Cardiff School of Sport
DISSERTATION ASSESSMENT PROFORMA:
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An Exploration of Athletes’ Perceptions of Loyalty within a Coach-Athlete Relationship

(Dissertation submitted under the discipline of Coaching)

Sian Swanson

ST20007690
AN EXPLORATION OF ATHLETES’ PERCEPTIONS OF LOYALTY WITHIN A COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP
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Appendix 1 – Ethical Status
Abstract

Objectives: To explore athletes’ perceptions of loyalty and its importance within their coach-athlete relationships. Specifically, the study examines how athletes view their coaches’ decisions and actions (verbal and non-verbal) and the consequent effect on their feelings of loyalty towards them.

Method: Participants were eight athletes aged 18 and above, who at the time of the study trained with a personal coach a minimum of three times a week. Each participant was interviewed within the framework provided by a semi-structured interview guide. Interviewed were then transcribed and categorised into key themes. Following this the raw data was displayed within a table and divided into categories, sub-categories and key themes.

Results: The importance of commitment from both the coach and athlete and well as effective communication and honesty was a key finding. Athletes’ perceived trust, respect and loyalty as critical within their relationship, yet there was varied opinion about what each of these constructs entailed. Generally, disloyalty was imagined to break down the relationship resulting in decreased performance or even an exit from the coach, the sport or both.

Conclusion: The nature of coaching is complex and dependent upon individual preference. It is recommended that coaches engage with their athletes on a personal level in order to form a close bond and understanding of that athlete. Effective coach-athlete relationships where loyalty is present therefore have potential to make an important contribution to success in both performance and personal development.

Key Words: Coach-Athlete Relationship, Loyalty, Athletics
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION
“My philosophy is that you can reach (athletes) so much better if you come across not just as their teacher; but as their friend”
(Glen Mills – Usain Bolt’s Coach)

1.1 Loyalty
Loyalty appears to be a rarely discussed notion within the coaching environment with few studies dealing with the issue directly. Perhaps, one reason for this is because it can be conceptualised in a variety of different ways. Duska (1990) suggested loyalty may be defined as the devotion to an object, person or group of people. Hutchins (2013) takes this further by adding the unquestionable common bond involving trust, faithfulness and continual honesty. Loyalty within a relationship can determine its success or failure but with added complications of the thoughts and feelings of others making this more unstable and potentially unreliable.

1.2 Coach-Athlete Relationship
The relationship between an individual athlete and a coach is important to the development and success of the athlete’s performances with Lyle (1999) explaining that failure to recognise this importance may risk the athlete’s potential to succeed in the future. In a review of past and current literature critical analysis of the coach-athlete relationship explains how the many aspects involved each hold their own meaning. This includes not only the practical implication regarding the coaching environment but also the emotions involved. The importance of understanding loyalty in particular within the coach-athlete relationship comes through In Bolt (2010) as Usain Bolt discussed his relationship with one particular coach as a lack of understanding which led to him leaving due to the absence of respect and belief in his coaches training programme. Therefore aspects of loyalty are discussed and using literature to underpin the involvement and how this relates to the coach-athlete relationship.

1.3 Aim of the Study
The aim of this study is to explore athletes’ perceptions of loyalty within the coach-athlete relationship. In order to aid the answering of this question objectives are created which include: a description of how athletes’ experience loyalty within their relationship with their coach and what actions the coach employs in order for loyalty to be strengthened or reduced. By looking at the actions coaches use from an athletes’ perception it will be evident how the athlete receives these actions and whether this impacts positively or
negatively to their overall experience. By looking at how athletes perceive their own loyalty towards their coach and the influence their actions can have within the relationship a conclusion can then be drawn to the overall importance of loyalty to the athlete themselves and athletics in general.

This study will contribute to knowledge as both coaches and athletes will have evidence of which actions athletes perceive to promote loyalty and to what extent loyalty is seen as important. This can enhance the coach-athlete relationship with the view of increasing bonding within athletics coaching as according to LaVoi (2007) this close bond increases the chance of athlete success.

1.4 Pathway

The Literature review will use definitions for clarity as well as comment on evidence and opinions to introduce the subjects before critically examining the coach-athlete relationship and the modern theories of coaching. It will be in this section where loyalty will start to be linked to the coach-athlete relationship before going to understand the importance of loyalty and the different aspects involved. The narrative will lead on further to introduce athlete’s perceptions before finishing on the practical actions of how coaches demonstrate loyalty and finally concluding with how this study integrates within this topic area to progress understanding and contribute to knowledge.

The method of this study will be explained and justified in regards to why an interview process approach was used and the reasons for this type of research. In order to gain the relevant information concerning athlete’s personal experiences all results will be anonymous to encourage honesty.

Implications and limitations to this study are discussed before expanding on areas for further investigation. By gathering athletes from an individual sporting background, experiences of loyalty and which actions are related to loyalty will be easier to identify in an effective coach-athlete relationship. For instance negative experiences such as those described in Victoria Pendleton autobiography of how her coach used “blunt honesty”, “mockery” and was “cruel” and “unrelenting” (Pendleton, 2012) can be detected and addressed in order to link with Jowett (2005) idea of ‘The Coach-Athlete Relationship’ being a vital foundation of coaching and sport rather than just a by-product.
“I was mortified; my respect for (my coach) ran so deep that I ached for his approval”.
(Victoria Pendleton)

This review of literature explores issues related to loyalty with particular reference to the coach-athlete relationship. By critically examining the literature related to a topic, it is possible to develop and strengthen knowledge (Boote & Beile, 2005). Thus, it is possible to create a clear understanding of past and present contributions to knowledge and, consequently, place the current study in relation to previous work. This section begins with definitions and opinions of key researchers who have studied the coach-athlete relationship. It then focuses on athlete-centred perspectives (Hutchins, 2013; Harvey, 2009), before moving on to the concept of emotions and their role in forming loyal relationships (or not). Finally, the means through which a coach and athlete may demonstrate loyalty will be examined.

2.1 The coach-athlete relationship
The coach athlete relationship has been extensively studied in recent years (e.g., Cockerill and Jowett, 2002; LaVoi, 2004) and there is a general agreement about its importance. Cockerill and Jowett’s (2002) define the coach athlete relationship as one where coaches and athlete’s thoughts, feelings and behaviours are linked. Whilst this provides an outline of the coach-athlete relationship, further study of the underpinning foundations are needed in order to understand what is involved.

