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College Coaches' Experiences With Stress—"Problem Solvers" Have Problems, Too

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Research has demonstrated that coaches experience stress because of the nature of their job and that stress can affect their physical and mental well-being (Richman, 1992; Wang & Ramsey, 1998). The purpose of the present study was to better understand coaches' experiences with stress, the perceived effects of stress on their coaching performance, and their coping strategies. A semistructured interview approach was used with 10 NCAA Division I male and female head coaches. The five major themes that characterized the coaches' experiences were contextual/conditional factors, sources of stress, responses and effects of stress, managing stress, and sources of enjoyment. The results are discussed in relation to Smith's (1986) cognitive–affective model of stress. Opportunities for future research are suggested, and implications for practitioners who want to help coaches manage the stress of their profession are offered.

> You work so hard it's like your life becomes this program and this team, so I guess I might feel stress in the sense that I don't have a big social network outside of my job and the people I work with. . . . [laughing] I mean, we're supposed to be problem solvers, not people with problems.

This quote illustrates one coach's sentiments regarding the demands and expectations of college coaching. Although it is understood that athletics is a domain that is highly conducive to feelings of stress and anxiety, coaches' experiences with stress in this environment have not received significant attention, perhaps because of the misconception that coaches should be solving the problems rather than succumbing to them.

Is Coaching Stressful?

Although a considerable amount of research has examined the stress experienced by athletes (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Gould & Weinberg, 1985; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998; Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1991), the same level of attention to coaches' stress is missing, especially from a qualitative perspective.

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Sources of occupational stress have been identified for other professions, especially those entailing high levels of human interaction, such as law enforcement (Violanti & Aron, 1994), nursing (Bennett, Lowe, Matthews, Dourali, & Tattersall, 2001), public service (Ganster, Mayes, Sime, & Tharp, 1982), and teaching (Shaw, Keiper, & Flaherty, 1985). Thus, it might be presumed that coaches, who constantly interact with a variety of people including athletes, parents, other coaches, athletic directors, and game officials, experience high levels of occupational stress, as well. Moreover, coaches might find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to satisfy various, and possibly conflicting, requests of other people in addition to fulfilling their coaching duties.

Many notable coaches have left the profession because of the negative effects of stress. For example, former Notre Dame head football coach, Ara Parseghian, openly admitted that coaching stress had defeated him, and he had reached a point of emotional exhaustion (Kolbenschlag, 1976). George Ireland, former head basketball coach at Loyola University in Chicago, also retired early because of the physical demands that stress had placed on his body. He stated, "One day my doctor sat me down and asked if I wanted to keep on coaching or die in two weeks" (as cited in Kolbenschlag, p. 97).

To date, there have been few studies that have examined sources of stress in the coaching profession. High school coaches have listed coach–athlete relationships (Kroll & Gundersheim, 1982), inadequate salaries, and lack of free time (Malone, 1984) as primary stressors. Richman (1992) found that the stress associated with interpersonal relations was significantly related to higher levels of anxiety and depression and to lower levels of positive well-being and general health for college coaches. Sullivan and Nashman (1993) surveyed 10 U.S. Olympic head coaches regarding their stress-related experiences during the Olympic Games and found that selecting players, representing their country, having insufficient preparation time, dealing with the media, and being away from family were primary stressors.

Wang and Ramsey (1998) developed the Inventory for New Coaches' Challenges and Barriers (INCCB) to determine whether there were specific stressors for individuals in the early stages of their coaching career. The most significant challenge for the coaches they sampled was having the communication skills necessary to establish positive relationships with athletes. Other stressors included establishing a positive team atmosphere, keeping nonstarting players motivated, recruiting, and lacking financial resources.

Burnout Among Coaches

Freudenberger (1980) originally coined the term *burnout* as "a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward" (p. 13). Maslach and Jackson (1981) proposed a multidimensional conceptualization of burnout that included the components of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment, and they developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) to examine this phenomenon. Research conducted with this instrument has indicated that coaches report moderate to high levels of burnout (Kelley, 1994; Kelley, Eklund, & Ritter-Taylor, 1999; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Vealey, Udry, Zimmerman, & Soliday, 1992).

A theory commonly advanced to explain the complex phenomenon of burnout is Smith's (1986) cognitive–affective model of stress. According to Smith, individuals consider the rewards and costs of sport participation and compare them with their expectations of the activity and the attractiveness of alternative activities. Stress is predicted to occur if an individual experiences an imbalance between the demands of the activity and his or her coping resources and also perceives the demands as threatening. Therefore, one's perception is critical as to whether or not a stressful experience is viewed negatively. If stress is experienced frequently over a period of time, burnout might result.

