

## Chapter 14

# Serial Winning Coaches: People, Vision, and Environment

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### INTRODUCTION

The vocation of sports coaching is a relatively new in comparison to, say, the professions of medicine, law, and teaching. In the past few decades, the vocation of sports coaching has continued to develop toward professionalization across the world. Indeed, this progression toward professionalization is more advanced in some countries compared to others. However, as an emerging profession, the field of sports coaching has a limited empirical base to inform this process of professionalization. This limited empirical base is understandable in light of its recent emergence as an established vocation. Nevertheless, a key criterion for becoming a profession is an adequate research base (Duffy et al., 2011). Hence, a key intention of this study was to contribute in meaningful ways to the empirical base about the development of successful high-performance coaches.

Within the context of high-performance sports, coaches are central actors in the coach–athlete–performance relationship (Cushion, 2010; Lyle, 2002; Mallett, 2010). It is their responsibility to guide athletes' performances in the international sporting arena and they are held accountable to produce winning outcomes (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010; Mallett & Côté, 2006). Therefore, they are performers in their own right (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, & Chung, 2002). However, high-performance sport coaching (Olympic and professional sports) is dynamic, complex, and at times characterized by chaos (Purdy & Jones, 2011). Adding to this complexity, the work of coaches in elite sport has become increasingly more demanding and complex, reflecting transformations in society and sport itself (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010; Mallett, 2010). High-performance coaches face ever-growing challenges to succeed in their daily practice due to a number of factors; for example, increased international competition, the importance of the stakes relative to the country's investment in elite

sport, the lack of adequate resources or the opposite—the appropriate coordination and maximization of the abundance of resources available.

The recruitment and development of these coaches of elite athletes and teams is challenging and typically serendipitous, especially in light of the changing nature of high-performance coaches' work and the increasing demands placed on them to produce winning performances in this turbulent and uncertain environment (Mallett, 2010). Typically, coaches are employed because of their playing success (Gilbert, Côté, & Mallett, 2006; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006) and appointed without adequate training (Mallett, Rossi, Rynne, & Tinning, 2016). It is noteworthy that the recruitment of executives across professions has also been reported as random and unsystematic (Fernández-Aráoz, Groysberg, & Nohria, 2009), and at best, relies on subjective preference and trait-based personality tests (Fernández-Aráoz, Groysberg, & Nohria, 2009; Singer, 2005). This ad hoc approach to recruitment and appointment is most likely the case with high-performance coaches in many countries.

High-performance coaches who do not produce winning results are often sacked during or at the end of the competitive season. The sacking of professional coaches is commonplace and costs sporting organizations significant money [eg,  $n = 31$  sacked Australian football coaches (=25%) have cost clubs almost \$11 million AUD in payouts over the last 5 years; personal communication David Parkin, Australian Football League]. This example of coach sackings is not confined to Australia but occurs also in other parts of the world; for example, in England where football coaches have been sacked before the season has commenced and often after only a few weeks into the competitive season. This high turnover of high-performance coaches has significant implications for player and team development, organizational growth, and the financial security of sporting clubs. This volatility in coach employment is a major issue for the professionalization of sports coaching. We argue that there is a lack of a significant quantum of research to inform how organizations might make better decisions in the identification, recruitment, and development of high-performance coaches. Furthermore, much of the research that has been conducted does not provide much insight into knowing the coach in any depth; therefore, this superficial understanding of the coach is limited in making appropriate decisions to produce successful coach–athlete–performance outcomes.

Currently, the identification, recruitment, and development of the next generation of high-performance coaches in many countries are sketchy at best. In the appointment of executive leaders, personality assessment is often a core feature of the process using popular tools (eg, “Big Five” model) that target the broad and decontextualized qualities of people. However, this broad understanding of people is limited. Contemporary views of personality suggest that person-based psychology and its assessment should consider a more comprehensive and integrated portrait. Understanding coaches, as people, requires a deeper understanding of the person that also includes why they do what they do and how they make sense of their lived experiences (past, present, and future) in terms of time

and place (McAdams & Pals, 2006). To enhance our understanding of the practices of highly successful people across various contexts, a more comprehensive and nuanced examination of what underpins their successes is imperative; that is, why they behave the way they do. In this chapter, some significant research findings will be revealed and discussed to provide an insight into what we have learned from these highly successful sport coaches and how this understanding might inform coach identification, recruitment, and development.

So, what we do know already about successful coaches? Several research studies have yielded interesting insights into the developmental experiences of successful coaches (Gilbert et al., 2006; Erickson, Côté, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Jiménez-Sáiz, Lorenzo-Calvo, & Ibañez-Godoy, 2008; Nash & Sproule, 2009; Rynne & Mallett, 2012; Werthner & Trudel, 2006); their most valued characteristics (Ruiz-Tendero, & Salinero-Martín, 2011); their motivations (McLean & Mallett, 2012) and perceived needs (Allen & Shaw, 2009); how they draw from the knowledge and experience provided by sport scientists (Reade, Rodgers, & Spriggs, 2008); and their psychological makeup, skills, and coping strategies (Olusoga, Maynard, Hays, & Butt, 2012; Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees, & Hutchings, 2008). Studies gathering athletes' interpretations of their coaches' practices have also been conducted (Purdy & Jones, 2011). Specifically, empirical accounts of coaches' personalities have typically referred to broad traits or similar constructs (Becker, 2009; Lee, Kim, & Kang, 2013; Nash & Sproule, 2009; Norman & French, 2013; Olusoga et al., 2012). This research has highlighted some consistent findings (eg, diligent; typically played the sport they coached; learn mostly through experience and influenced by more knowledgeable others; relevance of life histories to how they coach). However, from a whole person perspective, this focus on broad traits provides an incomplete psychological portrait of coaches. Methodologically, these studies have typically focused on either the coach or athlete perspectives and conducted mostly with samples from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Furthermore, much of this research has been focused on the "what" of coaching practice (eg, behaviors, traits) and provides limited understanding of the person-in-context. There is a paucity of research that has examined: (1) consistently successful international coaches from around the world, (2) coach-athlete dyad perspectives, and (3) an examination of who they are (eg, meaning making) beyond what they do (attributes, behaviors).

The notion of a more comprehensive understanding of a person dates back to Allport (1937) and his view that in knowing someone we should explore the socially constructed meanings that people attach to one's lived experiences and the settings in which they take place; that is, to know someone beyond traits is to understand their subjective identities and how they tell their story that, in turn, provides a more holistic portrait.

There have been recent shifts toward frameworks for person-based psychology that considers the interplay between the individual and the social (McAdams & Pals, 2006; Mischel & Shoda, 2008). These frameworks for developing a

coherent understanding of the person synthesize the dynamic interplay between biological contributions, traits, motives, and personal stories, within a broader sociocultural context (McAdams, 1995). This return to a holistic understanding of a person offers an opportunity for a deeper understanding of personality development that could be generative for future research in coach identification, recruitment, and development. Embracing an integrative perspective of coaches' multilayered personality is logically aligned with the area of sport leadership and more broadly within sport and exercise psychology (Coulter, Mallett, Singer, & Gucciardi, 2016).

## McADAMS'S INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK OF PERSONALITY

Personality is a person's "unique variation of the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and integrative life stories complexly and differentially situated in culture" (McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 212). In recent times, there has been a return by researchers to appreciating an understanding of the whole person including contextual, biological, and experiential factors that were originally foregrounded by Allport (1937) and his contemporaries. The complementarity of phenomenological experience and normative assessments is consistent with Allport's well-known ideographic and nomothetic distinctions in studying the person. In the past two decades, several theorists (Mayer, 2005; McAdams & Pals, 2006; McCrae & Costa, 1997; Mischel & Shoda, 2008) have developed integrative models that capture the complexities of personality. For example, McAdams (1995, 2013, 2015) developed a metatheory of personality development that drew upon both the research fields of developmental and personality psychology, two fields in which people typically operate in "discursive silos" with limited dialogue between them (McAdams, 2015). This integrated framework for understanding the whole person (psychological self) was expressed in terms of three broad metaphors: the self as social actor, motivated agent, and autobiographical author. These three interrelated and increasingly more complex layers of a person permit a deeper understanding of why we do what we do (McAdams & Cox, 2010). Moreover, these three layers draw upon three epistemological frames (positivist, critical realist, and phenomenological paradigms) that represent conceptually different layers of personality (McAdams & Pals, 2006) that enable an examination of the person-in-context. Typically, these "discursive tribes" (eg, developmental psychology and personality psychology; positivist and constructivist) do not "talk" with each other and subsequently limit the potential of a comprehensive understanding of people.

