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5 Relationship maintenance strategies in the coach-athlete relationship:

6 The development of the COMPASS model

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9 Daniel J. A. Rhind, Ph.D.

10 Centre for Youth Sport and Athlete Welfare, Brunel University

11 Sophia Jowett, Ph.D.

12 School of Sport and Human Sciences, Loughborough University

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19 Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Daniel J.A. Rhind, Centre for

20 Youth Sport and Athlete Welfare, Brunel University, Kingston Lane, Uxbridge, Middlesex,

21 UB8 3PH

22 Tel.:+44 (0) 1895 266860

23 Email: Daniel.Rhind@Brunel.ac.uk

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Abstract

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The investigation of relationship maintenance strategies has received considerable attention in various types of dyads including romantic, marital, and familial relationships. No research, however, has yet investigated the use of maintenance strategies in the coach-athlete partnership. Thus, this study aimed to investigate coaches' and athletes' perceptions of the strategies they use to maintain relationship quality. Twelve one-to-one interviews with coaches (4 males and 2 females) and athletes (2 males and 4 females) were conducted. The interviews were structured based on the factors within Jowett's (2007) 3+1C conceptualization of the coach-athlete relationship (i.e., closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation). Deductive and inductive content analysis revealed seven main categories: Conflict management, openness, motivation, Positivity, advice, support, and social networks. The COMPASS model was developed based on this analysis and was offered as a theoretical framework for understanding how coaches and athletes might maintain the quality of their relationships.

Keywords: coach-athlete relationship, relationship maintenance strategies

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Relationship Maintenance Strategies in the Coach-Athlete Relationship:

The Development of the COMPASS Model

Significant strides have been made in our understanding of the nature and role of interpersonal relationships in sport over the past decade. Research in this domain has considered athlete-athlete, parent-athlete, and coach-athlete partnerships (e.g., Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). Recently, Jowett and Wylleman (2006), in considering research on the coach-athlete relationship, suggested that "...we have started crossing the chasm and started approaching an exciting research territory that needs exploration with careful navigation" (p. 123). Research progress in this field employs numerous theoretical and methodological approaches (see e.g., Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007 for overviews). Research indicated that relationship quality was positively associated with outcomes such as self-concept (Jowett, in press), satisfaction (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004), passion for one's sport (Lafreniere, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lorimer, 2008), and team cohesion (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004). Nonetheless, no research has focused on *how* coaches and athletes maintain the quality of their athletic relationships.

Commenting on all dyads, Canary and Stafford (1994) stated that "most people desire long-term, stable, and satisfying relationships" (p. 4). Moreover, it has been argued that unless people use effective maintenance strategies, their relationships will weaken and ultimately end (Canary & Stafford, 1994). A great deal of time must be invested in personal relationships to maintain them (Duck, 1986). In the context of sport, coaches and athletes establish and maintain their athletic relationships motivated by such wide ranging goals as improving performance, achieving success, maintaining fitness, or simply enjoying participation. Clearly such partnerships occur in a range of situations (e.g., different

1 competitive levels and types of sport) and are subject to organizational constraints (e.g.,
2 organizational culture, goals, funding pressures). Thus, maintenance of the coach-athlete
3 relationship is not simple and often necessitates conscious effort from both parties.

4 The coach-athlete relationship has been defined as "...the situation in which coaches'
5 and athletes' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are mutually and causally inter-connected"
6 (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004, p. 245). This definition highlights the bi-directional nature of
7 such relationships in that the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of the coach are both affected
8 by, and also affect, those of the athlete and vice versa. This definition also supports the belief
9 that relationship quality is multi-dimensional and hence one needs to consider the affective
10 (emotions), cognitive (thoughts), and behavioral interpersonal aspects of relationships (e.g.,
11 Kelley et al., 1983).

12 Jowett (2005, 2007) developed the 3+1Cs conceptualization of the coach-athlete
13 relationship based on a series of qualitative studies (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett &
14 Meek, 2000). This conceptualization refers to four constructs: closeness, commitment,
15 complementarity, and co-orientation. This model argues that the quality of the relationship
16 between a coach and an athlete is formed through these four key constructs. Closeness was
17 defined as the affective meanings that the coach and athlete assign to their relationship (e.g.,
18 respect, trust, liking). The cognitive aspect, operationalized as commitment, relates to the
19 members' intentions to maintain the relationship now and in the future. The behavioral
20 aspect, operationalized as complementarity, refers to the relationship members' co-operative
21 and corresponding behaviors of affiliation (e.g., being responsive and friendly). Finally, the
22 "+1" element of this conceptualization was co-orientation, falling under the cognitive
23 construct because it is perceptual in nature (cf. Laing, Phillipson, & Lee, 1966). It was
24 labeled the "+1" element because it runs through each of the other affective, cognitive, and

1 behavioral elements. Co-orientation concerns the degree to which an athlete and coach are
2 able to accurately infer how his/her coach/athlete is feeling, thinking, and behaving.

3 This body of research shed light on different factors that both affect, and are affected
4 by, the coach-athlete relationship. It also developed our understanding of the nature and
5 content of this important dyadic relationship within the realm of sport development.
6 Nevertheless, there remains a great scope for research in this field, as displayed by Jowett and
7 Poczwardowski's (2007) research model. This model calls for research regarding the role
8 played by interpersonal communication, because communication is viewed as a process from
9 which coaches and athletes can either become close (united) or distant (divided). Thus, the
10 argument is that relationship maintenance strategies are embedded within the interpersonal
11 communication "layer" of Jowett and Poczwardowski's (2007) research model.

