

Transitioning From High School & Collegiate Sport:
The First-Year Experience of Male CIS Volleyball Players

By Cameron Johnson

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Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

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Cameron Johnson

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree**

Of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have been undertaken to explore the impact of transition out of sport due to injury, team selection, or retirement. These studies have been completed in the fields of sport psychology, sociology and education amongst others. Fewer studies have addressed the topic of an athlete's transition into a new level of sport. The present study was undertaken to explore the first-year experience of male volleyball players in Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS). An interpretive case study (Ellis, 1998) was conducted to better understand the lived experience of three male volleyball players as they transitioned from high school and college level volleyball to an established program competing in CIS. A qualitative approach using narrative and interpretive themes was used to develop a deeper understanding of the processes and factors involved in the transition to CIS sport. A mid-season interview, a questionnaire and a post-season interview served as data collection tools to inform the narratives that followed in the final analysis. Consistent with interpretive inquiry methodology, the author reflected on his own experience as a former university athlete and where appropriate, integrated his transitional experience into the narratives.

In developing narrative and thematic representations of the first year student-athlete experience, literature pertaining to identity, roles, and communities of practice was used to inform analysis of the athletes' stories. This study provides valuable information to those with a vested interest in improving the transition experience of student-athletes such as coaches, university program directors, consultants, and the athletes amongst others.

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To my wife Megan, your selfless and passionate outlook on life is a source of inspiration to me. I am thankful for the love, patience, and support you showed throughout my graduate work. As well, to our daughter Linnae who unknowingly was the greatest source of motivation to complete this thesis and who provides immediate perspective on what is truly important in life.

To my family, who early on taught me the value of a good work ethic and gave me the confidence to take risks.

To the members of my committee, for your support and guidance throughout this research process. You have challenged me with your experience and expertise and the final product is better because of it. The passion you have in your respective fields is inspiring and has confirmed my belief of the importance of life-long learning. Thank-you!

I have been fortunate to have played with talented athletes and to have coached promising student-athletes. I have had the good fortune of having been coached by passionate coaches, and taught by empowering teachers. The valuable lessons I have learned from all of you have helped shape my perspective and certainly impacted the writing of this thesis. Thank-you!

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CHAPTER ONE

Being a young volleyball player in Winnipeg was exciting. I progressed through the levels of volleyball while watching the University of Winnipeg (UofW) Wesmen and University of Manitoba Bisons in one of the best cross-town rivalries in Canadian university sport. One day, as a grade 8 student sitting in the bleachers of Duckworth Centre at the UofW, I thought, "I'm going to play on that same court."

Nearby sat an old man that I had not yet met. I didn't know that he was a hall of fame basketball player who at one time was one of the top basketball players in the world nor that he was one of the most respected and popular professors at the UoW. Apparently, as the story goes, he would begin a course by asking a student to open his or her textbook. Wherever that point in the textbook, was where the class began. I had yet to learn that the tall, lanky man with white hair, wearing the black sweater with a big red "W" on it, was one of the most ardent and loyal Wesmen supporters. In his youth he was known as "King Carl." On that day, he was just another man in the crowd; an obviously loyal and longtime supporter that had caught my eye.

"Do you think we could make it to this level?" I remember asking a friend. His answer was in the silent shrug he offered in response. At the time, it didn't inspire great confidence but nonetheless, I knew that was what I wanted to do. Thus began a dream.

This dream was one that others have most certainly had. For some, these dreams may have included aspirations of international or professional sport careers. In my case, I wanted to play university level volleyball in the Canadian

Interuniversity Athletics Union or CIAU (now known as Canadian Interuniversity Sport or the CIS). According to the Canadian Interuniversity Sport website (CIS, 2007) in one year over 10,000 student-athletes participate in 11 sport disciplines with a schedule of close to 3000 events. The CIS states on its website (2007) that its mission is, “to enrich the educational experience of the athlete through a national sport program that fosters excellence” (p.1). This is accomplished through its value system which includes five components; (1) Quality educational and athletic experience; (2) Unity of purpose, respect for autonomy; (3) Integrity and fair play; (4) Trust and mutual respect; and (5) Equity and equality of experience (2007, p.1).

Playing in the CIS provides student-athletes with the opportunity to compete at the Winter and Summer World University Games from which international sport careers often are launched. As well, student-athletes who succeed in making it to national championships receive exposure through nationally televised events. On the website it also shares that they most often receive financial assistance that varies from university to university but can help in covering the costs of tuition and the compulsory fees (2007, Financial Assistance to Student-athletes) portion of tuition costs. In the United States, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) website presents a system of core purposes and values (2007, Core Purpose, Core Values) which is very similar to its Canadian counterpart. The underlying theme of pursuit of academic and athletic excellence in a respectful and equitable environment is present as mission statements across the North American continent.

A supportive environment and many opportunities await a student-athlete who has successfully transitioned into university from high school or college. For some,

university athletics is not the ultimate goal. Some aspire to pursue professional careers and the transition to university is but one of the transitions these athletes will experience in their journey to the next level. The transition from high school or intermediate level (i.e., college) to university athletics is thus very important, challenging, complex and deserves more attention in the research literature.

Purpose of the Study

Consistent with interpretive inquiry methodology (Ellis, 1998), this project begins with the entry question: What processes or factors contribute to the successful transition for athletes entering university athletics? In essence, this research study seeks to describe the first year experience of male CIS players. In particular, the processes and factors surrounding *successful* and *unsuccessful* transitions from high school or collegiate to university sport teams are interpreted. For the purpose of this study “successful” is defined as a transition by which the player has (a) made the team, (b) achieved his personal goals, (c) met or exceeded the coach’s expectations, and (d) is eligible to play the following year.

It is important to emphasize that I was particularly curious about developing a deeper understanding of the processes and factors that are involved for three sub-groups of student-athletes; (a) those that should be successful and are, (b) those that should be successful and are not, and (c) those that successfully transition without initial expectations of success. Due to the particular nature of the participant group in this study, the study group was limited to those who should be successful and are.

This research and my particular curiosities stem from the entry question and are rooted in my “concerned engagement” (Ellis, 1998) to learn of the lived

experience of first-year student-athletes (beyond my own experience as an intercollegiate athlete) to better equip athletes, coaches, and practitioners with the knowledge to help student-athletes pursue excellence at the university level.

Concerned Engagement

Concerned engagement or genuine engagement is used to describe, “what preoccupies, mystifies or confuses the researcher, or most makes them wish they could make a difference” (Ellis, 1998, p.19). Concerned engagement is further explained by Ellis as something that, “supports the creativity and attentional energy a fruitful inquiry requires” (p.19). My experience as a university level athlete and subsequent experiences as a beginning sport psychology consultant, teacher and coach are what drove me to this current study.

Upon reflecting on my own experience as a university athlete, I have always considered myself to have had a successful transition from high school to university. I succeeded well in academics and I was part of a national championship winning team. I didn’t, however, assume a high impact role as a key starter which means I was not a player who would play entire matches. I would be substituted in to serve and play defense; maybe play two to five points in a set. Did I indeed have a successful transition? Would my coach have a similar perception? It is these questions and reflections that have opened my eyes to the fact that much of what I seek to explore in this study will emerge through the interpretive inquiry process and will come from the dialogue with athletes.

As I look beyond my own transitional experience, I have also stopped to consider that of the experiences of my teammates. I as an athlete, coach, and sport

performance consultant, have seen varying levels of competency of athletes as they enter university. Some are highly regarded and are expected to succeed in their chosen sport. Many do, yet many others who have the physical skills do not find success at the next level. Why is that? Others come into the university athletic setting as walk-ons (e.g., they are not initially recruited for a spot on the team) and have very successful rookie years in university. Again, why is that? Are there skills that can be developed and adaptations that can be made in the athletic environment and academic system that can stimulate successful transitions? These are both the questions that create the challenge for this study and the reason for its impact.

Rationale for Research

This research question also stems from a lack of literature on the topic of transition to university level sport. Pearson and Petitpas (1990) suggested that for the most part, transitions in sport have received little attention in the literature. Many of the studies done in the 1980s and before are centered on the variables and the coping mechanisms used when disengaging or retiring. Few studies, if any, offer great detail regarding the transition into new sport careers. Botterill (1982), Ogilvie and Howe (1982), Werthner and Orlick (1986) looked at personal disruption once an athlete's competitive career was terminated. Numerous studies explored the impact of transition out of sport due to injury, team selection, as well as education and career planning (e.g., see Baillie, 1993; Harris, Altekruuse & Engels, 2003; Lally & Kerr, 2005). In the developmental psychology, educational psychology, and counseling literature numerous studies explored the conflict of the student-athlete dual role (e.g.,

see Killeya-Jones, 2005; McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004; Ypoyk & Prentice, 2005). This topic will be revisited in greater detail later in this thesis.