### Social Actor

From birth we play the role of *social actors*. Initially, genetics lay the foundation for people as social actors, whose actions are constantly evaluated by self

and others. Indeed, people are performative in the social interactions of daily life (McAdams, 2013) and these judgments of social performance are framed relative to others (eg, self-regulation, societal norms). Over time, people's behavioral signature (McAdams, 2013) is characterized by these broad and partly inherited dispositional traits (McAdams & Olsen, 2010). These behavioral signatures reflect peoples' social reputation in specific roles such as coaching and across contexts. Traits provide a broad and generally stable "skeleton" or outline for understanding people's personalities. However, traits are broad and decontextualized, which limits a deep understanding of people in specific roles such as coaching (McAdams, 2013). So, when we say we know someone, relying on traits is insufficient in knowing their deeply held goals and values and how they make sense of the lived experiences in telling their story about who they are and who they are becoming.

### Motivated Agent

White (1965) refers to the *age 5–7 shift* that highlights a psychosocial transition from early- to mid-childhood, which has significant implications for personality development (McAdams, 2015). From this transition, children's personalities from about 7–9 years undergo further transformation toward that of a *motivated agent* (Bandura, 1989; Erikson, 1963; Harter, 2006; Piaget, 1970; Sameroff & Haith, 1996). Children's psychosocial development during this transformation enables them to choose where and how to invest their time and effort (McAdams, 2013). Social forces are more influential at this layer of personality than the social actor's traits and are expressed in terms of personal goals, values, ideologies, and cognitive style (McAdams, 2015; Singer, 2005). McAdams (1995) also refers to this layer of personality as characteristic adaptations, reflecting the influences of social forces on personality development. Peoples' motivational and intentional lives, and how they differ in relation to a wide range of social-cognitive, and developmental adaptations embedded in time, place, and social role characterize this aspect of personality; children begin to express what they want to achieve, what they want to avoid, and what they value in their lives.

### Narrative Identity

Around late adolescence and early adulthood, people become an *autobiographical author* (McAdams & Olsen, 2010). In McAdams's (1995) integrated personality framework, this third and final layer is concerned with how people make sense of their past life experiences and their imagined future in creating a coherent story about themselves. It is noteworthy that not all stories are coherent within and across all three layers (McAdams, 2015). Nevertheless, this often cohesive, purposeful life narrative and identity builds upon the foundation of the two previous layers (social actor and motivated agent). In telling

their story, people reflect upon “why the actor does what it does, why the agent wants what it wants, and who the self was, is, and will be as a developing person in time” (McAdams, 2013, p. 273). Comparatively, social and cultural forces shape the autobiographical author’s unique story more than the first two layers (McAdams, 2013). “The internalized and evolving stories reconstruct the past and imagine the future in order to describe how we have become the people that we are becoming” (McAdams, 2015, p. 270); that is, a person’s narrative identity is a first-person account of the author’s subjective understanding of how he came to be and who he is becoming (McAdams & Pals, 2006).

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

The International Council for Coaching Excellence ([www.icce.ws](http://www.icce.ws)) established the Innovation Group of Lead Agencies in 2011. This group brings together a number of leading coaching organizations from all over the world with the purpose of advancing coach education and development in a number of key priority areas. High-performance (HP) coaching is one of those areas. The HP Sub-Committee, led by ICCE President Mr John Bales (Canada), recognized these challenges and agreed to initiate a research project entitled “Serial Winning Coaches” (SWC). The SWC project aimed to study those coaches who have, repeatedly and over a sustained period of time, coached teams and athletes to gold medals at the highest level of competition such as the Olympic Games, the World Championships, or major professional leagues. Therefore, the purpose of the research study was to profile SWC in order to facilitate the identification, recruitment, and development of high-potential HP coaches in the future, as well as better support the further development of HP coaches already working in elite sport. Essentially, they were interested in what can we learn from consistently successful high-performance sport coaches? Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to examine some of the world’s most successful international coaches using McAdams’s integrated personality framework. Specifically, we sought to investigate the personality of these serial winning coaches from a whole person perspective using different ways of knowing that reflect each of McAdams’s three personality layers. This unique way of investigating these coaches will enable us to learn more about how these serial winning coaches typically behave, why they behave the way they do, and how they make sense of their life experiences that informs their unique identities. In reviewing all data sets, we seek to identify a metastory that captures the essence of who these coaches are, their goals, values, and how these understandings shape their narrative identities.

## METHOD

A key aim of this research is to identify some common qualities and understandings of their personality but also to identify some unique stories about these highly successful high-performance coaches that will be informative to coach

developers. Hence, the search is not for a “magic recipe” or “ideal profile” but to contribute in meaningful ways to an empirical base to inform policy and practice in coach identification, recruitment, and development.

## Methodology

Idiographic and nomothetic research approaches can provide complementary information about understanding both the uniqueness of these individual coaches and then collectively as a unique cohort. However, the discussion of each of these coaches as unique people is beyond the scope of this chapter; therefore, the focus of this chapter is to use a nomothetic approach to search for some common elements. Nevertheless, we are mindful of some potential variation within this group; indeed, there is most likely “outliers” among the group of “outliers.” From these various case studies of SWC, we collected multiple data sets to enhance understanding of a highly successful coaches (intrinsic) and to also facilitate understanding of people who are consistently successful in the international arena (instrumental) (Stake, 1994). This study was designed and conducted across several research paradigms. The use of questionnaires (traits and strivings) and a semistructured interview embraced an eclectic mix of positivist, critical realist, and phenomenological paradigms that matched the conceptually distinctive layers of personality (McAdams & Pals, 2006). The integration of data from these multiple case studies enabled the identification of common traits and strivings but also the creation of a metastory that captured the core themes from the semistructured interviews.

## Participants

A purposive sample of several of the world’s most successful coaches was recruited for this project. These coaches were recruited through the Innovation Group of Leading Agencies (IGLA) of the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE). Fourteen SWC, who among them had won 128 gold medals and major trophies, participated in this study. These “outliers among outliers” had won major international championships with many athletes/teams and in multiple contexts. In this research, 14 serial winning coaches (SWC) from 11 countries (10 sports, including 5 team sports and 1 combat sport) contributed to multiple data sets that were complemented with data from some of their successful athletes. The criteria for athletes ( $n = 17$ ; 12 male and 5 female) were that she/he won a gold medal or title with coach and worked with that coach in last 5 years and for a minimum of 2 years. At least one athlete for 10 of the 14 coaches participated in the study. The coaches did not know which athlete participated in the study. The 14 SWC were all male, and had been successful in different contexts (eg, coached men and women; different leagues/countries), with an average age of 55 years (range = 44–67) and had coached for an average of 25 years (range = 7–43). All coaches were married (one remarried)

and had children. All but one coach was university-educated. Eight SWC were ex-internationals and 5 competed at the national level. All experienced short apprenticeships into high-performance sport after playing their sport.

## Procedure

Institutional ethics was obtained for this study prior to data collection. The participant coaches voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. They were purposively selected (Patton, 2002) because they fulfilled the criteria of repeatedly and over a sustained period of time, and in different settings, coached teams and athletes to gold medals at the highest level of competition such as the Olympic Games or the World Championships. The coach participants completed both measures and were interviewed (range = 60–180 min). The athlete participants completed the observer rater NEO-FFI-3 and participated in an interview about the coach. Data were transcribed verbatim, producing 650 pages of text (double-spacing). Through the extensive network of contacts available via the participating organizations, the researchers were able to access a unique sample of SWC based on the previous criteria. Likewise, a total of 20 gold medal or major trophy winners coached by the SWC were recruited for the study. This was an exclusive and select sample of consistently successful coaches and their athletes in a study of high-performance sport coaching.

## Measures

The primary aim of this study was to elicit information about the SWC personality across a number of layers as well as their daily practices, the education and development routes they took in their journey to success, and the key challenges facing HP coaches in the future. For this purpose, the following methods were employed.