12 Dindia and Canary (1993) described relationship maintenance as the strategies used to
13 keep a relationship in a specified state or condition. Some examples of the use of relationship
14 maintenance may include discussing an area of disagreement and coming to a joint decision
15 of how it can be resolved (i.e., conflict management) or going out together for the evening
16 (i.e., socializing). Wiegel and Ballard-Reisch (1999) suggested that maintenance strategies
17 are the primary method via which people within close relationships maintain relationship
18 quality. The initial studies of relationship maintenance centered on dating or married couples
19 (e.g., Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). More recently the principles and
20 concepts of relationship maintenance have been applied to parent-child relationships (e.g.,
21 Punyanunt-Carter, 2006) and friendships (Bippus, & Rollin, 2003). As yet, however, no
22 research has addressed this topic with reference to the coach-athlete relationship.

23 In a seminal paper within the relationship maintenance literature, Stafford and Canary
24 (1991) identified, based on factor analysis, five primary relationship maintenance strategies
25 that were used by dating or engaged couples: positivity, openness, assurance, social networks,

1 and shared tasks. Positivity concerned acting cheerful and upbeat when around one's partner.
2 Openness related to the direct discussion of the relationship and disclosing what one wants
3 from it. Assurance referred to the sending of messages that imply one's commitment to the
4 relationship. Social networks involved spending time together and interacting with mutual
5 friends. Finally, shared tasks related to the partners performing assigned chores around the
6 house. Canary and Zelley (2000) added two additional relationship maintenance categories:
7 Conflict management (i.e., co-operating when discussing disagreements) and advice (i.e.,
8 giving one's opinions regarding the partner's problems).

9 Canary and Stafford (1992) suggested that, in general, the use of maintenance
10 strategies also "affects the nature of the relationship" (p. 9). Over the years, research studies
11 found positive associations with relationship properties such as liking (Canary & Stafford,
12 1992), trust (Stafford, Dainton, & Hass, 2000), affinity seeking (Bell, Daly, & Gonzalez,
13 1987), control mutuality (Canary & Stafford, 1992), love (Stafford, et al. 2000), and
14 commitment (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Stafford et al., 2000). Research also has indicated
15 that maintenance strategies need to be continually performed because their absence could
16 lead to a rapid decline in the quality of a relationship (Canary, Stafford, & Semic, 2002).

17 Overall, it was believed that these types of relationship maintenance acts were used to
18 ensure the continuation of valued relationships through three distinct routes (a) the prevention
19 of their decline, (b) their further enhancement, and/or (c) their repair and re-establishment
20 (Canary & Stafford, 1994). Canary and Stafford (1994) argued that the use of these strategies
21 could lead to a number of positive relationship-related outcomes including intimacy,
22 commitment, and satisfaction.

23 Although no sport psychology research has directly considered relationship
24 maintenance within the coach-athlete relationship, some research appeared to address issues
25 related to maintenance strategies. For example, Gould, Lauer, Collins, and Chung (2007)

1 interviewed ten American football coaches who all received awards for their abilities to
2 facilitate their athletes' personal development. In the interviews, these coaches emphasized
3 the importance of communication (i.e., having open lines of communication with their
4 athletes, possessing clear expectations, and holding their players accountable). These coaches
5 also avoided using punishment or criticisms that were directed towards their players'
6 characters or personalities, and showed that they cared, trusted, and respected their players as
7 people. These enacted communicative acts paralleled the relationship maintenance strategies
8 labeled as positivity, openness, and assurance (cf. Stafford & Canary, 1991). Moreover,
9 research focusing on coaches' behaviors consistently has illustrated that supportive and
10 encouraging coaches were likely to have a positive influence on their athletes' development
11 (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006). This supporting coaching was particularly effective when
12 their athletes were less confident about themselves (Smith & Smoll, 1990). Thus, the use of
13 maintenance strategies in sport has been indirectly associated with positive outcomes.

14 Although this limited body of research indirectly addressed some of the processes
15 leading to satisfying coach-athlete interactions, it did not directly examine relationship
16 maintenance strategies. Thus, the aim of this study was to assess coaches' and athletes'
17 perceptions of the strategies that might be used to maintain the quality of the coach-athlete
18 relationship. Even though it was acknowledged that all relationships are unique, the present
19 research aimed to identify strategies that were salient across different relationships.

20 The need for the present study could be justified on three fronts. First, because the
21 quality of a coach-athlete relationship has been associated with a range of positive outcomes,
22 there is a demand to understand how relationship quality could be optimized. Second,
23 relationship maintenance is a significant area of research regarding other relationships but it,
24 as yet, has not been studied within sport. Third, coach-athlete relationships are significantly
25 different to the types of romantic, marital, and familial relationships studied thus far. Clearly,

1 these alternative dyads are linked biologically or legally. In contrast, a coach and an athlete
2 are generally linked contractually, professionally, or voluntarily with a view to achieving set
3 goals (e.g., fitness, financial rewards, enjoyment). Professional relationships, such as that
4 between a coach and an athlete, are fundamentally different to romantic, marital, and familial
5 relationships and hence, they may be maintained using alternative maintenance strategies. As
6 a result, research was merited to specifically investigate how coach-athlete relationships were
7 maintained.