Significant elements can differ depending on the individual coach and athlete preferences with the important emphasise being on variability. Jowett uses the key C’s of: closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation (Rhind, Jowett & Yang, 2012) to try and explain these foundation elements and looking into areas within this relationship. Commitment was added to the original 3 C’s (Jowett, 2003) as both coach and athlete must have the same effort input. These aspects form similarities with LaVoi (2004) who described the coach-athlete relationship using four main components of engagement, authenticity, ability and empowerment. Also recognising commitment levels through engagement but adding empowerment to ensure both coach and athlete have shared power associating itself with athlete centred coaching.

Athlete’s satisfaction, performance and self-esteem are crucial to their sporting careers with research suggesting an athlete centred approach to coaching being the most effective way of success (e.g. Trzaskoma-Bicsérdy et al, 2007; Liukkonen & Salminen, 1996). As named one of the most influential aspects of sport (Trzaskoma-Bicsérdy et al., 2007) it
was recently suggested the ability to listen to athletes’ opinion with effective communication that confirmed success (Liukkonen & Salminen, 1996). Whilst aiming for success, athletes develop both performance and personal development. These areas of personal development include: social, emotional and intellectual development aiming to provide active athletes who seek advice and help (Kidman and Lombardo, 2010) working towards more responsible athletes. A recent turn in coaching literature has been to discredit traditional hierarchical coach-athlete relationships and argue for more symmetrical, power-sharing arrangement (e.g., Kidman, 2001; 2005). Those advocating this approach suggest that it gives athletes more power over the decisions that affect their sporting lives and promotes continuous learning by making the athlete’s objectives priority. There is evidence that supports this view for example, Harvey (2009) found that athlete-centred practice enhances self-motivation and engagement and Kidman and Lombardo (2010) indicated that it improved athletes’ decision making abilities. Hannon, McGladrey and Murray (2010) however, further indicated that such an approach cannot unproblematically be put into practice; rather it must be developed over time, in conjunction with a stable coach-athlete relationship. When looking into Athletics, as an individual sport, selfishness can become apparent and athlete centred coaching is common. This approach links with an athlete’s ability to self-coach and according to Luciani (2004) self-trust is needed and defined as the “willingness to believe in you”. Self-belief is needed for success in any venture of life not just specifically to sport therefore is not solely used in athlete-centred coaching but a characteristic of the majority of successful athletes themselves. The view of a complex coach-athlete relationship has progressively become more common with research exploring the reasons behind its complexity (e.g. Jones, 2005; 2006; 2010). Many have varying views of the exact element needed within this complexity with all researching different aspects. With success being created by connections rather than the teachings of skill, technique and information (Jones, 2006) the time it takes to develop this has increased. Huguet et al. (2011) used mutual cooperation and interpersonal ties as key characteristics. Individual personalities complicate this relationship further as many coaches have found. In order to progressively develop continuously corresponding personalities are needed which became apparent early on in research with Lanning (1979) addressing this issue of interaction.
2.2 Emotions

Human emotion has long been believed to be complex especially when involving the
difference of two or more people within a relationship. Therefore emotion within the coach-
athlete relationship is an important factor to be explored with Sztompka (1997) exploring
the reasons behind rationalisation in human behaviour. Along with considerations of a
person’s: reputation, appearance and their past and current performance, many look for a
balanced person to form a functional relationship (Hargreaves, 2001; Cassidy, Jones &
Protrac, 2004). In contrast, Fineman (1993) suggested coaching was “calculated,
dispasionate and rational” and not subject to the vagaries of emotion or perception (Boler,
1999; Turner and Stets, 2005). This view is amongst the minority with the most recent
research in coaching arguing the benefits from understanding the emotions of an athlete.
An interesting suggestion in the form of uncontrolled emotion leads to the idea of
“Emotional Misunderstanding”. This proposition came long before ideas of complex
relationships but still signifies how a human being cannot be calculated when emotions are
involved due to misleading behaviour or misinterpretation. Denzin (1984) is an example of
how this links to the coach-athlete relationship by proposing “Emotional Misunderstanding”
can lead to signification loss of engagement and increase in hostility.

2.3 Loyalty as an Imagined Notion

Following on from how emotion can be subjective, and linking with the coach-athlete
relationship, it may be seen as having hidden intentions or emotions can cause for
vulnerability (Jones and Wallace, 2005; and Kelchtermans, 2005). This links with loyalty
being an imagined notion to which only the person themselves can truly know their
feelings and loyalty can only truthfully exists when the receiver recognises loyalty is
apparent (Aksoy et al., 2009).

Relationships can vary between close and non-close, the difficulty lies in ensuring the truth
of a connection within a non-close relationship. Researchers (Potrac et al., 2013 and
Hargreaves, 2001) suggested closeness arises when relationships are functional and
actions and feelings are truthful. Without the uncertainty of others actions trust may not be
needed. However, Luhmann (1979) recommended the use of trust due to the idea that
every relationship has risks and features vulnerability. With this in mind trust is needed as
no matter how close a relationship a coach and athlete form, they still need loyalty in order
to be successful in their goals. Therefore, a person may pretend to remain loyal but indeed
not truly feel this. Nevertheless humans have to “co-exist, cooperate and coordinate their
actions” which produces an uncontrollable and uncertain aspect as to whether those
actions are genuine or an illusion (Purdy et al., 2013). This is where the suggestion that loyalty is in fact detrimental to coaching and all other aspects of society in order for a relationship and a connection to remain between human beings.

2.4 Loyalty’s importance

With the decrease in jobs and increase in professionals the current climate is very competitive therefore the modern drive for successful achievement has left loyalty in disregard (Aksoy et al., 2009) which may be cause for recent culture of individuals left unsatisfied with a weakened community atmosphere within society (Aksoy et al., 2009). With persons increasing self-priority, they are at risk of high independency and low trust levels. Loyalty is needed in a relationship in order for a bond to form as commitment and dependency reduces a person’s freedom to leave resulting in long lasting strong connections (Campbell, Nicholson & Kitchen, 2006).

Crosby and Taylor’s (1983) created a psychological commitment theory which looked into different aspects of loyalty and using this Kim and Park (2000) discovered all aspects needed to be considered differently as they did not match or interlink completely. Havitz, Howard and Pritchard (2009) also looked into Crosby’s et al. (1983) theory but found that the reliability of measurement was unrepresentative of loyalty as a whole notion. With the idea of loyalty not being a singular concept this brought other options into an athlete’s perception of loyalty in the way of personal and professional loyalty. Professional loyalty may be defined as the commitment and drive to a common goal, achievement within a professional environment (Fayne and Khabakuk, 1972). In relation to the coach-athlete relationship this is used to refer to the coach showing loyalty to gaining the best performance out of an athlete. Bove and Johnson (2002) define personal loyalty as an exclusive attachment to an individual or the service of an individual. This understands the relationship between the coach and athlete with personal loyalty to each other as people and not just in regards to the sport. Linking to Potrac et al. (2002) in which personal relationships within the professional environment help build respect and shared understanding.

