greater exposure and become more important in society. Long-term studies are needed to determine whether such a change occurs.

Another recent study conducted by Beller, Stoll, Burwell, and Cole (1996) examined whether attendance at a Christian liberal arts college affected moral reasoning. Christian college administrators have claimed that Christian teaching would generalize into life and sport decision-making (Beller et al., 1996). Accordingly, it was hypothesized that moral reasoning would be higher in student-athletes exposed to Christian training.

The authors used a sample population drawn from four colleges, members of the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities (Bethel College, Gordon College, Messiah College, and Wheaton College). Student-athletes were randomly selected from the soccer ($n=139$) and cross-country teams ($n=36$), while nonathletes ($n=110$) were randomly selected from the general student population. No attempt was made to assess whether or not the participants held Christian beliefs. A similar method of HBVCI administration, as explained in the previous study (Beller & Stoll, 1995) was utilized to measure moral reasoning.

Results indicated that Christian training had little positive affect on moral reasoning of both student-athletes and non-athletes attending a Christian liberal arts college (Beller et al., 1996). Compared to their previous research (Beller & Stoll, 1995), the scores were essentially the same as secular institutions; student-athletes scored lower than non-athletes, and females scored higher than males.

One difference was noted in these results, however. Athletes participating in individual sports (i.e., cross country) scored at the same high levels as non-athletes. Beller et al. (1996) hypothesized this might be a result of individual sport athletes having higher moral reasoning skills before entering college. At pre-collegiate competitions, golfers, runners, and tennis players are chiefly responsible for monitoring and enforcing rules infractions without the use of outside help, such as referees. Another explanation presented was group size. Golf and tennis are individual sports with few members, in comparison to sports like football or baseball. Group member adherence to individual values and norms has a tendency to decrease as group size increases (Anshel, 1997).

Penny and Priest (1990) hypothesized this difference to be a result of golfers and tennis players having to call their own errors during the course of a competition. This means that the more an athlete has to think about the rules, the more the rules will be utilized (Penny & Priest, 1990). Therefore, the more an athlete thinks about the rules and uses them, the more likely he or she will develop a higher degree of moral reasoning.

The previous authors (Beller & Stoll, 1995; Beller et al., 1996) focused on moral reasoning of athletic and student populations without regard to religious belief. Hoffman (1992) cited an unpublished study of undergraduate students by Hoffman and Luxbacher (1983), which compared scores on a Christian belief inventory with scores on an ethical-

choice-in-sport survey. The choice survey was similar to the HBVCI, in that the students were asked to provide levels of approval of actions by other athletes made during sport situations. For example, a soccer scenario was presented in which a player refused to shoot on goal when the goaltender was injured during the play. Participants were asked whether or not the decision made by the soccer player was morally correct. The students with high religious belief scores recorded higher levels of approval to such actions (i.e., refusing to shoot on goal) on the sport choice survey as compared to students with low religious beliefs. These results might indicate that religious beliefs could be an important factor in determining how an athlete thinks, his or her attitudes, and resultant actions.

Attitude Assessment of Christian Athletes

Kelley, Hoffman, and Gill (1990) examined the relationship between competitive orientation and religious orientation in Christian undergraduate students ($n=308$) at a small liberal arts college. Based on both interview and survey data, the researchers concluded that the subjects who valued religion without regard for its usefulness (high intrinsic religious orientation) were focused on goals and the love of competition (high intrinsic competitive orientation). An example of this first type of subject would be an athlete who prays to have the correct attitude during competition. In contrast, subjects that valued religion for its usefulness (high extrinsic religious orientation) were focused on winning in sport (high extrinsic competitive orientation). This type of athlete would use prayer in an attempt to maximize his or her chance for victory.

Although an instrument like the HBVCI can produce numerical and comparable measures of attitudes in sport, it might not accurately explain how and why attitudes

affect decision-making in sport. For this reason qualitative research might complement and even enhance quantitative attitude measurement.

Qualitative Measurement of Christian Athletes' Attitudes

Sociologists have suggested that the values of competitive sport are in direct conflict with the values of Christianity (Hoffman, 1992; Prebish, 1993). In order to examine whether such a conflict existed, Stevenson (1991) utilized a qualitative design in a study of current and former collegiate and professional Christian athletes ($n=31$: 23 males, 8 females) affiliated with Athletes in Action (AIA) in Western Canada. Subjects represented various sports including rowing, soccer, track, volleyball, football, basketball, hockey, wrestling, and gymnastics.

A series of in-depth, informal, taped interviews were conducted with all participants at his or her respective campus or training facility. Qualitative analyses of these interviews led to the identification of three ways by which these athletes accommodated to the perceived expectations and conflicts within competitive sport. Accommodation is the process in which an athlete creates a unique identity for him or herself within the sport environment to justify certain behaviors and attitudes during sport participation (Stevenson, 1991).

The first type of accommodation was the Segregated-Type. This accommodation involved compartmentalizing his or her life. The Christian part of the athlete's life was separate from competitive sport. The athlete's Christian beliefs and values had little or no impact on the decisions made within the sport domain. Only a few participants mentioned using this type of accommodation.

The second type of accommodation was the Selective-Type. The majority of the participants used this type of accommodation. This Selective-Type athlete placed limits on the role their Christian beliefs would have in deciding behavior within the sport setting. In essence, the athlete would select when and when not to let his or her Christian beliefs guide his or her actions.

The third type of accommodation was the Committed-Type. This accommodation involved allowing Christian beliefs to dictate behaviors in both athletic and non-athletic settings. This third type was used by a small number of the participants. This group also expressed the most distress over differences between other team member's beliefs and their own.

The use of some type of accommodation was universal by these athletes in relation to the conflict between religion and sport values. Although accommodation techniques were used, not all the athletes were satisfied with the effectiveness of the chosen technique. The general dissatisfaction with accommodation techniques led the author to reexamine the taped interviews, and focus on the perceived value conflicts and the experiences of the Christian athlete.

In the reexamination of the interviews, Stevenson (1997) explored the perceptions and experiences of all the athletes ($n=31$) in relation to a) some of the difficulties (value conflicts) within competitive sport; and b) the use of their Christian faith to cope with the difficulties within competitive sport. Results indicated that five difficulties were experienced and expressed by the majority of participating athletes. These difficulties were:

- 1) The importance of winning: Competitive sport emphasizes winning above all else and this attitude is accepted as normative, but is in direct conflict with the participants' Christian beliefs.
- 2) The importance of social status: Importance was placed on becoming popular within the sport culture, which again was in conflict with the participants' Christian beliefs.
- 3) The relationship with the team and with the coach: Participants expressed confusion in both their relationships with coaches and teammates. Coaches often encouraged conflict between teammates during practices to enhance performance. Participants expressed difficulty competing against teammates to enhance their own standing on the team. Participants also expressed confusion in coaching behaviors directed toward them (i.e., coach favorite during freshman year, scapegoat during sophomore year).
- 4) The relationship with opponents: Participants expressed difficulty accepting the competitive sport norm that stated that the opponent was the enemy.
- 5) The expectations that others had of them as athletes in their social settings: Participants struggled with the perceived social obligations of athletic competition and team membership. The social aspects of sport, including alcohol use and sexual promiscuity, were difficult to justify with their core Christian beliefs.

One-third of the participants ($n=12$) reported a crisis during their athletic careers (Stevenson, 1997). A crisis was described by the researcher as an inability to deal with the conflict between the culture of competitive sport and the culture of Christianity. The researcher also noted that many athletes ($n=15$) were in search of some meaning or

purpose in their athletic endeavors. Stevenson (1997) hypothesized that participation in Athletes in Action (AIA) might serve as a means to find the desired meaning to athletic participation. Accordingly, it appears as though many athletes experience a conflict between their Christian beliefs and competitive sport norms.

Summary

The relationship between sport and religion began during ancient times and continues today. Although this relationship has existed for thousands of years, sport sociologists have only recently examined the relationship between religious and sport attitudes. Most of the previous research examining religion and sport has been quantitative in nature, with little qualitative research to date. The research conducted by Stevenson (1991, 1997) outlines how qualitative methodologies might enhance description of how, why, and to what extent Christianity impacts athletic attitudes. Continued research might enable researchers to gain a better understanding of the beliefs, experiences, perceptions, and ultimately the attitudes of Christian athletes.

Chapter 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to describe Division III Christian student-athletes' attitudes across several aspects of sport participation. Student-athletes ($n=5$) were interviewed in order to assess and describe their attitudes in six areas: competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury. This chapter describes the (a) qualitative phenomenological research design, (b) subject selection/participation, (c) instrumentation, and (d) data analysis.

Research Design

It has been suggested that in order to fully assess and describe the attitudes of individuals, the use of various qualitative methodologies is essential (Shelley, 1999). Similarly, Weinberg, Burton, Yukelson, and Weigand (1993) suggested the use of qualitative research to gain a greater in-depth understanding of beliefs, feelings, experiences, emotions, and thoughts (attitudes). Additionally, Converse and Campbell (1968) suggested that a qualitative design might allow for better understanding of social dynamics.

Patton (1990) defined qualitative phenomenological research as the structure and essence of an experience of a particular phenomenon. Husserl (1962) described it in even simpler terms by defining phenomenology as the study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses.

Leonard (1989) outlined the core of phenomenological inquiry to be the different attitudes of people based on their culture, language, and individual situations. Part of an individual's culture is their spiritual beliefs or religion. Therefore, a Christian student-

athlete's attitude and how they verbally describe that attitude, is impacted in some measure by the make-up of his or her Christian beliefs, feelings, experiences, emotions, and thoughts.

The experiential impact of an athlete's Christian beliefs was the subject of two qualitative research studies (Stevenson, 1991, 1997). Stevenson (1991) interviewed Christian athletes ($n=31$) affiliated with Athletes in Action (AIA). Qualitative analyses of interviews with these Christian athletes led to the identification of many value conflicts. These value conflicts prompted the author to reexamine the in-depth interview tapes focusing on the experiences and attitudes of Christian athletes (Stevenson, 1997). Specifically, the author explored attitudes in relation to the value conflicts found within competitive sport, and the use of their Christian faith to cope with these conflicts. Responses to the various interview questions were analyzed for common themes across participants.