*NEO-FFI-3.* The NEO Five-Factor inventories (self and observer reports) are commonly used trait measures within contemporary psychology research (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Specifically, the NEO-FFI-3 (Costa & McCrae, 2010) is a self-report measure that collects data specific to the first layer of personality—self as social actor (McAdams & Pals). The 60-item NEO-FFI-3 (self and observer reports) assesses the established Five-Factor model of personality—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 1997; McAdams & Pals, 2006). For each item, respondents are asked to rate the degree to which they agree that the description is true of the coach (self and observers reports) (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The NEO-FFI-3 has high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.78\text{--}0.86$ ), sound factor structure, and convergent validity with the longer 240-item NEO-Personality inventory (NEO-PI-3; McCrae & Costa, 2007). Earlier versions of the NEO-FFI have received satisfactory support for its validity, including convergence with other measures of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1997). The NEO-PI-3,

which is the longer version of the NEO-FFI-3, has been used in sport contexts (Allen, Greenlees, & Jones, 2011; Hughes, Case, Stuempfle, & Evans, 2003).

*Personal strivings.* This strivings measure (Emmons, 1989) captures information related to the second layer of McAdams and Pals (2006) integrated framework of personality—motivated agent. Respondents are asked to consider what they typically are trying to do in everyday behavior. Participants respond to the stem: “On a daily basis I typically try to ...”; for example, “appear knowledgeable,” “avoid appearing indecisive.” These strivings represent an underlying organization of how individuals think about their goals. A *striving assessment* matrix is created on the basis of respondents considering each striving and rating them along a continuum from 1 (not very) to 5 (very) on the following: how committed are you this behavior? How important is this striving to you? How likely is it that you will be successful in doing it? How challenging is this striving be for you? How much satisfaction does it bring to you when you achieve it? Motivational themes can be abstracted from this matrix striving content.

*Semistructured interview.* SWC and the athletes they coach participated in semistructured interviews. The semistructured interview was an attempt to examine the third layer of McAdams integrated model of personality—autobiographical author. Indeed, the interviews attempted to explore the personal narratives of these coaches that underpinned their traits and motives. Through the interviews, we sought to confirm, refute, and enhance the information provided by the psychometric questionnaires as well as elicit new information regarding practical examples of their daily behaviors and the strategies they use to successfully navigate the HP environment. The aim of the interview is to understand the different ways in which coaches have experienced their lives in and out of sport and how it might contribute to who they are and how and why they coach. The interviews also contained specific questions in a number of areas such as the learning and development opportunities accessed by SWC, the vital steps in their journey to coaching glory and the key challenges facing HP coaches in the future. In addition, athletes were also asked to identify the main differences, positive and negative, they saw between the SWC and other coaches they had worked with in the past or what they understood had been the main changes they had noticed in the SWC over the years.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis was based on McAdams and Manczak’s (2011) three-phase sequence termed “logic of person perception” (p. 41). This data analytical approach integrated findings across the three “levels” of understanding the participants—from macro (broad and decontextualized traits) to micro (personalized life story). Importantly, the data analysis was concerned with describing and understanding psychological individuality rather than searching for potential (mal)adaptive functioning. Initially, analysis was performed on

data for the first layer (personality traits), which was followed by analysis of the motives (second layer). Then an analysis that integrated the findings for the first two layers was conducted. The next phase of data analysis included an analysis of the third layer (life narrative), which was subsequently integrated with the first two layers to produce an assimilated and comprehensive story about the coach (Singer, 2005). Self and observer scores for personality traits were interpreted for each trait domain and personality style graphs were plotted following established scoring procedures (Costa & McCrae, 2010). The authors abstracted key motivational themes (eg, avoidance/achievement goals) based on participants' strivings based on Emmons's (1989, 2003) analytical procedure. The two authors repeatedly discussed the codes and themes until they reached at least 85% consensus (Smith, 2000). The authors analyzed the data following the principles of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006) to reveal patterns within the data. Owing to its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can support researchers in yielding a rich and complex account of data. The authors followed the six-step approach proposed by Braun and Clarke, which included a period of familiarization with the data through repeated readings of the data sets; a phase of initial generation of codes; categorizing the general codes into themes; reviewing the themes; defining and refining the themes; and the final production of the full report from which this section of the chapter has been developed (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). The coaches' and athletes' interview data were coded separately after which key themes from both data sets were compared. The broad themes that emerged were similar, yet there were noteworthy nuances within the themes, which we draw attention in the results and discussion sections. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that there is always potential for some confirmatory bias in the analytical process, which the authors were cognizant of and attempted to minimize (Patton, 2002). Strategies to minimize researcher bias included multiple readings of the text by both authors, and then the extraction of major themes that were discussed until consensus was reached.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Social Actor—Personality Traits

*Coach self-reports.* When compared to other adult men, the SWC self-reports offer the following information. The most distinctive features of this serial winning coaching cohort are this group's standings on the factors of conscientiousness (C), neuroticism (N), and extraversion (E) (Table 14.1).

*Observer—reports of coaches (athletes).* Ten of the 14 participant coaches received observer reports from athletes with whom they were recently successful over the last 5 years prior to data collection. Of these 10 coaches, 4 received 2 athletes' observer reports; hence, there were 14 athlete observer reports in total.

**TABLE 14.1** NEO-FFI-3 Serial Winners' Scores

Scale	Raw score	T score	Range
(N) Neuroticism	12	40	Low
(E) Extraversion	32	58	High
(O) Openness	28	51	Average
(A) Agreeableness	28	46	Average
(C) Conscientiousness	40	63	High

There were consistencies between the scores and the overall range for the self-reports and observer reports. This consistency provided some validity to the self-reported scores of the coaches. Nonetheless, an examination of the scores for N factor showed that the eight athletes' averaged scores (four received two athlete reports) reported that the coaches were less emotionally stable than self-reported. The athletes overall reported the coaches as average N. In terms of E scores there some variability with five athletes' scores reporting their coaches as High. Similarly, five of the 10 athletes' differentially rated their coaches on Openness—some higher and others lower but overall average. Four of the 10 athletes' scores were inconsistent with the coaches' scores for A. All four rated their coaches less agreeable, which meant they were comparatively Low. The most consistent coach–athlete scores were reported for the Conscientiousness factor. Seven of the 10 athletes' scores were consistent but the other three athletes' scores rated their coaches as more conscientious than coach-reported.

Overall, it is suggested that the coaches' self-reported scores were consistent with their athletes. Nevertheless, the participant athletes perceived their coaches as less emotionally stable and less agreeable, which warrants some consideration in making sense of the results of the coaches' self-reports.

*Distinctive trends in personality style.* Coach scores for Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Extraversion—and their interaction—produce a noticeable profile that places this cohort as clear optimists (well-being), directed individuals (impulse control), and go-getters (activity). This combination of personality styles (for well-being, impulse control, and activity) builds a picture of most coaches within this SWC group that (1) takes life in its stride, with a positive orientation focused on the future; and (2) has a clear vision of what each wants and needs to be done in this regard—accompanied by a will and zeal to work and focus hard to reach set targets.

More generally, this cohort is able to deal with stress in an adaptive manner, and focus on problem-solving solutions and actions instead of dwelling on life's challenges. They generally control their anger and frustration—if anything, showing an ability to suppress negative emotions and harness these for their own benefit and pursuits. They display a mix of creative instincts, enjoy topical

discussion with others, and are attracted to educating and working alongside colleagues. In this socially desirable context, they are confident decision makers and often see themselves as leaders who can mobilize people. These coaches are aspiring learners with an ongoing thirst for knowledge. Their approach to learning advocates a collection of individuals who either enjoy the creative nature of problem solving, or instead, stick to more traditional rules of engagement. Lastly, these coaches are clear achievement strivers, who channel tiresome efforts into others for (1) the selfless development, growth, and achievements of the athlete, and/or (2) the promotion of their own personal needs and recognition as a coach.

In providing a foundational structure to these SWC, the broad, comparative, and decontextualized traits (McAdams, 1995) portray an understanding of how they typically present themselves in the public domain. As a group, these coaches present themselves as conscientious, extraverted, and emotionally stable, which is consistent with some of the literature (Olusoga et al., 2012; Thelwell et al., 2008). Nonetheless, traits are limited in what they tell us about people. Specifically, we are unclear about people's motives, goals, and values that drive their actions. What do they want to achieve and why? To answer these and related questions requires a shift to another epistemological lens to examine the second and third layers of their personality.