More recent studies have looked at role and social development within the first-year student-athlete perspective (Galipeau & Trudel, 2005). Others have studied stress and coping during the transition to university for student-athletes (Giacobbi et al., 2004).). Although a transactional process model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) used in the above study offers a good foundation for studies of the first year student-athlete experience, more empirical scrutiny is needed to help sport psychologists understand the unique challenges and the adaptational processes experienced by freshman athletes (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Another research approach has been the exploration of the impact of mental skills training courses for student-athletes (Curry & Maniar, 2003 & 2004).

Galipeau and Trudel (2004) pointed out that throughout an athlete's career he/she will be faced with the uncertainty of being a newcomer each time he/she leaves one team and joins another, and that very few researchers have studied the experiences of newcomers on teams. In fact, reviewing the literature in sport and sport psychology journals does not provide much evidence in regards to transition to the elite level (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler,& Spink, 2008). This signals a strong need as non-student-athletes do not have the additional training and competition load that student-athletes have to manage. In turn, these student-athletes may require additional support. At minimum, information regarding the first year experience would benefit the athletes who could better prepare for the next stage of their careers as well as help

the coaches create the best possible environment to maximize the athletes' sport experience. It is apparent that the need exists in this field to expand on work being done in the fields of educational research, developmental psychology, counseling, and sociology as each pertains to the student-athlete experience.

In line with the qualitative paradigm, this study does not seek to prove or disprove theory. Rather it will explore and construct new and emerging themes through an interpretive and hermeneutic process. An interpretive inquiry approach involving interviews with student-athletes will be used to investigate the research question and by doing so will contribute to literature on an important topic. I include my own transition stories because they describe some of my own lived experiences and inevitably, those lived experiences played a role in my analysis and interpretation of data.

Moreover, a narrative style of representation, sometimes even crossing the borderline into fiction, can be the best tool for exploring the subjective and unique nature of an athlete's experience (Eichberg, 1994). According to Murray (2003) narratives can be defined as, "an organized interpretation of a sequence of events." According to this definition, "narratives are not simply ways of seeing the world but we actively construct the world through narratives and we also live the stories told by others and by ourselves" (p.112). Moreover, narratives permit the expression of emotions, thoughts and interpretations (Chase, 2005). Narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology to use with this particular research entry question as it enables the exploration of emerging themes while also communicating the meaning that the participants attach to that experience. Again to quote Murray, "it is through

narrative that we begin to define ourselves, to clarify the continuity in our lives and to convey this to others” (p.116). As an example, I begin the next section with a narrative which will serve to introduce the theoretical framework for the study.

Part of a new community

When the last whistle blew and we had failed to beat the University of Alberta Golden Bears in the final of our tournament at the University of Winnipeg, I walked off the court having just completed my first CIAU (now CIS) volleyball match. That match won't go down as one of the best matches and most likely, the rest of my team that day has long forgotten the score or outcome. It was for me, however, a somewhat surreal experience. I looked up in the stands and saw some junior high students not quite ready to leave Duckworth Centre. They were wearing their junior high volleyball uniforms and were just watching us stretch and finish up on the court. How many of them, I wondered, would be on the floor in the not too distant future. I knew how they felt. I had been one of those boys.

Before I could gather all of my stuff and head down to the locker room, that same tall lanky man with a fantastic grin and a black sweater with a red “W” on it, put his hand on my shoulder as he extended the other to shake mine.

“Hi Cam. Great game tonight. My name is Carl Ridd. I used to teach here at the University of Winnipeg”

“Thank you. Nice to meet you,” I replied noticing my coach looking at me with a smirk on his face.

Carl continued, "Every year I make a point of coming down to the floor and welcoming the freshmen athletes to the Wesmen."

As he spoke, Carl was still shaking my hand; something told me that what was happening was a rite of passage. Carl was looking right at me and had taken the time to find out who I was and was now talking with me.

"I like the calm attitude you bring. You were ready to go when the coach put you in. You're going to do great things here. Welcome."

I hadn't really played much and I don't think I had much impact on the game, but I appreciated the comment. I don't know whether he really saw that in me or if he had spoken to my coach, but in the years to come a calm, laid-back, always ready to go in type of player was an accurate description for who I was to become. The words of "King" Carl Ridd resounded within me as I shook his hand and entered a brand new community of practice.

Review of Relevant Literature – Theoretical Framework

Communities of practice

The term community of practice, suggested by Etienne Wenger (1998), is a notion centered on social learning and can be defined through three dimensions; (a) mutual engagement, (b) joint enterprise, and (c) shared repertoire. More specifically, a community of practice is different from a community of interest or a geographical community in that it implies that members of a community are informally bound by what they do together and from what they have learned through mutual engagement in these activities (Wenger, 2000). This model which has its roots in business and education has also emerged as a useful model for the domain of sport research.

Herein lies the link to freshman transition to university from high school. Galipeau and Trudel (2004, 2005) used the concept of communities of practice to better understand how athletes interact together thus developing in a team setting. The idea of development suggests a progression through a process. Their research was initiated in response to the lack of research dedicated to specific experiences of newcomers to varsity (university) teams.

“The process of becoming a team sport athlete is a social process” (Galipeau & Trudel, 2004, p.167). This component of socialization was also highlighted as an important aspect of transition into more elite levels of competition and training by Green (2005) who suggested that athletes are not socialized into the sport culture, but rather, they must be re-socialized. Athletes are re-socialized because they must adjust to a new group of athletes, new coaching, and new expectations. Green summarizes by saying that essentially the first-year athlete, as he or she is moving into a higher level of training and competition, is asked to do familiar things in new ways.

Lave and Wegner (1991) present the notion of *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP) to explain how first-year student-athletes integrate into a group or the new community of practice. The LPP model posits a social process by which an athlete progresses from a peripheral participant level to legitimate peripheral participant, from rookie/veteran relationship to full participant; each progression brings the athlete closer to the core of the community of practice. Galipeau and Trudel (2004) use an adaptation of this model to explore the role of the coach in the athletes’ transition and progression in a varsity team (see figure 1. Source: adapted from Wenger et al., 2002 in Galipeau and Trudel, 2004). They suggest that coaches

have less influence or control on core issues and decisions in regard to how the communities of practice functions as players move to the centre of the concentric circle model (that is, the core level of full participant or veterans).

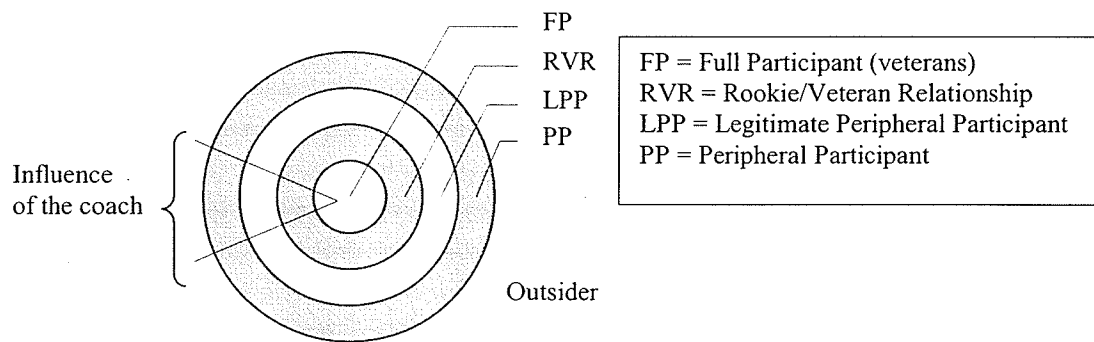


Figure 1. Levels of Community Participant in a Varsity Team.
(adapted from Wenger et al., 2002 in Galipeau and Trudel , 2004)¹

This transition can be very daunting and difficult for first-year student-athletes. Furthermore, the presence of first-year athletes has an impact on the community of practice as its new members disrupt the patterns of interaction in the already established community of practice (Galipeau & Trudel, 2004). As the transition of the athletes progresses and they become more involved in the community of practice, the identity of the athletes begins to develop as does the way the athletes perceive themselves and are perceived by others (Wenger, 1998). In an applied perspective, this concept is important for coaches to appreciate as they appear to have limited impact with the inner core of veteran players but more impact with the first year athletes. They are not directly a part of the athlete's community of practice. This

¹ Reprinted from Galipeau and Trudel. The Experiences of newcomers on a varsity sport team, p.172., Copyright 2004, with permission from American Press.

is because athletes have their community of practice and coaches have their own community of practice. It is the harmonizing of these two communities through “nurturing” the athlete community of practice that a more successful transition for athletes can occur and thus, greater team development can also occur (Galipeau & Trudel, 2004).

Student-athletes and the developmental life cycle

Parham (1993) profiled the 1990s (American) intercollegiate athlete by comparing the student-athlete with the non-student-athlete in the context of the developmental life cycle. He concluded that they share a very similar profile. Each must contend with developmental and existential concerns while navigating the developmental tasks that will promote health and maturity. Parham outlined the challenges faced by both groups: (1) developing and strengthening a set of personal competencies (academic, social, intrapersonal) that will encourage control in their environments, (2) solidifying their identities apart from family and communities, (3) discovering ways to nurture relationships, (4) coming to terms with beliefs and behaviors consistent with moral and ethical standards, and (5) formulating a career path that ultimately will be fulfilling professionally and personally (p.411-412).

