

# To what Extent are Men's NCAA Distance Running Coaches Humanistic?

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## Purpose

The goal of this case study was to explore the coaching philosophy and methods of a successful men's NCAA distance running coach and describe to what extent the stated coaching philosophy and coaching methods of the coach were humanistic.

## Review of Literature

### What is a coaching philosophy?

- A set of values or basic principles that guide a coach's behavior in practical coaching situations, and human relationships in general (Hogg, 1995)

### Why do you need a coaching philosophy?

- Provides program direction (Martens, 2012)
- Guides in decision making (Martens, 2012)
- Gives the coaching staff a framework to base coaching decisions (Parsh, 2007)
- Provides expectations for athletes and parents (Parsh, 2007)
- Reduces chances of surrendering to external pressures (Martens, 2012)
- Increases the likelihood of success (Martens, 2012)
- Positively impact athlete experiences in the sport (Hogg, 1995)

### What is a humanistic coaching philosophy?

- Collaborative, non-manipulative process between athlete and coach
- Takes into account individual differences and abilities
- Aim is to develop: emancipated, self-regulated, adaptable, and self-confident athlete (Lyle, 1999)

### Gap in the literature

- Few studies have methodically investigated coaching philosophies - none with distance running coaches
- All used self-report techniques – questionnaire, interviews, written statements, or online survey – with no triangulation
- Stated philosophy might not correspond to actual coaching practice (Garringer, 1989; Lyle, 2002; Martens, 2012)

### Significance

- Worthwhile to study the approaches taken by successful coaches to assist others in developing an effective coaching philosophy (Wooten, 2003)
- This is the first known study to use training session observations and artifact collection in the research of coaching philosophies.

## Guiding Questions

- 1) What is the coaching philosophy of the participant men's NCAA distance running coach?
- 2) To what extent is this coach's stated coaching philosophy humanistic?
- 3) To what extent are this coach's coaching methods congruent with a humanistic philosophy?

## Primary Themes Generated

- Theme 1: Coach/Athlete Interpersonal Communication and Relationships
- Theme 2: Coach/Athlete Decision-making
- Theme 3: Coach's Definition of Success

## Summary of Conclusions

The coach's stated philosophy and methods were humanistic in regards to:

- having close interpersonal relationships,
- open communication,
- collaborative decision-making with athletes,
- and an athlete-centered process-oriented definition of success,...

but were not humanistic in relation to:

- communicating more with the best (i.e., top eight) runners on the team and
- employing dictatorial methods in planning interval and tempo workouts independent from athletes.

## Findings & Implications

### Theme 1 Findings

#### Humanistic

- Coach accessibility for communication.
- View of coach/athlete interpersonal relationship.

#### Mixed

- Little coach/athlete communication at training sessions.

#### Not Humanistic

- Less communication with "new" runners to the program.
- More communication with top runners and runners with more experience.

### Theme 2 Findings

#### Humanistic

- Opportunities for athlete free expression.
- The goal setting process.
- The process of planning the training program.
  - Athlete input, individualization, and autonomy regarding weekly training mileage.
  - More input from athletes regarding training at the end of the season.
- General program decision-making.
  - On-the-spot training decisions based upon athlete input.
- Athlete autonomy.
  - Warm-up/cool-down routines, resistance training, when to run, contact support
- Perceptions of who is in control of the process of athletic development.

#### Not Humanistic

- The process of planning the training program.
  - No athlete input when planning interval and tempo workouts.
- Athlete dependency on the coach.

### Theme 3 Findings

#### Humanistic

- Coach's ambitions as a coach.
- Coach's definition of success for the individual athlete.
- Coach's definition of success for the team.
- Coach's view on winning.

#### Not Humanistic

- Coach's primary goal for the program.

### Theme 1 Implications

- Coaches should make a concerted effort to build interpersonal relationships and communicate more with athletes "new" to their program, particularly freshmen and athletes making the leap from high school to college.
- Little coach/athlete communication at some training sessions for non-technical sports to mimic competition conditions.

### Theme 2 Implications

- In areas where coaches are authoritative, athletes may not develop feelings of competence which could impact athletes' abilities to self-regulate independently from the coach.
- Coaches may consider allowing for more athlete input during peaking phases of training to account for delicate physical and/or mental states of their athletes during this time.

### Theme 3 Implications

- It is hard to separate athletic outcome measures as at least a portion of the definition of success for coaches working within the NCAA, particularly Division I.
- If an athlete has the potential to win, then winning may be considered a part of success within the humanistic model as it may be deemed the athlete would not be competing up to their potential if they do not win.

### Future Directions

- Comparison of coaching philosophies across NCAA Divisions, male vs. female sports, team vs. individual sports.
- Performance effectiveness of the humanistic coaching philosophy.
- Extent to which physical education teachers are humanistic.

## Methodology

### Pilot study

- Methods were first validated through a pilot study.

### Participant selection

- 1 Coach – Purposeful Sampling
- 5 Athletes - Random purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007)
  - 1 previous season (n=1)
  - 2 previous seasons (n=1)
  - 3 previous seasons (n=1)
  - 4 previous seasons (n=2)

### Participant Coach's accolades

- Led 15 teams (9 men's, 6 women's) to the NCAA Division I Cross Country Championships between 1998 and 2011 – all but 2 squads earning top-25 finishes
- National Men's NCAA Division I Cross Country "Coach of the Year"
- 4-time Region and 25-time Conference Men's or Women's Cross Country Coach of the Year
- 2-time Men's Conference Indoor Track Coach of the Year
- Coached 17 Men's and Women's Distance Running NCAA Division I All-Americans

### Semi-structured interviews

 (Esterberg, 2002)

- Coach – 2 interviews (45 minutes to 1 hour each)
- Athletes – 1 interview each (40 to 60 minutes each)

### Observations

- 8 training sessions (2 weeks)
- Team located in the west region of the United States
- "Observer as Participant" during 3 sessions (Merriam, 2009)

### Artifacts

- Training session planning schedules
- Team Handbook
- Coach Emails

### Data analysis

 (Creswell, 2007)

- Data was triangulated using Atlas.ti to generate themes and conclusions via open, axial, and selective coding procedures

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