### Motivated Agent—Strivings

In assessing the SWC personal strivings, the focus was on understanding these coaches as motivated agents, specifically, what they want in their life and how that is expressed in their coaching practice. These strivings provide some understanding of their motivational agendas that underpin their coaching behaviors and coaching priorities. A thematic content analysis (Patton, 2002) revealed several key motivational themes from the strivings, guided by Emmons's (1989) structure (Singer, 2005). In assessing personal strivings, the emphasis is on what the coaches are trying to do rather than what are they like (Traits). McAdams (2015) suggests that the influence of traits on goals is modest, partly because they represent different layers of personality development. The influence of social and cultural forces on the motivated agent is much stronger compared to dispositional traits (McAdams, 2015).

### Content of Strivings

*Approach versus avoidance.* Overall, the SWC were very much approach oriented. Their daily strivings included, "be enthusiastic toward my job," "be energized," "have fun," "complete tasks and meet deadlines," "control training intensity," and to "help athletes with skills." These coaches are positive in their outlook and possessed a strong sense of purpose and overall striving for achievement. Their strivings suggested they were optimistic, sought opportunities, and

were solution and future focused. This strong approach theme correlates with trait profiles associated with upbeat optimists (low N, high E) and go-getters (high E, high C). Bleidorn et al. (2010) suggested that people high in conscientiousness tend to be associated with strivings focused on achievement and power. Comparatively, there were very few avoidance strivings (eg, “to not lose control,” “not be withdrawn”).

*Agency versus communion.* From the trait profiles (average A, high C), we did not know whether the SWC were more driven in helping others (ie, getting along; McAdams, 2015) or for own needs or self-promotion (ie, getting ahead; McAdams, 2015). The content of these strivings provided some insight into the motives and goals of these SWC in terms of what was the source of their conscientiousness. Overall, the two-thirds of the strivings of these SWC reflected strong agency (eg, for self-improvement, learning; “to learn something new about my job everyday,” “challenge my thinking every day”); however, there was a commitment to the service of others for a clear purpose (eg, “be fair,” “do something good for someone I know and someone I don’t know”) albeit less strong than agentic strivings. This strong theme of agency correlates with trait profiles associated people who have clear direction (low N, high C). Perhaps the SWC seek to be the best performers they can be to enhance athlete/team performance outcomes.

## Motivational Themes

*Learning and personal growth.* A central motivational theme centered on learning and personal growth (eg, “engage, support and learn from support staff”). This personal growth was considered important for both coach and athlete (eg, “permanent ongoing education”). Many strivings were focused on self-improvement, which demonstrates the high degree of agency in becoming the best they could be (eg, “learn something new about my job every day”; “discover something new”). This strong sense of purpose (eg, “to achieve my objectives”) also reflected in their commitment to the service of others (ie, athletes and support staff; eg, “promote teamwork”; “support my kids and athletes”); that is, they were also athlete-centered and realistic (demand but be supportive).

*Achievement.* Another key motivational theme was associated with achievement (eg, “perform my potential”; “be successful”). They valued their work as highly important and challenging and the sense of accomplishment was a driving force (ie, high levels of internal motivation). This strong task focus with clarity of purpose (eg, “clear daily goals”) is associated with the drive to be successful. Moreover, this drive for success was driven by an approach for success rather than avoidance strivings (eg, “try not to be negative,” “build confidence daily”). These strivings, which suggest a high degree of confidence in their method, were consistent with the low-average N and high C.

*Power.* The third motivational theme that emerged was power, the ability to positively influence others (eg, “teach something to my children every day”),

also emerged as a strong motivational theme and consistent with the high E, and average A (Leader Style of Interactions). Central to this motive for power was the holistic development of athletes (average A, high C). For example, “have the athletes move one step closer to their performance” and “build athletes’ confidence daily.” Furthermore, the strivings reflected the need for personal development (eg, “balance work and family,” “look after own health”) to create the best environment for the athletes to thrive (eg, “be positive within positive surroundings”).

In summary, these strivings reveal that these coaches are driven by (1) personal growth and development for self and others; that is, *getting along* (McAdams, 2015); (2) to be highly successful and achieve through thorough planning and contingency plans that internally fueled their desire to challenge themselves; and (3) lead through the positive influence over others (ie, power); that is, *getting ahead* (McAdams, 2015).

*Commitment-investment.* These coaches reported a strong commitment to most of their strivings, which they also considered important. Unsurprisingly, there was a high degree of personal investment in sport and specifically the development of athletes. These strivings are consistent with the high scores for conscientiousness and, for example, Style of Learning (high C, low to high O; good students, by-the-bookers) and the need for achievement.

*Ease-effort.* Ratings from the perceived challenge and likelihood of success related to the stated strivings are related to the theme of ease-effort. The scores for these aspects of the strivings are consistent with the style of Well-Being (up-beat optimist) and a directed Style of Impulse Control (low N, high C).

*Desirability reward.* The coaches’ scores for how satisfied they feel when their strivings are achieved related to the desirability-reward theme. The high scores for satisfaction and the many strivings related to enhancing performance reflected the strong drive for success. From the trait profile (high E, average A), they enjoy the company of others and the ability to lead others to successful outcomes (Style of Interactions).

These SWC are highly motivated for success. Nevertheless, little is known about why they are driven to improve themselves. Why is it so important for them to be successful? What does it mean for them to be coaches within the context of their own lives? How do they make sense of their lived experiences and the person they seek to become; in other words, what are their narrative identities?

## Coach (and Athlete) Narratives

Fourteen serial winning coaches and 17 of their athletes (coached by 10 of the coaches) participated in semistructured interviews. The authors and in some cases author-led trained researchers conducted the interviews in the various countries. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and where necessary, translated into English. These were returned to participant coaches for review and editing but they did not request any changes.

In this section, we provide an overview of the key findings. However, presenting a thorough and detailed account of each of the themes and subthemes elicited by the interviews is beyond the scope of this chapter. After summarizing the key themes that emerged, the authors highlight and discuss, in some depth, a few themes deemed to be of special significance either because of their novelty; or because they affirm and/or challenge previous research findings or public opinion of what serial winning coaches are like and do; or because of the potential impact of these findings in the thinking and practice in how high-performance coaches are recruited, developed, and managed in the future. We use coach and athlete data to illustrate these key themes.

As previously stated, although the emergent themes and narratives might suggest a simplistic overview of the coach–athlete–performance relationship, we underscore both the complexity and diversity of elite coaching experiences and how coaches and athletes made sense of these events. Identifying a stereotypical serial winning coach is likely impossible; however, the research has identified some common and also several unique qualities and practices and the underlying forces that contributed to making these coaches highly successful. At the request of the IGLA group, the researchers focused on the following broad questions in the interviews:

1. What are serial winning coaches like (personality traits, values, and beliefs)?
2. What do serial winning coaches do (practices and behaviors)?
3. How did serial winning coaches develop into the coaches they are today?

*What are serial winning coaches like?* There were consistencies between data collected from all three layers of a person: NEO-FFI-3 (Costa & McCrae, 2010), the strivings matrix (Emmons, 1989), and coaches' and athletes' interviews. These emergent themes are presented in Table 14.2.

*What do serial winning coaches do?* The data revealed three key themes about what serial winning coaches do: vision, people, and environment. First, a clearly articulated vision of what is necessary to win was perceived as central to success. Seeing the “big picture,” understanding its complexity while being able to simplify it into manageable components and developing and implementing pertinent strategies to make this vision a reality was underscored. Monitoring and regulating action plans was pivotal to achieve that end. Second, the importance of selecting and developing a high-performing and cohesive group of people who exude confidence (including the athletes and the support team) was reported. This confidence or belief in all actors was framed as the ability of the coach to instill belief in: *me* (get all in the program to believe in the coach); *you* (develop higher levels of confidence in athletes and the support team that they could succeed); and *us* (the realization in all involved of the power of the group to achieve more by working together). Third, SWC created a functional work environment, which facilitated the achievement of actors' goals (coach, athlete, and organization). These SWC developed a high-performing culture, in which everyone understood and bought into the communicated vision and

**TABLE 14.2** Comparative Analysis (Coach vs Athlete) of SWC Personality Traits, Values and Beliefs, and Key Skills

Coach data themes	Athlete data themes
<b>Personality traits</b>	
SWC described themselves as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having a very strong work ethic</li> <li>• confident</li> <li>• being thirsty for knowledge</li> <li>• socially competent</li> <li>• endorsing a positive approach to problem solving</li> </ul>	Athletes described their coaches as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having a very strong work ethic</li> <li>• confident</li> <li>• knowledgeable</li> <li>• socially competent</li> <li>• endorsing a positive approach to problem solving</li> </ul>
<b>Values and beliefs (the way the world should be)</b>	
SWC believed that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• coaching should be athlete-centered and holistic</li> <li>• coaches must uphold high moral standards</li> <li>• sustained success requires an adequate work-life balance</li> </ul>	Athletes thought that their coaches: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• were athlete- and team-centered</li> <li>• upheld very high moral standards</li> <li>• valued all involved</li> <li>• had an appropriate work-life balance</li> </ul>
<b>Key skills required to succeed</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective communication</li> <li>• Teaching</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Managing</li> <li>• Decision making</li> <li>• Relationship building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective communication</li> <li>• Managing</li> <li>• Motivating</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Relationship building</li> </ul>

invested necessary (human and material) resources, to maximize the chances of success. The congruent data and emergent themes from both coaches and athletes are combined and presented in [Table 14.3](#).