While highlighting these common threads, Parham (1993) also indicated where student-athletes face different challenges, notably: (a) learning to balance academics and athletics, (b) adapting to a certain degree of isolation from social and more “mainstream” activities, (c) managing varying levels of success, (d) injury management and prevention, (e) satisfying multiple relationships (e.g., parents, friends, coaches, teammates), and (f) terminating an athletic career and finding other

activities in which to participate to bring the sense of fulfillment and satisfaction (p.412).

Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavalée (2004) suggested four interacting layers in a developmental model on transitions faced by athletes: 1) athletic, 2) psychological, 3) psychosocial, and 4) academic. The athletic developmental layer is connected to the stages of a) initiation, 2) development, and 3) mastery suggested by Bloom (1985). This model (see figure 2 below) takes into account transitions that need to be considered in terms of the different domains in the lives of athletes as well as the fact that non-athletic transitions may have an impact on the development of the athlete's sport career (Wylleman et al.).

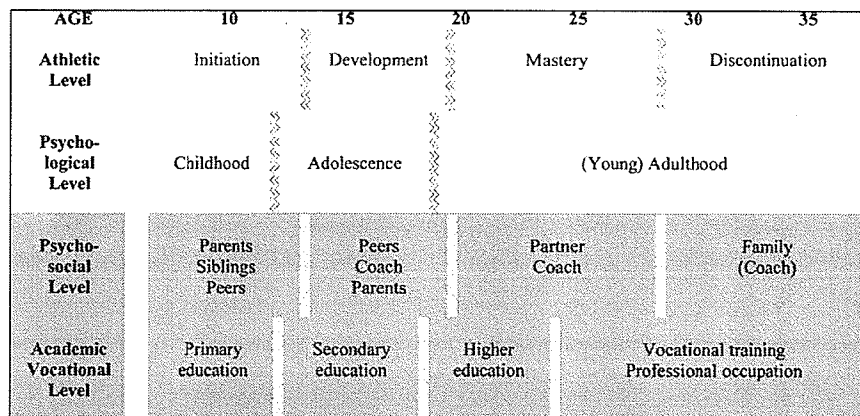


Figure 2. Developmental model on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial, and academic/vocational levels ²

The top layer represents stages of transition athletes' face in their sport specific development. The second layer operates on a psychosocial level and reflects childhood, adolescence and (young) adulthood. The third layer addresses the psychosocial development in relation to parents and siblings, peers and coaches, and

² Reprinted from Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavalée. Career transitions in sport: European perspectives, p.11., Copyright 2003, with permission from Elsevier.

other interpersonal relationships. The final layer is representative of the academic development through primary (elementary and junior high), secondary (high school), higher education (university or college) and then professional occupation. It becomes apparent that combining the dual roles adds layers of complexity as role clarification and self-identity establishment are taking place.

Self-identity and competing roles

Schlossberg (1981) has provided a model of adaptation to transition that has served in the literature as the foundational definition for this concept. Transition, in this model, was defined in the following way: “A transition can be said to occur if an event or nonevent results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships”(p.5). Closely related therefore is the notion of “self” and in the context of this study, the multiple roles and identities a person can have. As Yopyk and Prentice (2005) suggest, “any one individual can have many social identities” (p.329). To best understand the elements in play, it is important to discuss self-identity and the dual role of the student-athlete in general.

The concept of self-identity may be illustrated best by contrasting it with other similar elements of “self”. As Brewer, Van Raalte, and Petitpas (2000) suggest, self-identity and self-concept both address the question, ‘who am I’? There are some key differences however. Self-concept is a collection of self-descriptive roles and attributes that constitute the self (Fox, 1997), while self-identity is more of a self-definition of goals, values and beliefs. Self-esteem, is the “evaluation and affective component of the self-concept” (Weiss, 1987, p.88) or how people feel about

themselves. Self-identity therefore is related to a self-definition as opposed to a self-evaluation (Brewer et al., 2000).

This is an important distinction and when extrapolated with the sport literature takes on even greater importance. Early research showed that the value or importance placed on a given self-concept domain determines the relationship between performance in that domain and feelings of self-esteem, affect, motivation, and the resulting behavior (Harter, 1990; Rosenberg, 1979 as cited in Brewer et al., 2000, p.31).

More recent research conducted by Killeya-Jones (2005) demonstrated the impact of the dual role of student and athlete. This study is particularly pertinent as it is one of the few that addressed specifically the topic of freshman (first year) athlete transition. In this setting, athletes occupy both a role as students and as athletes and thus these roles may be competing for temporal (time demands) and psychological resources which may cause conflict. More specifically, Killeya-Jones suggested that student-athletes, whose student and athlete roles were more convergent in their evaluation and meaning, exhibited better psychological adjustment and satisfaction. Conversely, more negative psychological adjustment was found when there was a greater discrepancy between the student and athlete roles. In other words, the more integrated one's roles, the more positively adjusted one will be.

As Killeya-Jones (2005) states, student-athletes may be in similar environments with similar demands or roles, however their levels of success differ. The way in which the environment and the demands were perceived, interpreted, and evaluated played an important role in the level of overall success of the transition in

first-year student-athletes. Overall, the study highlights the need to accurately interpret and evaluate both roles. Successful transition will be dependent on the ability of the student-athlete to harmonize the conflicting roles so that they are in fact, not conflicting roles as much as they are co-existing. According to Killeya-Jones, if the student-athlete wants to enact the student role, he/she cannot neglect the athlete role and if he wishes to enact the athlete role, he cannot neglect the student role. When either of the two roles was elaborated upon, increased satisfaction was not observed. This result was extrapolated to suggest that it is the convergence of the student and athlete roles and not the elaboration of the individual roles that lead to greater life satisfaction overall.

Essentially, the studies by Killeya-Jones (2005) as well as Yopyk and Prentice (2005) allude to the idea of perspective; that is how student-athletes construct their own identity and interprets their context through the lens of their own experience. Though the term student-athlete has been used it would be inaccurate to suggest that all athletes transitioning to the collegiate level regard themselves as student-athletes. Galipeau and Trudel (2004) suggest that in terms of identity, it can be understood through the perspective that has the person see him/her self as a student-athlete or as an athlete-student. A student-athlete pursues academic excellence; an athlete student may maintain the minimum academic standard so that he or she may be eligible to continue to play sports.

Identity salience

Interestingly, results of the Killeya-Jones (2005) study also show that it is the positive elaboration of the student role that encouraged the convergence of the dual

role of student and athlete. This would suggest important implications for university athletic programs as it would mean that helping first-year athletes connect to a positive elaboration of their student role would lead to greater satisfaction overall as a student-athlete. In a study addressing a similar topic of identity salience, Yopyk and Prentice (2005) sought to determine if priming a student-athlete on either one of the two identities could elicit different identities among student-athletes.

In the first part of the study cited above, student-athletes were primed with their athletic identity, their student identity, or no identity. They were then asked to perform a difficult mathematics performance task. Results demonstrated that those student-athletes primed with the student identity performed better and demonstrated greater self-esteem on the mathematics task. Moreover, in the second study student-athletes were asked to complete the same questionnaire minus the athlete and student priming questions and then they were instructed to fill in letters in 20 word fragments on a second questionnaire. More than half of the letters were missing so there were many different possibilities. These fragmented sentences had either one possible answer using a word relating to athletic identity, a word relating to the student identity and others had both possible completions. Results in this test revealed that participants generated more athletic-related word completion if they completed a self-rating inventory than if they completed a mathematics test. In general therefore, the two studies completed by Yopyk and Prentice (2005) provide evidence to suggest that student-athletes assume different identities, depending on the task at hand.

Generally, the lived experience of a student-athlete appears to be an adaptive process that is facilitated through convergence of the athlete and student roles

(Killeya-Jones, 2005) as well as an ability to shift identity focus based on the task at hand (Ypoyk & Prentice, 2005). The more developed the ability to successfully adapt, shift and converge the dual role, the better the transition and experience will be thus avoiding “identity foreclosure” – selecting one identity or role over the other or simply not fulfilling either role effectively (Morrisey, 1995).

Observations and findings from Morrisey (1995) or Killeya-Jones (2005) may speak to the stereotype of the student-athlete who struggles academically. Perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that the struggle is not academic but an adaptive struggle to harmonize the dual role of athlete and student. Perhaps it is this maladaptive process that feeds the stereotype of the student-athlete. The study of stereotypes of student-athletes is another important area of consideration.

Stereotypes of student-athletes

When evaluating the effectiveness of the transition of first-year student-athletes, the topic of stereotypes of the student-athlete population is important to consider. This is because research suggests that stereotypes can create self-fulfilling prophecy which have an impact on the stereotyped group (Hamilton & Trolie, 1986, Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). Moreover, research has shown that often student-athletes are viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype by their fellow first-year student colleagues. Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991) conducted a survey study with 293 randomly selected freshmen students. They were presented with a number of scenarios including such examples as reactions to being partnered with a student-athlete as a lab partner. Results showed that negative attitudes existed towards student-athletes, in particular with regards to academic issues. Though not directly

within the scope of this study, it does have some importance to recognize that this finding comes from an American study. An interesting comparison could be made to identify if the same reactions exist in a Canadian context. The fact that negative attitudes exist towards student-athletes in the Engstrom and Sedlacek study may also highlight the lack of knowledge of the demands on the student-athlete. In fact, they suggest that student-athletes should be considered nontraditional students with a culture of their own.