Although Smith's (1986) model was developed to examine burnout in athletes, it has also been used to examine burnout in coaches. For example, Vealey et al. (1992) investigated high school and college coaches' burnout and found that the factors most strongly related to burnout included trait anxiety and a number of perceptions associated with the coaching role, such as rewards, amount of control or autonomy, overload of commitments, and level of social support. Cognitive evaluation has also been shown to mediate stress and burnout of college basketball coaches (Kelley & Gill, 1993), as well as baseball and softball coaches (Kelley, 1994), in that higher levels of perceived stress were related to higher levels of burnout.

Coaching-Science Literature

Although there has been some focus on stress in the coaching profession, most coaching-science research has been concerned with coaches' behaviors (Gilbert, 2002). For example, Mowat and Morris (2001) demonstrated interest in basketball coaches' arousal levels (as measured with a heart-rate monitor and questionnaires) and how they related to their behavior during games. High school football coaches' postcompetitive behaviors in relation to arousal management of athletes have been examined, and overall findings suggest that almost half of this group did not know how to implement or instruct their athletes on stress-management techniques (Foshee & Conn, 1993). Also, despite some interest in coaching stress and burnout, only four studies examined coaches' use of coping strategies between 1970 and 2001 (Gilbert).

To date, the limited research on coaching stress has been quantitative in nature, which follows the trend of coaching-science research in general (Gilbert, 2002). The studies that have been conducted have provided some insight into the incidence of burnout and possible predictors of burnout (Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Kelley et al., 1999; Vealey et al., 1992), the possible sources of stress for college coaches who have recently entered the profession (Wang & Ramsey, 1998), and the relationship between stress levels and the health of coaches (Richman, 1992). Research has also indicated that coaches often are a significant source of athletes' stress (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Udry, Gould, Bridges, & Tuffey, 1997), suggesting that coaches' stress levels might also be affecting the quality of athletes' sport experience. What remains unknown is coaches' experiences with stress and the ways they attempt to manage it. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to gain an understanding of NCAA Division I male and female head coaches' experiences with stress, the perceived effects of stress on their coaching performance, and their coping strategies.

Method

Participants

The participants were male (n = 6) and female (n = 4) NCAA Division I head coaches of baseball, basketball, diving, softball, swimming, tennis, and volleyball teams. Most were White (n = 9), 1 was Asian American, and their ages ranged from 36 to 55 years (M = 45.70). Total years of coaching experience ranged from 14 to 30 years, and time spent as a head coach or co–head coach ranged from 5 to 30 years. At the time of data collection, 7 coaches had teams or athletes who were ranked in the top 10 nationally. Seven coaches were currently married (4 of whom had the roles of co–head coach for two of the teams) and 4 had children. Coaches were selected from three large universities in two different areas of the United States.

Procedure

Before interviewing the participants, I engaged in a bracketing interview conducted by an individual familiar with semistructured-interview techniques. The purpose of this interview was to enlighten me about my own biases regarding coaching stress and minimize the chance that they would influence my interpretation of participants' comments (Ely, 1991). Because I had very little coaching experience, many of my responses during the interview were based on assumptions, as well as findings from the existing literature. Thus, the interview brought attention to my incorrect speculations so that I was able to put them aside during the interviews and analysis.

Also, two pilot interviews were conducted with NCAA Division I coaches before interviewing participants. The purpose of these interviews was to gain experience with the interview process and detect potential problems with the structure or content of the interview guide. After the initial pilot interview, the order of the questions was changed to promote a better flow throughout the interview, and the wording of one question was altered for clarity. In addition to these preliminary interviews, I had completed two qualitative-research courses and had previously been involved in qualitative studies.

Purposive criterion sampling was used to identify participants who would be appropriate for this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Coaches who were deemed acceptable for the purposes of this study needed to be at the Division I level and have at least 5 years of experience as a head coach. I anticipated that the findings might differ significantly if several levels of competition were used, and it would not make sense to ask participants to examine their experiences with stress over time if they were in the first few years of their head-coaching career. Coaches who met these criteria were invited, in person or by telephone, to participate in the study. Fifteen coaches were initially contacted, and those who expressed an interest were asked to choose a location and time for the interview. Nine of the interviews were face to face, and one was conducted over the telephone. The interviews ranged in length from 35 to 75 min, with the average interview taking 45 min.

Before conducting the interview, the purpose of the study was explained, coaches were informed that the interview would be audiotaped, they were assured that confidentiality would be preserved by deleting all potential identifiers (e.g.,

the coach's name, the name of the university, etc.) from any resulting transcripts, and all participants signed a consent form.

The semistructured interview format that was used began with a request for specific background information, followed by a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit information about coaches' perceptions and experiences with stress, such as how their athletes might be able to tell if they are experiencing stress, how stress affects their performance, and attempts to manage stress.[1] The same questions were asked of all participants, and probes were used throughout the interviews for clarification and additional detail (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. A copy of the transcript was then mailed to participants for an opportunity to review and alter responses or offer new ideas or experiences (Ely, 1991; Patton, 2002). None of the participants suggested any changes to their transcripts.