A detailed discussion of what SWC are like and do is not possible in this chapter. Nonetheless, in the following section we attempt to consider the findings previously described to offer a tentative explanation of what we believed to be central to success in a high-performance environment as described by these SWC and their athletes. When considered as a whole, coach and athlete data were consistently pointing in the direction of the relational nature of high-performance coaching as a fundamental factor to success. We will thus shift the focus to this point and the impact of the nature of the coach–athlete–performance relationship on performance outcomes.

*High-performance coaching is highly relational.* A large part of the role of the high-performance coach revolves around the management of the performance team, including but not limited to athletes, other coaches, and support staff (Lyle, 2002; Mallett, 2010). We concluded that it is the ability of the SWC

**TABLE 14.3** What Serial Winning Coaches Do: Main Themes and Subthemes Emerging from Coach and Athlete Interviews

Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing and enacting a clear philosophy</li> <li>• Ability to see into the future</li> <li>• Capacity to simplify complexity</li> <li>• Thorough action planning</li> <li>• Constant reviewing and adjusting</li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People selection (athletes and staff)</li> <li>• Believe in <i>me</i> (the coach)</li> <li>• Believe in <i>you</i> (the athlete)</li> <li>• Believe in <i>us</i> (the team and organization)</li> <li>• Managing the high-performance entourage</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building the organization (influencing upwards)</li> <li>• Creating the culture (norms and ways of working)</li> <li>• Providing stability and dependability</li> </ul>

to build and manage a “high-performing” coalition of people that facilitated success. The members of this coalition must have the required skills to fulfill their roles, the motivation to succeed, and the desire to compromise personal pride or gain for the benefit of medium- to long-term success (ie, selflessness). From this perspective, high-performance coaching is clearly relational. It is about people supporting other people to achieve exceptional outcomes. Two main themes emerge from this parallel analysis of the data: the role of emotional intelligence as a springboard to a plethora of positive outcomes; and the evolving shift in the nature of the coach–athlete–performance team relationship toward a “benevolent dictatorship.”

*Emotional intelligence as a springboard to management, learning, and coping.* Chan and Mallett (2011) underscored the importance of emotional intelligence in successfully dealing with interpersonal challenges in highly contested sporting environments. The International Sport Coaching Framework (ICCE, ASOIF, & LBU, 2013), based on the work of Côté and Gilbert (2009) and Gilbert and Côté (2013), proposed that as well as having appropriate professional knowledge (ie, of the sciences and the sport), coaches must also possess interpersonal (ie, how to connect with people) and intrapersonal (ie, self-awareness) knowledge and skills. Moreover, Côté and Gilbert posited that effective coaching is the consistent and integrated application of these three types of knowledge to facilitate athletes’ developmental outcomes, including performance. Both coaches and athletes corroborated these assumptions.

From the high degree of congruence between coach and athlete NEO-FFI data, it was established that SWC have an enhanced level of self-awareness, a key component and mediator of emotional intelligence (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Gilbert & Côté, 2013). Interviewed athletes also reported their coach as having an enhanced level of self-awareness and emotional intelligence. For instance,

an athlete talked about how his coach “wasn’t always nice, but knew exactly when he was and when he wasn’t and plays whatever role he thinks is going to get the job done on that day” (Athlete 11). Another female athlete (Coach 10) openly said that her relationship with her coach and her performance was hindered:

*until the coach became more self-aware of some of his behaviours and how they affected us. We were constantly in fear of him and it took us two years to gather the courage to talk to him about it. He has done a lot of self-reflection since and we went on to win gold (Athlete 12).*

Coaches reported that high levels of emotional intelligence were necessary to adapt their behavior to each individual rather than using a one-size-fits-all to relationship building and/or conflict management. They also reported that emotional intelligence played a role in anticipating problems and putting the steps in place to avoid them before they occur (Olusoga et al., 2012).

Within this context, and as expressed in Athlete 12’s previous quote, optimal levels of self-awareness seem to protect coaches against their own behavior that unwittingly can have potentially detrimental effects on athletes’ performance. It is also plausible that enhanced levels of self-awareness are linked to the ability of this group of coaches to be effective and efficient learners. Having a clear idea, through introspection and self-reflection, of one’s own strengths and areas for improvement could provide the impetus needed to seek ways to fill a gap in knowledge or skill.

As aforementioned, high-performance coaching is a social activity in a highly pressurized context. Long and irregular hours, prolonged international commitments, close yet hierarchical relationships with athletes and staff, within a highly contested and at times unpredictable setting, among other factors were identified by SWC as a potential “recipe for disaster” (Coach 10). The majority of SWC expressed a view that high-performance coaching is not a profession for the faint hearted and that steps need to be taken to ensure that the coach remains healthy and fit to lead and manage the group. Coach 7 put it this way “I learnt the hard way. I became very ill and had to drastically change my approach to things, find ways to switch off and manage pressure better. I am never going there again.” While high-performance coaching can obviously lead to proud and memorable moments in a coach’s career, it is clear that the mental and physical well-being of the high-performance coaches can be compromised by the very nature of the job. Aspiring high-performance coaches should be made aware of these risks and the antecedents. Increased self-awareness, as suggested by Longshore (2015), may have potential therapeutic and protective properties to buffer against the inevitable stresses of high-performance sport and help coaches cope (Olusoga et al., 2012).

*The coach as a benevolent dictator.* Although coaches and their athletes generally agreed with the nature of the coach–athlete–performance relationship, they emphasized different elements of the coach–athlete dyad. Coaches viewed

their coaching style as collaborative and facilitative, whereas the athletes generally viewed the coaches as a “benevolent dictator.”

*I think the consequences [of tough decisions] are, he feels massive pressure to get it right and it's people's lives. People are there, [athletes] are there giving up their all of their twenties and some of their thirties because they love [sport], but when you have to make selection decisions it's people's lives. And that's tough especially for the Olympics. He's not a robot with no emotion. He understands that that affects people, but they're decisions that have to be made and he makes them in the best interest of [national sport] and he justifies that, but it's still tough for him. (Athlete 11)*

The athletes acknowledged that while coaches were keen to demonstrate some eagerness to listen and take athletes' opinions on board to build a partnership between athlete and coach, athletes recognized that the final decision was the coach's and that that was his role. The term “benevolent” however, indicated that athletes felt the coach had their best interest at heart the majority of the time (Jowett & Clark-Carter, 2006). Coaches repeatedly stated that they always tried to put themselves in the shoes of the athlete. This need to show empathy was something these coaches learned as athletes. Through the interviews, coaches were mindful that the daily decisions they make affect people. However, coaches stressed that, while being considerate to athletes and others in the way decisions were made and communicated, they were paid to make those decisions and live with the consequences. These SWC were described as ruthless, yet not heartless decision makers because they cared about others.