The use of a semi-structured interview format and analysis, similar to Stevenson (1991, 1997) was incorporated in the present study to enhance the understanding of Christian student-athletes' attitudes. Specifically, a qualitative phenomenological research design (Shelley, 1999) was utilized to assess and describe the beliefs, feelings, experiences, emotions, and thoughts (attitudes) of Christian Division III student-athletes. Specific procedures were followed to enhance rigor (objectivity, conciseness) and trustworthiness (believability) in the data collection and analyses processes. These procedures encompass participant selection, the test instrument, and data analysis.

Participant Selection

All participants ($n=5$) needed to be 18 years of age and have been a student-athlete at Ithaca College within one year of the onset of the selection process. Ithaca College student-athletes were selected for convenience. Each participant volunteered in response to either a recruiting flyer (Appendix A) placed in the college athletic training room or after hearing a recruiting statement (Appendix B) made at a visit by the primary researcher to the Ithaca College Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) weekly meeting. Additionally, each volunteer was required to answer yes to three questions prior to their acceptance into the study. The questions asked were:

1. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?
2. Do you believe Jesus Christ died for your sins?
3. Have you devoted your life to Jesus Christ?

Once the volunteers answered yes to these three questions, they were informed that the study dealt with exploring the attitudes of Division III Christian student-athletes across several aspects of sport participation. Each volunteer was also told that he or she would be interviewed using an interview guide (Appendix C) for approximately one hour by the primary researcher. Once the subject agreed to participate an interview time was set up. For convenience, all interviews were conducted in the Ithaca College Athletic Training Room offices.

Prior to each interview, the researcher reiterated the nature of the study and the interview format. Verbally, the issues of confidentiality, anonymity, potential risks, and benefits were discussed with each athlete. Next, each participant read and signed an informed consent form approved by the Ithaca College Human Subjects and Research

Committee (Appendix D), which outlined the aforementioned issues. Finally, biographical information was attained for each of the five participants (Appendix E). Once the informed consent was signed and biographical information collected, a pre-interview statement (Appendix F) was read to each participant. Time was then given for the participant to ask the researcher any questions regarding the interview or interview process. The interview followed this question and answer period.

Test Instrument/Procedures

Each participant was interviewed once during the last two weeks of the 1999 spring semester. Each interview lasted between 45 and 55 minutes and was tape-recorded. Questions were asked in regards to the areas of competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury.

At the start of each interview, the primary researcher emphasized the importance of honesty in answering the interview questions. It was further explained that there was no right or wrong answer; therefore each participant was free to answer any way in which he or she chose. Finally, each participant was asked for his or her permission to be audiotaped.

An in-depth, semi-structured interview guide format was utilized for data collection. Patton (1987) described an interview guide as a list of questions or issues to be explored during the course of an interview. Patton further stated that an interview guide allows for consistency in topic coverage, while allowing for freedom to explore different areas of those topics. The development of the interview guide was an in-depth process entailing the creation of open-ended questions. Many revisions were made to ensure each question was not biased in leading the participants to answer in a certain

way. Revisions were made as a result of discussions with the primary researcher's advisor and mock interviews with fellow graduate students.

The in-depth process of developing the interview guide was the first step to enhance rigor. Rigor deals with one's development, adherence, and accuracy in identifying the problem, designing the research, and analyzing the data (Shelley, 1999). Other means to ensure the rigor of the interview guide included (Shelley, 1999):

1. Using open-ended and relevant interview guide questions in relation to the overall research questions.
2. Building rapport through the primary researcher's attendance and discussions at FCA meetings and through his visibility and interaction with athletes as a staff athletic trainer at Ithaca College.
3. Practicing interviewing skills (i.e., listening, probing, rephrasing, etc.) during a semester long counseling class prior to the study.

Data Analysis

A six-step data analysis process followed a modified form of the qualitative phenomenological analyses used by Shelley (1999). Each of the five verbatim interview transcriptions was the basis of the final data analysis. The process consisted of six specific steps.

First, verbatim data transcriptions were read multiple times to grasp a general sense of the information obtained. Second, data were coded into units for each research question. Competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury were coded 1 through 6 respectively. For example, if a statement dealt with motivation it would be coded with a 2. If a statement dealt with injury it would be coded with a 6.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described coding as “unitizing” raw data. This coding helped to better organize the raw data into the different aspects of sport participation being explored prior to the examination of significant statements.

Third, significant statements were extracted. Shelley (1999) described these statements as responses that directly relate to the overall research questions. Each of these statements was also coded. For example, the first significant statement by the first participant, pertaining to the first area of exploration was coded 1(1). The first number referred to the participant and the second number referred to the aspect of exploration (i.e., competition, motivation, etc.). Accordingly, the first significant statement by the second participant, pertaining to the first area of exploration was coded 2(1). If a participant had more than one significant statement per area of exploration a letter was added to the second number. For example, the second participant’s third significant statement in reference to injury would be coded 2(6c). This coding procedure was completed for all participants. After the coding of the significant statements, meaning units were formulated.

The fourth step entailed the formulation of meaning units for each participant in order to place meaning on a group or cluster of significant statements pertaining to a specific research question. The primary researcher created a succinct statement (i.e., meaning unit) by paraphrasing all similar significant statements. This meaning unit provided meaning to the research question coded in the second step.

Fifth, meaning units were further synthesized into higher order themes for each participant. Higher order themes were the descriptions of the participant’s attitude in relation to each of the six areas of exploration. Meaning units with a similar focus were

combined into a higher order theme statement for that area of exploration. The higher order themes represented the unique attitudes of each participant (see Appendices G, H, I, J, and K respectively).

The sixth and final step involved the synthesis of the higher order themes into common themes (see Appendix L). The common themes represented an attitude across participants in each of the various areas of exploration. At least three of the participants needed to express a similar attitude in order for that attitude to become a common theme.

In summary, the following six steps were followed:

1. All participants' verbatim interview transcriptions were read multiple times to obtain a sense of what had been discussed.
2. Coding or "unitizing" of data was completed to better organize the raw data.
3. Significant statements (responses directly related to specific outlined areas of exploration) were extracted from the raw data and coded.
4. Meaning units were formulated to describe or synthesize a group of significant statements and place meaning on them in relation to each area of exploration for each participant.
5. These meaning units were then synthesized into higher order themes for each area of exploration by which each participant's attitude was described.
6. Common themes were formulated across participants for each of the aspects of sport participation explored (competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury).

Two steps in the original data analysis process as described by Shelley (1999) were eliminated. These were the use of lower order themes and participant reviews. Shelley (1999) described the data analysis process as a means to make the data more understandable and manageable. Lower order themes are used if the data are not easily managed and synthesized to create higher order themes directly from the meaning units. The present data were easily managed and higher order themes were synthesized from meaning units without the use of the intermediate step of lower order themes.

Also, the primary researcher did not utilize participant reviews. First of all, the primary researcher was confident that his probing questions (e.g., What do you mean?) during the interview process eliminated any confusion about participant responses. Furthermore, time constraints, the unavailability of participants during the summer break, and participant travel expenses back to campus made participant reviews unrealistic.

Finally, it was essential for the researcher to recognize any biases or preconceived notions prior to and throughout the data analysis process. A bracketing process as outlined by Patton (1990) was followed throughout the data analysis process to enhance both rigor and trustworthiness. Patton (1990) suggested that researchers:

1. Locate key phrases and statements: The primary researcher highlighted phrases and statements within the verbatim transcriptions of each participant that were directly related to significant aspects being explored in the study.
2. Interpret meanings of phrases as an informed reader: The primary researcher, as an informed reader, paraphrased similar statements and phrases into succinct meaning units.

3. Inspect the meaning for what it reveals about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied: The succinct meaning units were divided into the different aspects of sport participation being explored (competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury). An overall statement of meaning in relation to each aspect (higher order theme) was developed from the meaning units.

All data were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist within one week of the last interview and the aforementioned data analysis process began. These steps allowed the data to be organized and described so that it was manageable and understandable for the researcher and reader, which is critical to the trustworthiness of qualitative methodologies and results (Patton, 1987).

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The following results were derived from content analyses of in-depth interviews with five Division III Christian student-athletes. These analyses produced 233 significant statements, which were integrated into 148 meaning units. The meaning units were further integrated into 66 higher order themes. Finally, the higher order themes (Appendix G, H, I, J, and K respectively) for each of the five student-athletes (i.e., participants 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) were synthesized into six common themes. Each of the six common themes and verbatim responses supporting each theme are presented below.

Common Themes

Despite the fact that each participant was unique in his or her attitudes toward sport participation, many similarities were found between the participants that provided some insight into what might be the overall attitudes of Division III Christian student-athletes. Each participant's higher-order themes for each of the six areas of exploration (competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury) were compared to yield the six common themes that follow. It is these six common themes that describe the Division III Christian student-athlete's attitudes.

Questions asked during the interviews were intended to facilitate an understanding of Christian student-athlete's attitudes in each of the aforementioned areas. One common theme emerged from each of these areas.

Competition

The first area of exploration assessed Division III Christian student-athletes' attitudes in relation to competition. Through comparative analyses, the following common theme emerged from the five interviews.

Experiencing frustration during competition was both a test of their faith and an opportunity to utilize their faith through prayer to regain focus and a positive attitude.

Each of the five athletes expressed frustration as a result of not performing well. For example, participant 1 stated, "...[I] just kind of tend to just get angry. And angry at myself because I didn't do the things that I know I'm capable of doing [during competition]."

She felt that her faith was strengthened by the way she handled this frustration and she stated:

I think at the moment I'm usually not, okay, that's [what] God wanted to happen [in the competition]. But...a couple hours later then I kind of say okay, this is the plan for today, this is what happened today. This is gonna make me stronger, this is something that I'm going to build [on].

She also talked about the role of prayer in this process when she stated, "I think prayer...helped me to know what to do to get better...gave me the strength to get through this [competition]...and...help[ed] me to deal with this [frustration] myself."

Participant 2 also expressed the feeling of frustration during competition and the means by which he dealt with his frustration:

Hopefully [I act] like a Christian. At times you don't act the way you want to act [during competitions]. You blow up, you may curse. It's your nature as a sinner. But I would like to think the majority of the time, if my head's in the right place, if my head is focused on Christ and that's all it's focused on, when I face a frustration [during competitions]...that's the

opportunity for me to go to Christ and to pray about, knowing there's a reason for it.