Both inductive and deductive analyses were used in this study (Patton, 2002). Based on the procedures outlined by Scanlan, Ravizza, and Stein (1989), an inductive content analysis was used to identify common themes in the raw data; place those themes into categories of greater generality, labeled higher order themes; and create the highest level themes, labeled dimensions. This inductive approach was derived from the clustering technique, which involves comparing and contrasting quotes and then uniting quotes that have a similar meaning (Patton). Some of the dimensions or higher order themes were derived deductively based on answers to specific questions in the interview guide. For example, responses to the question "How do you try to manage your stress?" were coded into the dimension of managing stress. Data analysis was done concurrently with data collection to determine when thematic saturation was reached, thus indicating when further interviews did not need to be conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton).

Transcripts were examined independently by another researcher familiar with qualitative data analysis to further establish the trustworthiness of the data (Ely, 1991; Patton, 2002). Subsequent meetings were then conducted to compare results and discuss issues related to theme development. As a result, an additional major theme (dimension) was identified and various subthemes (first- and second-order themes) were rearranged. The data were then reanalyzed using the input and interpretation of the coanalyst to render the most accurate representation of the coaches' experiences with stress.

Results

Collective analysis of the participants' responses revealed five major dimensions to explain the coaches' experiences with stress: (a) contextual/conditional factors, (b) sources of stress, (c) responses and effects of stress, (d) managing stress, and (e) sources of enjoyment. These dimensions are further divided into first-order themes and second-order themes (see Table 1).

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[1]A copy of the interview guide is available from the author.

Table 1 Dimensions and Higher Order Themes

Dimension	First- and second-order themes
Contextual/conditional factors	level of competition (4) success of the program (6) age/years of experience (8) marriage to co–head coach (4)
Sources of stress	interpersonal/personal sources (10) other people (10) self-imposed stress (3) task-related sources (10) being the head coach (4) time demands (5) recruiting (8) outcome of competition (4) sources that would lead to quitting (10)
Responses and effects of stress	positive responses (9) motivation (6) preparation (2) awareness (2) negative responses (9) physiological (1) behavioral (6) emotional (3) cognitive (6) effects on others (4)
Managing stress	cognitive strategies (6) focus (6) perspective (3) emotional-control strategies (8) balance (3) philosophy (2) social support (7) sport psychology (3) behavioral strategies (10) preparation (5) activities (6)
Sources of enjoyment	interpersonal/personal sources (8) task-related sources (8)

Note. The number of coaches who discussed each theme is indicated in parentheses.

Contextual/Conditional Factors

The themes in this category represent factors related to the structure of the coaches' environment, as well as demographic characteristics that play a role in the coaches' experiences with stress.

Level of Competition. Because many of the participants in this study had coached in less competitive settings before their current positions at the Division I level,

they mentioned the level of competition when discussing stress. One participant stated,

> There's more stress here, simply because you've increased your level of competition. I have to recruit and get better players here at [my current university] to reach the level of success that we want to reach than I did at [my former university]. . . . Here you have to work harder to reach that level of success.

According to one coach, the increased level of competition decreased the amount of stress he felt in relation to financial support:

> When I started off, I coached at the NAIA level and we had no money, and there was stress. Here the girls have six pairs of shoes and at [my previous university] we had to hold bake sales to get them one pair of shoes.

Success of the Program. In addition to the level of competition, the history of the coaches' program had an impact on their stress levels. Several coaches felt that there were certain expectations because of the programs' past success, whether the expectations were self-imposed or imposed by others.

> You really have to produce, especially in this environment where the expectations are so high. There's always that pressure of feeling like you have to succeed and supercede what you did the year before. Regardless of if you have a younger team, or less experienced, or have injuries, you feel still like you constantly have to do better and better and better.

Stress might also arise from lack of success, as demonstrated by one participant who described the challenging experience of having to rebuild a program:

> There's an increased workload simply for the fact that we inherited a program that was at the bottom of the [conference]. It's a little different when you inherit a program that's in good shape. So we've had to do a lot to change the image of [my present university].

Conversely, the success of a program can lead to the reduction of stress for some coaches. One participant said, "The people here are so supportive . . . but I think I'm honest to know the reason for that is because we're successful. They like winners and they have some other sports that aren't so they really need us."