Consequently, SWC are not just transactional leaders, but transformational in how they conducted their business. This is consistent with previous literature (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Din & Paskevich, 2013; Hodge, Henry & Smith, 2014; Kellet, 2009). Indeed, sustained success at the highest level of competition depended on the ability of the coach to transform athletes and teams into self-driven, self-regulated, and self-reliant actors—this agency was identified in the strivings data. Coaching at this level (it could be argued at any level) is interpreted much more as a partnership between coach and athlete rather than a dominant hierarchical power relationship. This paradigm shift in the way high-performance coach–athlete relationships are construed and function has been reported in the literature (Davis & Jowett, 2014; Hodge et al., 2014; Mallett, 2005). Nonetheless, this (when appropriate) collaborative approach to leadership between coach and athlete at the elite level has not been commonly reported and especially in terms of contributing to successful performance outcomes. These collective studies provide increasing support for this paradigm shift in fostering successful coach–athlete–performance relationships. A fundamental part of this partnership building relies on coaches' respect for athletes as people:

*Yes, and coaching, but not only as a person, but also as a human being. And also some sort of a manager, because he wants ... at some point my management quit,*

*for example, and he searched for a new management for me, so he wants the best for me and then ... of course it is not part of his job, but he wants ... he just does that. I think that is the bond you have or something, but he is very ... yes, how should I say this... he is very involved with you. And sometimes more than you know. And he treats everybody of our team like that, so to speak. (Athlete 7)*

Within this context, several athletes identified the persuasive skills of their coaches to build a collaborative environment, which was characterized by open and transparent communication, consensus decision making, and support for athlete initiative in problem solving. A number of athletes expressed how they had struggled with this idea of collaboration as they had always worked under more controlling and directive coaches who told them what to do and when to do it, which problematizes the notion of collaboration or autonomy-support in decision making (Mallett, Rabjohns, & Occhino, 2015; Occhino, Mallett, Rynne, & Carlisle, 2014). Essentially, athletes referred to their coach as someone who had their best interest at heart, sought consensus, but in the end made decisions, some of which may have been unpopular. Furthermore, athletes accepted that the final decision rested with their coach but endorsed the shift away from coaches whose practice was “my way or the highway.”

*Look, from my own experience, if I was a coach this is what I would do. The more dictator-like coaches, the reputation of the guys from the Balkans, that kind of coach doesn't work at all, they are going to become extinct because sportsmen need to be happy too and enjoy what we do and what we like doing. When we stop enjoying ourselves, we cannot perform at our best and you can tell very easily when you go to a session happy because you know you are going to have a great time, that you are going to have a dynamic session, that you are not going to have a coach making you run or punishing for just about any silly thing for small stuff ... when you are happy is when you are going to perform better and also improve more. (Athlete 3)*

Another key element of the effective coach–athlete collaborative approach was the ability of the coach to find the appropriate balance between challenge and support to facilitate growth and development. These data associated with collaboration are related to key themes from the strivings data around personal growth and learning as well as power to influence others. The importance of creating simulated pressure was emphasized; however, supporting athletes through that process was deemed vital to success. Likewise, eliminating athletes' sense of entitlement (eg, taking staff and fellow athletes, resources, and status for granted), especially in an era where financial support for some athletes is vast and some of them enjoy celebrity-like status, are daily problems faced by SWC. Coaches also felt that the current trend in which athletes' every want is catered for by the coaches, support staff, and the organization had the potential to undermine athletes' agency, independence, and initiative (Mallett, 2005) and to likely produce docile athletes (Denison, 2007). Coaches felt this docility potentially

mitigated against the development of self-reliance, which they viewed as fundamental to success; we termed this notion *athlete grounding*.

Furthermore, the belief that athletes should be solely focused on training and performance and not be “bothered” with potential distractions (eg, family, friends, study) was not supported. Coaches stressed the need to understand that athletes “have other things going on in their lives” (Coach 6) and that providing the time to deal with them can actually enhance performance rather than take away from it. Athletes generally supported this view.

*How did serial winning coaches develop their craft?* The final element of the study related to the developmental pathway of the coaches. Two main lines of enquiry were pursued in this respect. The first revolved around the educational pathways of the coaches and the second delved into the most significant events and milestones in their career.

*Coach education pathways and opportunities.* Contrary to some previous accounts (Trudel, Gilbert, & Werthner, 2010), SWC strongly valued formal education, be it academic or sport-specific, as a platform or foundational stage of learning from where to grow (Araya, Bennie, & O’Connor, 2015; Demers, Woodburn, & Savard, 2006; Mallett & Dickens, 2009). All but one of the SWC were university-educated. Regardless of the discipline studied (eg, sport science), they all reported the significant contribution of their formal education to provide foundational skills to succeed in professional coaching (Allen & Shaw, 2009). Formal education, especially early on in their careers, provided SWC with mental models and reference points they could use to attempt to define what their objectives were and how they would go about achieving them. It also provided “thinking tools” they could use to interpret events unfolding in front of their eyes. In addition, SWC emphasized the power of nonformal (eg, clinics, seminars) and informal learning opportunities (eg, dialogue with others or self-reflection). Collectively, these formal, nonformal, and informal learning opportunities were valued by the SWC, yet their relative contribution seemed to vary over time and at different stages of their coaching career as previous research has shown (Côté, 2006; Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009; Mallett, Rynne, & Billett, 2016).

SWC viewed themselves as curious and having an insatiable thirst for knowledge (Valée & Bloom, 2005), which is generally consistent with their trait profile (conscientious and most with a high degree of openness) and strivings (eg, agentic, personal growth, and centrality of learning). What underpinned these themes of conscientiousness, personal growth, and learning was the desire to be better and know more (*to get ahead*). This led them to seek additional learning opportunities in the guise of coaching clinics and study visits and were avid readers of electronic and hard-copy material, especially early in their careers (Mallett et al., 2014). They also confessed to being avid consumers of their own sport, watching it as much as they could afford. This ongoing obsession to learn as much as they could was underpinned by their need to prove themselves competent (Deci & Ryan, 1985; McLean & Mallett, 2012).

Various forms of informal learning were reported. All coaches identified that direct engagement in coaching practice was the most influential on their coach development (Jiménez-Sáiz, Lorenzo-Calvo, & Ibañez-Godoy, 2008). Catalysts for learning were the athletes and other coaches. In particular, the importance of athletes for stimulating learning is a novel finding. Although this finding makes intuitive sense, the role of athletes in high-performance coach learning has received little attention in the literature (Rynne & Mallett, 2016). Gilbert and Trudel (2001) reported the significance of issue setting (how issues were identified and framed) to stimulate reflective practice, albeit with youth coaches. Nevertheless, the notion that athletes stimulate coach learning is implicit in Gilbert and Trudel's notion of issue setting. SWC viewed athletes as invaluable sources of information. Observing athletes in training and competition striving to find solutions to problems allowed coaches to think through the same issues and find novel solutions (if not outright copy those found by the athletes themselves). Engaging athletes in a regular process of consultation was also viewed as capital to obtaining "insider information" that otherwise would remain hidden. Coaches and athletes stressed that this was not an easy process as there was a fine line between athletes liking being consulted and them thinking the coach had run out of ideas or was directionless. This consultative process was especially so, particularly for athletes more used to didactic and controlling approaches with previous coaches.

Nevertheless, for any learning to take place, a deep level of self-reflection and self-awareness was deemed necessary (Werthner & Trudel, 2006). Structured self-reflection was not considered essential, although necessary, when dealing with technical and tactical debriefs (ie, formal meetings with staff and players). As an example of unstructured regular self-reflection, Coach 3 said "you never stop thinking about it when you go home; about the things you could have done better to impact the outcome." SWC reported that solitary introspection contributed to regulating coaching practice. This is in keeping with the earlier theme of self-awareness as a springboard to other positive outcomes and the striving to influence others in this process.

All SWC stressed how a number of significant others (eg, mentors, family) had been very influential in their learning. Mentors were highlighted as one of the greatest influences on SWC development and importantly they identified the capacity of the "developing coach" to retain decision-making power, even if wrong, was necessary for enhanced growth and learning (Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999). Sometimes, this mentor was just someone they admired and tried to emulate, but no direct contact was necessary other than observation and writings of these "mentor" coaches.

In addition, most coaches were former elite athletes themselves (Côté, Erickson & Duffly, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2006). Eight of the 14 had been international athletes, five had been national level athletes, and only one had not played his sport at a high level. An elite playing background was not considered the main reason for elite coaching success, but coaches stressed it had afforded

them a frame of reference as both a player as well as a coach (Rynne, Mallett, & Tinning, 2010). It also provided an expedited transition into high-performance coaching (Rynne, 2014). Specifically, this previous elite athlete experience provided not only credibility with the players and a very practical knowledge of their sport, but a way to better relate to what their athletes were going through (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Erickson et al., 2007; Occhino, Mallett, & Rynne, 2013; Rynne et al., 2010).