Authors and former college volleyball player Sherry K. Watt and former football player James L. Moore III (Watt & Moore III, 2001) contributed a chapter in *New Directions for Student Services* that addressed specifically the question: Who are student-athletes? In their chapter, they suggested that college student-athletes face all of the same challenges as a nonathlete (e.g., social adjustment, career exploration and intellectual growth amongst others). In addition to these demands however, student-athletes must also engage in sport-related activities (e.g., practice and competitive schedules, traveling, etc.). As mentioned previously, the complexity of the dual role and the interpretation by the athlete is important and the student-athlete is constantly coping and balancing these roles.

Stress and Coping

Pioneer research that has become the foundation for the stress and coping literature was completed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) who identified a transactional process model of stress and coping. They defined coping as “the changing of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage the external and/or internal demands of a specific person-environment transaction that are appraised as stressful”

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.141). Within the scope of this definition, coping is seen as a *process* as opposed to a *reaction* to stress. It has become one of the most widely accepted models to explain the nature of adaptational processes (Giacobbi et al., 2004). The theory suggests that situational appraisal plays a key role. The model predicts that when in the presence of a stressful event, an individual will not immediately try and cope with the stressor. There is a preceding appraisal of the stressor (primary appraisal) which will identify the situation as being threatening to the goals or well-being of the individual. Based on the outcome of that appraisal, a cognitive-evaluative secondary appraisal will be undertaken to establish what can be done to cope with the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is in the moment of this appraisal that the individual may appraise the event as being controllable and will then seek to resolve the situation via *problem-focused coping*.

Information gathering, goal-setting, time management skills and problem solving are examples of such a coping strategy aimed at managing or altering the stressor. If however, the event is interpreted as being outside of the individual's control, an *emotional-focused coping* strategy will be used. These strategies are intended to regulate the emotional response resulting from the stressor and tend to be more defensive in nature (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

There are few research studies that have been conducted exclusively on first-year athletes. Giacobbi et al., (2004) however, researched the experience of first-year female athletes and the stress and coping mechanisms at play as they transitioned into collegiate athletics). The study was undertaken in response to the lack of research that focused on the first year student-athlete. The adaptational process of first year student

non-athletes has been widely studied (e.g., see Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000; Wintre & Sugar, 2000; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000) however the student-athlete population has not received the separate attention that it should. The study undertaken by Giacobbi et al. (2004) had three purposes: a) to explore the sources of stress and coping responses of five first year university swimmers, b) to explore the nature and impact of social support on the participants' perceptions of stress, coping responses, and adjustments to university life, and c) to develop a grounded theory that represents the dynamic and changing nature of the participants' coping responses throughout the school year (p. 3-4).

The results of the study demonstrated that there were a number of stress factors related to training intensity, high performance expectations, interpersonal relationships, being away from home, and academics. Main coping strategies included social support from parents and teammates, as well as humour and fun combined with a strong social network. The results of the study were also interesting in that the researchers observed a clear distinction between the effectiveness of social support early in the academic year versus later. Early in the year social support provided a safe environment in which to vent. As the year advanced, this coping strategy appeared to be more dependent on the quality of relationships in the athletic context (Giacobbi et al. 2004).

Within this study, there was a direct link to the research on avoidance and approach coping suggested by Anshel and Anderson (2002). The use of humour may have been used as an avoidant strategy to distract from the rigors of training (Giacobbi et al., 2004). As well, the grounded theory of the transition to university

athletics supports the transactional process model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This was the case because coping efforts changed as athletes became more comfortable in their environment. Thus, it can be suggested that coping is a learned response as athletes began to see their performance challenges in a more positive light as the year progressed.

It is difficult to anticipate exactly which theories one can expect to inform the analysis in an interpretive research project and thus, the preliminary review of literature remained open-ended in the initial stages. As the interpretive inquiry process of the project unfolded, it revealed links to the research topics reviewed herein (e.g., communities of practice, student-athlete identity, stress and coping). There were also topics, such as stereotypes, that did not emerge as being particularly pertinent to the participants of this study. This process showed different and unexpected directions that were not initially addressed (e.g., coach expectations, achievement motivation, and reflective practice). Ellis (1998) writes in *Teaching from understanding: Teacher as interpretive inquirer* that the act of writing will often be the process by which connections and insights emerge. She suggests that, “one can and should begin writing without knowing everything one will say or write about” (p.6).

Having said this, the preceding relevant literature review provides a strong footing for the study. It demonstrates the foundational research that has been completed, while also highlighting the need for more in-depth and new directions for research into the important topic of transition to university from high school athletics.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Increasingly, qualitative research is being used to explore topics in sport psychology thereby allowing deeper understanding of the participant's experiences (Dale, 1996). There has been a growing realization of the potential benefits and the number of research articles and presentations on the topics demonstrate this recognition (Strean, 1998). Furthermore, this growth may be due to the desire to secure authentic information about the people and situations studied as well as the realization that conventional forms of research may in fact constrain the data in ways that misrepresent the phenomena that the researcher wishes to understand (Eisner, 1997). Qualitative inquiry follows the notion that there are multiple maps of the world as it is experienced. Strean (1998) suggested that in the field of sport psychology, "the time has not been taken to gain an understanding of what athletes experience or what variables seem to be particularly influential for their development" (p.335). Since that time, qualitative methods have been used more often. In particular, the preceding studies reviewed for this research project have in large part, all used qualitative methods.

Rationale for Interpretive Inquiry

In 1996, Denison wrote three sport narratives to explore the lived experience involved in retirement from sports. At the time he highlighted the fact that there had been "a call for alternative styles of representation within the social sciences"(p. 351). In this particular study, I attempted to work outward from my own experience of transition to university athletics to explore what Denison called the "world of

experience” that surrounds athletes’ transition to the next level of training and competition after high school.

Denison (1996) proposed three advantages for using sport narratives: (1) narratives show rather than tell; (2) they are less author-centered; and (3) they allow the reader to interpret, and thus together they effectively communicate what has been learned. Ultimately, he suggested that using this approach avoids using a traditional approach “where the subjects’ voices would be buried beneath layers of analysis” (p. 352). Though I am not proposing the use of sport narrative or stories as the sole tool of representation, I have included my own story to account for the biases which I will bring to my research, as well as to offer another perspective to the “data” that was collected, thus enriching the depth and quality of description of the lived-experience of those being studied. As well, I used excerpts and quotes from the participants to lend greater depth to their voice in this study. I feel this depth will be achieved through the creation of realist and narrative tales.

Andrew Sparkes (2002) writes in *Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity* that the realist tale has come to “dominate qualitative research in sport and physical activity” (p.40). The realist tale provides an opportunity for the voices of the participants to be heard in a coherent text while helping to interpret and describe the lived experience of a person or group by connecting this data to theory. Sparkes cited Van Maanen (1988) who declared that one of the most striking characteristics of the realist tale is the almost complete absence of the author from the finished text. The authorial presence lies in the methods section but does not figure prominently throughout the text. As well, the realist tale also makes use of closely edited

quotations to give the reader a strong sense of the participant's voice. Finally, the realist tale uses article titles, abstracts, introductory sections and literature reviews to create interpretive omnipotence. Although, this particular study did not use realist tales exclusively, realist excerpts contributed greatly to the finished product.

Complementing the realist tale is the confessional tale which also holds a narrative style but emphasizes the researcher's point of view. More specifically, it provides both the voice to the participant as well as the opportunity to walk the reader through the research process thus accounting for researcher bias, character flaws, vulnerabilities, and previous experience (Sparkes, 2002). In other words, the confessional tale accounts for the unknown methodological moments in a realist tale by unmasking the fieldwork involved in the research.

This last point lends itself well to this study which uses an interpretive inquiry approach based on hermeneutics. This type of inquiry does not necessarily seek to answer a question completely, or solve a problem. Rather, it opens up potential avenues for further inquiry and effort (Ellis, 1998, p.10). Furthermore, Ellis suggests that insights and connections emerge from the process of writing itself. I found this to be true as I reflected upon my own experience with the proposed topic of transition. As I began to write my own story, topics related to acculturation and re-socialization began to emerge and thus lent greater importance and relevance to the literature I was reviewing. It is the back-and-forth between what I as the researcher already know or expect to know, and the new findings and interpretations. As this research study progressed, this same writing and hermeneutic process illuminated the new and emerging themes, topics, and directions that remained to be interpreted and

discovered. Even the topic of participating in the study, which required the athletes to reflect on their experiences, is an interesting optic of study. In essence, the data analysis used interpretive as well as narrative themes. I suggest that this study shares elements of both approaches as they are complimentary and pertinent to the entry questions and its challenges.