Participant 4 described a similar scenario:

It makes me feel guilty when I get upset about a competition... And I've kind of pushed that away... I pray big time. That's all I'll do. I just throw out the distractions and just focus so that I know that I'm doing this for God.

Participant 3 stated, "Every time you play, go out on the field, say a quick prayer. You know it's not to be the greatest... [but God] help me just to have a good game and bring glory to You [God]."

Participant 1 described the function of prayer in this way, "...I know that a lot of people pray to win, but for me like I kind of pray to do my best and whatever the outcome is, but that is what the outcome is."

Participant 5 described how during his best game ever, he prayed not to perform well but to have the right attitude and to be thankful for whatever the result:

The best game that I ever had, which was an indoor game... any time I scored a goal I would pray. Later on I kind of had reservations about that for maybe it wasn't really the greatest thing because it's in scripture and stuff. But really, I feel like it really made an affect in that game perhaps. My performance in that game. I would say I depend on prayer more... for my attitude on and off the field.

Participant 2 utilized prayer in a similar manner:

[Prayer] sort of sets my heart at ease, sets my mind at ease. Let's me focus on what I want to do. And that just helps push everything out, any distractions, so I can focus on what I have to do right then and there... [Prayer] puts me in the position where I am relying more on God than on myself. And it just encourages me... puts it [doubt, pain] out of my mind and my body can still perform.

Motivation

The second area of exploration assessed attitudes in relation to motivation.

Comparing and contrasting participant's higher-order themes resulted in one common theme.

Participants were motivated during sport participation to perform their best, and to utilize athletics as a means to achieve their ultimate goal of serving and glorifying God through their performances.

This theme was evident across all five participants. The outcome of a competition was secondary to performing at their best. Comments from Participants 2 and 5 reflect the attitude of all the participants. Participant 2 claimed he would rather play at his best and lose then win and play at less than his best:

[I would choose] Losing and playing my best. Because that means if I played at my best it means I've given it my all and I think that's more important because you get more out of that within yourself than just going out there and beating anybody who didn't try hard...I think you need to try hard [and be motivated] to improve yourself. I'm in the business of improving my life.

Participant 5 stated a similar sentiment when he said, "...I guess you feel more of a sense of accomplishment [intrinsic motivation] after a tough game that you lose and play your best."

In relation to her primary motivation, Participant 1 said:

[I'm motivated by] the desire to improve. The desire to push myself and to be the best athlete that I can be...and to really go to my fullest potential. To win and to do my best...I'm not going to be totally satisfied if I don't win but at the same time if I did my best and I feel that, you know, I tried as hard as I could do and if third place is as good as I can get but I still did the best that I can, then I think that, you know, that's okay...I wouldn't be very satisfied if I won knowing that I hadn't done very well.

The motivation to serve and glorify God through athletic performance was well summarized by Participant 2 when he stated:

Being motivated for Christ, instead of...self-serving goals...all your performances...given for Christ and that's your only audience...And each time you go out on the practice field it's a chance for you to become more and more like Christ.

Similarly, Participant 3 stated, "It's not important to glorify me...To play so I can enjoy myself, and doing so bring glory to God." Participant 5 used an analogy to express his relationship with Jesus Christ and how that relationship changed his motivation:

An analogy that you're no longer the driver. Christ isn't only in the car; He's driving the car. He's directing wherever He wants you to go and looking to Him not only as a leg to fall on but as a leg to walk on... That it means that you have chosen instead of living your life for yourself, choosing your own motives, going after your own goals, giving your life over to God [and being motivated to glorify God].

Anxiety

The third area of exploration involved how Christian student-athletes dealt with anxiety in sport. Comparison of participant's higher-order themes revealed only one common theme.

The use of prayer served to lessen athletic anxiety by facilitating focus and enhancing confidence in their performances.

Four out of the five participants stated that they utilized prayer to help them focus as well as lessen anxiety. Participant 1 described how prayer decreased her anxiety when she stated:

[My anxiety is lessened] Definitely a lot through prayer but I think I don't tend to get very nervous. I think that has a lot to do with...just my belief that God already has something planned...and He's gonna help me to do the best I possibly can [confidence, and faith]...it [prayer] just kind of takes you to the point where you are just more calm and relaxed.

Participant 2 explained how he used prayer and the recitation of Bible verses to accomplish the same objective:

It [prayer] encourages me in knowing that I have somebody else on my side and that helps me fight the anxiety. So I usually pray through those verses...It [prayer] sort of sets my heart at ease, sets my mind at ease. Let's me focus on what I want to do...It helps me when I'm tired and when I feel like I can't go on, I know that's mostly in my mind...praying about it puts it out of mind and my body can still perform.

Participant 4 specifically talked about her use of prayer during her javelin competitions as she stated, "...before I throw [javelin] I just pray that God and he just like gives me like a peace and a calmness...He'll just relax me and help me focus on what I have to do." Similarly, Participant 3 stated "Before I go on the field...[I] take a second and go by myself and sit down and say a quick prayer...[prayer] helps get everything [anxiety, pressure] else out of your head."

Leadership

The fourth area of exploration dealt with the Christian student-athletes' attitudes toward leadership. Analyses of the higher-order themes across participants resulted in one common theme.

Participants considered themselves role models and preferred to lead by example both on and off the field, and not through the use of words.

In relation to others use of alcohol, Participant 4 described her leadership style off the field:

I respect them [teammates] as people. I don't have a belief that in your life what's good for me is good for you. I don't have any right to impose [say] anything on, I mean it's ultimately God's decision ...I try to...show them that...you can still have fun without using alcohol.

Similarly, Participant 2 stated:

[I am] a silent leader. A leader by example...leading by your servitude. Lead by example and taking the blame on yourself so people will see...that you're honest and sincere. I think it makes you a better leader. My teammates just know...why I don't go out and drink with them.

In terms of leadership style, Participant 1 stated, "I lead by example...I've always been a leader, ever since I was little...I feel like that that's something that I do and that I do well."

Each participant described himself or herself as a role model in their sport performance. Participant 5 believed being a role model was both an honor and a privilege:

I would definitely say that I'm a role model to a lot of kids back home. Well first of all, I think it's an honor. And I think it's a privilege. And to me it means acting responsibly. Doing things, not doing things that I think a ten-year-old or a twelve-year-old shouldn't do. Definitely. I think I've been put into a position to be a role model for a lot of the younger Christian kids back in the area where I'm from and I'd say that I've become a...role model for a number of the guys at my old high school who are a year or two...behind me.

Participant 5 also stated:

I don't think that athletes who are poor role models should be portrayed as role models. I don't think that people should label someone like Dennis Rodman to be a role model. I think people like David Robinson, people like Michael Jordan, people who play the game with respect and integrity, people who are deserving of being a role model. Maybe even outside of their athletic abilities...I think that being a role model comes with being known by people. But I think it also comes with being a respectable person and having integrity.

Similarly, Participant 1 stated:

I think knowing that [I am a role model] makes me act in a different way...I am a role model to the other girls on the team...I try to keep that in mind when I'm doing things, when I'm pushing myself...leading by example...They [athletes] should realize that what they do is influencing

other people...I think they have a responsibility to the people that...are supporting them, are coming to their games.

Participant 2 believed Christianity encouraged him to be a silent role model and witness to the world:

I think it [his Christianity] encourages it. You know, we're supposed to be witnesses to the world. To witness to the world you're gonna be a role model somewhat. Whether or not you're being a good role model depends on how well you walk the walk. I've always heard, you know, the statement, "Always preach the Gospel and if you must use words". So, you know, my actions and all that, and I think that...is a role model.

Participant 3 described the duty of a role model in very simple terms as he stated, "...athletes in a collegiate setting [should] live up to certain things [standards]. He further stated role models should be "an ideal athlete [like Jesus Christ]...[or] your dad or your brother." Participant 4 stated her role model was, "My boyfriend...he stays strong and that's encouraging to me." She further stated "I hope other people see it [that she is conscious of acting like a Christian], like younger people."

Team Cohesion

The fifth area of exploration involved assessing attitudes concerning relationships and interactions with teammates and coaches. Through comparative analyses, a single common theme emerged.

Participants expressed a feeling of separation (i.e., lack of cohesion) between themselves and their non-Christian teammates as a result of differing values in relation to off the field activities (alcohol, drugs, sex, etc.).

Three of the participants expressed this feeling of separation. Participant 2 expressed his frustration and concern with this separation when he stated:

I think, one thing that hinders me...is being separate [from non-Christian athletes]...as a Christian...it's hard for me to foster team unity with my friends cause I don't go out drinking with them [non-Christians] on the weekends...So building the off the field friendships... That hinders me.

This same participant showed further frustration when attempting to explain how he dealt with this perceived separation:

...I would like to spend more time with them [teammates] but it's so hard because...I used to go out with them a lot...thinking I could be a witness. But they're so distracted through the alcohol or through trying to hook up with some girl that...it wasn't very profitable in my mind...I think it's a mixed reaction. ...some guys make fun of me for it [Christian beliefs]. Just the fact that...I have a steady girlfriend...the fact that I don't go out and drink.

In a similar way, Participant 4 expressed that she felt separated from her teammates:

...It sets us (Christians) apart definitely and I think it's a good challenge...they know I'm different, like they always ask me why I don't drink, why I don't go out and stuff. And so they see that it's different but they don't always know why.

In relationship with his coach, Participant 5 stated how he felt his coach and his teammates believed he was "different":

I definitely felt like he saw me as being different than the rest of the guys on the team. I don't know if he knew it was my Christianity or if he just knew that I didn't hang around with the rest of the guys on the team [non-Christians] off the field a whole lot. I think the main thing that they noticed was I didn't go to the parties, I didn't drink with them. I think some of them might have known I was a Christian because another guy on the team who considers himself a Christian kind of had my back, especially on the alcohol issue...I think that he might have said something to them about why I didn't drink.

Injury

The sixth area of exploration dealt with student-athletes' attitudes toward injury. Comparing higher-order themes across participants resulted in one common theme.

Relying on their Christian faith lessened their disappointment following injury by enabling them to believe and accept that their injury was a part of God's plan, and motivating them not to waste their God-given athletic gifts.