8 Method

9 *Participants*

10 A purposive sample ($N = 12$) consisted of 6 coaches and 6 athletes who worked
11 independently and hence, were not existing coach-athlete dyads. Efforts were made to recruit
12 participants who had experienced a range of different coach-athlete relationships. To
13 maintain the anonymity of the participants, we identified them as Athlete 1 - 6 (A1, A2...) and
14 Coach 1 - 6 (C1, C2...) in the results section.

15 A1 (25 year old female) was an international ice skater who had been training since
16 she was 12 years old. She worked with a single coach throughout her career, but this
17 relationship ended after a period of significant conflict. A1 subsequently continued for a short
18 time without a coach before retiring from the sport. A2 (25 year old male) was an
19 international discus thrower and had been involved with the sport for 13 years. He worked
20 with his first coach between age 13 and 18 years old before changing coaches when he
21 moved away to university. A2 competed at many international youth sport events and
22 currently trained with his coach for 10 hours each week.

23 A3 (24 year old female) competed as a rower at the national level and had been
24 rowing for 8 years. She had worked with her current coach for 1 year, training for around 10
25 hours each week. She was also successful at the elite university level. A4 (23 year old

1 female) had been playing women's football (soccer) for 7 years. She played for an elite
2 university football team. A4 had been working with her coach for 2 years, training for
3 approximately 4 hours each week.

4 A5 (18 year old female) represented her university at field hockey and had been
5 playing the sport for around 5 years. She trained for 6 hours per week, and had two main
6 coach-athlete relationships with a coach at home and one at university. A6 (22 year old male)
7 was a successful karate player and won medals at the national level. He had worked with his
8 coach for 20 hours each week over the previous year.

9 C1 (25 year old male) coached at the county level (i.e., regional representative teams).
10 He generally worked with children under 16 years old and had been coaching for 3 years. He
11 trained 3 hours per week. C2 (32 year old male) was a football (soccer) coach with a Union
12 of European Football Associations (UEFA) B license, which is a level of coaching
13 certification. He coached at the national level, both in England and in Spain. He had been
14 coaching for 10 years.

15 C3 (24 year old male) coached the university archery team. He had been involved in
16 archery for 4 years. He had only been coaching for the past year and mainly worked with
17 beginners for around 2 hours each week. C4 (27 year old female) coached the university 1st
18 football (soccer) team. The team was successful at the university level. She used to play for
19 the team before injury ended her career. She then obtained her UEFA B license, which is a
20 level of coaching certification, before training the team for 10 hours per week over the past 3
21 years.

22 C5 (23 year old female) used to compete in trampolining at the national level. She had
23 been coaching at the elite university level for 2 years, training for around 3 hours per week.

24 C6 (57 year old male) coached squash at the county level (i.e., regional representative teams)

1 for around 30 years. He coached a range of players from the beginner level through to county
2 players.

3 *Instrumentation*

4 One-to-one interviews were conducted to gain in-depth data about the strategies used
5 to maintain the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. An interview schedule was
6 developed based on relevant theory and literature (e.g., Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Cockerill,
7 2003). The original interview schedule was piloted with an athlete and a coach. These
8 interviews were conducted to gain feedback on the content of the interview and to check its
9 approximate length and duration. As a result of the pilot study, minor modifications were
10 made to enhance clarity, coherence, and discourse. The final interview schedule contained a
11 total of 10 open-ended questions and was divided into 3 sections. (The interview schedule is
12 available from the authors.)

13 The first section outlined the purpose of the study before covering demographic
14 information (e.g., the participant's main sport, length of participation, and competitive level).
15 The second section was the main part of the interview and contained standardized questions
16 that addressed various aspects of interpersonal interactions. Specifically, the focus of this
17 section was on collecting responses related to what the participants considered to be
18 important in a good coach-athlete relationship, as well as how they thought such a
19 relationship was developed and maintained. Participants were also presented with simple
20 definitions of the 3+1Cs and were invited to discuss the time/s when they experienced each of
21 these relationship properties and to consider efforts made to maintain the quality of the
22 relationship (e.g., Think of a time when you were committed to your coach/athlete. What do
23 you feel helped to develop and maintain this?). Prompts and follow-up questions were used
24 as necessary to facilitate and encourage the flow of information. The third and final section of
25 the interview asked participants to make any additional comments, clarify, or expand on any

1 comments made during the interview (i.e., Are there any other factors which you now think
2 help the development and maintenance of a good coach-athlete relationship, which we have
3 not already discussed?). All interviews were conducted by the first author. All interviews
4 were audio-taped with the permission of the participants and were transcribed verbatim
5 immediately after each interview.

6 *Procedure*

7 Sport clubs within or close to the investigators' university were e-mailed to inform
8 coaches and athletes about the purpose of the study and to invite them to participate. Shortly
9 after the e-mail was sent, a phone call was made to the head coach at the club to identify any
10 potential participants. If there was interest in participating in the study, a convenient time and
11 location was arranged for the interview. In an attempt to maximize the diversity and breadth
12 of the obtained qualitative data, a conscious effort was made to recruit independent coaches
13 and athletes (i.e., no dyads) from a range of sports and competitive levels. Each interview
14 was conducted in a private room with only the interviewer and interviewee present. All
15 participants were informed that the interview was anonymous and confidential and that they
16 were free to end the interview at any time. Prior to any data being collected, approval for the
17 study was obtained from the university's ethical advisory committee. Interviewees were e-
18 mailed a copy of their transcribed interviews so they could check and verify the accuracy of
19 the transcription.