Age and Years of Experience. Considering the coaching experience level of these participants (14 years minimum), it is not surprising that it affected their experience with stress. Four coaches indicated that their age or years of coaching experience diminished their stress, whereas four coaches expressed the opposite opinion. Two coaches did not feel that there was a significant change in the stress they had experienced over the years. One coach discussed how a lack of knowledge could affect one's experience:

> Early in my career I just got too stressed and too upset with my team, as opposed to being able to help them. At times, I think probably my actions or reactions might have been detrimental to them. I was young, and you learn. I had never even run a practice when I started coaching, it was my first

> coaching job, so I just walked in, inexperienced, it was trial and error, learning as I go along. If I had only known then what I know now, we would have won a championship earlier.

Several participants noted the confidence that comes with experience and establishing credibility. Two coaches stated, "I'm just more self-assured."

Other coaches expressed a contrasting view regarding the effects of age and experience on stress. Some considered the physical effects of age to be a deterrent to handling stress. As one participant suggested,

> Your body can take a lot more at one time. . . . The older that I get I find that I just can't do that. I don't have the emotional energy, I don't have the physical energy. . . . When I first started, it was always, "I'm strong enough, I can deal with everything," and as I get older I realize I can't do that.

Marriage to Co–Head Coach. Four of the participants in this study shared the role of head coach with their spouse, and they discussed the impact of this situation on their experience with stress. One coach stated,

> We respond differently in situations and games and I think sometimes I get stressed if I don't agree with [my spouse's] response. . . . It may be easier to ignore what's going on with one of the other coaches if you aren't married . . . you know, you say things more freely to the people you're closest to.

These coaches had the additional stress of "taking their work home with them" and described how this situation affected not only their professional environment but their personal lives, as well. One coach stated, "Our work never leaves us; we go home and it's still there." Another participant commented, "It's easy to find that your whole life is consumed with the program and your sport when both of you are doing it full-time."

Sources of Stress

Interpersonal/Personal Sources. Stress related to others was one of the most prominent sources for this group of coaches. One coach stated,

> I think where the stress comes from is the fact that you're relying on 18- to 22-year-olds to make the right decisions and do the right things that prepare them to be successful, both on the field and inside the classroom, and they don't always do that. . . . I feel like we do a good job of teaching them what to do in certain situations on the field, but what kind of frame of mind, what kind of an emotional state, what kind of a physical state they come to the field in is a whole other issue. . . . I often tell my team that "the best compliment I can give any one of you individually is that I don't have to worry about you."

Many of the coaches indicated that their stress or expectations were self-imposed. Coaches stated, "I put more demands on myself than like an outside stress coming in" and "I put more stress on myself than anybody else does. My expectations of myself are higher than anybody else's."

Task-Related Sources of Stress. Numerous stressors were coaching-related tasks. Six of the coaches had formerly been assistants, so many of them discussed the stress involved with shifting roles from assistant coach to head coach. They mentioned factors such as increased responsibility and being the primary decision maker. One coach explained, "There's a difference between telling the coach that I think we should do this in a given situation and actually being the one to make the decision. It's a huge difference."

One participant referred to coaching as a "24-7 job." In fact, the time involved in this profession was noted often in the descriptions of these coaches' experiences with stress. Another participant said, "It does consume my life. . . . It's just the fact that this is definitely not a normal profession. It's something that, it's basically a lifestyle."

Eight of the coaches discussed some aspect of recruiting as a source of stress, even though some indicated that, overall, it was something they enjoyed. The competitiveness involved in the recruiting process was mentioned by several of the participants.

> You go to the national tournaments and there's 250 coaches there and it's kind of like a meat market. And you always try to find a different pitch. . . . "Well how can I present this differently?" It's basically selling ice to Eskimos, is what you're trying to do.

An additional source of stress related to recruiting was the long process involved; coaches felt they had to "start the process earlier and earlier." One participant stated, "If you're not thinking about recruiting 12 months a year, then you're not gonna get [the athletes you want]. . . . It never stops."

The pressure of wanting to win or feeling they had to win was felt by 4 of the coaches. As one suggested, "There's the stress of just being successful. We get graded every week, 'Did you win or lose?' Not 'Did you play well?'" Another participant described the pressure to win by saying, "The reality is what gets you hired or fired is your ability to win or lose."

Sources of Stress That Would Lead Coaches to Quitting. All of the coaches were asked to describe any factors that would increase their likelihood of leaving the profession. Many discussed the passion they felt toward coaching, and that if they ever lost that deep enjoyment, it would be a sign to retire. In response to this question, one coach said, "If I didn't look forward to coming in [to school], then I would be cheating everyone—the student-athletes, the staff, the fans, the program, the administration. I mean, I couldn't do that." Other reasons coaches gave included physical hardship, wanting more free time, losing consistently, and interference with family life. One coach who was married and had young children stated,

> As much as I love this, if it ever got to the point where I was missing out on my kids growing up and being there for them, not just my kids, my wife, then at that point I think I would do some self-evaluation as to whether or not this is really worth it.