Relying on their Christian faith through the use of prayer was an inherent part of how several participants dealt with their injury. Participant 1 explained how important prayer was in her injury management:

I think prayer...help[ed] me to know what to do to get better. ...[My faith] gave me the strength to get through this...and be with me to help me to deal with this myself...I think religion almost plays a bigger part in injury than in performance because it's more, so much more mental and you need your religion more when you are dealing with adversity because...you got to be thankful for the good things. But I think that's really the time when you need to lean on it a little bit more is during your health problems. I think it [Christianity] gives me a better experience because...I don't see it as this awful injury that's never going to get better. I see it as that being what God wanted to happen and there was a reason for it ultimately.

Participant 4 expressed her injury as an opportunity to learn about the strength of her faith as she stated, "I [tried] to find what I can learn from some situations, maybe God wanted me to take a step back [from the injury] and just like review [my faith] and see [His plan]...and what I was feeling."

Participant 2 reiterated the feeling of viewing his injury as an opportunity to learn about the strength of his faith:

It [Christian faith] didn't stop the disappointment but I know it did lessen it...this happened for a reason and it's a new opportunity [to assess and strengthen my faith]...to trust God and it's a whole new opportunity to still work hard and still try to glorify God. And not give up.

Three of the participants described a similar attitude in relation to their motivation not to waste their God-given gifts following injury. Participant 2 expressed the impact his faith had on his injury rehabilitation:

[I was] motivated to get back out there...just thankful that...I had an injury and now it's over. Now I can get back out and play again... [I had] a whole new opportunity to still work hard and to still try to glorify God [using the gifts he has given me].

In a similar way, Participant 1 indicated how her faith facilitated her rehabilitation and return to competition:

I need to rehab to get better and to be able to go on using the gift that God gave me and go on performing or doing whatever it is that He wants. I'm not afraid to do that drill because this was just what God wanted to happen in that particular instance...it helps me get back into it better because...psychologically, there's no barriers to my return because I just believe that it's something that God let happen, and if it's going to happen again, it's going to happen again because that's what God chooses to happen.

Participant 5 stated, "I would say that my faith inspiring my competitive nature made me want to play with the injury in the following games [and not waste my God-given ability]."

Summary

The results focused on the emergent common themes for the six research questions exploring Christian athlete's attitudes in the areas of competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury. This study has identified several common themes detailing the attitudes of Division III Christian student-athletes. Despite the fact that each of the participants was unique in his or her responses, six common themes were identified and discussed.

Within the area of competition, frustration was expressed as both a test of faith, and as an opportunity to utilize their faith through prayer to regain focus. Furthermore, prayers during competition were intended to be a means of attitude enhancement rather than utilized to produce an optimum performance. Within the area of motivation,

participants were motivated to perform at their best, as well as serving and glorifying God by utilizing their God-given gifts during their performances.

The attitude that prayer served to lessen anxiety was also strongly expressed. It was also evident that participants considered themselves role models and preferred leading by example, rather than through words, both on and off the field. Concerning team cohesion, a feeling of separation was evident between Christian and non-Christian teammates in relation to off the field social activities. Finally, the participants relied upon their Christian faith following injury, which lessened their disappointment and allowed them to see that the injury was part of God's plan and motivated them not to waste their God-given gifts.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This present study explored Christian student-athletes' attitudes in six areas of sport participation (competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury). This chapter provides a breakdown of the six emergent themes. In addition, each theme is discussed in relation to current literature, as well as verbatim statements made by the participants.

Competition

Experiencing frustration during competition was both a test of their faith and an opportunity to utilize their faith through prayer to regain focus and a positive attitude.

In a recent study of competitive anger, Brunelle, Janelle, and Tennant (1999) stated that "anger appears to be an intrinsic product of an environment that locks opposing forces together in athletic competition. Not only has it been accepted as an inherent part of sport, but anger [frustration] is often encouraged and elicited to improve athletic performance." This statement is in direct contrast to the attitude expressed by the participants of the present study. The frustrations expressed by the participants were not viewed as performance enhancing but rather something to overcome as a test of faith.

Participant 1 described her frustration in these terms:

I think at the moment I'm usually not, okay, that's [what] God wanted to happen [in the competition]. But... a couple hours later then I kind of say okay, this is the plan for today, this is what happened today. This is gonna make me stronger, this is something that I'm going to build.

She also talked about the role of prayer in this process when she stated, "I think prayer...helped me to know what to do to get better...gave me the strength to get through this [competition]...and...help[ed] me to deal with this [frustration] myself."

Participant 2 also expressed the feeling of frustration during competition and the means by which he dealt with his frustration:

Hopefully [I act] like a Christian. At times you don't act the way you want to act [during competitions]. You blow up, you may curse. It's your nature as a sinner. But I would like to think the majority of the time, if my head's in the right place, if my head is focused on Christ and that's all it's focused on, when I face a frustration [during competitions]...that's the opportunity for me to go to Christ and to pray about, knowing there's a reason for it.

Stevenson (1991) described a similar utilization of faith during interviews with Christian athletes. One athlete described this utilization as he stated:

I went through the [800 meters] semifinals heat and came out with the fastest time and so I was expecting to win the championships. And [in] the first 200 meters [of the finals] I got knocked down...I got back and finished the race...I didn't lose my cool, I just accepted that the Lord must have had something in mind for me and I took it quite well.

Participant 4 also described a scenario of using her faith to overcome frustration:

It makes me feel guilty when I get upset about a competition...And I've kind of pushed that away...I pray big time. That's all I'll do. I just throw out the distractions and just focus so that I know that I'm doing this for God.

Participant 4 was not only frustrated by competition, but she also expressed frustration at times of being a Christian. This does not mean she was unhappy with her faith but at times her faith felt like a burden. She expresses this frustration as a negative part of her Christianity when she stated, "I guess [the negative part of Christianity is the] frustration of being a Christian. [It's frustrating] just trying to portray that happy, joy Christian [to my teammates all the time]."

A common thread found through all the statements made about prayer was the idea that prayer was meant solely for enhancing attitude, and not for enhancing performance. Participant 3 expressed this attitude when he stated, "Every time you play, go out on the field, say a quick prayer. You know it's not to be the greatest...[but] help me just to have a good game and bring glory to You [God]."

Participant 1 described the function of her prayer in this manner, "...I know that a lot of people pray to win, but for me like I kind of pray to do my best and whatever the outcome is, but that is what the outcome is."

Participant 5 echoed this philosophy of prayer use as he described how during his best game ever, he prayed not to perform well but to have the right attitude and to be thankful for whatever the result:

The best game that I ever had, which was an indoor game...any time I scored a goal I would pray. Later on I kind of had reservations about that for maybe I wasn't really the greatest thing because it's in scripture and stuff. But really, I feel like it really made an affect in that game perhaps. My performance in that game. I would say I depend on prayer more...for my attitude on and off the field.

As shown by the previous statements, Christian athletes have utilized prayer as a means of attitude enhancement rather than to gain a better outcome. Coakley (1994) suggested that people (Christians) resist the urge to negotiate with God for a good performance. He speculated that a concern arises that negotiating with God might alter the plan that God has intended for him or her. He further suggested that this alteration of God's plan would seem unacceptable for many Christians.

Motivation

Participants were motivated during sport participation to perform their best, and to utilize athletics as a means to achieve their ultimate goal of serving and glorifying God through their performances.

The universal statement in regard to what motivated each participant was to perform at his or her best. The outcome of a competition was secondary to trying and performing at their best. Participant 2 claimed he would rather play at his best and lose then win and play at less than his best:

[I would choose] Losing and playing my best. Because that means if I played at my best it means I've given it my all and I think that's more important because you get more out of that within yourself than just going out there and beating anybody who didn't try hard...I think you need to try hard [and be motivated] to improve yourself. I'm in the business of improving my life.

Participant 5 stated a similar sentiment when he said, "...I guess you feel more of a sense of accomplishment [intrinsic motivation] after a tough game that you lose and play your best."

In relation to her primary motivation, Participant 1 said:

[I'm motivated by] the desire to improve. The desire to push myself and to be the best athlete that I can be...and to really go to my fullest potential. To win and to do my best...I'm not going to be totally satisfied if I don't win but at the same time if I did my best and I feel that, you know, I tried as hard as I could do and if third place is as good as I can get but I still did the best that I can, then I think that, you know, that's okay...I wouldn't be very satisfied if I won knowing that I hadn't done very well.

Although Participant 1 made this statement about her motivation, she later made a statement that was somewhat contradictory when she described part of her motivation as, "...the whole egotistical thing. I like to win. I like to know I'm the best at something...because I think competing, it pushes you to be your best."

This attitude about competing for selfish reasons was not limited to Participant 1.

Participant 4 echoed this attitude when she reluctantly stated:

Unfortunately I have to say a lot of it [motivation] has to do with pride, honestly. You know I get a kick [out of] doing well and tons of people saying well good job...I do it to please my family and...the joy it gives me.

Participant 5 expressed a similar attitude when he stated:

I also really like to be watched. I like having people's attention and stuff, so in competition knowing that people are on the sidelines watching me with the ball, knowing that people on the sidelines are watching me make a cut...for a true pass. I guess [I'm motivated by] the competition and the attention.

Although these participants made statements describing part of their motivation in terms of the attention they desired as well as their desire to win, each participant emphasized that the primary motivation would continue to be to perform at their best. The aforementioned statements might be an indication that these athletes use feedback from others to assess if they have performed at their best. This could also be an indication that the motivation to win and gain attention might have been recently replaced by the motivation to perform at their best.

This motivation to perform and work to be their best might be a derivative of the Protestant work ethic common to the American culture of the last few centuries (Prebish, 1993). This work ethic states that good things (i.e., winning) come to those who work hard, are disciplined, and are dedicated. Stevenson (1997) described this work ethic motivation with Christian athletes. One athlete stated, "Many times people think that if they become a Christian, they can't become intense in their sport, and I think that's false because I think Christ wants us to give 100% of our bodies." Another athlete stated, "I

can deal with losing...but what I can't deal with now is performance that isn't full effort."