20 *Data Analysis*

21 The use of content analysis after an interview is the most common qualitative
22 approach within sport psychology research (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993). Content
23 analysis is a process by which large amounts of qualitative data are organized through coding
24 the information into categories that concern similar themes. It was deemed to be the most
25 appropriate approach in the present research because it would allow the identification of

1 salient themes across participants' responses. It also helped to highlight potential strategies
2 that might be relevant to all coach-athlete relationships. Both deductive and inductive forms
3 of content analysis were employed in this study.

4 The analytical process commenced by reading all 143 single-spaced pages of the
5 transcribed data to increase our understanding of the information that was obtained from the
6 participants. Subsequently, a review panel (comprised of the authors and an independent
7 researcher) analyzed the data on the basis that a raw data unit represented a "quote" (i.e., a
8 complete sentence/s that referred to a distinct strategy and made sense as a stand alone unit).
9 A total of 401 meaning units were highlighted. In the first stage of the analysis, quotes were
10 categorized deductively into one of the seven maintenance strategies highlighted within the
11 literature review: conflict management, openness, advice, positivity, assurance, shared tasks,
12 and social networks. Any relevant quotes that did not represent these categories, were placed
13 in an 'other' category.

14 In the second stage, the quotes within the 'other' category were then inductively
15 analyzed to underline new potential maintenance strategies specific to the coach-athlete
16 relationship. Finally, the quotes within the existing and new categories were reviewed to
17 identify lower and higher order themes.

18 The review panel then independently reviewed the initial categorizations to confirm
19 that all of the quotes were correctly classified. The panel went through each quote to confirm
20 the agreement on the classification. In particular, quotes were reviewed in terms of whether
21 they better reflected the newly created motivation category. Thus, some of the quotes were
22 moved from the positivity category to the motivation category at this stage. All areas of
23 discrepancy were resolved by dialogue and re-assignment.

24 As a final check, once the review panel was satisfied with all the classifications, the
25 categories and sub-categories were given to an independent psychology researcher who was

1 asked to assign each sub-category (lower order theme, specific) to the most appropriate
2 category (higher order theme, general). Then, the same researcher categorized the quotes into
3 the most appropriate lower order theme. The responses supplied were 90% in agreement with
4 the authors' categorizations, demonstrating some evidence of inter-rater reliability.

5 Results and Discussion

6 Seven higher order themes emerged from the data: Conflict management, openness,
7 motivation, positivity, advice, support, and social networks. These seven dimensions
8 contained 21 sub-categories. The results are presented using a frequency table and illustrative
9 quotes as recommended by Culver, Gilbert, and Trudel (2003). Overall, each of the
10 dimensions was referenced by the majority of the participants. The largest discrepancies
11 between the coaches and the athletes were found regarding conflict management (which was
12 mentioned by all coaches, but only by four of the athletes). Interestingly, both athletes who
13 did not mention conflict management were from team sports (i.e., field hockey and rowing).
14 Similarly, support was discussed by all athletes, but only by four of the coaches). Both
15 coaches who did not mention support were involved at the county level indicating that
16 competitive level might influence the use of maintenance strategies.

17 Table 1 summarizes the categorization of raw data points into the various dimensions
18 and themes. Results were broken down to show the distribution of the coaches' responses, the
19 athletes' responses, and the sample as a whole. This information is presented to give an
20 overview of the data and to outline the distribution of the quotes, rather than to provide a
21 basis for any comparative or statistical analysis.

22 *Conflict Management*

23 The first dimension that emerged from the data concerned conflict management,
24 which was cited by 10 of the participants (6 coaches and 4 athletes) with 9.5% of the raw data
25 points being categorized in this dimension (6.5% coaches and 3% athletes). Conflict

1 management reflected expectations, consequences of unmet expectations, and cooperation in
2 the discussion of conflict. It contained the themes of proactive strategies (e.g., taking steps to
3 clarify expectations and avoid conflict) and reactive strategies (e.g., co-operating during the
4 discussion of disagreements). The following quote is an example of proactive conflict
5 management. It shows how this particular athlete continually discussed expectations with his
6 coach, helping him to avoid the development of any conflicts that could arise from
7 expectations not being met:

8 You can discuss at the beginning of the relationship what you both expect
9 from one another and have an understanding, a consensus, between the two
10 from the start of the relationship, but I think that it is important during the
11 relationship as years go on to reassess that (A2: Male international track and
12 field athlete).

13 This dimension was similar to that highlighted within close relationships (Canary &
14 Zelley, 2000; Stafford et al., 2000). Its conceptualization, however, has been expanded to
15 include not only co-operative acts during disagreements, but also pre-emptive strategies such
16 as clarifying the expectations and the consequences when these are not met (e.g., fines for
17 being consistently late for training). The inclusion of these pre-emptive strategies might
18 highlight the distinctive elements of the coach-athlete relationship relative to other dyads.
19 Previous research emphasized the importance of discussing expectations (e.g., Gould et al.,
20 2007). It might be that sporting dyads are used to setting goals and planning for future events
21 and hence, these pre-emptive strategies play a particularly significant role within the sporting
22 arena.