In sum, the obsessive pursuit of knowledge was central to these coaches' ongoing success. Their personal agency and meaningful engagement in learning situations guided learning and growth. This obsessive pursuit of knowing more is consistent with the trait profiles and striving themes of these coaches. Among other things, the next section will propose an explanation for the SWC's quest for knowledge and the constant need to demonstrate competence.

*Coach critical life events and milestones.* Becoming a high-performance coach and specifically a serial winning high-performance coach was characterized by a combination of four underpinning factors that are worthy of discussion. These included: (1) parental influences—work ethic, lifelong learning, and altruism; (2) early desire to coach; (3) “serial insecurity”; and (4) serendipity and risk taking.

First, SWC attributed their strong work ethic, engagement in lifelong learning, as well as their passion for coaching, to parental influences. In other words, having been brought up in an environment that valued these qualities had impacted their approach to work. Nine coaches reported how the work ethic exhibited by their parents had had a significant impact in the way they approached their sport and the subsequent obsessive engagement in lifelong learning, initiated by a valued university education that was considered essential to success. In addition, half the SWC attributed their altruistic nature, their desire to help others, to their parents who worked in the “helping professions” (eg, teaching, nursing). For instance, Coach 3 stated that, “he had the teaching gene in him” because his mother was a teacher.

Second, SWC identified both an early desire to coach (from a very early age) and the recognition by a significant other (a teacher or one of their coaches) that (1) they wanted to coach, and (2) that there was a “special talent” or disposition for coaching. Coach 4 recalled how older coaches used to mock him because he was attending coaching clinics while still playing the sport or how his teammates would come to him for advice instead of going to the coach. He also spoke about how his coach would sit down with him and run things past him. Coach 7 retold the story of how he always felt he was the teacher or coach in the field and that he brought it upon himself to coach his teammates during games and practices and that it just felt natural. For the majority of the coaches, their previous elite athlete experience provided a “foot in the door” to elite coaching opportunities (Erickson et al., 2007; Rynne, 2014), which they embraced.

Third, many of the SWC identified their need to constantly prove themselves as a key driver for their progression and consistent success. Consistent

with the high scores for the conscientiousness trait in the NEO-FFI and the very strong achievement striving, coaches and their athletes reported the extremely high work capacity of the serial winners and their very strong drive to win. Two main factors were identified as underpinning their significant drive for success: *grounded self-belief* (coaches' self-belief based on previous successes and on how much work has gone into preparing for a specific competition); and *reasonable self-doubt* (a nagging feeling at the back of the coaches' mind that they either were not good enough to win again or that they still had something to prove). These interrelated factors seemed to spur the coaches onto continued effort and buffered against potential complacency. Remarkably, for such an accomplished group of people, and in line with [Carter and Bloom \(2009\)](#) and [Mallett and Coulter \(2016\)](#), a high number of the SWC recounted experiences of “unfinished business” as athletes that somehow they had managed to “put right,” or were trying to, as coaches. Painful losses or an overall sense of not having fulfilled their potential as athletes seemed to have driven the careers of some of these coaches. These statements point toward a underlying drive for these coaches to consistently need to prove themselves, a certain level of what we have called “serial insecurity,” which were significant forces in driving their motivating them to continue to strive and thrive in the high-performance environment.

*I'd say is I've been on a journey that in some ways has been driven a little bit by fear of not being good enough—I want to be great, I don't know why but I do. I don't want to be great last year; I want to be great this year. I was voted “coach of the decade” by [sports magazine] and that summer I was sitting with my Dad, before I went to the Olympics, and he said “what decade was that again?” I said “it was last decade” and he said “that's what I'm saying.” (Coach 2)*

The SWC's “serial insecurity” also reflects the very nature of high-performance sport in which coaches' and athletes' self-efficacy and perceived competence are put to the test on a daily basis. SWC expressed that to be able to cope with this constant pressure, developing “a thick skin” and learning to embrace the “insecurity” and allowing it to drive you forward was vital (Coach 2).

Finally, although most SWC were doing rudimentary “coaching work” prior to commencing their coaching careers, their foray into formal coaching was typically serendipitous and opportunistic. For example, Coach 4 spoke of how he received a phone call while he was about to jump on the team bus as the captain of the national team to go to the European Championships when he was asked if he wanted to coach a specific senior team. Put on the spot, the SWC decided to “hang up his boots” there and then and to start his coaching career as of that moment. For others, their athletic careers were cut short due to critical life incidents. For instance, Coaches 10 and 13 spoke about road accidents, which finished their playing career or sidelined them for a substantial period of time. It was during these critical periods that they either started considering a career as a coach or actually started coaching. Associated with this notion of serendipity

was the opportunistic risk-taking, considered necessary for coaching development and success. This risk-taking element was present in most SCW career pathways. These risks included leaving stable employment, dropping pay or status to become a head coach in a different setting, retiring early from playing to coach as the opportunity arose, taking a coaching job in a faraway country just to get started. Some were calculated risks, some were perceived as outright “leaps of faith,” but it was apparent that a certain element of serendipity and potential risk, in addition to their strong work ethic and passion, was a feature of these consistently successful career coaches. Incidentally, Coach 4 went on to win a national and European title in his first season as a coach. This is not to say that the coaches had got lucky or had not worked hard. These coaches were ready, willing, and able to take their chance when it came along: A winning coach is a “predator of opportunity” (Coach 13).

### Author—Coaches’ Personal Narratives

In general terms, SWC told underlying plots in their stories. For ease of understanding, we provide a generic “title” for two major characterizations and then go on to offer a rationale and description for both. Every coach is different and they differentially share aspects of both primary narratives. We are solely attempting to generate a coherent story that best represents this group of coaches.

*The righteous avenger.* There is a strong sense that many of these coaches are on a personal crusade of atonement fueled by perceived past failings that are omnipresent. They are trying to put “right” the perceived “wrongs” of the past. For example, unfulfilled ambitions as an athlete due to personal shortcomings or critical life-events and a near-pathological “serial insecurity” drives them to work relentlessly hard to achieve their goals. However, single Olympic or championship success does little to feel atonement for past failings. Even repeated success (winning) does little to stifle their quest for some redemption. They always need a new adventure to aim for and see themselves as the heroes who will save the day. This obsession with their past inadequacies might manifest in potentially blinding egos, which they need to keep under control to ensure it does thwart succeeding in their quest. This is a precarious balance, which can only be sustained through high levels of emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and persuasive power (at times manipulation) to bring the performance team (athletes, coaches, and support staff) along with them on this quest. Nevertheless, these adventurers operate from a moral high ground and strive to do the right thing for themselves and others. Finally, these coaches understand that no adventure worth a big reward is risk-free and demonstrate a tendency to take risks when the opportunity arises in order to achieve their goals. As we have seen, some of these risks can be fairly calculated, while others are outright leaps of faith.

*The higher-purpose altruist.* Coaches fitting this description tended to believe that their actions were driven by a higher purpose, such as the nation’s

pride or fulfilling the dreams of the athletes and their families. They carry out their work with a sense of duty and responsibility and understand the inevitability of the personal suffering attached to the job (eg, lack of family time; stress and pressure; public scrutiny) as part of the package and something to be proud of. While guided by a strong sense of right and wrong, in pursuing this higher purpose, these coaches exhibit a certain ruthlessness and steely determination to achieve their goals that may appear as detached or impersonal, particularly when it is necessary to make a difficult decision. A higher proportion of coaches in our sample would fit within the adventurer profile than the altruist, and yet the two plots can coexist within the same coach.

In addition, the researchers found that the two types of SWC shared a common narrative that we termed the *grounded realist*. The grounded realist is the part of these coaches' persona that allows them to normalize the exceptional set of circumstances surrounding the life and work of a high-performance coach: a highly pressurized job, public scrutiny, long hours, time spent away from home, the immediacy and potency of results, managing a large group under pressure, etc. The grounded realist is able to keep these factors in perspective and rather than fight them, embrace them, and use them to his advantage. This coach is also able to find ways to keep doing the normal things and preserve their life outside the sport (stay in touch with family and friends, hobbies, etc.), as well as staying in good physical and mental shape in order to be able to do the job to the best of their ability. All in all, the grounded realist provides the conditions that allow the coach to continue to perform; in other words, it underpins the longevity of the coach, which is requisite to become a SWC.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Recommendations for Coach Recruitment

The premium placed on the identification, recruitment, and development of elite athletes should be afforded to those charged with the responsibility for delivering athlete success—the high-performance coaches. These coaches should be identified, recruited, and developed appropriately. For some sports, this essential component of sustained high performance takes the shape of carefully designed succession plans. In most sports, however, it seems the appointment of high-performance coaches remains ad hoc, unplanned and haphazard. Organizations seeking to develop high-performance coaches are encouraged to design talent identification and development programs akin to those of athletes and informed by empirical evidence.

