1 **Title:** Coach Education and Positive Youth Development as a Means of Improving
2 Australian Sport.
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Coach Education and Positive Youth Development as a Means of Improving Australian Sport

Introduction

Sport plays a large role in Australian culture (Light, 2010) with over 90% of Australians involved in playing or watching sport (Australian Sports Commission, 2017). However, retention of Australian athletes is at risk (Australian Sports Commission, 2017). Protecting Australian sport from decreased participation across all ages is vital to maintaining the intergenerational cycle of Australians playing sport (Australian Sports Commission, 2017). Sport is important to Australians' mental and physical health and contributes substantially to the economy (Australian Sports Commission, 2017). To address the prospect of declining participation, the Australian Sports Commission (2017) has declared a focus towards increasing youth athlete participation by the year 2036.

The objective of this paper is to suggest that Australian sport coaches, are vital in sustaining Australian youth sport participation (Duda, 1996; Cote & Mallett, 2012; Vella et al., 2013). Through coach education, coaches have the potential to enhance motivational climates that foster positive youth development (Bailey et al., 2013; Duda, 1996; Falcao et al., 2012; Santos et al., 2017). Positive youth development through sport occurs when young athletes obtain personal, physical and social skills from playing sport, that can be transferred to other areas of their lives; improving their present and future wellbeing and societal contributions (Holt et al., 2016).

Positive youth development through sport has been shown to increase participant retention (Cote et al., 2010; Smith & Smoll, 1997), due to enhancing athletes' general wellbeing (Falcao et al., 2012; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) and consequently boosting their enjoyment of sport. However, research on positive youth development in Australian sport is lacking (Gould, 2016; Light, 2010). More Australian studies are required to investigate if current coach education is adequate in providing coaches with knowledge and skills to foster positive youth development. Thus, this paper will conclude with research recommendations aimed at advancing our understanding of the effectiveness of Australian coaches and Australian coach education in promoting positive youth development through sport.

Motivational requirements for positive youth development

Positive youth development occurs when children's values, beliefs and life-skills are proactively strengthened to enable maturation into well-balanced, optimal-functioning individuals (Gould & Carson, 2008). For positive youth development to occur, attention must be given to the motivational climate surrounding young people (Bailey et al., 2013; Dweck, 1986). The *motivational climate* is created through the way that influential adults define success; consequently, shaping how children interpret their efforts towards achieving goals (Dweck, 1986).

Two types of motivational climates have been identified; mastery and performance (Duda, 1996). In *mastery-orientated* environments, rather than emphasising goal attainment, success is interpreted as self-improvement obtained when working towards one's goals (Duda, 1996). Focusing on the enjoyment and satisfaction of progress, especially through challenges and overcoming failures, teaches individuals social-emotional skills such as self-determination, work ethic and citizenship (Dweck, 1986). In contrast, *performance-orientated* environments can be detrimental to personal growth as they emphasise social comparisons and superior outcomes over others, with goal attainment the definition of success (Dweck, 1986). Performance-orientated individuals often seek easy pathways to achievement so as to avoid failure and social judgements, but in the process prevent themselves from developing social-emotional skills and satisfaction in the progress made toward goal attainment (Duda, 1996).

Fostering positive youth development through sport

86 Sport is often considered training for real-life (Petitpas et al., 2005) and ideal for enhancing
87 youth's positive development (Camire, 2015; Vella et al., 2011). *Positive youth development*
88 *through sport* goes beyond building athletes' sport specific abilities, and aims to cultivate
89 their psychological, social, emotional, physical and intellectual skills (Cote et al., 2010; Roth
90 & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Santos et al., 2017) that can be utilised in sport and life (Falcao et al.,
91 2012; Gould & Carson, 2008). Mastery-orientated contexts that de-emphasise the outcome
92 of winning and prioritise athletes' self-improvement in abilities and sportsmanship (Bailey et
93 al., 2013; Duda, 1996; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003), have been reported as necessary for
94 positive youth development through sport (Cote & Mallett, 2012). Mastery-orientated sports
95 provide athletes with opportunities to experience challenges, independence and cooperation;
96 all while athletes' efforts are supported and encouraged (Ames & Archer, 1988; Bailey et al.,
97 2013; Dweck, 1986). Athletes who feel safe and supported in taking risks towards reaching
98 goals, regardless of the outcome, are more likely to engage in activities that foster their
99 cognitive and social-emotional skills (Duda, 1996; Falcao et al., 2012; Vella et al., 2013).
100 The support, enjoyment and positive development experienced in mastery-orientated sports,
101 as well as increased overall wellbeing (Camire & Trudel, 2014; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003),
102 reinforces athletes' desire to remain playing sport (Ames & Archer, 1988; Bailey et al., 2013;
103 Cote & Mallett, 2012).