23 *Openness*

24 Openness was mentioned by all 12 participants and 12% of the raw data units were
25 categorized within this dimension (5% coaches and 7% athletes). Openness related to the

1 disclosure of one's feelings. It contained three themes: Non-sport communication (e.g.,
2 discussing issues that are not directly related to training or competition), talk about anything
3 (e.g., making it clear that the coach/athlete can talk about any topic with you), and other
4 awareness (e.g., making an attempt to understand how the coach/athlete is feeling). The
5 following quote was an example of the use of the 'talk about anything' form of openness:

6 You are confident enough to have two-way communication and feel assured that if
7 you bring something up outside of sport, then it is not just going to be battered away
8 and it is not going to affect anything. It is just positive from both sides (A4: Female
9 university football player).

10 A coach focused on the importance of the non-sport communication form of openness
11 within the coach-athlete relationship and showed the way it could help to maintain the quality
12 of the relationship by saying, "Talking a lot, but not just talking about your sport and your
13 coaching but sometimes taking it further than just being coach and athlete, that can build up a
14 better relationship" (C5: Female university trampolining coach).

15 This dimension directly related to the openness category within Stafford and Canary's
16 (1991) model of relationship maintenance. Openness strategies within the coach-athlete
17 relationship involved the discussion of topics outside of the sporting environment (e.g., work
18 and family life). Communication related to training or competition was categorized within the
19 advice dimension discussed below.

20 *Motivation*

21 The motivation dimension was discussed by all 12 participants. With 31.75% of the
22 raw data points (15.75% coaches and 16% athletes), it was the most frequently mentioned
23 form of relationship maintenance within the coach-athlete relationship. Motivational
24 strategies were defined as those that either indicate individuals' motivation to work with
25 coaches/athletes or coaches/athletes motivating their athletes/coaches to continue working

1 with them. This category contained four themes: Effort (e.g., putting in effort during training
2 or competition), motivate other (e.g., attempts to motivate the coach/athlete), fun (e.g.,
3 attempts to make the interactions enjoyable), and showing ability (e.g., demonstrating that
4 one has the capability of making the relationship successful). In other words, coaches need to
5 show that they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to help the athletes achieve their goals
6 and athletes need to show that they have the abilities to meet the expectations of the coaches.
7 Thus, the fact that both sporting partners were motivated to work with each other should help
8 to maintain the quality of the relationship. The importance of the effort form of motivational
9 strategies is illustrated by an athlete who said, “I definitely would be more committed to a
10 coach who shows you more like, passion and enthusiasm for it” (A5: Female university
11 hockey player).

12 The next quote underlines the importance of motivating the other through goal-
13 setting.

14 We sit down once a month or once a term and kind of set a main goal and then
15 obviously like smaller goals to get there. But I think, just because, you know,
16 you set a main goal so far in advance that you have got to have miniature
17 hurdles to overcome or to achieve to build up that trust that you will get to
18 your main goal (A3: Female national rowing athlete).

19 The following quote was an example of showing ability in terms of
20 demonstrating to the sporting partner that one is capable of helping him/her to meet
21 his/her sporting targets:

22 Another good thing to do, with older kids especially, is to demonstrate, not
23 necessarily your capabilities but you show that you know what you are talking about,
24 that you can help them; when you are coaching them the things that you are saying are
25 actually useful (C1: Male county tennis coach).

1 There might well be some overlap between the use of these strategies to enhance
2 performance and to maintain a relationship. The key distinction here was that the intention of
3 the use of these strategies was to encourage one's sporting partner to continue the
4 relationship. Performance enhancement might be a consequence of this intention, but a
5 relationship might be maintained without improving performance, such as when enjoyment is
6 the priority. Motivational strategies have not been addressed within relationship maintenance
7 research. Giving one's partner reason to continue the relationship is likely to be applicable, to
8 varying degrees, to all dyads and not just the coach-athlete relationship.

9 *Positivity*

10 The fourth category of relationship maintenance strategies – positivity - was
11 mentioned by 11 out of the 12 participants (5 coaches and 6 athletes) and 10% of the raw data
12 points were categorized under this dimension (5.5% coaches and 4.5% athletes). Positivity
13 was comprised of three themes: Adaptability (e.g., changing one's behavior to suit the
14 preferences of the coach/athlete), fairness (e.g., showing good sportsmanship), and external
15 pressures (e.g., positively dealing with events outside of the coach/athlete's sporting life).

16 One coach demonstrated the adaptability form of positivity by saying, "You need an
17 approach that is customized to who you are talking to, otherwise it will not work" (C2: Male
18 national football coach). This coach highlighted the importance of adapting one's behaviors
19 to suit the preferences of the athlete to ensure that the partnership is effective and successful.
20 Another athlete, when talking about the maintenance of his commitment to the coach,
21 emphasized the importance of his coach being aware of the external pressures that he was
22 under:

23 If you have just finished work or something and you say I have had a bad day
24 at work, you know, I feel tired and the coach might say right well let's not
25 train for an hour and a half tonight, let's train for an hour and put a harder

1 session in later in the week or something like that. So, I think that is important
2 (A2: Male international track and field athlete).