Responses and Effects of Stress

Positive Responses. All of the coaches were asked if they had ever viewed stress in a positive way, and 9 of them provided examples that indicated they had. Some of the coaches discussed how stress can enhance one's focus and motivation. One coach in particular claimed, "I think stress, where it really helps you to be stressful sometimes, is it keeps you energized. It keeps you on line to where you want to go. . . . I think you need stress." Two coaches explained how learning from stress can help one prepare for the future. One coach said, "There's going to be a time when you're going to have stress. If you haven't experienced it, you're just going to fall apart, and I think for us and for me, I welcome stress."

Some coaches felt that stress could be viewed positively because it can increase one's awareness. One participant suggested,

> When something is stressing you out or creating some type of negative tension, (a) you realize it's a problem, and (b) you've got to do something about it. . . . So if it pushes you to realize something that needs to be dealt with and move on quicker, then it's positive.

Negative Responses. Many of the coaches felt that stress could have a negative effect on their physiology, behaviors, emotions, and thoughts. A change in body language or tone of voice was displayed by some coaches when they experienced stress, and they stated that they could become tense, fidgety, agitated on the bench, louder, or quieter. Some coaches suggested that they became more emotional or moody if they were stressed. Many of the coaches felt that stress was most detrimental to their ability to focus. One participant said,

> We have an expression on our team called "being in the mirror room," where you get to a point where all you're thinking about is yourself and what's going on with you to the point where it's as if you're in a room and the walls are all mirrors, where everywhere you look all you see is yourself. And when I get stressed I think that's where I get.

Effect of Stress on Others. Four of the coaches felt that their stress had an impact on their athletes. One participant felt that his stress level could influence athletes' performances, stating, "If you show stress, the team's not going to play as well because they're not going to be as relaxed." Another coach described how her stress could, in turn, cause her athletes to experience stress.

> [The athletes] pick up on [my stress]. They're very astute. They can tell when things aren't going well; I try to hide it, but they can tell. . . . Sometimes they may find me a little bit unapproachable or they don't want to approach me in the sense of "gosh, I don't want to bother her." And then it starts to stress them because the things they need to discuss or get out or communicate, they can't.

Managing Stress

Cognitive Strategies. Cognitive strategies are methods that participants used to alter their thought process, such as where they directed their focus or how they attempted to keep things in perspective. Six coaches indicated that they used some type of cognitive strategy to manage their stress. Specifically, some discussed how focusing on factors they could control helped reduce their feelings of stress. One coach stated,

> I think when you are stressed I think it's usually because you're focusing on something that you really can't control. I think when I'm stressed it's because I'm too focused on the outcome rather than the process. . . . I mean, you have to focus on the process and then the outcome is going to take care of itself.

Another coach agreed with this outlook: "I'm never going to get out of coaching because I burn out. I'll never burn out because I don't base my enjoyment on winning. I never have."

Three of the coaches discussed how keeping things in perspective helped them manage stress. In regard to the media, one coach stated, "I was taught by [my former coach] to keep [the media] in perspective. . . . Nobody knows our world. Nobody can understand it. So I don't have resentment or frustration with the media because I understand they're not in our bubble." A coach who was married and had children felt that it was critical for him to maintain a proper perspective on his profession and what was important to him. He said,

> My wife is due soon and I bet you 10 years ago I probably would have gone to senior nationals . . . and now I realize that's ridiculous. I mean, my place is here, [my assistant] can take care of the athletes, and as much as I would love to be there, I think that bringing a child into this world is a whole lot more important than anything that's going to happen at those 5 days at nationals.

Emotional Control Strategies. Eight coaches indicated that they tried to manage their stress by using techniques to regulate their emotions. One coach indicated,

> I feel very strongly about staying balanced, so almost everyday I [participate in a recreational activity] before my day starts . . . so I kind of have two lives which gives me equilibrium. . . . The outlook that it provides for me is really to keep me emotionally and physically level, and what it does is it gets me outside of this intense, competitive world that I live in to this very laid back, very slow world . . . and I don't have to be competitive.

Seven of the coaches described how grateful they were for the social support they had, whether it was from friends, family, other coaches, their coaching staff, or the administration. One coach explained how staying connected to her family and friends helped her maintain enthusiasm in her life. She stated, "Socially, the friends that I keep are nonathletically related people, which gives me another outlet to just be myself." Another coach felt support from friends who were also coaches. She explained,

> Socially, I surround myself with . . . other coaching friends so we can all relate and we can all support each other. . . . [They] understand where I'm coming from because a lot of them are coaches or administrative people who are involved in athletics.

Having a loyal staff that they felt they could turn to helped some of the coaches manage their emotions. One coach stated, "I've worked with my assistants and they help me during the match to be less stressed. They'll keep me more calm."