The importance of coaches

105 In the context of sport, youth coaches are considered teachers and leaders (Feltz et al., 1999).
106 Parents, athletes and sporting organisations entrust coaches to help athletes develop, both in
107 and out of the sporting arena (Camire, 2015; Strachan et al., 2016). As the primary influences
108 on the sporting climate (Ames & Archer, 1988; Duda, 1996; Bailey et al., 2013), coaches are
109 pivotal in fostering positive youth development through sport (Camire et al., 2012; Cote et
110 al., 2010; Vella et al., 2013). When coaches deliberately create mastery-orientated
111 environments that aim to develop athletes beyond sporting skills and tactics, positive youth
112 development becomes more likely (Holt et al., 2017). Creating a mastery-orientated
113 environment conducive to positive youth development, requires coaches emphasise the goal
114 of sport as being to learn from mistakes while enjoying working hard for personal
115 improvement (Duda, 1996). Coaches should focus on athletes' development rather than
116 performance, with athletes evaluated against themselves, not others (Ames & Archer, 1988).
117 It is vital that coaches make all athletes feel important and acknowledged (Dweck, 1986).
118 Coaches can further encourage athletes' positive development by incorporating deliberate
119 lessons into their programs, designed to teach life-skills (Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt et al.,
120 2017) such as emotional control (Falcao et al., 2012), cultural competence, personal
121 responsibility, and interpersonal skills (Camire et al., 2012; Light, 2010). Finally, improving
122 youth athletes' positive development can be achieved through coaching behaviours such as
123 role modelling, fostering strong relationships, using empathetic communication (Smith &
124 Smoll, 1997) and positive reinforcement (Gould et al., 1989).

Problems with positive youth development through sport

126 Athlete development through sport is, unfortunately, not always positive (Shields &
127 Bredemeier, 2010). Just as coaches shape mastery-orientated environments, they also
128 influence performance-orientated athletes (Duda, 1996), possibly due to cultural norms of
129 winning at all costs (Cote & Mallett, 2012). Currently, youth sports in Australia are
130 predominantly performance-driven (Agnew et al., 2016; Cote & Mallett, 2012). Athletes
131 who participate in performance-driven sports are more likely to develop negatively (Cote et
132 al., 2010) and experience increased adversity in (Camire et al., 2012) and out of sport (Gould
133 & Carson, 2008). In their report to the Australian Sports Commission, Cote and Mallett
134 (2012) suggested that athlete attrition in Australian youth sports may be attributed to the
135 performance-driven sporting culture and its lack of emphasis on positive youth development.