3 This dimension was comparable to the positivity category within Stafford and
4 Canary's (1991) model of relationship maintenance. Rather than focusing on acting
5 cheerful and being upbeat when around the partner, however, positivity in this study
6 referred to the importance of adaptability, fairness, and acting positively regarding
7 issues that were outside of the sporting arena (that often and inevitably influence sport-
8 related activities). The key was not just being aware of an issue, but taking positive
9 measures to deal with it and ensuring that it did not have a negative effect on the
10 sporting relationship.

11 *Advice*

12 All 12 participants discussed strategies that fell within this category. This
13 dimension contained 16.5% of the raw data points (8% coaches and 8.5% athletes); it
14 was the second most frequently mentioned category after motivational strategies.
15 Advice was defined as giving one's opinions on problems encountered by the coach or
16 the athlete, as well as giving and receiving feedback in a positive and open way. Advice
17 contained three themes: Sport communication (e.g., discussing issues that are directly
18 related to training or competition), reward feedback (e.g., praising the coach/athlete
19 where appropriate), and constructive feedback (e.g., giving opinions and instructions
20 designed to improve performance rather than criticize). A coach exemplified the
21 constructive feedback form of advice: "Try and, you know, give them good one-to-one
22 feedback, lots of encouragement so you can build that relationship" (C1: Male county
23 tennis coach). Moreover, an athlete underscored the importance of having honest
24 feedback from the coach and explained the way she developed the respect for her
25 coach:

1 There are times in the relationship when I respected (coach) for being honest
2 with me. For example, perhaps she thought that I wasn't competing at the right
3 standard or I wasn't doing something correctly, she would always be open and
4 honest with me and I always respected (coach) for that (A1: Female
5 international ice-skater).

6 Advice was, therefore, an important strategy through which coaches and athletes
7 could maintain the quality of their relationships. Advice played a significant role in giving
8 both rewarding and constructive feedback, as well as in communicating in general about
9 sport. This dimension related to the advice category within Stafford et al.'s (2000) model.
10 The nature of advice given within a romantic relationship was different to that given within
11 the coach-athlete relationship. Advice was a more central process within a sporting
12 relationship because it was viewed as a key element of coaching (e.g., Smith & Smoll, 1990).
13 Thus, the meaning of advice went beyond simply giving opinions regarding problems and
14 included rewarding, praising, and constructive feedback to the coach/athlete.

15 *Support*

16 Ten out of the 12 participants cited support as an important dimension (4 coaches and
17 6 athletes). A total of 9% of the raw data points were categorized within this dimension (3%
18 coaches and 6% athletes). Support was defined as showing that one was committed to the
19 coach-athlete relationship and available for the coach/athlete in terms of both sports-related
20 and personal issues. This dimension contained three themes: Assurance (e.g., showing that
21 you are committed to the coach/athlete), sport-specific support (e.g., giving support to the
22 coach/athlete after poor performance), and personal support (e.g., giving support to the
23 coach/athlete regarding non-sport issues). One athlete discussed the importance of the coach
24 providing support during competitions and explained that this support helped him to maintain
25 the quality of the relationship:

1 Once you are at the competition... they would make sure that every time you have a
2 fight or every time you were performing the routines, he would make sure there was
3 always someone present on the mat to like basically be your coach and guide you and
4 all of that kind of stuff so you very much had their support and you know, one-on-one
5 services in those situations (A6: Male national karate).

6 The same athlete explained how the coach was there for him when he was going
7 through a difficult time and highlighted the importance of this personal support:

8 Like one lesson I was training and my grandpa died like about a couple of days
9 before that and he could see that my head obviously was not in it and he pulled me to
10 the side and he asked me if I was ok and I told him and just having that support from
11 the instructor definitely helps (A6: Male national karate).

12 This strategy corresponded to the assurance category within Stafford and Canary's
13 (1991) model. It was expanded, however, to highlight the importance of supporting the
14 coach/athlete regarding both sporting and non-sporting issues.

15 *Social Networks*

16 This dimension was mentioned by all participants with 11.5% (6.25% coaches and
17 5.25% athletes) of raw data units relating to this category. It was defined as spending social
18 time with the coach/athlete as well as mutual friends, and involved interactions that took
19 place away from the track, field, or court. It contained two themes: Socializing (e.g., spending
20 social time with the coach/athlete) and shared network (e.g., spending time with mutual
21 friends). Participants discussed the importance of socializing with reference to the benefits of
22 travelling to competitions together:

23 If players can go all together in the same bus it is much better than having people
24 going in their own cars because the travel is important, people talk on travels... We
25 have this tradition of game day, all players, compulsory, have to go to the social and

1 have to meet for a drink later. Even if it is only for half an hour, just show up, have a
2 coke and go home, that is alright, as long as they show up and be there for a while and
3 share something with your team mates. That kind of thing is important for having a
4 good relationship with your players (C2: Male national football coach).

5 Participants also highlighted the importance of socializing that did not occur on the
6 track, field, or court and emphasized how such activities could help maintain relationships:

7 I definitely think that them making the effort to go to something like that (end of year
8 awards night), it helps out the club and the team because then we know, we see the
9 club as one and not just the girls and then the coaches (A5: Female university hockey
10 player).

11 Finally, one athlete discussed the benefits of having mutual friends and affiliations
12 help to maintain the coach-athlete relationship:

13 I have been in a couple of coach-athlete relationships where I know the coach's
14 family and I know the male coach's wife and son and daughter and ended up actually
15 being, becoming friends with their son and forming friendships and going out socially
16 with the coaches' sons and being like that and that does improve the bond (A2: Male
17 international track and field athlete).