The interpretive process is built around three principle themes (Ellis, 1998). The first is the creative aspect of interpretation meaning that the interpreter will construct meaning from the data. A second theme is the back and forth analysis between expression and meaning. This is essential to the process as a movement between the whole and the individual parts of the data forms the loop (see figure 3 below). Finally, the role of language in its historical context and the impact it has on the meaning of the interpretations is also an important theme.

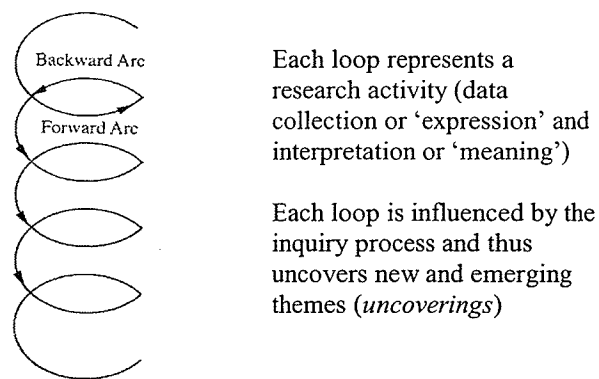


Figure 3: Interpretive Inquiry as an Unfolding Spiral (Ellis, 1998, p.20)³

³ NARRATIVE INQUIRY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH by Julia Ellis. Copyright 1998 by Taylor & Francis Group LLC - Books. Reproduced with permission of Taylor & Francis Group LLC - Books in the format Dissertation via Copyright Clearance Center.

As a researcher with feet in both worlds – that of sport (as a coach) and in education (as a teacher) – as well as experience as a former athlete in the CIS, it was a rich and challenging experience to synthesize the lived experience of the student-athlete participants into representations that accurately described the realities interpreted. Allow me to use an analogy that emerged in my reflection during the writing process to best show the value of the stories, discussion, and analysis within this study.

As I walked through the data and attempted to establish narrative and interpretive themes, I found myself pondering whether I had adequately captured the importance of what we could learn from the stories of the three athletes involved in the study. I felt an important responsibility to do so. And then, I reflected on my own experience as a teacher. In fact, I reflected on my very first formal experience as a teacher and it brought me this realization; that interpretive and narrative inquiry helps bring new meaning to experiences through the voices of the participants. The connections that surface from the personal reflection and the sharing of these experiences open the door for new meaning and perhaps a deeper understanding of a situation to emerge.

By way of example, if I were to ask a person to guess what a first year experience in university volleyball would be like, he/she may correctly guess some of the themes that could emerge. In a similar light, I remember asking people, when I was completing my first student-teaching practicum, if they thought they could remember grade one. I was curious to hear the answer from my family and friends

because I had thought that I could remember grade one (I thought everyone could) ... until I walked into grade one for the first time as a teacher.

The richness of the experience and the meaning comes through in my story of feeling virtually powerless in front of those 15 six year olds; of being shocked at how small everything was and in how I felt the weight of responsibility for making sure these children learned what they needed to learn. Through reflection, perhaps these people will question something they thought they understood previously; what it was like in grade one. It isn't until one hears the stories that one is then motivated to question one's own understanding of the meaning you attached to the stories and the implications thereafter.

This study offers this same opportunity. Through the rich reflections of the student-athlete participants, we may be called to re-think our understanding of the first-year experience of a CIS athlete. Stake (2003) supports this notion and adds that, "when the researcher's narrative provides opportunity for vicarious experience, readers extend their memories of happenings" (p.145). The resulting analysis will both uncover the *processes* of the experience as well as the *story* from those who experienced it.

Study Design

Participants – Building Rapport

Initially, four first year student-athletes (all of the first year athletes on the team) were invited to participate in the study. After agreeing to participate, one student-athlete opted out of the study prior to the first interview protocol. As a result, three first-year male volleyball players entering an established CIS program formed

the study group. The participant sample was chosen because of the access I have to the athletes via the coach as a colleague in sport and the high school system. As well, being a part of the volleyball community, I have an already established rapport with many of the athletes. Although these relationships can facilitate the research study, it is important that the interview process is not compromised with the participants which speaks to the power relations that could be present. It can be argued that as a researcher there is an inherent power position in relation to the participants. I have made efforts to maintain an arm's length relationship from these athletes to help recognize the potential power relations that exist and mitigate as much as possible any of these problematic scenarios. In some cases, the players are former players from high school teams that competed in the same league as teams I coached and in others they are part of the common, larger volleyball community.

Since the potential participant pool is limited by the number of first year athletes in the local universities, an initial, informal contact was made with the head coach at one institution who was supportive of the research project. He invited me to speak informally to the players to present the project idea to find out if it was something in which they would be willing to participate. A brief meeting to explain the main points of the project occurred explaining also the process of the project proposal and ethics submission criteria. All of the participants said they would participate if the project was approved.

Ethical Considerations

In the social sciences, ethical considerations are subjective (Berg, 2004). In light of this, I have done my best to reflect upon the potential considerations to ensure

the rights, privacy, and welfare of the student-athletes who participated in this study. The student-athletes participated with informed consent (see Appendix A). The objectives, methods, and forms of representation were explained to the participants. Participants could have opted out of the study at any time. Given the nature of the interview content, confidentiality was assured by keeping the interview data between the participant and the researcher. The identity of the participant was not revealed (pseudonyms are used) nor was the team of the participants revealed. Also, given the small number of participants, other identifying characteristics (e.g., jersey number) were changed.

Data collection

This study used semi-structured in-depth interviews (see Appendices B and C) at two points in the season (mid-season in December and post season in March) and a follow-up questionnaire (see Appendix D) at the end of the season. The need for multiple interview sessions falls in line with the methodological assumptions of interpretive inquiry. Ellis (1998) explains the interpretive inquiry process as an unfolding spiral where each loop may represent a separate activity that resembles data collection and interpretation. In other words, each loop represents a different attempt to get closer to what one hopes to understand (Ellis). Each loop, or uncovering, generates findings which serve as the basis for future inquiry. These loops function within the hermeneutic circle which takes into account the researcher's existing preconceptions (i.e., forward arc) and evaluation of the initial interpretation and attempt to see what went unseen before (i.e., backward arc). This process helped take into account my own biases and

perspectives as a former athlete who has gone through the transitional period being studied as well as my interpretation of the data being collected.

The interview guide is influenced by the literature pertaining in large part to “communities of practice” research. I saw that theory as being particularly pertinent to the entry question. In addition to the communities of practice research, the interview guide was also developed with influence from two previous graduate theses on similar topics: *Freshmen athletes' perceptions of adjustment to intercollegiate athletics* (Armenth-Brothers, 1995) and *A case study of freshmen swimmers' college transition experiences* (Skinner, 2004). The Skinner study was particularly useful in referencing a similar theme and the direction the author took in his interview guide.

As I once lived through a high school to CIS transition, it could be suggested that I have accrued some benefits as a member of the culture. This can help when interviewing the participants as I may be seen as an “insider” (Sparkes, 2002). This same “insider” status may also be perceived as a threat to the interpretation of the data. To counterbalance this, Sparkes suggests that a structured interview guide can help ‘tame’ the authorial subjectivity.

Interview Protocol 1 – Mid-December

The first sets of interviews were completed in mid-December. December represents a natural break in both the academic and athletic calendars. At this point of the season, players had experienced the first half of the season. This phase of interviews served to further establish a rapport with the participants as well as achieve a sense of what their goals and objectives were for the season. This is important as the accomplishment of goals is a key component of the definition of success in this study.

This interview phase also served as an opportunity to establish the background of the individual participants to better understand their training and competitive history.

Sample interview questions included: Tell me a bit about yourself. How old are you? What school did you attend? Can you describe your progression in volleyball from the time you started playing, up to the time when you started playing this year in university? For example, when did you first start playing volleyball?

Finally, this phase of interview questions sought to identify specific experiences related to the first weeks of the season where the transition process was fresh in the minds of the athletes. The idea was that at this point in the season the participants perhaps will have had the benefit of hindsight, reflection and hopefully a sound perspective regarding their experience in the first months of their CIS careers. Sample questions included: Can you describe your first interaction (practice, meeting) with this team? How did you feel? What are some of the challenges you've faced in the first part of the season? How did (are) you deal (dealing) with them? Can you walk me through a typical day as a first year player on this team? The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and coded following the interpretive inquiry process of the hermeneutic circle. The interpretations also served to inform the second phase of interviews which occurred at the end of the season.

Questionnaire: Athletes

Prior to the end of season interviews, a questionnaire was given to each of the participants. Participants were invited to reflect on any further changes or information they felt was pertinent in the latter part of the season. With this questionnaire I attempted to understand if there had been any further developments or

changes since the first semester of the season. In addition to this, I gave the athletes the opportunity to share suggestions for future “first-year” athletes. I asked questions such as: Did you feel like you were part of the team? When did this occur? How did you know? What message or suggestions would you give to next year’s incoming rookies?