Notwithstanding the statements of the participants of the present study and other literature, Aitken (1992) argued that:

In contemporary sport we are confronted with a perverted or alienated form of winning. Today winning does not involve just the desire to demonstrate a superiority of skills, which is the normal goal of any game; rather, it involves an inordinate desire to win in an absolute sense.

This emphasis on winning described above might be the norm for most athletes, but is not the primary focus for the participants of the present study. Although several participants acknowledged the importance of winning, their primary motivation was to play and perform at their best.

Although, the motivation to perform at their best was expressed among all the participants, three of the five participants expressed further motivation in the following way:

Being motivated for Christ, instead of...self-serving goals...all your performances...given for Christ and that's your only audience...And each time you go out on the practice field it's a chance for you to become more and more like Christ. (Participant 2)

Similarly, Participant 3 stated, "It's not important to glorify me... To play so I can enjoy myself, and doing so bring glory to God." It is evident however, that this statement might not have been made by this athlete prior to attending college. This is confirmed by the statement, "Being a Christian athlete is something that...I never considered until I got to college. I never really thought about it... Then I joined FCA, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and it was something that [I] started...to talk about."

Stevenson (1997) reported a similar statement from a Christian athlete and member of AIA:

Because my purpose was to glorify God by using my body, I found that I was a freer person. No longer was I competing to make my place on the team or for my scholarship or for my coach or even for myself, but I was competing for Christ, and Christ was the only one in the stands... And so the only way I could fail in Christ was if I didn't try my best.

Interestingly, Participant 5 used an analogy to express his relationship with Jesus Christ and how that relationship changed his motivation to glorify God:

[My motivation is like] An analogy that you're no longer the driver. Christ isn't only in the car; He's driving the car. He's directing wherever He wants you to go and looking to Him not only as a leg to fall on but as a leg to walk on... That it means that you have chosen instead of living your life for yourself, choosing your own motives, going after your own goals, giving your life over to God [and being motivated to glorify God].

It might be that such a change in motivation was a result of Participant 5 wanting to avoid, change, or compensate for the feelings he expressed in relation to being motivated by audience attention. Neal (1981) expressed the idea that Christian athletes should use their athletic performance to glorify God and become more like Christ. Participant 2 actually mentioned that his view was partly influenced by his recent discovery of Neal's book and his current use of some of the author's suggestions for glorifying God. It might be that some of the athletes in this study have only just begun learning about what it means and how to glorify God.

Anxiety

The use of prayer served to lessen athletic anxiety by facilitating focus and enhancing confidence in their performances.

Four out of the five participants stated that they utilized prayer to help them focus as well as lessen anxiety. Participant 1 described how prayer decreased her anxiety when she stated:

[My anxiety is lessened] Definitely a lot through prayer but I think I don't tend to get very nervous. I think that has a lot to do with...just my belief that God already has something planned...and He's gonna help me to do the best I possibly can [confidence, and faith]...it [prayer] just kind of takes you to the point where you are just more calm and relaxed.

Participant 2 explained how he used prayer and the recitation of bible verses to accomplish the same objective:

It [prayer] encourages me in knowing that I have somebody else on my side and that helps me fight the anxiety. So I usually pray through those verses...It [prayer] sort of sets my heart at ease, sets my mind at ease. Let's me focus on what I want to do...It helps me when I'm tired and when I feel like I can't go on, I know that's mostly in my mind...praying about it puts it out of mind and my body can still perform.

Participant 4 specifically talked about her use of prayer during her javelin competitions as she stated, "...before I throw [javelin] I just pray that God and He just like gives me like a peace and a calmness...He'll just relax me and help me focus on what I have to do."

This reliance on prayer could be considered a ritual for these participants in that they prayed regularly during their competition. Coakley (1994) suggested that prayer serves a ritual purpose within the sport environment. Sport is inherently an uncertain activity. As a result, prayer might serve to lessen the anxiety involved with uncertain situations. Without the ritual use of prayer, the uncertainty takes over and fear reigns (Prebish, 1993). This perceived reliance became evident when Participant 2 stated, "[Without the use of prayer and the recitation of bible verses, competition] would be a lot

harder. I think I still could visualize my plays and...get myself psyched up and in tune but it would be a lot harder. I think I rely a lot on it.”

Bodley (1995) described how a professional athlete utilized prayer as a means to lessen anxiety before a big ballgame. Orel Hershiser, former pitcher for the Cleveland Indians, described the affect of prayer on his performance:

I think a lot of prayers around the country went up for me today because it is well known I am a Christian. There are a lot of Christians around the United States and the world probably praying for me today because they knew it was a big game and I might have had a little impact on their life at one time or another. I felt very, very strong and at peace the whole day. It carried through the game.

The use of prayer seemed to be an essential ingredient for most of the participants of the present study, however one participant did not express the use of prayer to relieve anxiety. This participant did not utilize prayer because he rarely felt anxious, thus prayer was not needed in this respect.

Leadership

Participants considered themselves role models and preferred to lead by example both on and off the field, and not through the use of words.

In relation to teammates' use of alcohol, Participant 4 described her leadership style off the field:

I respect them [teammates] as people. I don't have a belief that in your life what's good for me is good for you. I don't have any right to impose [say] anything on, I mean it's ultimately God's decision ...I try to...show them that...you can still have fun without using alcohol.

Similarly, Participant 2 stated:

[I am] a silent leader. A leader by example...leading by your servitude. Lead by example and taking the blame on yourself so people will

see...that you're honest and sincere. I think it makes you a better leader. My teammates just know...why I don't go out and drink with them.

Finally, in terms of leadership style, Participant 1 stated, "I lead by example...I've always been a leader, ever since I was little...I feel like that that's something that I do and that I do well."

This desire to lead by example rather than words can also be found in statements made by current and former professional Christian athletes. In one interview (Donaghy, 1991), Gary Gaetti (professional baseball player) stated:

I don't walk through the clubhouse saying 'Alright, who am I going to talk to about Jesus today? My life is directed by Christ, and the Spirit of God directs me in the things to say and when to say it...I don't think I've ever been a person who has thrown Christianity on anybody. If somebody wants to talk about Christ, I'm going to talk about it...The whole idea is to do what God wants me to do and to be more Christ like.

In another interview (Weir, 1999), Terry Bradshaw, former quarterback of the Pittsburgh Steelers and current television broadcaster, talked about how sharing his faith verbally has caused problems for him, so much so, that he only models his faith. Terry Bradshaw stated:

I felt a responsibility as a Christian to share my faith [verbally]. As I've gotten older and have seen the effect or impact it [faith sharing] can have if you strive and cause problems, I got real protective of my faith, and don't do it [share faith verbally] anymore. [But] one of these days I'm going to come forth with a real testimony that will shock people.

The desire to share the Christian faith is evident in both the present study as well as interviews with professional athletes. None of the athletes wanted to force their beliefs or faith upon their teammates or fans. But each wanted to show the world what their beliefs and values were through their leadership and examples portrayed through sport.

Two well-known evangelists have expressed the idea that Christian athletes should act as witnesses for Christ and role models for others. Oral Roberts stated, "Athletics is part of our Christian witness...nearly every man in America reads the sport pages." Jerry Falwell echoed these sentiments as he stated, "To me, athletics are a way of making a statement...I believe you have a better Christian witness...when you competitively, head to head, prove yourself their [opponents] equal on the playing field." (Coakley, 1994).

Each participant described himself or herself as a Christian role model or witness in their sport performance. Participant 5 believed being a role model was both an honor and a privilege:

I would definitely say that I'm a role model to a lot of kids back home. Well first of all, I think it's an honor. And I think it's a privilege. And to me it means acting responsibly. Doing things, not doing things that I think a ten-year-old or a twelve-year-old shouldn't do. Definitely. I think I've been put into a position to be a role model for a lot of the younger Christian kids back in the area where I'm from and I'd say that I've become...a role model for a number of the guys at my old high school who are a year or two...behind me.

Participant 5 also stated:

I don't think that athletes who are poor role models should be portrayed as role models. I don't think that people should label someone like Dennis Rodman to be a role model. I think people like David Robinson, people like Michael Jordan, people who play the game with respect and integrity, people who are deserving of being a role model. Maybe even outside of their athletic abilities...I think that being a role model comes with being known by people. But I think it also comes with being a respectable person and having integrity.

Similarly, Participant 1 stated:

I think knowing that [I am a role model] makes me act in a different way...I am a role model to the other girls on the team...I try to keep that in mind when I'm doing things, when I'm pushing myself...leading by example...They [athletes] should realize that what they do is influencing

other people...I think they have a responsibility to the people that...are supporting them, are coming to their games.

Participant 2 believed Christianity encouraged him to be a silent role model and witness to the world:

I think it [Christianity] encourages it. You know, we're supposed to be witnesses to the world. To witness to the world you're gonna be a role model somewhat. Whether or not you're being a good role model depends on how well you walk the walk. I've always heard, you know, the statement, "Always preach the Gospel and if you must use words". So, you know, my actions and all that, and I think that is what is a role model.

The attitude of these participants might have been influenced by their participation in FCA. Fellowship of Christian Athletes was designed "to confront athletes and coaches and through them the youth of the nation with the challenge and adventure of following Christ and serving him through the fellowship of the church." With such a mission statement, it is evident how membership in FCA could influence participants' attitudes. But the two participants, who were not members of FCA, expressed a similar desire to be a witness and role model.

Team Cohesion

Participants expressed a feeling of separation (i.e., lack of cohesion) between themselves and their non-Christian teammates as a result of differing values in relation to off the field activities (alcohol, drugs, sex, etc.).

Crace and Hardy (1997) recently identified 14 value areas that might affect team cohesion. One of these values was spirituality. It could be concluded that team cohesion might be dependent on whether or not the team and its leaders recognize and accept the

spiritual differences and needs of each team member. It was evident that some of the participants in the present study felt as though their spiritual differences were unaccepted.

Participant 2 expressed his frustration and concern with a perceived separation from his teammates when he stated:

I think, one thing that hinders me...is being separate [from non-Christian athletes]...as a Christian...it's hard for me to foster team unity with my friends cause I don't go out drinking with them [non-Christians] on the weekends...So building the off the field friendships...That hinders me.