18 It may be the case that the use of these strategies not only maintained the coach-
19 athlete relationship, but also had positive outcomes for related factors such as group cohesion
20 (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004).

21 This dimension was directly related to the social networks dimension within Stafford
22 and Canary's (1991) model. It emphasized the importance of spending time together in social
23 events that occur outside of the sporting environment. Such activities appeared to contribute
24 toward developing and maintaining the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

25 General Discussion

1 The present study explored the relationship maintenance strategies used by coaches
2 and athletes to maintain the quality of their athletic relationships. Content analysis of the
3 obtained qualitative data suggested seven main categories: Conflict management, openness,
4 motivation, positivity, advice, support, and social networks. It was proposed that these seven
5 strategies represent the COMPASS model of maintenance strategies in the coach-athlete
6 relationship.

7 Generally speaking, both the openness and social network strategies were similar to
8 those found in previous research regarding romantic relationships (Stafford & Canary, 1991;
9 Stafford, et al 2000). Other dimensions were adapted to ensure that they were relevant to the
10 context of coach-athlete relationships. Specifically, the category of conflict management was
11 expanded to include proactive strategies for avoiding conflict. Positivity was re-defined to
12 refer to adaptability, fairness, and managing external pressures. Advice essentially
13 emphasized positive and constructive feedback, and support highlighted the importance of
14 supportive communicative acts.

15 In the coach-athlete relationship, a motivation category emerged encompassing
16 strategies that were intended to inspire the coach and the athlete or to demonstrate personal
17 motivation. With almost a third of comments relating to this dimension, motivational
18 strategies appeared to play an important role in maintaining the quality of coach-athlete
19 relationships. It could be argued that such strategies were actually related to performance
20 enhancement rather than relationship maintenance. Because relationship quality often has
21 been associated with performance success (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003), it is possible that
22 these two factors were inextricably linked. A key point to note, however, is that the
23 motivational strategies contained within the COMPASS model focused on motivating one's
24 sporting partner to work with them and not purely to continue in the sport. This difference
25 was key yet subtle. For example, coaches might motivate their athletes to work with them by

1 making training enjoyable. Relationship maintenance might therefore occur without
2 performance enhancement.

3 The strategies highlighted through the present study supported previous research
4 within sport psychology. For example, Gould et al., (2007) in their research with award-
5 winning coaches, highlighted the importance of a number of interpersonal skills including
6 using open lines of communication (openness), having a winning record (motivation), caring
7 about their athletes as people (positivity), and having clear expectations and accountability
8 (conflict management). Moreover, this study also added to previous research focused on the
9 importance of support (e.g., Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006; Rees, Hardy & Freeman, 2007).

10 Based on the findings of this study, the COMPASS model was proposed as a
11 framework for enhancing and maintaining the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (see
12 Figure 1). The model suggested that the use of these seven maintenance strategies would
13 have a positive effect on the quality of the relationship, as defined by Jowett's (2005, 2007)
14 3+1Cs conceptualization. Correspondingly, the absence of these strategies was theorized to
15 have a negative effect on relationship quality (cf. Canary, Stafford, & Semic, 2002). These
16 effects were suggested to be bi-directional in that the use of these strategies could influence
17 one's views of the relationship (i.e., direct perceptions), as well as one's beliefs of how the
18 sporting partner perceives the relationship (i.e., meta perceptions). Likewise, it was also
19 suggested that the use of these strategies would influence the sporting partner's direct and
20 meta perceptions.

21 The development of this conceptual model contributes to the gap in the literature
22 identified by Jowett and Poczwardowski (2007). Specifically, it begins to develop our
23 knowledge of interpersonal communication within the coach-athlete relationship. The
24 COMPASS model might facilitate our understanding of how the elements within Jowett's
25 (2005, 2007) 3+1C conceptualization may be maintained (i.e., closeness, commitment,

1 complementarity, and co-orientation). Further research could investigate how specific
2 strategies help to maintain the different elements of relationship quality. The COMPASS
3 model, therefore, complements the 3+1C conceptualization, and combining these two
4 theoretical frameworks could provide an integrated approach to the understanding of the
5 nature, content, and the quality of coach-athlete relationships.

6 Sport psychology consultants, coaches, and athletes may therefore use the COMPASS
7 model to help maintain effective working partnerships. This research might benefit key
8 stakeholders through informing the development of coach education programs and provide a
9 basis upon which interventions may be built and tested.

10 This study represented an important step in “crossing the chasm” identified by Jowett
11 and Wylleman (2006, p. 123). This “chasm” represents a vast area of knowledge related to
12 the coach-athlete relationship, which merits exploration. The present study and the
13 COMPASS model expanded our knowledge of the interpersonal dynamics between the coach
14 and the athlete by promoting an understanding of the processes necessary for maintaining the
15 quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

16 Research that continues to investigate the relationships between maintenance
17 strategies and the quality of coach-athlete relationships is warranted. Specifically, the roles of
18 individual factors (e.g., age, gender and race, athlete experience and coach qualifications,
19 personality characteristics), relationship factors (e.g., relationship length, typical versus
20 atypical relationships), and environmental factors (e.g., culture, team and individual sports)
21 are worthy of investigation. Research investigating the relationships between maintenance
22 strategies and outcome variables (e.g., performance, satisfaction) would also be of interest.
23 There is also scope for using the COMPASS model to inform an intervention aimed at
24 improving the quality of coach-athlete relationships.