Knowles (2013) suggested the act of being disloyal consists of pretence, lies and hypocrisy. Maxymuk (2012) believed if an athlete is disloyal to one coach then they are likely to be disloyal to the next arguing it is the athlete who the loyalty transpires from. Hence this study is looking into the athletes’ perceptions of loyalty and its importance and also how loyalty is displayed.
Loyalty is seen as an umbrella term of many different emotions and acts with these individual aspects being well researched (Reina and Reina, 2006; Purdy, et al., 2013). Starting with trust, it has been described as a fundamental aspect of a relationship where the dynamics can be from an interpersonal or organisational perspective (Purdy, et al., 2013). Trust is vital to a relationship especially within the coaching environment due to the want and need for achievement. However, if trust is not present it has been thought that distrust takes its place. Numerous researchers have looked into distrust with similar definitions of: a violation of trust, low levels of trust, an absence of trust or the opposite of trust (Bies and Tripp, 1996; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Gilbert and Tang, 1998; Butler and Cantrell, 1984). Distrust has the ability to ruin the cooperation in a community setting (Sztompka, 1992) which within the coach-athlete relationship can cause an athlete to be disloyal. Hardin (2002) and Sztompka (1999) provide a deeper understanding of the concept of trust and how the dynamics fuse coaches and athletes together within this environment. Trust has to be not only given but accepted by the receiver and used actively to push the relationship forward to progress.

An additional fragment of loyalty is believed to be respect; which should be found within the centre of coaching. Those at the heart of the research propose without athlete respect coaches are unable to trust them, form a bond with them or commit to them professionally (Potrac et al., 2002; Purdy et al., 2009; Purdy & Jones, 2011). However, this respect needs to be mutual in the way both parties respect each other from the onset and maintained throughout the entire relationship. To preserve respect Giddens (1998) put forward both coach and athlete’s expectations need to be upheld.

Bennie and O’Connor (2012) link respect and trust to convey honesty and suggested this to be vital to an effective coaching relationship. Although some relationships may lack honesty; a successful and operational relationship must contain both coach and athlete honesty as without this other aspects of loyalty can never be truly believed as the relationship could be based upon pretence. This links back to the notion that loyalty itself is only an imagine idea which sets about the importance of communication within the coach-athlete relationship.

Pendleton (2012) discussed how one particular coach was “so warm and engaging” this encouraged and assured Victoria Pendleton that there was no pressure or expectation which was the encouragement that was needed during that particular time. Ruiz-Tendero et al. (2012) agrees how engagement between an athlete and coach is a most vital aspect in the coach-athlete relationship due to the need for “voluntary involvement” and dedication which specifically applied with athletics as an individual sport. Unless
engagement is present and shown both coach and athlete can feel lack of enthusiasm in reaching targets due to commitment levels not being equal.

Loyalty makes up one of Gilbert et al. (2010) five characteristics in effective sports coaching. Gilbert and Trudel (2012) use this, with the assistance of Coach Wooden, to emphasise the relevance loyalty has to the coach-athlete relationship and how coaches should use this to gain success. However, this shows that coaches may: look into, think about and relate to loyalty but it lack evidence of athletes reactions to their coaches’ actions and feelings of loyalty which is vital to ensure both coach and athlete are working together.

2.5 Athlete’s perceptions of Loyalty demonstrations

Coaches are able to demonstrate loyalty to their athletes by using coaching characteristics for instance: positivity; support; individualised assistance; fairness; and appropriate consistent behaviour (Becker, 2009; Horn, 2008 and Becker, 2013). However, depending on the athlete, actions may be interpreted differently reinforcing how important closeness within the coach-athlete relationship is as this will ensure the coach is able to demonstrate loyalty in a way the athlete will recognise and appreciate. Becker (2013) stressed this importance of not only the coaches’ actions but effectiveness of how these actions were received. With this in mind common qualities were devised in a pathway to lead coaches to successful interactions with athletes. Simultaneously coaches ought to evade mediocrity to provide athletes with a vision of their own personal capabilities (Voight and Carroll, 2006). This ensures the athlete perceives the original coaching actions as acquisition of loyalty, trust, respect and therefore accomplishment.

Athletes involved within the more balanced coach-athlete relationship are likely to show loyalty by gaining from each other. However, not all athletes feel an equal position is achievable as some seek their coaches’ approval. Hutchins (2013) suggested in agreement it is a coach’s values, beliefs and philosophy as well as time invested through constant nurturing that facilitated the opportunity for an athlete to gain loyalty with both the coach and the training programme. In Bolt (2010), his coach, Mr Mills explained how for him coaching was not one dimensional because the acquisition of life skills brought together a more balanced person in order for them to utilise their talent. Furthermore Mr Mills expressed how reaching out to an athlete to befriend them gained the faith needed to be successful together (In: Bolt, 2010).
An athlete’s perception of loyalty towards their coach is a understudied topic with very little specific studies being conducted, this leaves the door open for interpretation as to whether or not athletes do actually take the risk in ignoring loyalty and using their personal drive to attempt better things or do they feel they want and need loyalty with their coach to ensure they are successful in the long term. Samuel and Tenenbaum (2013) suggest that athletes have a high tendency to consult others when making decisions on major changes in their sport. Chase and Martin (2013) conducted a study in which results were found that athletes need ability recognition in order to succeed causing an athlete to seek praise and approval. Pensgaard and Roberts (2002) found athletes strive for mastery and that their belief was the coach enables them to be involved with their learning as well as supporting, appreciating and caring for them.

2.6 Closing remarks
After defining the coach athlete relationship and loyalty (Fayne and Khabakuk, 1972; Bove and Johnson, 2002; Cockerill and Jowett, 2002; Duska 1990) and gathering information regarding what is involved and needed in order for a coach-athlete relationship to be successful (Bowes, Jones and Kingston 2010; Lanning 1979; Hannon, McGladrey & Murray 2010) the link with loyalty was then made. Using the evidence of emotional understanding being necessary and the complexity of the coaching-athlete relationship also being subjected to personal and individual interpretation it was found that loyalty was needed within this relationship. Yet what lacked in research was how the coach and the athlete perceived loyalty within this environment needs further exploration.
CHAPTER 3:
METHODOLOGY
“I know (my coach) wouldn’t really like it if I introduced him all the time as just my coach … (he) is more of a motivator and support. (My coach) has become a father figure to me”

(Steve Cram)

3.1 Introduction
The exploration of how an athlete perceives loyalty within the coach athlete relationship and how the coach may influence this is a relatively unexplored area. Following the appropriate approval from Cardiff Metropolitan University athletes were asked to participant within the following study.