I anticipated the questionnaire acting as a ‘primer’ for the final interview. As it turned out, the participants confirmed that the reflection on the topics of the questionnaire helped them to prepare for the final interview. That is, the questionnaire helped to inform the answers they provided. The questionnaire ultimately sought to better prepare the participant for the final interview as the reflective process required for this phase may have required more time or thought than what could be at the time of the interview. Giving the participants an opportunity to write their thoughts provided another avenue to communicate their ideas other than just verbal responses. Two of the three participants completed and returned the questionnaire. The questionnaire and summary report were given to the participants at the beginning of March (see member check below).

Interview Protocol 2 – Mid-March (Post-season)

A second set of interviews was conducted at the end of the season when all of the players had completed their first full year. In this phase of interview questions, I sought to follow-up on the initial interview responses by finding if the athletes had achieved the goals they had set for themselves at the beginning of the season. For example, in the first interview protocol, I had asked the question: What are your hopes/goals for this year? How do you see your role? In this second interview

protocol, I asked the following questions: Do you feel you accomplished the goals you set out for yourself? Would you say you had a successful first year? At this point of the season, I had hoped to learn about the most important moments of the first-year experience. These are the stories that emerge once the athletes see how the experience fits into the bigger picture of an entire season. Indeed, rich interview data came from the second interview protocol after the season was complete. Sample questions included: What does a typical first year look like? Are there critical steps of development? What do you think will be the greatest differences in your 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th years? What will people that never experience CIS sport as an athlete not understand about this first year?

At this point I had also transcribed and coded the first phase of interviews and provided a summary report to the participants to verify that my interpretations were in line with what they wanted to communicate. This report was provided to the athletes at the beginning of March to allow for time to read and respond to the report. This was part of the member checking process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which I will describe in greater detail later in the chapter. As well, it was at this time that the end of season questionnaire was distributed.

Data Analysis

As explained in the processes of the hermeneutic loop, I recorded, transcribed, coded, and identified themes in time to do member checking. Once the first interview protocol was completed and the interview was transcribed, a system of analysis inspired by Smith and Osborne's (2003) interpretive phenomenological analysis was completed. This system made sense given its "intellectual connection to hermeneutics

and theories of interpretation” (p.51). Upon review of the examples provided in the Smith and Osborne text, it appeared both appropriate and useful to the current project.

In this regard, the following process was followed. First, the transcript was read and re-read so I could familiarize myself with its contents. With each reading came the opportunity for new insights and interpretations. As Smith and Osborne (2003) suggested, I found myself, “moving through the transcript commenting on similarities and differences, echoes, amplifications and contradictions in what (a person) was saying” (p.67). This step consisted of making general observations in the text in the left hand margin of the transcript. The next step consisted of using the right margin to write emerging themes where I tried to identify what Smith and Osborne suggest are the “essential qualities” of the text. It is in this step that there began to appear some of the terminology that surfaced in the literature review. It is also in this step where I began to notice that similar themes emerged at different points in the transcript.

Once this second step was completed, I listed emergent themes and sought connections between them. Under theme titles I listed the key quotes and made notes as to which passages and themes could potentially become rich narratives. The final step consisted of me repeating this process with the transcribed interview of each participant. When this was done, I was able to identify the main that I wrote into the final report. Each participant received a one to four page report consisting of his thematic cluster and my interpretations as well as selected quotes pertaining to those themes.

Following the initial phase of interviews the process described above helped inform the final phase of interviews (i.e., backward, forward loops). The analysis was then informed by the literature. At the beginning of this research project, the literature pertaining to communities of practice appeared to be the most pertinent. I conducted the study with the understanding that the hermeneutic process outlined earlier demands openness on my behalf to new and emerging themes that may have required support from different theoretical areas of the literature. In the end, the communities of practice and identity literature proved to be particularly pertinent. While navigating through the analytical process, the areas of coach expectations and motives towards achieving success and fear of failure also emerged as being particularly pertinent.

Trustworthiness issues

Research literature pertaining to qualitative methodologies indicates that validity and quality are important considerations but that qualitative research “should be judged by criteria which are appropriate to it” (Smith, 2003, p.232). In regards to interpretive research, Angen (2000) explains that, “what we can know of reality is socially constructed through our intersubjective experiences within the lived world, which results in a form of truth that is negotiated through dialogue” (p.10). In this regard there exist different understandings for “validity” in interpretive research then the realist, positivist ‘holy trinity’ of validity, reliability, and generalizations. Angen (2000) calls for a process of validation which would consist of an “evaluation of trustworthiness” (p.16). Smith lends support to this approach as he presents criteria suggested by Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie, (1999) and Yardley (2000) which would be

appropriate. These include: 1) sensitivity to context, 2) commitment, rigor, transparency and coherence, and 3) impact and importance (p.232-235).

In regards to the first criteria, an effort was made to demonstrate an awareness of the existing literature both in regards to the topic of investigation as well as the research method. Secondly, I was engaged in the process and I made an effort to be an active observer in the environment that was being studied. Furthermore, I addressed the rigor of the study by assuring transparency in the research process. Suggestions and implications are given which demonstrate the importance and potential impact of this study. In the final analysis, the stages of the research process are outlined. Moreover, I included my own experiences to help the reader appreciate my voice as the writer and help consider the impact those experiences have on my representations of the student-athletes' stories.

In addition to the above criteria, Ellis (1998) suggests that, "one should avoid confusing an evaluation of an interpretive account with the sort of objective validation traditional approaches seek" (p.30). Furthermore, Ellis suggests six questions to determine whether an answer has been uncovered by an interpretive account:

- 1- Is it plausible, convincing?
- 2- Does it fit with other material we know?
- 3- Does it have the power to change practice?
- 4- Has the researcher's understanding been transformed?
- 5- Has a solution been uncovered?

- 6- Have new possibilities been opened up for the researcher, research participants, and the structure of the context? (pp.30-31)

The concerned engagement in this study was centered on the factors pertaining to transition for student-athletes. My experience going through the transitional process as a CIS student-athlete complimented my current roles as a coach, teacher, and beginning sport psychology consultant and motivated the inquiry for this study. In relation to the six questions, I feel this study presents compelling narratives and interpretations which are supported by the literature but given the form of representation, have the potential to have impact and thus potentially change practice. Moreover, by engaging in the research and writing process, new ways of seeing the topic have emerged for me and thus new ideas and “solutions” were born. Finally, the research and writing process has also illuminated future direction for similar research that continues to deepen our understanding of the first-year student-athlete experience from a number of perspectives (e.g., athletics, academics, family supports, coaching development).

Finally, a member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was completed at two points in the study to verify the accuracy of my representations during the analytical stages as well as in the final product. Follow-up was conducted after the two interview processes via an agreed upon method. Each participant indicated he preferred email and so the member checking was done through email communication. This served as an opportunity to triangulate data by conducting a member-check with the participating athletes. The participant had the opportunity to confirm, revise or reject my interpretations. This, according to Lincoln and Guba is “the most crucial

technique for establishing credibility (p.314).” Cho and Trent (2006) provide a useful definition that describes member checking as, “a process in which collected data is ‘played back’ to the informant to check for perceived accuracy and reaction” (p.322). Accurately representing the experiences of the participants in the narratives and analysis is what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) calls the “crisis of representation” (p.18). Essentially, I wanted to know that my interpretations adequately represented the realities of the research participants.

As explained above, an initial summary report of my interpretations following the first phase of interviews was given in February. After I completed the first member checking process, I completed a second member check in June 2008 by forwarding to the participants a draft of the final interpretations and narratives for them to review. Participants were invited to read the first two chapters as well if they so desired. This method was chosen due to the opportunity it provided the participants to comment on a more developed and complete interpretation of the themes. The second interview protocol was completed by the end of April and the final member checking procedures were completed by mid-June.

In this process, one of the participants responded via email and confirmed the accuracy in one of the narratives when he said:

I loved it actually. It brought back memories again of this season and how great it was. The part where "Mark" and "Jon" met was captured perfectly because that is how it happened. Also the story of the serving run I had in Thompson Rivers again let me relive that night and all the

feelings that came with it. I wish there was something like this every year so the team could remember all the events that occurred.

This feedback from the research participant supports the representation of my interpretations and was an important part of the research process. The following figure shows the timeline of the research process for this project.

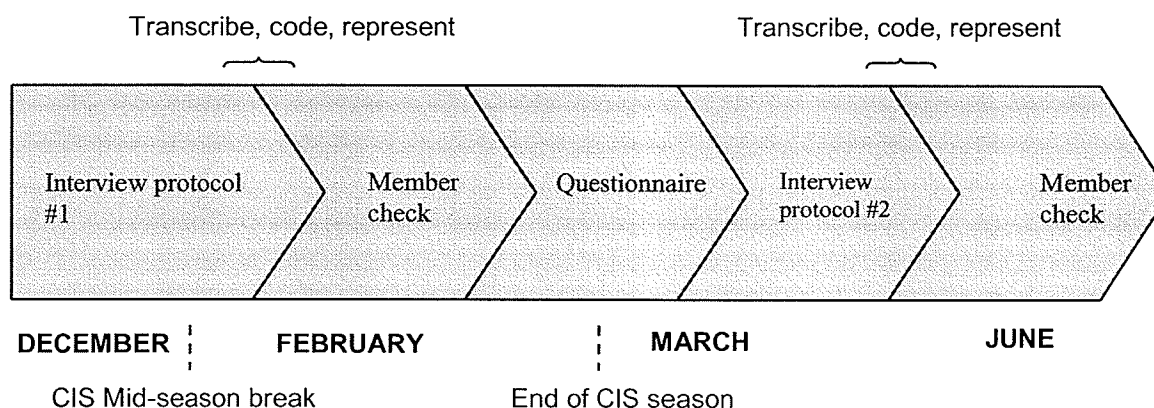


Figure 4. Research timeline.