136 Most coaches understand that they can inspire positive youth development (Gould et al.,
137 2006; Santos et al., 2017; Vella et al., 2011; 2013); however, preliminary data suggests they
138 do not fully understand why (Bean & Forneris, 2017). Many coaches do not actively foster
139 positive youth development in athletes, believing positive development occurs through
140 participation alone (Bean & Forneris, 2017). Other coaches take a reactive approach, only
141 addressing personal development if problems occur (Zakrajsek & Zizzi, 2008). Coaches who
142 do aim to incorporate positive youth development, often use limited positive youth
143 development methods (Gould et al., 1989) or inadvertently employ approaches that
144 negatively impact youth development (Dweck, 1986; McCallister et al., 2000).
145 A lack of education on positive youth development in sport (Erickson et al., 2008; Harwood,
146 2008; Santos et al., 2017) may attribute to coaching mistakes and limitations (Lerner et al.,
147 2005; Strachan et al., 2016) that negatively influence athletes (Cote et al., 2010; Petitpas et
148 al., 2005; Vella et al., 2013). Positive youth development coach education programs help
149 coaches develop confidence (Falcao et al., 2012; Santos et al., 2017), self-awareness (Smith
150 & Smoll, 1997) and knowledge (Vella et al., 2013) in fostering positive development in
151 athletes. Despite the advantages of educating coaches on positive youth development, most
152 compulsory coach education courses focus primarily on sporting skills and tactics (Santos et
153 al., 2017). Little importance is given in coach education to the holistic development of
154 athletes, especially at the community level (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005).
155 **The need for mandatory positive youth development coach education**
156 International research provides a strong argument for the mandatory inclusion of positive
157 youth development components in Australian coach education (Erickson et al., 2008; Falcao
158 et al., 2012; Harwood, 2008; Strachan et al., 2016). For example, without being part of
159 mandatory education, positive youth development in sport is devalued (Falcao et al., 2012;
160 Harwood, 2008; Strachan et al., 2016) and difficult for coaches to source (Erickson et al.,
161 2008; Strachan et al., 2016). Positive youth development education programs are available
162 online, however most coaches are unaware of their existence (Nash & Sproule, 2012).
163 Introducing mandatory positive youth development education would ensure all Australian
164 coaches are aware of the importance of positive youth development in sport (Harwood, 2008)
165 and equipped with the knowledge, confidence and skills to foster positive development in
166 larger populations of athletes (Falcao et al., 2012). Larger numbers of positively developed
167 athletes will increase sport participation rates (Cote & Mallett, 2012), athletes' longevity in
168 sport (Camire et al., 2012), individual contributions to society (Lerner et al., 2005), sporting
169 organisations' sustainability, and the Australian economy (Australian Sports Commission,
170 2017). Therefore, coach education that includes positive youth development education, not
171 just sport specific information, will help coaches create mastery-orientated sporting
172 environments that enable youth to develop into healthy, functioning adults with less
173 destructive behaviours, improved civic engagement (Lerner et al., 2005) and sustained sports
174 participation (Duda, 1996). Successful integration of positive youth development coach
175 education into Australian youth sport will require the collaboration of governing sporting
176 bodies, policymakers, education providers, coaches, sporting clubs and parents (Australian
177 Sports Commission, 2017; Camire, 2015).
178 **Shortfalls in Australian research**
179 Positive youth development has been studied from various theoretical perspectives including
180 motivation theory, self-determination theory, social learning theory and ecological systems
181 theory (Lerner et al., 2005; Weiss, 2016), however few real-world applications have resulted
182 (Weiss, 2016). To date there has been a lack of large-scale research on positive youth
183 development in Australian sport to support claims that increasing coach education on positive
184 youth development will actually benefit Australian sport (Light, 2010; Vella et al., 2011).

185 There is currently little research within the Australian context to answer the following
186 pertinent questions:

- Is there concordance between what Australian coaches should know and practice regarding positive youth development in sport and what they actually do understand and apply (Bailey et al., 2013)?
- Do Australian coaches have efficient access to quality positive youth development coach education (Bailey et al., 2013; Nash & Sproule, 2012; Pope et al., 2015) that has been empirically tested for Australian youth sporting populations (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Gould, 2016)?
- What opinions and knowledge do Australian coaches and parents have about coach education and positive youth development in sport (Bailey et al., 2013; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005; Newman et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2017; Vargas-Tonsing, 2007; Camire & Trudel, 2014)?
- What cultural impacts and individual beliefs influence positive youth development in Australian sport (Bailey et al., 2013)?

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to stress the important role of coach education in providing coaches with information on creating mastery-orientated environments that foster positive youth development. Past research indicates that positive youth development through sport benefits individual athletes, coaches, families, sporting organisations and communities. The diverse benefits of positive youth development through sport, suggest that enhancing positive youth development in Australian sport through improved, mandatory coach education may have profound consequences, including sustained youth athlete participation. However, more research is needed to determine if international findings are relevant for Australian sport and to further understand how positive youth development can be fostered through Australian sport to benefit everyone involved.

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