3.2 Qualitative Research
Athletes from an athletics background took part in a one to one interview process for qualitative research to discuss different aspects of loyalty within the coaching environment as well as their own personal views on what loyalty means to them. Due to the subjective nature of the study using qualitative research allows for a more in depth analysis of the real life situations (UWE FLICK, 2009). This will provide evidence in order to answer the above questions and conclude to respond to the title of the study. Qualitative research allows for people to give their experience within their own words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) which encouraged the decision to use open questions during the interview process to allow for personal expression. Interviews were the most effective choice for this study to allow for the participants individual perspective to come past the theoretical literature (Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour, & Hoff, 2000). The semi-structured interview guide was used in order to allow for free flowing thoughts and examples.

3.3 Participants
The participants used were present athletics competitors above the ages of 18 currently involved with a personal coach training at least three times a week. Participants need to be in contact with their coach at least three times a week for a minimum of three months because for loyalty to be formed a period of coach-athlete contact time needs to be adhered to. In a similar study, Rhind & Jowett (2012) used a minimum coaching period of three months in order for the coach-athlete relationship to be stabilised. Participants will be older than 18 to encourage additional understanding of relationships and observation of the environment surrounding them. Eight athletes will be selected based on the above criteria to take part in the study through a voluntary basis and athletes will be reassured
everything they say will be anonymous and confidential. Athletes will be able to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview process.

Purposive sampling will take place by either participants volunteering after displaying the study criteria publically within a training facility or by asking for volunteers that fit the requirements. Draper & Swift (2011) used purposive sampling with the reasoning of having a relatively small number of participants and wanting to extract rich data from small numbers. Each participant was chosen in relation to their coach-athlete relationship status, understanding of the importance of relationships within sport and also a general understanding of feeling and emotions relating to specific coach and athlete actions.

3.4 Instruments

An interview guide was produced in order to assist the interview process and aid participants in answering the questions. In a similar topic area French and Norman (2013) agreed upon interviews being the most effective method of data collection due to the in depth nature and possible insights into the coach–athlete relationship. There are many types of questions used during the interview (Kvale, 1996) and with appropriate use deep insights can be received. The majority of questions used were open questions to allow participants to freely give their opinion whilst reducing the effect of social desirability and researcher bias. LaVoi (2007) reinforced the importance of open ended questions in order to gain truthfulness. Some closed questions were used in order to make comparisons easier however; prompts assisted participants to expand further. Likewise, Stirling and Kerr (2013) used probes within their recent study on the coach-athlete relationship. Only relevant questions and prompts will be used to ensure the trustworthiness of the information and the participants will be valid due to their involvement within an intricate coach-athlete relationship. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for reference purposes and to aid analysis. For participant reassurance all information gained will remain anonymous to increase truthfulness, complexity and reliability of responses. Participants gave their permission for the audio device to be recording throughout the entirety of the interview.
3.5 Procedure
A pilot study took place under the same consent and control procedure in order to test out the effectiveness of the interview guide. Following this, and any amendments, the eight interviewees took part in the study within a neutral environment to discuss loyalty, the coach-athlete relationship, how the two interlink, and examples of actions displaying loyalty within this environment and how the coach may influence the creation of loyalty. Before the interview took place, participants were required to read an information sheet explaining the study and the procedure, they were then asked to complete a consent form agreeing to the interview, and the recording of the interview. They signed two copies to which one they keep and the other is kept by me in order to comply with the ethical approval. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Cardiff Metropolitan University. Transcription of the interviews took place and a copy was given to the participants. Once they had agreed on the use of the written evidence, the analysis of information started. This process was used in order to gain a non-influential view of the participant’s perceptions. Participants had the right to withdraw at any stage.

3.6 Data Analysis
The interview transcriptions were split into the individual questions and then coded in terms of data produced within the interview. Then, key subjects were grouped overall in order for the participant’s responses to be clustered in regards to how loyalty is perceived. A similar process was used by Qvist et al. (2011) where the transcriptions were read several times in order to gain an overall insight to the interview before breaking down key themes. In order to illustrate the findings, the transcriptions will be highlighted in regarding to key quotations and insights, and then following this using excel, a table displaying the information was assembled. The raw data code was separated into main key themes determined by the aims of the study, categorised and further split into a subcategories which were deductively determine. Key words related to loyalty will also be displayed within a table in regards to how the athletes perceived their importance and relevance towards loyalty and their coach-athlete relationship. The analysis was conducted through a deductive process of selecting the main key themes with an inductive approach with drawing extra information meaning conclusions were based on the participants’ perceptions and were not pre-determined by previous literature or opinions.
The results and discussion are displayed together. A descriptive narrative was used when presenting the results with the discussion explaining: the results found; the importance of those results in terms of both theoretical and practical implications; strengths and limitations with discussion on future research directions. Weiss, Barber & Sisley (1991) found displaying interview results in this way allowed for a more in-depth view whilst allowing the reader to understand what was found. A conclusion of key findings will complete the discussion.
CHAPTER 4:
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
“It was the start of a love-hate relationship that has caused me more tears, pain and
ultimately joy than I could have ever dreaded or wished for.”

Jessica Ennis (2012)

The data indicates athletes’ perceptions of loyalty depend on what they need and want out
of the coach athlete relationship. The results found have been categorised into main
themes related to the aims of the study, with key findings being further divided into sub
categories. Data is presented in the form of quotations selected from the data, which are
discussed within each sub-section.

4.1 Athletes’ Experiences of Loyalty
This study found athletes’ experience of the coach-athlete relationship varied widely.
There were examples which ranged from athletes seeing their coach as a friend to those
who perceived their relationship to be purely professional.

4.1.1 Personal Relationship
Seven out of eight participants expressed a personal friendship, calling their coach either
“a father figure” or “a friend”. Athletes with an older coach, of similar age to their parents,
leant towards their coach as a father type figure. Perhaps, this was a consequence of the
participants being based at a university campus. This is supported by Richardson et al.
(2008) who suggested that where athletes train away from home, their coach often
becomes a “primary attachment figure in their life”. As participant B said:

(My coach) is a bit of a father figure... he’s got a daughter so can relate to me and
my personal problems... I spend more time with my coach than I do with my
parents.