Three of the coaches mentioned the influence of sport psychology in helping them manage stress. One coach said,

> If I didn't have the sport psych part . . . I think the stress would make me much more negative, and I think I would be more combative, and I would be more confrontational. . . . I think I'm much more tolerant, so the stress doesn't seep in as great and as ugly as it did earlier.

Another coach referred to his use of visualization to help him remain calm when making decisions. He stated, "I have coached way more games in my head than I've ever actually coached."

Emphasizing fun as a part of their coaching philosophy, in addition to simply keeping their philosophy in mind, played a role in stress management for 2 of the coaches. One participant stated, "I think that if I stick with my philosophy I'm probably going to be more successful in the long run, and definitely not have the stress that I've put on myself over the years."

Behavioral Strategies. Behavioral strategies are behaviorally based activities that the participants used to manage their stress, such as preparation, exercise, and reading. One coach developed backup plans to help him prepare for possible stressors that could occur during competitions. He indicated, "I will go through before every match and say, 'what if this player gets injured,' so I have written down, literally, 10 or 11 different lineups that I keep in a folder that I can turn to."

Six coaches mentioned that they exercise, read, or get a massage to manage stress. One participant said, "I like to do things physically, so a lot of times I'll try to ride the bike or lift weights or something. I find that I ride the bike a lot faster when I'm stressed [laughing]."

Sources of Enjoyment

Interpersonal/Personal Sources of Enjoyment. Eight of the coaches discussed factors they loved about coaching that fell into this category. Several mentioned the opportunity they had to watch the development of their athletes. One stated,

> I love seeing a freshman come in and as a senior she's a young woman. Here, we take some kids that, they could have a pretty bad life, and all of a sudden they get their degree here and they turn it around a little bit, and I feel good about that. They might have never got their college degree if it weren't for [the sport]. [The enjoyment] is the kids and how much you can affect their lives in a positive manner.

Many coaches also expressed their love of the athletes and how gratifying it was for them to see their athletes succeed. They mentioned "watching people improve" and "seeing the upside of progress." One participant stated, "I really like the interaction with the girls. I really care about all my players deeply."

Another said she enjoyed coaching because she felt it gave her an opportunity to give back to the sport. "[This] is a sport that was and still is . . . great for my life, has taught me so many things, taught me how to deal with stress and pressures and I feel like I have a lot to give back."

Task-Related Sources of Enjoyment. Eight coaches mentioned sources of enjoyment that related to tasks specific to the act of coaching, such as employing strategy, recruiting, winning, teaching, and factors associated with the sport itself. One individual stated, "[After a loss] I like figuring out how to put this thing back together; that's the fun part, too. It's crazy. It's fun to have failure, it's like, 'okay, this is fun, how are we going to fix this?'" Another participant said, "I like the strategy involved. I like preparing for the opponent. It's not only the preparation, but during the course of the game, game management. The challenges, like a chess match, I enjoy that."

Four of the coaches indicated that they enjoyed certain things about recruiting. When asked to describe her feelings about recruiting, one coach said,

> I love it! I love it! Oh my gosh, I love it. I love being able to go and say, this is what we're about. I have so much to brag about and get excited about. The home visit is my most enjoyable time because I can share with them my passion.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to gain a deeper understanding of coaches' experiences with stress, the perceived effects of stress on their coaching performance, and their coping strategies. Many of the present findings support Smith's (1986) cognitive–affective model of stress. The balance between the coaches' demands (sources of stress) and resources (coping strategies) was mediated by their perceptions of these factors. If the coaches perceived that their demands outweighed their resources, this would lead to distress and negative responses, which might have a detrimental effect on their coaching performance. If this occurred consistently over an extended period of time, withdrawal from coaching could be the eventual consequence. If coaches perceived that they had effective resources to meet their demands, however, eustress (i.e., positive stress) might result, in which case the coaches would positively respond to situational demands and be less likely to leave the coaching profession because of stress. These coaches' overall experiences with stress were affected by their environment and their personal characteristics.

Contextual/Conditional Factors

The structure of the coaching environment and various demographic factors had an influence on many of the participants' experiences with stress. Most of the coaches were involved with athletic programs that were very successful and currently had teams or athletes that were national champions or ranked in the top 10 nationally

for their respective sports. Although there are no published data regarding the stress of success in the coaching population, Gould, Jackson, and Finch (1993) found that national-champion figure skaters experienced more stress after winning their title than they did beforehand as a result of self- and other-imposed expectations. Coaches in the present study discussed the expectations that came with being consistently successful and the feeling that they had to always maintain or supercede previous performances. Success, however, was also seen as a positive factor because it increased support from administrators and facilitated the recruiting process.