Writing of Results

The writing of results includes narrative forms such as realist and confessional tales as well as interpretive themes. As explained in detail above, once the analysis of the data was completed following the first interview process, an initial interpretation occurred and a synthesis of themes and key quotes was written and shared with the participants. This product was not the final product. Berg (2004) supports this stage of the research process when he outlines that, “experienced researchers do not make definitive conclusions during preliminary periods in the research process. Rather they hold an open and perhaps even a skeptical point of view (p.39).” Stake (2003) confirms this point of view by suggesting that, “case content evolves even in the last

phases of writing” (p.145). This notion falls in line with interpretive inquiry methodology.

Following the second phase of interviews, the stories, observations, and anecdotes of the participants were selected and written into a final product so as to represent the themes and experiences of the first year athlete. Stake (2003) offers a pertinent summary of the interview and writing of results when he states, “more will be pursued than was volunteered. Less will be reported than was learned” (p.144). With this in mind, a special effort was given to organize the final product in such a way that it brought to light, in a logical and sequential way the factors and processes that became the first year experience of the participants of this study. A balance between analysis, discussion, and narratives were used to bring to life the lived experience of the participants. Consideration of the information obtained from the questionnaire as to the recommendations for future first-year athletes was also included. This form of representation allowed the processes of the first year experience to be uncovered while giving as much voice as possible to those who experienced it.

As well, the study adopted a case study approach which is popular amongst qualitative researchers. Berg (2004) suggests that, “concentrating on a single phenomenon, individual, community, or institution, the researcher can uncover the manifest interaction of significant factors of the phenomenon, individual, community, or institution” (p.251). By using an interpretive case study, I was able to capture some of the processes that other research approaches may have overlooked. Moreover, case studies, “are of value for refining theory and suggesting complexities

for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability” (Stake, 2003, p.156). The report that is the result of the participant interviews and the subsequent analysis seeks to find a balance between teaching the reader what I learned (teaching didactically) and providing material for readers to learn on their own and attach their own meaning (discovery learning) (Stake, 2003).

Max van Manen (1990) reminds researchers that with regard to lived experience, “to orient oneself to a phenomenon always implies a particular interest, station, or vantage point in life” (p. 40). Although I assume many roles in my life, I used my pedagogic interest as a teacher-coach and a beginning sport psychology consultant to discuss the experience of transition to the CIS. A narrative form supported by pertinent literature helped create a product that will hopefully contribute to the body of knowledge while at the same time speaks to the people who may have a vested interest in the research topic. I have attempted to use experiential language they can understand, relate to, and use.

Consistent with the qualitative methods being used in this study, I wrote my own experiences into the study. I do this to acknowledge the layers of interpretation that I bring to the study. Additionally with the best of intentions and respect for the accuracy in the participants’ stories, it is ultimately I, as the writer, who decided what was included in the final product. It is my own experience as a teacher and as a coach that guided me towards the method of representation that I chose. As a teacher, I too have transitioned from a “rookie” to a more experienced teacher. In that evolution, I have had the fortune of networking and being mentored by more seasoned teachers in

my school. They have taught me that the evolution of a teacher consists of a journey through survival to empowerment.

Although that journey goes outside the scope of this project, the basic notion is that as a rookie teacher, I was centered on teaching content and curricula. As I progress, the emphasis has changed to process and now I strive to use the content as a means to empower students to the point where, as a teacher, I hope to see in their actions that they no longer need me since they have become learners on their own. I have come to appreciate this same evolution as a coach. Not only can I appreciate the parallels between the two roles but also how one has helped develop the other. Basically, being a teacher-coach turned researcher has allowed me to see the importance of showing and discovering rather than simply telling.

Of course, a process takes longer, the result is not always as obvious but in the end, the lessons can be more real. These lessons can have greater importance because what is learned from a process oriented, lived experience perspective is connected via episodic and emotional pathways. These connections run deeper than the semantic pathways of memorization and lessons that are simply “told”. In that light, I seek to *show* what I learned from studying the first year experience of three CIS athletes rather than simply *tell* their experience through theoretical analysis and discussion.

CHAPTER THREE

New perspectives on roles and supports for first-year student-athletes

The Expanding Comfort Zone

As a guest coach with the Canadian Men's National volleyball team, I learned a great deal from the coaches and players who were training and competing at a level I had never experienced. Interestingly, much of the feedback from coaches towards the players wasn't that much different from what my coaches in high school, on the provincial team and university had provided.

In one instance, the Team Canada men's volleyball head coach designed the drills of his entire morning session at the 2005 evaluation camp around being adaptable and creative. He spoke passionately to his athletes:

Be creative. When you are in a difficult situation, don't just put the ball over the net; put the other team in trouble. How many ways can you score? How many tools do you have to become a threat to the other team, even when you are not in an ideal situation? Be able to adapt, be creative.

On another occasion, the successor to the previous head coach alluded to the same theme but from a perspective of not limiting themselves by what they as athletes had always done in a particular situation. Essentially, the message was don't limit yourself by not trying something new. Instead, develop ways to make plays in challenging situations as well as routine situations. By doing so, the repertoire of skills and tools available to the athlete multiplied. In short, the comfort zone of the athlete was expanding.

In a similar light, I feel that I am constantly telling my students to take intellectual risks in my classes. It is the only way, I tell them, to progress. As with many teachers, my walls are lined with posters and quotes. I like them because as I mentioned earlier, they tend to show rather than tell. One interesting message that I found pertaining to expanding one's comfort zone comes from former executive and president of Hewlett-Packard Co.'s Carly Fiorina:

In bullfighting there is a term called querencia. The querencia is the spot in the ring to which the bull returns. Each bull has a different querencia, but as the bullfight continues, and the animal becomes more threatened, it returns more and more often to his spot. As he returns to his querencia, he becomes more predictable. And so, in the end, the matador is able to kill the bull because instead of trying something new, the bull returns to what is familiar. His comfort zone.

Another one of the quotes on the walls of my class is from Peter McWilliams and reads, "Comfort zones are most often expanded through discomfort." I share these quotes because they demonstrate the first step in the transition of the athletes in this study who quickly are forced to expand into a new comfort zone. It is in the discomfort of the first weeks and months of the season that the foundation for this new comfort zone is challenged. They have assumed student and athlete roles in the past but they now carry different meanings. They must learn to manage the dual role and rely on their previous experiences to help navigate in this new zone.

The Dual Role

Consistent with the literature pertaining to the dual role reviewed for this study (see Killeya Jones, 2005; Yopyk & Prentice, 2005; Morrissey, 1995) the participants highlighted the role of student and athlete as a challenge in their transition. One of the biggest differences that all three participants suggested from any previous level was the athletic training load. Practices increased from one to one and half hours to three hours. In addition, the expectation from coaches and teammates had also increased in intensity. It would not be accurate to suggest that this was a surprise. The participants anticipated there was to be increases in these two areas as there had been in previous transitions to new levels (i.e., junior varsity to varsity, high school to provincial team). Nevertheless, the increased training load and expectation had an impact on the participants' time, energy, and relationships. Here are a few insights from Derek:

With high school we practiced hard, every single day but an hour and a half, two hours and that would be it. We would get weekends off and we would play so many more games. In University, we started practicing two months before we even played a game. So it was really tough in those two months to even know what you are going to do or if you're going to start or if you're just going to ... you don't even know where you are. So you don't even know how good your team is either, so everything is just a complete guess and you're training hard three hours a day on something that you don't even know if you believe in. You don't even know if you want to be on the team.

There appears to be conflict resonating from these words. It speaks to the unknowns that a player must face. In the review of literature, I mentioned Parham's (1993) research on intercollegiate athletes and the challenges they face. Amongst others, he outlined learning to balance academics and athletics, adapting to a certain degree of isolation from social and more "mainstream" activities, and satisfying multiple relationships.

Mark, Derek and Riley shared experiences that lend further support to Parham's (1993) work on the developmental life cycle and the student-athlete. It takes passion, determination, and stamina to persevere and continue to train at the university level given the fact that, in addition to the comments above, Derek also added, "you don't even know in what to believe or if you are even fully invested as a team member yet." This was not an isolated comment. Mark shared similar feelings:

I just look at some other people, I live in residence, they are only taking four classes this semester and they think they are busy. And I am taking four plus two labs equal to what they are taking and after I come home from practice I just feel destroyed and ready to go to sleep and they want to go out partying. And that just can't happen.