This same participant showed further frustration when attempting to explain how he dealt with this perceived separation:

...I would like to spend more time with them [teammates] but it's so hard because...I used to go out with them a lot more thinking I could be a witness. But they're so distracted through the alcohol or through trying to hook up with some girl that...it wasn't very profitable in my mind...I think it's a mixed reaction. ...some guys make fun of me for it [Christianity]. Just the fact that...I have a steady girlfriend...the fact that I don't go out and drink.

In a similar way, Participant 4 expressed that she felt separated from her teammates:

...It sets us (Christians) apart definitely and I think it's a good challenge...they know I'm different, like they always ask me why I don't drink, why I don't go out and stuff. And so they see that it's different but they don't always know why.

In relationship with his coach, Participant 5 stated how he felt his coach and his teammates believed he was "different":

I definitely felt like he saw me as being different than the rest of the guys on the team. I don't know if he knew it was my Christianity or if he just knew that I didn't hang around with the rest of the guys on the team [non-Christians] off the field a whole lot. I think the main thing that they noticed was I didn't go to the parties, I didn't drink with them. I think some of them might have known I was a Christian because another guy on the team who considers himself a Christian kind of had my back,

especially on the alcohol issue... I think that he might have said something to them about that that was why I didn't drink.

Stevenson (1991) explained that this perceived separation might be a result of a conflict in norms within the team. He further stated that the expectations of fellow teammates to accept and participate in certain accepted social (team) norms (i.e., alcohol, drugs, sex) could create great conflict between the Christian athlete and his or her teammates. Stevenson (1991) expressed awareness of this value conflict as evidenced by the following statement by a Christian athlete:

I mean everything at [this university] was geared to football. The order went football, and then girls, and then drinking, and then partying, and then study. I found that it really opened my eyes when I came over here. ...I was coming to a new city [to join the football team]. I didn't know anybody. I wanted to be accepted by the team and be one of the guys type of thing...it was real important to get their acceptance. But it was really hard because their idea of acceptance was to be a beer-swilling, girl-chasing type of guy and it was not really my style.

A few of the athletes within the Stevenson (1991) study actually decided to quit sport due to the intense difficulty of dealing with this value conflict. While quitting might not be the norm, it testifies to the struggles with value conflicts that many Christian athletes face.

Although the majority of participants expressed this separation and conflict of values, Participant 1 expressed how her faith and the faith of her teammates positively affected her and the closeness of her team. Participant 1 described:

I know that a lot of teammates and I will go to church together. - It strengthens our bond, not only as athletes but just as friends cause it's something that we believe in and that's how we base our lives. I think to a point because...you have the same beliefs...this person isn't going to be...this is awful that this happened [loss of game]... They look more at it as...the way that God shaped the outcome as opposed to just things happening by choice.

Injury

Relying on their Christian faith lessened their disappointment following injury by enabling them to believe and accept that their injury was a part of God's plan, and motivating them not to waste their God-given athletic gifts.

Regardless of experience or ability, no athlete is immune to injury (Stedman, 1993). This statement could also read, regardless of how much faith an athlete has, there is no injury immunity. For the participants in this study, faith became a tool for coping with their injury rather than a way to avoid it.

Relying on their Christian faith through the use of prayer was an inherent part of how several participants dealt with their injury. Participant 1 explained how important prayer was in her injury management:

I think prayer...help[ed] me to know what to do to get better. ...Gave me the strength to get through this [injury]...and be with me to help me to deal with this myself...I think religion almost plays a bigger part in injury than in performance because it's more, so much more mental and you need your religion more when you are dealing with adversity because...you got to be thankful for the good things. But I think that's really the time when you need to lean on it a little bit more is during your health problems. I think it [Christianity] gives me a better experience because...I don't see it as this awful injury that's never going to get better. I see it as that being what God wanted to happen and there was a reason for it ultimately.

Participant 4 expressed her injury as an opportunity to learn about the strength of her faith as she stated, "I [tried] to find what I can learn from some situations, maybe God wanted me to take a step back [from the injury] and just like review [my faith] and see [His plan]...and what I was feeling."

Participant 2 reiterated the feeling of viewing his injury as an opportunity to learn about the strength of his faith:

It [Christian faith] didn't stop the disappointment but I know it did lessen it...this happened for a reason and it's a new opportunity [to assess and strengthen my faith]...to trust God and it's a whole new opportunity to still work hard and still try to glorify God. And not give up.

Participant 3 had not associated his Christianity with injury prior to the interview.

However, he stated the following that indicates that he might have experienced the impact of his faith on his injury and healing. "I think that the injury wasn't something major, God has control...He's [God] got control of whether it's [injury] gonna heal or not...Healing comes from God...I'm gonna get better when the time is right".

Dan Reeves, the current coach of the Atlanta Falcons, recently described the influence his faith had in dealing with a career-ending injury years prior as an athlete. He stated: "Had it not been for that injury, I never would have gotten into coaching...I think when you're a Christian like I am, you realize that God really does have a plan for you."

(Weir, 1999)

Some of the participants indicated that their motivation not to waste their God-given gifts impacted them during injury rehabilitation. Participant 2 expressed the impact his faith had on his injury rehabilitation:

[I was] motivated to get back out there...just thankful that...I had an injury and now it's over. Now I can get back out and play again...[I had] a whole new opportunity to still work hard and to still try to glorify God [using the gifts he has given me].

In a similar way, Participant 1 indicated how her faith facilitated her rehabilitation and return to competition:

I need to rehab to get better and to be able to go on using the gift that God gave me and go on performing or doing whatever it is that He wants. I'm not afraid to do that drill because this was just what God wanted to happen in that particular instance...it helps me get back into it better because...psychologically, there's no barriers to my return because I just believe that it's something that God let happen, and if it's going to happen

again, it's going to happen again because that's what God chooses to happen.

In a recent interview (Weir, 1999), Mark Schlereth of the Denver Broncos discussed how he was able to come back from 22 surgeries in his career. He stated:

Certainly, my faith has played a huge role. If you look at Jesus Christ, and how he lived his life, it was about serving others [with your gifts]. I've really felt that throughout my career I was a servant [needing to use my God given gifts]. Putting my team first has been a major factor in my career [and rehabilitating from injury].

Dave Dravecky, former pitcher for the San Francisco Giants, went through years of rehabilitation on his arm, which he eventually lost to cancer. He wrote a book (Dravecky, 1990) about his experiences, and made this statement about one of his comebacks:

I was enough of a realist to know that the odds were against my coming back. I knew I might not make it back. My part was to do everything possible to try with all my might [not wasting the gifts and opportunity from God]...My faith in a personal God released me from the fear of failing...It's trust [in God]. Trust helped me to work hard [in rehabilitation] and not worry about the outcome.

Summary

The common attitudes expressed by the participants of the present study indicate that many Division III athletes rely heavily on their faith during sport participation. Examples of this are evident throughout the participant statements, which include the use of prayer to cope with frustration, enhance attitude, calm anxieties, and lessen injury disappointment. The participants also expressed how their faith influenced their motivation to perform their best and glorify God through their performance.

Other studies (Stevenson, 1991, 1997) have suggested that this reliance on faith exists at higher levels of sport as well. Prebish (1993) claimed that “young Christian athletes often seem to be interested in religion primarily as a means to get an edge [by having God on your side].” Although this could be the case for many Christian athletes, the participants of this study did not express this attitude. Finally, an important aspect of the present study was the expression of a perceived separation between the Christian and non-Christian team members. The value conflict described by Stevenson (1997) was evident in this study and should continue to be a focus of study in any future research of Christian athletes.

Chapter 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the attitudes of Division III Christian student-athletes in the areas of competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury. This chapter provides a discussion of the recommendations for future research. Along with these recommendations, conclusions and a summary of the common attitudes expressed by five Division III Christian student-athletes is provided.

Summary

Religion and sport appear to have little in common. But within American culture, religion and sport have a unique relationship. This unique relationship has begun to attract greater attention from the sport sociology and psychology fields. Recently, Stevenson (1991,1997) described the beliefs and experiences (attitudes) of Christian athletes and found a value conflict with Christian athletes' sport participation.

Similarly, the present study explored the relationship between Christianity and sport through the description of Division III Christian student-athletes' in the areas of competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury. A qualitative phenomenological methodology as outlined by Shelley (1999) was utilized to fully describe the attitudes of the participants following in-depth interviews. The common themes represented attitudes across participants in each of the aforementioned areas of exploration. Analyses of all participants' responses in each of these areas resulted in the formation of the following six common themes.

Competition

Experiencing frustration during competition was both a test of their faith and an opportunity to utilize their faith through prayer to regain focus and a positive attitude.

Motivation

Participants were motivated during sport participation to perform their best, and to utilize athletics as a means to achieve their ultimate goal of serving and glorifying God through their performances.

Anxiety

The use of prayer served to lessen athletic anxiety by facilitating focus and enhancing confidence in their performances.

Leadership

Participants considered themselves role models and preferred to lead by example both on and off the field, and not through the use of words.

Team Cohesion

Participants expressed a feeling of separation (i.e., lack of cohesion) between themselves and their non-Christian teammates as a result of differing values in relation to off the field activities (alcohol, drugs, sex, etc.).

Injury

Relying on their Christian faith lessened their disappointment following injury by enabling them to believe and accept that their injury was a part of God's plan, and motivating them not to waste their God-given gifts.

Conclusions

The common attitudes expressed by the participants of the present study indicated that many Division III Christian student-athletes might rely heavily on their faith during sport participation. Participants relied heavily on prayer to cope with frustration during competition. Prayer enabled them to regain focus and return to a positive state of mind. Prayer was also utilized to deal with competitive anxiety, and injury disappointment. The overall result of these prayers was a feeling of acceptance that things (e.g., success, failure, injury) happen according to God's plan. This acceptance and understanding helped to decrease anxious feelings before and during competition, as well as decrease the anger and disappointment following injury.

Participants also expressed how their faith influenced their motivation to perform at their best. Participants wished to perform at their best in order to serve and glorify God through their performances. This motivation to serve and glorify God through athletics was a new development for some of the participants. This change in motivation could be a result of recent participation in the Christian organization, Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). This motivational development needs further study.