Sources of Stress

Multiple sources of stress were mentioned by the coaches. Among those considered the most stressful were communicating with athletes, lack of control over athletes, recruiting, and the pressure of having so many roles and responsibilities. It is interesting that the only source of stress reported in previous literature (Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Richman, 1992; Wang & Ramsey, 1998) that most ($n = 8$) of the coaches in the present study found stressful was recruiting, and 4 of these coaches stated that overall, they enjoyed the recruiting process. This discrepancy indicates the importance of continuing to use a qualitative approach to expand coaching-science literature and gain a better understanding of coaches' perceptions.

Negative Responses to Stress

Four of the participants felt that their negative reactions to stress affected their athletes. A coach's experience with stress influencing an athlete's experience with stress has been illustrated in other literature, as well (Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; McCann, 1997; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Specifically, McCann suggested that it is very easy for athletes to recognize when their coach is under stress and that a coach who is visibly anxious might produce a diminished confidence for the athlete. One Olympic athlete stated, "We all know that coach doesn't handle pressure well. Basically she freaks out! She starts pointing out problems and trying to change things at the last minute, so we try and avoid her the last week before Nationals" (McCann, p. 12). One coach in the present study suggested that when she was experiencing stress, her unapproachable demeanor could cause her athletes to avoid her and perhaps hold in issues because "they don't want to bother [her]." A similar occurrence was described by Udry et al. (1997), who found that the coach was seen as a negative influence by 70% of the burned-out athletes they surveyed. These authors suggested that resource bankruptcy could be a factor mediating coach behavior, in that the coaches might themselves be under stress and, thus, not be able to meet the needs of their athletes. Taken together, the available evidence suggests that consistent behavior and effective stress management are not only helpful for the coach's confidence and anxiety control but might also help his or her athletes feel more confident and under control in high-pressure situations.

The Effects of Stress on Coaching Performance

Despite the extensive list of coping strategies used by the coaches in the present study, several indicated that stress could have a negative effect on their

performance. If they were not able to effectively manage stress, some felt that their level and direction of focus was impeded, it became more difficult to make decisions, and emotional outbursts were more likely. These perceptions are in line with the final stage of Smith's (1986) model of stress, which posits that a decrease in performance might occur if one has a negative response to stress. In addition, Kellman and Kallus (1994) claim that stress often results in the inability to perform necessary coaching behaviors such as analyzing situations and preparing athletes during competitions.

Positive Responses

Nine of the coaches stated that they viewed stress in a positive way, as a motivational tool, a way to become aware of issues that needed attention, or as an opportunity to better prepare for the future. The other coach claimed that her whole outlook on coaching was positive. This positive perception of stress is commonly referred to as eustress and has been shown to facilitate an individual's productivity and feelings of accomplishment (Selye, 1956).

Managing Stress

The present group of coaches described an array of coping strategies they used to manage stress. According to Smith (1986), an individual's perceptions and resources play a critical role in his or her experience with stress. Consistent with this notion, the coaches' experiences with stress were mediated by how they perceived their situation and the coping strategies they used to meet the demands of the situation. For example, media presence was a regular experience for several of the coaches, yet they chose to direct their focus elsewhere or simply "keep [the media] in perspective." Coaches frequently talked about recognizing and focusing on the factors they could control. Therefore, rather than viewing demands such as the media, travel, or the outcome of a competition as stressful, they redirected their focus to factors within their control. Ironically, the coach who had the highest winning percentage in the sample had the strongest sentiments toward focusing on the process instead of worrying about winning. She believed that her lack of concern over winning facilitated her team's ability to perform well and eased the stress she felt. In contrast, the four coaches who cited the outcome of competition as a source of stress did not indicate that they focused on factors within their control as a way of managing stress.

Taken together, the positive perceptions of stress exhibited by the coaches along with the coping resources they used to manage stress could explain their relatively positive experiences with stress and provide support for Smith's (1986) contention that perception acts as a mediator between sources of stress and actual stress levels.

Sources of Enjoyment and Sources of Stress Related to Quitting

A potential consequence of ineffective stress management is withdrawal from the activity (Smith, 1986). Dissatisfaction with the activity or attractiveness of other

activities might cause a coach to leave, whereas if an individual enjoys the activity, he or she will be more likely to continue (Smith; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

According to coaches, sources of stress that would increase their likelihood of leaving the profession included physical hardship, wanting more free time, attraction to an alternative activity, interference with family life, losing the passion for coaching, losing consistently, and consistently feeling frustrated or unhappy. Conversely, common sources of enjoyment from coaching included recruiting, strategizing, seeing athletes improve, and developing relationships with athletes. Consistent with Smith's (1986) model, many of these coaches felt that they would leave the profession if costs (sources of stress) outweighed the rewards (sources of enjoyment). They stated that experiencing occasional instances of frustration, however, would not deter them from coaching. Many of the reasons they gave for potentially leaving the profession are also consistent with the results of previous studies. Pastore (1991) found that the most commonly cited reason NCAA Division I coaches gave for leaving the profession was a lack of time with family and friends. In a subsequent study, 2-year-college coaches claimed that time demands and the resulting interference with personal time were the most likely reasons for quitting the profession (Pastore, 1992).