Although always professional, the coach would allow personal matters to be discussed if
they were to have effect on performance and training. In terms of practical implications for
coaches, having a close bond with the athlete can decrease the chance of the athletes’
personal life declining their performance. Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) conducted a
similar study which found athletes found having their coach as a father figure positively
influenced their relationship. This links with Potrac et al.’s (2002) study in which an elite
football coach emphasised the importance of a strong social bond in order to use their
personal manner to gain respect from athletes.
Those who considered their coach as a friend tended to have a coach only slightly older than themselves in participant A’s instance their coach still competed and therefore gave common ground to develop friendship. As Participant A said:

We’ve done a lot together; we’ve been through a lot. …Compared to other coaches…this (relationship) has grown quite strongly I think because we’ve been with each other for so long we know each other and our personalities inside out. We get on well as friends in athletics and outside.

Four participants emphasised how this relationship forms best when the coach understands the athlete’s personality and with time this understanding should naturally progress. Participant E said: “I’ve known him (coach) a long time….he is more like a friend” and Participant C said: “I get on with him (coach) a lot better now since we’ve been together longer”.

4.1.2 Professional relationship

The second category found, Professional relationship, formed sub-categories including:

the mutual cooperation between the coach and athlete and how the athlete perceived this impacted the relationship. All participants found that this affected their relationship positively when their coach was able to work closely with them. Participant A commented:

We know each other really well; we know what works for us together so in terms of giving feedback he barely has to say anything now. I just know what he is going to say making the process of teaching each other a lot easier.

LaVoi (2007) links how interpersonal communication and relationship quality can be a vehicle for resolving of differing opinions. With an effective teaching process and shared understanding coach and athlete can discuss and resolve differences successfully.

Participant E explained how their coach understood them:

The fact he (the coach) has been through it (elite training) himself…and he knows the sacrifices you have to give up.

A coaches’ previous life experiences can affect how their coach style is developed with Jowett (2003) conducting a case study revealing former athlete coaches knew the sacrifices and therefore gained further respect for their athletes.

Participant B and C both felt their coaches were “verging on an autocratic approach” or “a very autocratic coach”. Both athletes responded differently as athlete B felt “as though coaches should be adaptable” and participant C accepting their coach as “he’s a quite old fashioned coach really …he has a set plan and everyone does that”. This showed how athletes can vary in understanding of their coach’s behaviour and although both coaches may be doing the same thing, athletes have different perceptions.
The other six participants saw their coach athlete relationship as “not very dictatorship and more working as a team”. Participant G explained “open and honest as possible is the best way” for a relationship to form, with coach and athlete “being able to meet in the middle”. As previously found by Harvey (2009), an autonomous athlete within an equal coach-athlete relationship tended to show increased self-motivation and engagement. The practical implications are the athlete feels in control leading to increased confidence and assumes responsibility for own actions (Galasso, 1986).

4.2 Coaches Actions which Strengthen or Reduce Loyalty
This study found that athletes perceived a varied range of demonstrations used by coaches to consciously or subconsciously reduce or increase loyalty within their relationship.

4.2.1 Commitment and Attention
All eight participants found commitment was a major factor within their relationship as coaches’ were “there six days a week to see me (athlete)” and “there for every single training session”. Not only did coaches show commitment to training but also athletes’ performance. Participant A gave interesting insight to their coach commitment and how they perceived this.

He took it on himself to drive me and another training partner from Cardiff to Birmingham, he didn’t request any petrol money even though we offered as well as deciding to stay overnight just to watch us and give us any help we needed. He is definitely willing to put the time in…..although I do question sometimes why he does travel because I know he has had higher athletes than me in the past. Following this the participant was asked for reasons their coach may do this for all athletes; to which the response came as “I think he just loves the sport and has a love of coaching”. This demonstration of loyalty through commitment to both the athlete and the sport increases athlete loyalty; with participants responding “it helps with the motivational process” and “it makes me appreciate him a lot more”. However, it is clear to see the athlete is questioning the coach’s motives. The coach appears to be supporting the athlete; yet this actually has the reverse effect on the athlete’s self-belief supporting Luciani (2004) of the importance of athlete mentality and perceptions of own ability. Erev et al. (1991) previously found when feelings are not mutual or actions are not underpinned by communication; differences in perception of the relationship can cause a feeling of doubt and uncertainty.
Devotion and unquestionable commitment may not always provide the desired effect as participants A, B and D explained how this demonstration can create a feeling of “I just don’t want to let him down”, “I hate to disappoint him” and “I’m doing it for (the coach) just as much as myself”. Hill et al. (2009) found this increase in pressure can lead to ‘choking’ whereby the athlete begins to doubt their own ability. The practical implication for coaches when investing time into an athlete is to remain supportive to keep the athlete calm, relaxed and not pressurised into doing their best all the time. A powerful statement from participant A, explained how “if you’re not giving 100%, he (the coach) doesn’t think you’re worth being there.” This common statement from the coach caused the athlete to doubt their own commitment to training and to the sport as well as their ‘worth’. The statement from participant A within the previous paragraph (doubting the coach’s motive) may perhaps link to reasoning of why the athlete’s motivation decreases when knowing they are unable to fully commit and give 100%.

Participant G described how his coach was present at “25 percent of sessions” which theoretically decreases loyalty however; in this case the athlete understood this was due to both coach and athlete having full time jobs with varying shifts. The athlete explained how when the coach was there “you can tell he is giving 100 percent every single session”. This links with coach attention which six out of the eight participants commented on the amount of attention received determines their thoughts on coaches’ loyalty. This demonstrated the importance of quality interactions rather than large quantity of less meaningful coach-athlete contact time (Fisher et al., 1982). Lorimer & Jowett (2013) found shared understanding was vital to a relationship within the coaching environment and used a definition of “coaches and athletes’ capacity of accurately perceiving each other’s’ feelings, thoughts, and behaviours”. If coaches can use their attention effectively within reality they may form a closer bond with their athletes leading to loyalty.

4.2.2 Belief in Athlete and Caring

The second category was the coach’s belief in the athlete and their care for them. Jones (2009) suggested caring naturally occurs within connections and relationships and positively impacts a learning environment. Participants B, E and H commented on how their coaches “saw potential in me (athlete)”; “valued my (athlete’s) opinion” and “believed that I (athlete) can achieve my goals”. These demonstrate positive ways in which a coach can show care for their athlete. Appreciation from the coach can develop athletes’ self-belief with Luciani (2004) making the link of self-belief and increased motivation to improve performance. Participant H gave an example from during a competition:
He (my coach) can sense if I’m a bit stressed so he can change the way he will talk to me to make me more relaxed. If it (competition) is going well he will let me know in his own little way just by an extra smile...making me feel good about my performance. Above is a demonstration of reassurance from the coach which shows care for the athlete in ensuring they’re comfortable. Mayeroff (1971) suggested that caring was assisting an athlete to grow and realise who they are as a person. Participant B and C noticed caring within their relationship. “He (coach) cared for me” and “he (coach) makes you feel like he is thinking about you”. Participant C developed how their relationship grew stronger as a consequence of caring.