One important aspect of the present study was the participants' perceived feeling of separation (i.e., lack of cohesion) between themselves and their non-Christian teammates. This feeling of separation parallels the value conflict Stevenson (1997) described with other Christian athletes. The values expressed by non-Christian team members off the field in relation to alcohol, drugs, and sex, do affect their Christian teammates. Participants expressed frustration and confusion in dealing with the conflict

between their own Christian values and their teammates' values. If such value issues are not addressed, team cohesion could be greatly diminished.

Finally, it is important to understand that Christian student-athletes are a unique population with certain attitudes toward sport participation. They rely heavily on their faith during competition to cope with frustration, enhance focus and attitude, calm anxieties, and lessen injury disappointment. Also, faith influences their attitudes in relation to motivation and social activities with teammates. Recognizing and describing the impact that faith has on this unique population is essential to better understanding the Christian student-athlete.

Recommendations for Future Research

A number of Division III Christian student-athlete attitudes were described in this study. Such descriptions contribute to the understanding of Christian student-athletes. However, much more research needs to be done in order to fully understand the Christian student-athlete.

The first recommendation involves replication of the present study. Interviews of Division III Christian student-athletes should be conducted as they were for this study. Such future research should also include more participants ($n > 5$) that represent a greater cross section of the athletic population, encompassing many sports, levels (i.e., high school, professional, etc.), genders, and church denominations. Sampling a larger cross section of the Christian athletic population might make it possible to apply results to a greater number of Christian athletes. Selecting Christian athletes from many levels of sport participation might also enhance the understanding of how sport attitudes develop or change over time and level of competition. The use of participants with varying years

as a Christian might also help to indicate the influence of Christianity on athletic attitudes over time. Assessing the attitudes of Christian student-athletes who are on scholarship (i.e., Division I), with non-scholarship Christian athletes (i.e., Division III) might also prove fruitful. For example, Beller and Stoll (1995) studied the differences of moral reasoning in athletes at small liberal arts colleges and athletes at large public institutions. A comparative study could be helpful in assessing if the size and nature of an institution affects Christian student-athletes' attitudes.

Furthermore, it could be useful to compare attitudes of Christian athletes that are and are not members of Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) or other Christian athletic organizations. Stevenson (1997) examined the attitudes of AIA members through multiple interviews. Examining differences between members of Christian athlete organizations and non-members could lead to a greater understanding of the effect and influence an organization like FCA or AIA has on its members.

Based on the present study's results, it would also seem important to conduct a more in-depth study of the injury experience of Christian athletes, conflicts in team cohesion, and the impact and use of prayer by Christian athletes. For example, a comprehensive study could be conducted on injured Christian student-athletes that follows the methodology outlined by Shelley (1998) in his recent study of athletic injury experiences. How one's Christian faith impacts injury and rehabilitation warrants further study. It would be interesting to compare injured Christian athletes experiences with the participants of the initial study (Shelley, 1998).

Feelings of separation between Christian and non-Christian teammates should also be examined further. Stevenson (1997) described this separation as a value conflict.

In addition to replicating the present study, interviews might be conducted with non-Christian teammates and members of the coaching staff to identify if this feeling of separation was a universal emotion. The focus of such a study would likely be on the participants' perceptions of his or her interactions with Christian teammates on and off the field. It would be interesting to explore these perceptions and attitudes and apply the findings to improve team communication and cohesion.

Finally, the impact and use of prayer should be further studied. Future studies should focus on the use of prayer in all areas of sport. The present study indicated that prayer provided a calming effect for the athletes. A future study could examine whether or not this has a physiological component (decreased heart rate, blood pressure, etc), or is strictly a psychological state.

The need for future research in the area of Christianity in sport is large, as Christian attitudes in sport have been a topic of very little research. The present study provides a good starting point for further research. Several recommendations have been provided in the hope that future research can add to the present results and aid in a greater understanding of and interaction with Christian student-athletes.

Appendix A

Recruiting Flyer

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!!

Volunteers are needed for a study assessing Christian student-athletes' attitudes in sport and competition. Eight volunteers are needed for this study. Due to the small number of subjects needed for this study not all volunteers will be selected to participate. Volunteers must be at least **18 years old**, and be **student-athletes from Ithaca College**. Volunteers must affirm their Christian faith by being able to answer yes to the following three questions: 1) Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? 2) Do you believe Jesus Christ died for your sins? and, 3) Have you devoted your life to Jesus Christ? Each volunteer will participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Responses will be tape-recorded and transcribed. The primary researcher, Dr. Greg A. Shelley, Dr. Jeffrey C. Ives, and a professional transcriber will be the only persons to have access to these tapes. All tapes will be destroyed after interviews are transcribed. All interviews will be **strictly confidential**. The responses will be used to describe Christian athletes' attitudes in the areas of competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury.

If you can answer yes to the above three questions and would like to participate in this study or have any questions please feel free to call Chris H. Hummel at (607) 266-8102 or see him in the Hill Center Athletic Training Room.

Appendix B

Recruitment Statement

The purpose of this study is to describe Division III Christian student-athlete attitudes in relation to competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, and team cohesion. Each student-athlete must affirm their Christian faith by answering yes to the following three questions: 1) Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? 2) Do you believe Jesus Christ died for your sins? and, 3) Have you devoted your life to Jesus Christ? Participants that answer yes to these three questions will be asked to undergo an interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Responses will be tape-recorded and transcribed. The primary researcher, Dr. Greg A. Shelley, Dr. Jeffrey C. Ives, and a professional transcriber will be the only persons to have access to these tapes. All tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study. Your participation will be kept strictly confidential. Volunteers must be at least 18 years of age and be student-athletes from Ithaca College.

If you would like to participate in this study or have any questions please feel free to call Chris H. Hummel at (607) 266-8102 or see him in the Hill Center Athletic Training Room.

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Sport Attitude Questionnaire

Age:

Sport:

College:

Year in School:

Gender (M/F):

of Years in Sport:

of Years as a Christian:

Church Denomination (if any):

Ethnic Background:

- 1) What does it mean to you to be and call yourself a Christian?
- 2) How did you become a Christian?
- 3) What does being a Christian athlete mean to you?
- 4) Do you feel being a Christian affects your sport performance?
- 5) Has sport ever made you question your Christian beliefs? If yes, explain or give an example.

Motivation

- 6) What motivates you during practices? Competitions?
- 7) If you had a choice between winning, and losing but playing your best, which would you choose?
- 8) List the five most important aspects of your life?
- 9) What kind (type) of goals do you set in sport? For example...

Competition

- 10) Why do you compete?
- 11) In terms of competition, what influence does your Christianity have?

12) What do you consider unethical or immoral behavior in sport? Provide examples of these types of behavior.

- Supplements?
- Performance Enhancing Drugs?
- Injure Opponent?
- Break a rule?

13) What aspects of your Christianity hinder or help you during competition?

Anxiety/Relaxation

14) How do you deal with anxiety before/during competition?

15) Do you have any rituals/habits/superstitions around or during practices and competitions?

- If yes, what are they, and why do you have them?
- How do these rituals/habits impact your anxiety?

16) Does prayer play a role in your sporting performance?

17) How do you deal with frustration during practices and competition?

Leadership/Role Modeling

18) Do you have any role models in sport?

- If yes who and why?

19) Do you see yourself as a role model? If yes, explain what it means to you to be a role model? How do your Christian beliefs affect your attitude toward being a role model?

20) Should athletes be expected to be role models?

21) When an athlete thanks God or Jesus Christ for a performance, what do you think?

22) Do you see yourself as a leader on the team?

23) How do your Christian beliefs affect your attitude toward being a leader?

Team Cohesion/Relationships

24) Do your teammates know you are a Christian? Do the coaches? If yes, what exactly have you told them about your Christianity?

25) Are there aspects of your Christianity you haven't shared or talked about? Why?

26) How do your teammates and coaches view Christianity? Have any of your teammates or coaches shared their Christian faith with you? If yes, provide an example without utilizing names.

27) Have you ever felt a teammate or coach has treated you differently because of your Christian beliefs? If yes, provide an example or a time when this occurred.

28) What would you do if your coach or teammate asked you to do something you felt was against your Christian beliefs?

29) How do you deal with teammates that do not share your Christian beliefs? How do they deal with you?

Injury

30) Have you ever been injured while practicing or competing? If yes, how did your Christian faith impact your injury, rehabilitation, and return to sport?

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Describing the Division III Christian Student-Athlete: A Qualitative Exploratory Study

1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe attitudes of Division III Christian student-athletes.

2. Benefits of the Study

The student-athletes involved will benefit from this study by exploring their own beliefs and behaviors in relationship to their Christianity. The exploration might lead to enhanced relationships with teammates and coaches. This study will also benefit the field of sport psychology, as the topic of Christianity in sport remains relatively unexplored. Sport psychology consultants might also benefit as the information gained might enhance their understanding of Christian student-athletes.

3. What You Will Be Asked To Do

You will be asked to participate in one interview. It will consist of 30 open-ended questions. The entire interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. The interview will be recorded and transcribed following the interview.

4. Risks

Participation in this study does not pose any foreseeable psychological or physical risks to you as a subject.

5. If You Would Like More Information about the Study

If you have any questions or concerns before, during, or after the study, please feel free to contact Chris H. Hummel at (607) 266-8102.

6. Withdrawal from the Study

Participants in this study are free to withdraw consent or discontinue participation at any time during the study. You have the right to refuse to answer any question that you choose not to answer. Participation is voluntary. Please notify the researcher immediately if you would like to stop the interview.

7. How the Data will Be Maintained in Confidence

All interview responses will be kept strictly confidential. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed without the use of names or identification. The primary researcher, Dr. Greg A. Shelley, Dr. Jeffrey C. Ives, and a professional transcriber will be the only persons to have access to these tapes. The tapes will be destroyed after interviews are transcribed.

_____ Please initial if you have read and understand the above information.

I have read the above and I understand its contents. I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

Print Name

Signature

Date

I give my permission to be audiotaped.