From the perspective of the key stakeholders, an important outcome of this research was to learn more about what makes these coaches so successful to inform both policy and practice in the identification, recruitment, and development of the next generation of high-performance coaches. Indeed, these coach developers sought a comprehensive and flexible profiling system for

high-performance coaches. The significance of a deeper understanding of the person behind the coach was a key finding in this research. To assist coach developers in introducing and implementing such a comprehensive profiling system might require the support of specially trained psychologists, but could lead to the identification of potential coaches who have an insatiable drive and who are: athlete-centered; able to create a vision and communicate that vision; capable of leading and managing large groups of people; lifelong learners; highly resilient and prepared to take risks.

A point of special interest identified by this study is the long-term potential of the coaches and their prospect of longevity in the job. One area of interest is assessing prospective coaches' resilience (eg, "thick skin"). In addition, those looking to recruit high-performance coaches would be advised to evaluate the coaches' ability to maintain an appropriate work–life balance for self and others in the program. Being able to do so allowed SWC to remain fresh and energetic, and to cultivate better relationships with their families and the athletes themselves. Of course, as Coach 7 indicated when he said that "on average I spend 200 days away from home with my athletes, but I still think I have a pretty good work–life balance," that balance is relative and each individual has to find what works for them. SWC stressed the value of quality time with friends and family, time for self around some kind of hobby, and the importance of remaining in good physical shape. In profiling prospective coaches, gaining an insight into how they manage this could prove very useful. It may not be the make-or-break of hiring a coach, but it may be something that the employing organization can support the coach with over time for the benefit of the athletes, the coach, and the organization itself.

## Recommendations for Coach Education and Development

From the analysis of the SWC data, the authors would like to put forth the following recommendations to coach developers:

- At the highest level of coaching, a solid educational grounding seemed to matter for SWC. This is supported by other studies of high-performance coaches (Araya et al., 2015; Mallett et al., 2014; Mallett & Dickens, 2009; Olusoga et al., 2012). SWC felt that their formal training accelerated the amount of on-the-job learning they could do. So, although interpreted mostly as a starting point and foundation for the journey, organizations supporting young high-performance coaches should encourage, facilitate, and support engagement in this process of formal education. In saying that, SWC stated clearly that they were not supportive of "token coach education" and that formal and nonformal development opportunities should be carefully thought out and be pitched at the right level for the coach.
- Coaching courses should support the acquisition of new knowledge, yet for coach education to fulfill its role, coaches must be provided with time, opportunities, and support during or in between courses to take stock of current

knowledge, digest new knowledge, and look for ways to translate it into practical applications. Individual and guided self-reflection appears critical for this to happen. By the admission of the SWC, high-performance coaches are never the finished article. In a way, those developing high-performance coaches should make explicit attempts to connect formal and informal learning in seamless ways, for instance, through the careful design of learning tasks that require the application of a recently acquired knowledge base to a specific and real situation the coach is trying to resolve (ie, issue setting; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001).

- In connection with the previous items, coach development should be embedded in the reality of the job and appropriately supported via a mentor, a “more capable” assistant, peer groups, social networks, and vast amounts of guided and nonguided self-reflection. SWC strongly supports the value of the mentoring process, yet stresses that throughout this process, the developing coach should retain decision-making capability and power in order to develop accountability and accelerate learning.
- In appropriate countries, sports, and specific settings, a “coach loan” system similar to that of professional team sport players might be generative in coach development. Emerging high-performance coaches would thus be loaned out to other organizations where the coach could “cut his/her teeth” and learn safely on the job until they are ready to come back to the institution of origin.
- The development of the program management capabilities of the coach should be enhanced at every opportunity. SWC invariably reported that the management of large operations and groups was a key feature of “modern” coaching and that it would become even more important in the future.
- SWC corroborated the suggestion that high levels of emotional intelligence were pivotal to successful management of elite athletes and programs (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Côté & Gilbert, 2009). A first step would be to support coaches in developing heightened levels of self-awareness. Recently, Longshore (2015) has demonstrated how mindfulness training, a technique that revolves around the development of moment-awareness, can improve emotional control, reduce stress, and help build better coach–athlete relationships in high-performance coaches. Supporting coaches in understanding what makes them who they are and how they behave via exercises similar to the strivings questionnaire (Emmons, 1989, 2003) or the life story interview may be generative in fostering self-awareness. Likewise, consistent amounts of guided and nonguided self-reflection will enhance the coaches’ self-awareness and their critical thinking ability (always questioning what you and others do and looking for a better way), which SWC remarked as key to sustained success.
- Finally, as already mentioned, SWC place great emphasis in achieving a relative work–life balance. Coach education and development for

high-performance coaches should devote time and resources to support that current and prospective coaches understand the value of this proposition and develop strategies to fulfill it.

## Role of the Sport Psychologist

Sport psychologists can play a leading role in supporting high-performance coaches and those recruiting and developing them. With regards to recruitment, sport psychologists are well placed to support a more comprehensive profiling process, recommended earlier, to promote an effective coach–organizational fit. Along these lines, sport psychologists can play a significant part in supporting sporting organizations define more clearly who they are, their philosophy and vision, and the kind of people they need to maximize adaptive outcomes for all actors within the sporting context.

When high-performance coaches are considered (and consider themselves) as performers in their own right (Gould et al., 2002), it is easy to see the potential role of sport psychologist in supporting the development of coaches. However, an agentic coach should drive this coach–sport psychologist partnership. Based on the results of this study, we see two major areas where sport psychologists can make a contribution. First, sport psychologists can support coaches to achieve deeper levels of self-awareness. This process of self-awareness augmentation can lead to coaches gaining a deeper understanding of who they are, what drives them, and what triggers certain feelings, emotions, reactions, and behaviors. It can also help coaches recognize possible issues earlier and the potential consequence of different ways of dealing with them before they happen. It may also improve the ability of the coach to understand athletes better and be able to empathize with their needs and wants. Positioning coaches as performers is central to coaches understanding themselves and reflecting upon how they act and subsequently impact on athletes. An antecedent of leading others is first, knowing thyself. Enhanced self-awareness has the potential to mediate many positive or adaptive coach and athlete outcomes: for example, stress reduction and coping; emotional regulation; higher levels of emotional intelligence; and increased management capacity.

Second, we have shown how throughout the data collection process, SWC emphasized the need to achieve an adequate, yet relative, work–life balance. Sport psychologists can help coaches recognize the need for this balance and then work with them to support them to find this balance. Given that the SWC tended to believe this is something they had learned over the years and, in some cases, the hard way, this may be especially helpful for young aspiring coaches who may be more inclined to espouse an “all-out” or “win or bust” theory of success.

Guided self-reflection, personal counseling/coaching, rest and regeneration diaries, and mindfulness training might be just a few of the ways in which sport

psychologists can support the development of high-performance coaches. Perhaps working with coaches, in preference to athletes, might be more beneficial to the coach–athlete–performance relationship.

## Recommendations for Future Research

On the basis of the findings from this research study, we propose some ideas for future research. First, more research is required to continue to build an empirical base in knowing coaches better. This research is important to assist coach developers and sports psychologists in supporting the learning and development of high-performance coaches. Indeed, improving the quality of coaches will importantly contribute to more than successful performance outcomes—it will contribute to the holistic development of young people, which is a key purpose of sport (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Second, we support the complementarity of ideographic and nomothetic approaches to knowing a person in sport settings (Coulter et al., 2016). McAdams's (1995) three-layered approach to knowing a person integrates multiple data sets from different epistemological frames that provide a more comprehensive portrait of people that gives a deeper understanding of people and their behaviors. These integrated accounts of coaches might be extended to include data from additional and relevant layers that also shape personality development. For example, examine the relational dynamics between key actors in the sport setting as well as the sociocultural context in which they operate (eg, ethnographic accounts) to gain a deeper understanding of the whole person in context (Sheldon, Cheng, & Hilpert, 2011).

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