Future Research Recommendations

Considering the qualitative nature of this examination and the demographic characteristics of the participants, these findings cannot be generalized to all coaches. Many of the coaches in the present study discussed the different levels and sources of stress they experienced as assistant coaches and head coaches; thus, it would be useful to interview college assistant coaches to determine how their experiences and perceptions of stress might differ from those of head coaches. According to previous research (Caccese & Mayerberg, 1984; Drake & Hebert, 2002; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Pastore & Judd, 1993; Vealey et al., 1992), and consistent with the results of the present study, it remains unclear whether having more years of experience increases or decreases the amount of stress coaches perceive. It would be of value to interview coaches who were in the early stages of their career to gain a better idea of the impact of this personal characteristic on stress.

Four of the participants in the present study experienced the unique situation of being married to their co–head coach. All of these individuals described sources of stress related to this situation, and it would be interesting to expand on this knowledge by conducting a focus group in which these participants shared their experiences with each other. It is unclear whether this situation enhances one's ability to manage stress by acting as a form of social support (Koustelios, Kellis, & Bagiatis, 1997) or if it is primarily debilitative as a result of "taking their work home with them."

These coaches presented several coping strategies, but it is not known how they learned these techniques or any strategies they used but did not find helpful. Coach-education programs would benefit from research designed to uncover how coaches have developed effective stress-management techniques.

Finally, researchers must continue to go beyond investigating coaches' behaviors related to stress in order to expand coaching-science research (Gilbert, 2002). In addition to awareness of what coaches are doing to manage their stress, the

present study has demonstrated the significance of perception in order to grasp a more comprehensive understanding of this population.

Practical Implications

Five coaches in the present study claimed that communicating with athletes was a source of stress. Perhaps not surprising, research with athletes has indicated that communicating with coaches is a significant stressor for them, as well (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998). Thus, it appears evident that the coach–athlete relationship might be a significant source of stress for both parties, and they could benefit from communication-skills training. Specifically, teaching assertiveness and active-listening strategies would help promote effective conflict resolution. Another component of this training could include helping coaches become more aware of the different communication styles and learning preferences that athletes might have. Cassidy, Potrac, and McKenzie (2006) introduced this idea into their coaching-education program, and it was met with a positive response by the coaches.

Although the coaches in the present study seemed to manage their stress well, it is likely that there are coaches who could benefit from stress-management training. In such cases, Taylor's (1992) stress-management model for coaches represents a useful framework for individuals to consider. The present findings suggest support for many of the components of the model, such as the importance of understanding coaches' perceptions and their sources of enjoyment, considering coaches' previous experiences and environmental conditions, ensuring that the coaches understand their personal symptoms of stress, and emphasizing the value of social support. Because Taylor based his model primarily on research conducted with professionals who were not in a sport setting, the model could be enhanced by including some of the coping strategies offered by the coaches in the present study.

A coach-education program for rugby coaches in New Zealand included a component in which the coaches had the opportunity to share ideas and strategies with each other (Cassidy et al., 2006). The coaches noted that this was a section of the program that was unique, and they were very appreciative of this opportunity to learn from their peers. Furthermore, Demers, Woodburn, and Savard (2006) discussed a program that includes learning from a mentor as part of an internship for future coaches. The strategies used by the experienced coaches in this study could affect coaching education because they provide this sought-after knowledge that is directly relevant and applicable to the coaching environment. Perhaps stress management should be an additional component of coaching-education programs because a major goal of many programs like the one discussed by Demers et al. is to "develop coaches who can meet the needs of the athletes they support" (p. 172), which is easier to accomplish when the coaches can also address their own needs.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the present study, the following conclusions appear warranted. First, Smith's (1986) framework for explaining athletes' experiences of stress and burnout is also applicable to coaches. Specifically, coaches' perceptions

of their sources of stress were critical to their overall experience. Simply having demands did not necessarily result in a negative experience with stress; rather, these coaches responded both negatively and positively to sources of stress. Second, several sources of stress, as well as factors coaches enjoyed about their profession, are related to their relationship with their athletes, indicating the salience of this particular aspect of coaching. Third, coaches feel that their negative reactions to stress could influence their athletes' performances and experiences with stress. Finally, this sample of coaches uses numerous coping strategies to manage their stress that might be helpful to inexperienced coaches or those who feel overwhelmed with the demands of this profession. As mentioned previously, this aspect of coaching stress has been neglected in the coaching literature (Gilbert, 2002). The notable impact of these coaches' abilities to manage stress on their overall experience with stress indicates that this is a critical aspect of understanding this population that needs to be examined further.

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