He (coach) is around the same age as our parents so he does seem to be a father figure and also coaches his son. He sees it (training) as probably looking after us and making sure we develop as people as well as athletes....and I got a lot closer to him then. This links Jowett (2007) theoretical implication of coach athlete closeness and the benefits to performance. Athlete H then explained how caring was beneficial to their performance as an increase in motivation, commitment and security allowed for relaxation during training and increase is productivity. “He (coach) allowed me (athlete) to feel relaxed” and “by showing he cared, it showed his loyalty”. Jones, Bailey & Santos (2013) recent study suggested the approach of coach care and the impact on ‘the one’ caring and the ‘cared for’ and the development of a stronger coach-athlete relationship.

4.2.3 Communication and Honesty

The third sub-section was the importance of good communication between the coach and the athlete as seven out of eight participants commenting on effective communication with participants B and E stating the importance of honesty. This agrees with Bennie and O’Connor (2012) on how communication is vital to a relationship yet must include honesty. Participant D said: “he speaks to me every day” and “he keeps in contact (over summer)” when thinking about their coach’s communication. Athlete F makes the link of effective communication with their loyalty.

We ask each other questions and always discuss things…the communication broke down barriers and we’re able to say ‘what are your suggestions in this specific area?’…This makes you more loyal. This relates to Huguet et al. (2011) discussion of how mutual cooperation promotes a stronger coach athlete relationship.

The eighth participant (C) found communication was not effective within their relationship with their coach and therefore decreased loyalty.
Some days he won’t speak to you because he’s caught up with someone else….then you have to just go speak to him another time. Because their coach “wasn’t speaking to any of us (athlete) and wasn’t giving us any advice” this caused the athlete to stop training for a week. Coaches need to be aware of the consistency of their behaviour Becker (2009).

Participant B stated that honesty was important to them especially when reflecting upon performance.

He (coach) will have an honest opinion of me and if I haven’t done well he will go ‘you’re letting yourself down’ which can seem harsh but I respect him for it because an honest reflection drives me on to the next competition. This shows the coach understands the athlete because participant H, with the same coach, spoke of how when “he (coach) can tell things are going badly just gives me an extra smile as reassurance”. If the coach was to give the honest reflection that can be seen as “harsh” this particular athlete may not be able to cope and performance may decrease further.

4.2.4 Trust

Participants stated trust was highly important however found difficulty in giving physical examples of coach demonstrations. Purdy et al. (2013) suggested trust was a fundamental aspect of the coach-athlete relationship with athletes confirming their perceptions of loyalty involves trust from their coach.

Six of the participants stated trust was present in their relationship with their coach with varying reasons for this trust being given, an example from Participant H:

He (the coach) definitely trusts me to get on with a session… I will go and do part of the session in the morning and he doesn’t have to sit and watch me. This makes me feel good that he can trust me and doesn’t treat me like a novice. The coach’s action of trust led to the athlete having enhanced positive feeling in terms of loyalty with increased confident attitude which is needed for a stable training environment.

Lack of trust was also gathered from participant B within the interview as they spoke of a reoccurring situation where their coach was trying to go back on a prearranged agreement.

I still hurdle once a week in case I ever want to go back to multi-events and when I first went full time with my coach I specifically said I will (be their full time athlete) on the condition I can complete this hurdle session. The other day he (the coach) had a conversation with me and said me doing the session counteracted everything he done prior and he had to stay (at the track) to keep an eye on me because he doesn’t trust me. That got to me quite a lot and I was pretty angry. I found I was demotivated for the entire session as he didn’t trust or respect my personal decision.
Trust needs to be given and received and when either a coach or an athlete goes back on a decision this trust can be broken (Sztompka, 1999). As the example explains the implications to the athletes training session lead to demotivation and upset feeling. If this was to extend over a period of time the relationship may be in danger of breaking down permanently.

4.3 Athletes Own Actions which Strengthen or Reduce Loyalty

Athletes’ then spoke of their own perceptions on what made them loyal or disloyal to their coach. Interestingly athletes gave very few or no examples of times they had any thoughts or shown actions that may reduce their loyalty to their coach. The examples given included: dishonesty, lack of commitment and the athletes belief that they knew their body better than anyone and therefore went against their coach.

Two categorises from this key theme were internal demonstrations and physical demonstrations. The examples given by participants when asked about their own actions were less detailed which Bennett-Levy et al. (2001) suggest may be due to some people finding self-reflection more difficult than reviewing actions of another person due to personal interpretation and emotion.

4.3.1 Internal Demonstrations, Thoughts and Feelings

Internal demonstrations looked into athletes’ thoughts and feelings towards their coach. Six participants stated how “I’m definitely loyal to my coach”; “I feel as though my coach is as good as it gets” and “I feel like I owe it (loyalty) to him”. Of the other two participants (A and E), participant A stated how their loyalty for their coach was “fading” with participant E sharing a view point of how “it (loyalty) can be problematic because it can hold you back and stop you progressing the way you wish to”. Saleh (2009) found how extreme loyalty can lead to fear of change which as participant E mentioned can lead to decrease in progression. The practical implications regarding athletes’ thoughts and feeling of loyalty in general and how they see the loyalty within the coach athlete relationship should be a coaches’ priority in order to be able to work alongside each other sharing their values and beliefs.
4.3.2 Physical External Demonstrations

Physical demonstrations further sub-categorised into various aspects of what the athlete did or did not demonstrate in order to respond to their coach’s loyalty or initiate a feeling of loyalty towards their coach.

4.3.2.1 Commitment

The largest factor athletes thought contributed to their loyalty towards their coach was their commitment to the coach and training. Seven of the participants commented on their commitment to training with examples of “I rarely miss sessions”; “I train with him six days a week” and “just the fact of turning up on time”. Participant A and B both mentioned how they did not go home for long during the holidays with participant B expanding:

He (coach) deserved me to stay up here (at the university) over Christmas… I don’t feel as though he makes me and have never felt that pressure from him but I feel within myself I owe it to him to be here.