1 Such further work would help to overcome some of the limitations of the present
2 study. The generalisability of the COMPASS remains unknown and merits further
3 investigation. Thus, the COMPASS model should be tested in different samples to determine
4 the extent to which it could be generalized across diverse coach-athlete relationships. There is
5 also potential to investigate the extent to which the strategies within the COMPASS model
6 are salient in other interpersonal relationships in sport (e.g., relationships between athletes or
7 between owners of clubs and coaches).

8 The present study was not without methodological limitations. In terms of the
9 participants, the retrospective nature of the interviews might have resulted in events being
10 recalled and described inaccurately. For instance, subsequent success or failure in sport might
11 have the potential to influence how coaches or athletes look back on their previous
12 relationships.

13 The research study reported here builds upon work that was conducted in the broader
14 relationship psychology research field that aims to unravel the specific relationship
15 maintenance strategies people use. This study found that certain relationship maintenance
16 strategies may be common across different relationship contexts (i.e., romantic and sport).
17 Moreover, evidence indicated that relationship maintenance strategies may be unique to the
18 specific relationship context (e.g., the importance of motivational strategies in sport). Overall,
19 this study and the generated COMPASS model represent an important first step in facilitating
20 our understanding of how relationships, specifically those that pertain to coaches and their
21 athletes, might be maintained. It provides an initial tool that sport psychology researchers and
22 practitioners may use to begin to consider relationship maintenance strategies that can
23 ultimately help coaches and athletes navigate the journey along the road to performance
24 success and personal satisfaction.

25

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2 Table 1

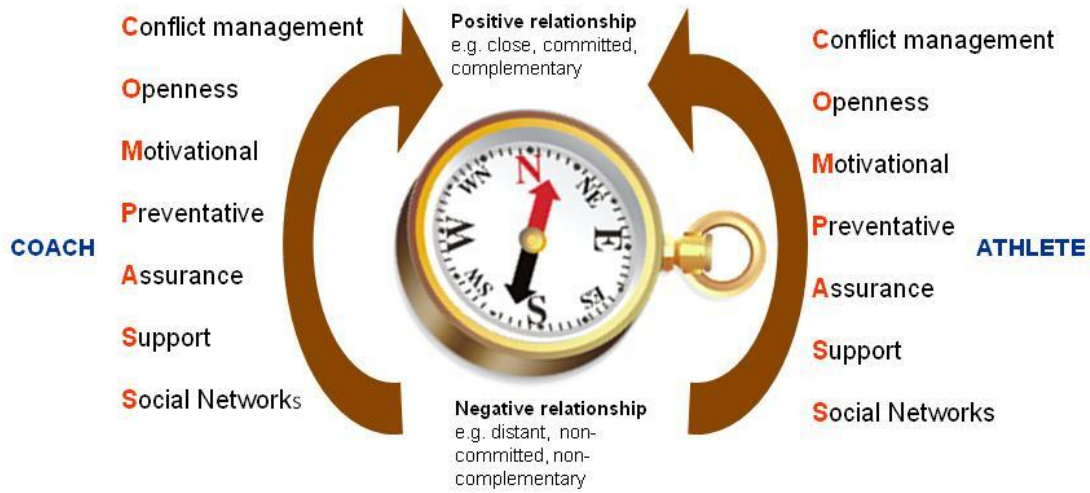
3 *Frequency of the Main Categories and Subcategories of Maintenance Strategies in the*4 *Coach-Athlete Relationship*

Categories	Frequencies					
	Sub-categories					
	Coaches		Athletes		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Conflict Management</i>	26	6.5	12	3	38	9.5
Proactive	11	2.75	6	1.5	17	4.25
Reactive	15	3.75	6	1.5	21	5.25
<i>Openness</i>	20	5	28	7	48	12
Non-sport communication	9	2.25	9	2.25	18	4.5
Talk about anything	6	1.5	9	2.25	15	3.75
Other awareness	5	1.25	10	2.5	15	3.75
<i>Motivation</i>	63	15.75	64	16	127	31.75
Effort	16	4	14	3.5	30	7.5
Motivate other	13	3.25	15	3.75	28	7
Fun	9	2.25	5	1.25	14	3.5
Show ability	25	6.25	30	7.5	55	13.75
<i>Positivity</i>	22	5.5	18	4.5	40	10
Adaptability	6	1.5	7	1.75	13	3.25
Fairness	7	1.75	1	0.25	8	2
External Pressures	9	2.25	10	2.5	19	4.75
<i>Advice</i>	32	8	34	8.5	66	16.5

Maintenance in the coach-athlete relationship 31

Sport communication	10	2.5	5	1.25	15	3.75
Reward feedback	10	2.5	6	1.5	16	4
Constructive feedback	12	3	23	5.75	35	8.75
<i>Support</i>	12	3	24	6	36	9
Assurance	7	1.75	6	1.5	13	3.25
Sport support	5	1.25	14	3.5	19	4.75
Personal support	0	0	4	1	4	1
<i>Social Networks</i>	25	6.25	21	5.25	46	11.5
Socializing	21	5.25	17	4.25	38	9.5
Shared networks	4	1	4	1	8	2

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Figure 1. The COMPASS model of relationship maintenance in the coach-athlete relationship.