Print Name

Signature

Date

Appendix E

Biographical Information

Participant #1

Age: 21

Sport: Track and Field

Year in School: Senior

Gender: Female

of Years as Christian: 21

Church Denomination: Catholic

Participant #2

Age: 20

Sport: Football

Year in School: Junior

Gender: Male

of Years as Christian: 10

Church Denomination: None

Participant #3

Age: 21

Sport: Soccer

Year in School: Junior

Gender: Male

of Years as Christian: 21

Church Denomination: Presbyterian

Participant #4

Age: 19

Sport: Track and Field

Year in School: Sophomore

Gender: Female

of Years as Christian: 4

Church Denomination: Presbyterian

Participant #5

Age: 19

Sport: Soccer

Year in School: Freshman

Gender: Male

of Years as Christian: 19

Church Denomination: None

Appendix F

Pre-Interview Statement

Before we begin, have you signed and understood the informed consent form for this study? I will first ask you a few demographic questions that will be used within the discussion of results, but no names or identification will coincide with this demographic information.

This interview will consist of 30 open-ended questions. There are no right or wrong responses. Try to answer each question as honestly and completely as possible. There may be times when I ask you to expand or explain your responses. Feel free to ask for clarification if you do not understand a question. The overall purpose of this study is to describe Division III Christian student-athlete attitudes in relation to competition, motivation, anxiety, leadership, team cohesion, and injury.

Do you have any questions or comments before we begin?

Appendix G

Higher Order Themes- Participant #1

COMPETITION

- 1) She would rather win by beating someone at their best by playing at her best.
- 2) Her main goal of competition is trying to perform her best.
- 3) Sport (competition) has never made her question her faith.
- 4) Hindering others by cheating and the use of performance enhancing drugs should not be part of sport and essentially is immoral and cheats yourself.

MOTIVATION

- 1) Her main motivation is the desire to improve and fulfill her potential.

ANXIETY

- 1) An acceptance of her own ability as a result of her belief in God has increased her athletic confidence.
- 2) Her confidence comes from her intense belief that through prayer God will be with her and help her perform her best.
- 3) Prayer allows her to focus on the task rather than her emotions.

LEADERSHIP

- 1) She feels very comfortable in a leadership role and attributes this to her Christian faith helping her handle difficult situations more effectively.
- 2) She feels responsible for her actions and tries to lead by example.
- 3) She sees Jackie Joyner Kersee as a role model due to her intense work ethic and her ability to overcome the many obstacles in her life.

TEAM COHESION

- 1) She feels attending church with her fellow teammates has strengthened the bond between them as teammates, leading to greater comfort increasing discussions and interactions with them.
- 2) She has never experienced being treated differently because of her Christian faith nor has she treated any teammate differently based on their faith or lack thereof.

INJURY

- 1) She states that her faith played a much larger role in her injury than in day to day competition. Dealing with an injury, rehab, and return to competition is a more mental process making reliance on her faith much more essential to successful injury dealings.
- 2) She relied on her faith through the use of prayer to help her accept the loss associated with her injury and the injury itself, during rehab to never quit and waste God's gifts, and return to competition without the fear of reinjury. No barriers or fear to returning to play.

Appendix H

Higher Order Themes- Participant #2

COMPETITION

- 1) His ultimate desire during competition is to become more like Jesus Christ.
- 2) Competition allows him the opportunity to test his faith and ultimately strengthen it through greater reliance on God.
- 3) The use of performance enhancing drugs or intentionally harming someone is immoral and has no part in sport.
- 4) Frustration during competition leads him to act in ways he wishes not to because he loses his focus on Christ. Through prayer he sees his error and refocuses on Christ.

MOTIVATION

- 1) Playing his best is more important than winning because only goal and desire is to try his best, maximizing his God given gifts, and trying to be more like Christ.
- 2) His love of one on one competition is a main motivating factor on the playing field.
- 3) He is motivated no matter who his competition is because he feels his only audience is Jesus Christ.

ANXIETY

- 1) Prayer helps him focus before a competition and lessen anxiety by giving him a more calm, relaxed feeling.

LEADERSHIP

- 1) He prefers to lead silently and by example, witnessing for Christ in the process.
- 2) He feels that athletes, due to exposure, should be aware of their influence and act as a good role model.

TEAM COHESION

- 1) He has created a self-imposed isolation from the rest of his team based on his disagreement over his teams use of alcohol, but he does not feel it has affected the on the field interaction with his teammates although he admits it has made building off the field relationships very difficult.

INJURY

- 1) His faith lessened the disappointment following his injuries and helped him to realize that it was all part of God's plan.

Appendix I

Higher Order Themes- Participant #3

COMPETITION

- 1) His desired outcome of any competition is to win, but it has become more important to him recently that he glorifies God and plays his best.
- 2) The outcome will take care of itself, and he feels he can only control how hard he works.

MOTIVATION

- 1) His motivation has been lacking lately due to a decrease in fun with his teammates, but his desire to play his best for Jesus Christ has reinstilled his motivation to play.
- 2) He feels team success is more important than his individual performance.

ANXIETY

- 1) He uses a pre-game prayer to increase his focus on God, placing himself in God's hands, which acts as a calming force lessening his anxiety.
- 2) His Christian faith puts sport in a more realistic setting decreasing the amount of pressure he places on his performance.

LEADERSHIP

- 1) He saw himself as a role model prior to his college experience but doesn't feel like one on his team.
- 2) He feels his leadership role has decreased from previous years due his increased conflict with his teams norms and values.

- 3) Although not a vocal role leader, he tries to follow Jesus Christ's perfect example, by leading his team through his actions, not words.

TEAM COHESION

- 1) The time and opportunity to discuss his Christian faith with his teammates has decreased since last season due to the change in team leadership.
- 2) Everyone should be treated the same without judging others.

INJURY

- 1) He has never associated his Christian faith with injury.

Appendix J

Higher Order Themes- Participant #4

COMPETITION

- 1) Her Christian faith influences her during competition by helping her refocus when she becomes frustrated with her performance.
- 2) Her frustration greatly affects her self-confidence but through the use of prayer, teammate support, and recitation of bible verses she has been able to refocus and stop the negative thinking snowball effect.

MOTIVATION

- 1) Winning and the pride that comes with winning has been her main motivation, but recently trying to please God, using his gifts, working hard to do her best, and having fun have become more important motivators.

ANXIETY

- 1) Her Christian faith via prayer has given her the inner peace she feels she needs during competition to lessen anxiety, avoid distractions, relax and focus on performing for God.

LEADERSHIP

- 1) She feels her leadership status on the team is based on her athletic ability, rather than her leadership ability or desire to lead.
- 2) Her boyfriend is her role model in the way he conducts himself as a Christian with his football team. She wishes that she could follow his example with her team, but finds it difficult.

TEAM COHESION

- 1) Being a Christian means being set apart and having the challenge to set a Christian example on and off the field for your teammates.
- 2) Being a member of a team in which very few members share her beliefs leads to situations that tempt her to do things with her team that she thinks is wrong (ie drinking, partying).
- 3) The challenge of being a small Christian minority on her team has actually strengthened her faith.
- 4) She is frustrated trying to portray a happy Christian all the time and wishes she could show her teammates that being a Christian is fulfilling even though it may not bring continuous success and happiness in sport.
- 5) She would love it if her teammates were to share her Christian beliefs but would never force her beliefs on them nor judge them for their own beliefs.

INJURY

- 1) Injury allowed her to step back from her sport and reprioritize her life. Her faith helped her to stay positive and not dwell on her disappointment and frustration she experienced during rehab.
- 2) She remains cautious about reinjury, especially in certain situations during competition.

Appendix K

Higher Order Themes- Participant #5

COMPETITION

- 1) His competitive nature sometimes makes him act contrary to his beliefs, especially when he doesn't play up to his potential.
- 2) His Christian faith has made him a more respectful and less angry player without taking away his aggressiveness and emotion.
- 3) Using drugs or harming opponents have no place in sport.

MOTIVATION

- 1) Prayer plays a larger role in attitude than in the performance itself. Optimal attitude is his prayer request rather than optimal performance.
- 2) His motivation on the field now is to prove that he deserves more playing time and can help the team.
- 3) He competes for the love of the game, the physical exertion, and the attention he receives.
- 4) His motivation stems from his Christian faith in that he wants to work hard to help others while maximizing his God given gifts

ANXIETY

- 1) He claims not to feel anxious.

LEADERSHIP

- 1) He enjoyed leading his high school team in a prayer before each game, but no longer sees himself as a leader as this does not have a place on the college team he is now a part of.

- 2) Although he is not a leader, he still considers himself a role model for those around him and those that see him play. He considers it an honor and a privilege and is conscious of his actions.

TEAM COHESION

- 1) He feels there was never an appropriate time to share his faith with his teammates but feels he does witness silently through his actions (ie. Not drinking).
- 2) He feels he has been treated differently than others on his team but does not know if it was due to his Christian faith.

INJURY

- 1) His faith allowed him to play through the pain of injury and actually play harder.

Appendix L

Data Analysis Flow Chart

<u>Area of Exploration</u>	<u>Higher Order Themes</u>	<u>Common Themes</u>
Competition	Participant #2 (2, 4) → Participant #3 (1) Participant #4 (1,2) → Participant #5 (2)	Experiencing frustration during competition was both a test of faith and an opportunity to utilize their faith through prayer to regain focus and a positive attitude.
Motivation	Participant #1 (1) → Participant #2 (1, 3) Participant #3 (1) → Participant #4 (1) Participant #5 (1, 4)	Participants were motivated during sport participation to perform their best, and to utilize athletics as a means to achieve their ultimate goal of serving and glorifying God through their performances.
Anxiety	Participant #1 (1, 3) → Participant #2 (1) Participant #3 (1, 2) → Participant #4 (1)	The use of prayer served to lessen athletic anxiety by facilitating focus and enhancing confidence in their performances.
Leadership	Participant #1 (1, 2) → Participant #2 (1) Participant #3 (3) Participant #4 (2) → Participant #5 (2)	Participants considered themselves role models and preferred to lead by example both on and off the field, and not through the use of words.
Team Cohesion	Participant #2 (1) → Participant #3 (1) Participant #4 (1, 2, 4) → Participant #5 (1)	Participants expressed a feeling of separation (i.e., lack of cohesion) between themselves and their non-Christian teammates as a result of differing values in relation to off the field activities (alcohol, drugs, sex, etc.).
Injury	Participant #1 (1, 2) → Participant #2 (1) Participant #4 (1) → Participant #5 (1)	Relying on their Christian faith lessened their disappointment following injury by enabling them to believe and accept that their injury was a part of God's plan, and motivating them not to waste their God-given gifts.

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