This athlete also mentions further within the interview how they “want him (coach) to be proud of me (athlete)”. This need for approval creates a loyalty and a need for loyalty in return. Therefore, the athletes engage with actions in which they believe the coach would want in order to please them and gain loyalty (Thompson & Sherman, 1999).

Participant F demonstrated their commitment to their coach by saying “I wouldn’t go with anyone else”. This refers to the athlete changing coach or asking other coaches for help or advice. Also mentioned during the interview was how participant C paid their coach.

We do pay him (the coach) as well and this does show that we are loyal to him and committed to him and we want to be there training.

This brings in an external factor of finance to ensure security for both the athletes and the coach. However, Perry (1989) discussed the repercussions of the coach becoming reliant on that external demonstration of commitment.

4.3.2.2 Belief in the Coach and Effort Invested

All participants said they demonstrated loyalty towards their coach by investing effort into training. They found their coach was able to identify when they were trying hard to complete training sessions and devote energy into all aspects of their sport and their relationship with their coach. Participants said “I want to achieve my best”; “I want to improve” and “if you show him (coach) you put the effort in… then he’s happy”. This links with athletes trying to gain approval from their coach. During the study athlete A said: “If you don’t believe in what he is trying to do then you’re not going to get any form of benefit from it”. By showing belief in your coach and their abilities you trust them to lead you on...
the right pathway. This relates to the mutual understand that both coach and athlete have to successfully work together towards a common goal (Erev et al., 1991). Participant D found this belief in their coach helped them through a tough time during injury.

I (athlete) spent a large portion of the winter getting injured and people were questioning whether or not I was actually committed to running. This made me think ‘Am I actually doing the right thing here (with current coach)? Or should I have stayed with what I was doing back home and get my old coach back’. My current coach took me to one side and said ‘If you want to run, then run’. This helped me out as I felt he wanted me there…and I trust what he had done before would work for me.

This example shows how a stressful situation especially related to injuries can put strain on the coach athlete relationship and it is important that coaches are able to reassure athletes (Davis & Jowett, 2013).

4.3.2.3 Communication and Honesty

The next sub section was participants’ demonstrations of effective communication. Five participants found “staying in contact” and “texting in advance” meant coaches were more willing to do the same. Participant H spoke of how they “always make sure I’m listening to what he (coach) is trying to tell me”. This then allows the athlete to make corrections of technique to physically demonstrate they had listen and understood. Within Kacperek (1997) study on effective communication, evidence suggested non-verbal communication can be used to enhance a bond between two people through facial expression, listening and body language.

Participant G said “if I find out new information about my event, I won’t go behind his (coach) back; I will always ask him his opinion first.” When athletes are performing to a high level they will have their own views on training and it is important for coaches to allow the athlete some independence in what they do. Participant G was one of the athletes which said loyalty was important to them and this came from being open and honest in their relationship.
4.3.2.4 Trust

Although all participants stated they trusted their coach, opinions differed as to what trust was and what was involved. Athlete B suggested that to them “trust is the ability to be open and honest”. Athlete B links Purdy et al. (2013) suggestion that trust is decisions made whilst making considerations for other involved. “I (athlete) trust he (coach) has got the best intentions for me”. This was similar to participant D’s response of:

If you can’t trust your coach is giving you the right stuff to work on then it is unlikely you are going to be loyal to them.

Within real life coaching having a trust in the training programmes is a key factor for success. Along with athlete D’s suggestion of “trust is having a mutual reassurance”. Sztompka (1999) agrees with how both coach and athlete needs to actively demonstrate trust and have the mutual understanding in order to progress during a relationship.

4.4 Athletes’ Perception of Disloyalty

Osborne (2010) described disloyalty as a betrayal of friendship. Athletes were asked about their thoughts of disloyalty or how this may affect a relationship. The results found 7 participants discussed thoughts and feelings of absent loyalty and subsequent effects. However, participant A engaged with the idea of how they have previously and sometimes still do show disloyalty towards their coach.

I’m showing some more disloyalty now as I’m skipping sessions when he’s not around…but I don’t think it is showing disloyalty to him as we respect him but disloyalty to his training programme. But what he doesn’t know can’t hurt him.

Participant A previously doubted their coach’s intentions when demonstrating commitment; Berkowitz (1972) suggests that we doubt others actions when we may be feeling guilty of our own actions leading to suspicion the other person in a relationship may be lying as well. This links in with participants A’s responses of how he is questioning his loyalty to his coach but doesn’t understand how his coach is still demonstrating loyalty. Coaches need to understand their athletes in order to try and pick up signals of unhappiness during training and try to prevent decrease in commitment before it happens.

4.4.1 Effects of disloyalty

Athletes had varied opinions of effects of disloyalty with some participants’ finding the relationship would become “dysfunctional” and others spoke of how their own personal motivation would decrease. Participants A, B and C commented on how disloyalty would affect their relationship with their coach and ultimately they would leave their coach or
leave the sport completely. The other five participants spoke of how their relationship would become strained and tense and would lead to no improvement for the athlete. Athlete E said:

You could pretend to be loyal but you’d be lying to yourself and you wouldn’t be happy. You would just be going through the motions rather than actually enjoying what you are doing and progressing.

This shows that although to an outside person there may seem to be loyalty between a coach and an athlete, relationships (along with Weber and Carter’s (2003) suggestion of trust) have the potential to include pretence. As a human being the potential for decision making allows both a coach and athlete to consciously behave in a certain manner in order to get what they want, if the coach and athlete have different values, beliefs or goals this may lead to one or both engaging in false loyalty demonstrations in order to reach that success. Although this may seem a correct decision, the coach-athlete relationship especially within athletics is one of close one-to-one contact involving high commitment and if there is not a passion or care for the other person then Gasso (2014) suggests a person cannot be fully engaging with the learning process.

Participant A previously spoke of how his loyalty was decreasing, when asked about disloyalty within a relationship and why an athlete may stay within this relationship the response was “habit”.

I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t have triple jump, I don’t know if this is loyalty to the sport and the coach or just trying to keep my habits alive. I’m just trying to keep my identity.

Kissinger and Watson (2009) suggested identity is increased either: through increased performance; sporting success; over a substantial period of time or expectations of others. Therefore, practical implications for coaches include being aware of athlete feelings and motivational levels.

4.5 Athletes’ Perception of Loyalty’s Importance or Unimportance

The final theme within this study is if and why athletes perceive loyalty within the coach athlete relationship as important. When analysing the interviews it was interesting to see how athletes talked about loyalty’s importance as different to what occurred within their loyalty and their perception of an ideal.
4.5.1 Positives of Loyalty within Athletics

All eight participants expressed a need for loyalty within athletics. Athlete A mused over a thought of “if you are not loyal to your coach, you question your loyalty to the sport”. This particular athlete has had doubt regarding continuing with the sport and also continuing with their coach which could cause for unsure emotion. This participant also presented a view of:

Loyalty in athletics is difficult because there is always a student and a master. Loyalty is useful from a coach’s perspective and is one of the few qualities a training group needs if you’re a coach as if the athletes are loyal to you that are one of the few ways you can help motivate them.

Participant F had similar experience where loyalty towards their coach motivated them to train “that one extra session a week” when the coach asked them to travel to a different track on a weekend. Harvey (2009) agrees how loyalty and connection with a person can be used as motivation in making more of an effort.

Participant G summed up participant B, H and D’s responses with:

I think the athlete and coach should have the same perceptions and same definitions of what loyalty actually is and means to them.

This really emphasises the importance of individual preference in terms of mutual cooperation and understanding.

4.5.2 Loyalty’s Unimportance

Participant E showed a particular view on how loyalty was unimportant and should not be dictated by the coach.

I think ultimately the athlete makes decisions because at the end of the day when they step on the track it’s only them; the coach can’t do it for them. If they feel they need help from elsewhere they should be free to go and get help.

This links to Kidman’s (2001; 2005) work on how power within the coach athlete needs to be shared in order to form a self-sufficient athlete able to make decisions and progress for themselves. As participant B explain “him (the coach) being in control can be a hindrance”.

This brings a need for coaches to be relaxed in terms of accepting help. From the interviews conducted the general consensus found was athletes preferred when they had a say and some opinion in what training they were going to be doing. For example, Participant H said “I can ask him about anything”.

Participant B added it can cause “a massive issue if you do get attached to that coach” with Richardson et al. (2008) proposing athletes seek approval from role models within their immediate circle.
4.6 Closing Remarks

So, in answering the question what are athletes’ perceptions of loyalty within the coach athlete relationship; it was found the majority of athletes found loyalty was present within their relationship and this increased with time. Whether the relationship consisted a strictly professional relationship or an increased personal relationship largely depended upon the age of the coach. Loyalty can mean different things to different individuals and with effective communication and commitment to succeed a coach and athlete are able to use loyalty to form a positive relationship. This re-enforces Jowett use of the key C’s (Rhind, Jowett & Yang, 2012) as closeness develops through time and personal relation; commitment has been heavily discussed and noted by athletes; complementarity and co-orientation in a mutual understanding and aiming towards common goals.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION
“I am inspired that those who have always been there for me remain ever loyal” (Paula Radcliff)

5.1 Key Findings
The key findings of the study were grouped under three main areas, these included: Athlete individual preference and interpretation; support of Jowett’s key C’s; and the importance of loyalty to athletes. Each of these areas will be briefly explained. Firstly, through the research it became clear that athletes’ individual preference and interpretation differs widely and coaches need a close bond in order to be able to provide what the athlete needs (LaVoi, 2007; Jones, 2009; Jowett, 2007; Jones, Bailey & Santos, 2013; Sztompka, 1999). Athletes responded to varied demonstrations of loyalty with the main areas including: commitment, caring, effective communication, honesty and trust. Secondly, the data offered support for Jowett’s key C’s (Rhind, Jowett & Yang, 2012) and in particular, the importance of commitment within the coach-athlete relationship. Furthermore, the athletes interviewed found that closeness, along with complementarity values and belief, made for a good foundation of a relationship. Co-orientation and team work developed a shared understanding (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013) that enabled a stable relationship to form and coach and athlete to share opinion in order to come together in goal attainment. Finally, athletes perceived loyalty to be highly important within their own coach athlete relationship, but when asked if loyalty is theoretically useful within a coach athlete relationship within athletics participants were less certain. Hence, whilst athletes found loyalty was needed to ensure a close bond with a coach, but could cause attachment leading to difficulty and delay when leaving a coach when the time was right to do so.

5.2 Practical Implications
This study posed questions for both athlete preferences and in particular how coaches consider those preferences. Sports coaches within athletics are involved in a close relationship and must consider their athletes’ philosophies in terms of loyalty and its importance. Coaches should be aware of what decisions and actions (verbal and non-verbal) can be perceived as loyalty enhancers and loyalty reducers. In order for a coach to gain the loyalty of their athlete they must communicate effectively with them to underpin the direction in which both coach and athlete see their future going.
5.3 Personal Reflection
For me this journey started as finding out what athletes thought about loyalty. However, as time went on, my personal understanding of the coach-athlete relationship developed, as did my interpretation of loyalty. This topic was of particular interest to me as it reflects the way I experience personal relationships within my life (including coach-athlete relationships). I find my investment of feeling, time, effort and loyalty is high and consequently I have expected the same from others; expectations that have not always been met. My interpretations of athletes’ loyalty have changed in respect of increased consideration for differences in philosophy and my subsequent actions include a more relaxed approach to expectation from other and an open approach to communication and discussion with both my coach and other athletes. This process has changed my relationship with some of the participants as it brought us closer. One participant has spoken of his concerns with his coach after the study was finished. He found after the interview he was able to open up about his ongoing issues due to a feeling a mutual understanding.

5.4 Strengths and Limitations
This study had both strengths and limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. The strengths included: the rich data extracted from the sample size and the participants involved. In terms of a qualitative study, a sample of eight participants was sufficient for a deep insight into the participants’ coach-athlete relationship. This allowed for rich data to be received and used in understanding the complications of day-to-day interactions between a coach and athlete. Limitations within the study consist on the risk athletes do not tell the truth or are reserved with the information given. Although participants were supported and reassured of the ethical approval this may have impacted the depth of their responses. The second limitation found was the highly political status within athletics especially within a close community training facility, where the study took place. As an athlete embedded within this community this may have led to deceptive responses in order to ensure a pretend of success.
5.5 Future Research Direction
To develop this further the same study could be conducted with coaches in order to compare and contrast how the athlete perceives loyalty within the coach-athlete relationship and how the coaches see loyalty. This will enhance meaning to the data found as all human beings have different perception and coaches may not agree with how some athletes wish to progress within their careers and therefore do not see the need for loyalty in order to achieve that success.
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To: Sian Swanson

Project reference number: 13/05/358U

Your project was recommended for approval by myself as supervisor and formally approved at the Cardiff School of Sport Research Ethics Committee meeting of [include the one that applies 29th May 2013, 26th June 2013, 24th July 2013, 16th October 2013, 27th November 2013].

Yours sincerely

Jake Bailey

Supervisor