Mark also highlighted how beyond the physical demands and the time spent in practice, athletes also need to find time for their studies, which can be difficult.

It's a big change from high school for sure, from playing high school volleyball and high school academics. But it's been tough for sure being able to find time for volleyball and trying to get some school work in, with three hour practices. Everyday you come home your tired; you

want to sleep and your hungry and need to find time to study. It's tough for sure.

Further compounding the challenges faced by the student-athlete is finding times for friends, as Derek noted:

It's been tough. You have volleyball friends and you have regular friends. And then you might have a smaller group of friends that has almost been eliminated just because you are so busy. I think a lot of people don't understand how much time it takes up and how much energy it takes up in your day.

The words of Derek and Mark above give us insight into the conflict that exists for these student-athletes between the challenges of the dual role and if they even want to engage in it.

Identifying with the student role

In this particular study, all three participants indicated that both the student and the athlete roles were important. In some cases, this was the mindset going into the season. It was something that had already been established in the home environment by the participant's parents. Mark shared his experience:

My dad always says to me there are three 'S's : School, Sports, and Social. And he said you can only have two of them. I have always thought of that; its just one of those things that sticks. You're going to school and you're playing sports so your social life is going to be a little lower and so it just stuck with me.

Another participant who was strong academically shared that he had academic goals of getting into a challenging business school program but at the same time, he didn't fully appreciate the importance of making schoolwork a priority until his first test results came in. This was reinforced by another who stated:

I had my mind focused on volleyball and if I wasn't playing volleyball then I wasn't out partying but I wasn't doing work. So, it really hits you at certain times ... When I was done the day, I did not even want to look at a textbook. I didn't want to look at a volleyball. And that was exhausting. And you have to look at a textbook when you get back.

The perception towards the student role has interesting implications and some suggested links to Yopyk and Prentice (2005) as well as Killeya-Jones (2005) who studied the dual role of student-athletes, self-identity and identity salience. In these studies, key pieces of information come to light. One finding was that when athlete and student roles converge (through engagement in both roles), as opposed to overemphasizing one and de-emphasising the other (known as identity foreclosure), there is a better chance of success in both roles. Furthermore, when athletes were primed on their student role in the research studies reviewed above, their overall role convergence and thus performance in both roles improved.

While the academic transition was not the primary focus of this study, it is interesting to note that the participants were engaged in both roles; that is to say each placed an importance on both his athlete role and student role at some point during the season. For some, this occurred at the beginning of the year and for others it came in the second half. In addition, all three expressed a feeling of improvement both

academically as well as athletically in their roles on the team. From an experiential point of view, their feelings of improvement and success increased in the second half of the year and consequently they perceived their transition experience as being successful.

Influences before arriving at the CIS level

Parents

Upon review of the literature there appears to be little information regarding the experiences of athletes prior to competing at the elite levels. To grasp the whole picture it would seem important to consider the influences the athletes had before they became CIS athletes. The participants in this study spoke of the importance of their families, their previous coaches, and other teams that helped make their transition to the CIS level a success.

It is not difficult to hypothesize that family, and parents in particular, would play an important role in preparing student-athletes for the jump to the next level. Wylleman, Verdet, Lévêque, De Knop, Huts (2004) have identified ways in which parents can help their son or daughter. In particular, they addressed the role of parents of elite athletes. The study reports an interesting statistic in their study where 89% of parents felt that their child was well prepared to pursue an elite athletic endeavour (such as playing university sport) but only 53% felt that their child was ready for post-secondary studies. Parents play an important role in the sport careers of their children and this role occurs on multiple levels such as emotional, logistical, and financial. Most specifically to the adolescent athlete transitioning from high school to university, the notion of separation and building autonomy becomes paramount. The

parents can play an important role in maintaining support while at the same time not becoming an imposition. In the current study Mark alluded to this when he shared:

I would say my Dad (has had the most influence on me) ... if I have to make an important decision I call him and ask him. He doesn't know much about volleyball but he knows a lot about people...I just ask him what he would do; the positive and the negatives. My first year he really helped me out but second year when I had this choice between a college or here (at the university) he was just leaving it on my shoulders. I guess growing up you gotta ' make your own decisions and live with it. I still ask him questions all the time.

The following discussions and integration of quotes will help to contextualize and provide a more concrete appreciation of what the athletes perceived the role of their parents to be. The athletes in this study identified parents as a source of guidance; early on, they contributed to having developed a mindset towards the balance of academics, sport, and social aspects in their life. The following quotes speak to the important role parents play:

My Dad has been an active support for sure. He has been on me. He just reminds me of what I need to do, what I should be doing and sometimes of how I should be doing it too. My Mom is there as more of a support person. They work as a team for me so it's good.

One rule from my mom was that if I was sick and missed school then I had to miss practice too. A couple of times this year, I was pretty sick

in the morning and then getting better in the afternoon and then going to practice but thinking...no I can't! Time management and discipline from my parents have been huge.

Though their direct contact may be less in university, parents play an important role in establishing the foundation for attitude, perspective, and work ethic.

Coaches

Previous coaches emerged as being important influences in what came before the transition for the three athletes of this study. For Derek, his previous high school coach came to the CIS team at the same time and became his university coach. The strong relationship he had with him has already been established. However it is important to reiterate the crucial role the coach had before he got to the CIS. Roy, Trudel, & Lemyre (2001) state that the coach's knowledge is important in establishing credibility with the athlete.

The following excerpt from Derek speaks to both the high regard he has for his coach's knowledge as well as the tremendous impact the coach had on him on an athletic, academic, and emotional level:

I have never trusted anybody more with my whole entire life. He's been my coach since grade 9. We have a strong relationship with him and he's my teacher and you can't get around him.

He wasn't exactly strict, but he had some rules that you had to just do. That you were expected to follow, he would never allow you to go and party the day before a game, he would never allow just stupidity, even

in the classroom. So if I got in trouble in the classroom, he would come straight up to me and he say, "you are messing up and you're not going to play unless you get that mark back up."

Not only did Derek's coach influence him in his role as a student but he also helped him with emotional control and attitude:

He really watched my attitude. Part of my attitude on the volleyball court in high school was being really cocky and arrogant. There was a time in high school when every single time we played (another team in the league) we would just yell at each other pointless, random things. I think about it now and that's a stupid thing I said to him, that hurt his feelings. One time it escalated and I jumped on the net by accident, I was just on the net and he grabbed my jersey and pushed it back through the net then I went at him through the net and (my coach) benched me for the rest of the tournament. I got in so much trouble for that, he just yells at me and I feel like the biggest loser.

Mark commented on how much more knowledge he gained from his club coach before playing in college:

I think I learned more in two months of playing club and provincial than I did in four years in high school ... There is so much more knowledge; more technical skills. It got me more prepared mentally; just playing with a higher caliber team forces you to get better.

Riley had a somewhat different perception in that much of his foundation came earlier than high school and wasn't developed further until after high school in the provincial and youth national team settings:

I didn't have a top high school coach but it worked out well because we basically had the same guys from club so he just let us go out and play. In club we had the same coaches from 15 to 18 years old so they basically knew what we could do. Whatever they had taught us at an earlier age was basically all that we had.

Just as students have many teachers who each contribute something to the overall development for that student, coaching helped these athletes create new perspectives and acquire new knowledge about the game and themselves. They were also part of the overall developmental process of these athletes as they were often part of club or provincial teams.

Elite playing experience

Few players make the step from high school directly to university. Many play on club teams or provincial teams that group the top high school athletes. In this study, Riley had the opportunity to play on the youth national team. Much of the initial experience in high school sets the foundation for these opportunities to play on other teams before university. In that regard, the opportunity to compete at a level between high school and university emerged as a key factor, in addition to the influence of parents and coaches. This may be for a number of reasons. First, it provides the athlete with another transitional experience as Trudel and Galipeau (2003) suggest, "an athlete will be faced with the uncertainty of being a newcomer

each time he or she leaves one team and joins another” (p.167). In essence, it could be hypothesised that they are developing antecedent experience on which they could reflect and re-connect in the CIS setting. Secondly, the gap between high school and university is sizable. As one athlete pointed out, they were no longer just playing against guys their own age. It is conceivable that an eighteen year old could be playing against a twenty-three year old. This is a tremendous difference in terms of physical and psychological development as well as experience in general.

Participating in elite club volleyball programs such as is offered by the university or youth national teams run by the National Team, provide the athlete with an opportunity to experience playing against better, more physical and experienced players. It could also provide the experience of competing and training on the road which was another factor that emerged as having an impact on the first year athlete. The following excerpts from Riley illustrate the notions explored above:

Part of the reason I was able to balance everything was because of my past experiences. Last year we did a lot of travelling to tournaments ... I also played on the Youth National team where I lived (away from home) for a month. We practiced and then travelled to the Dominican Republic to play in the NORCECA Championships. All of these experiences got you prepared for living in a dorm or hotel room and playing on the road just like traveling in the CIS.

Mark who had played in college shared:

College has got me over the next stepping stone I guess you could say ... College whipped me into shape. High school I was in shape

because of all the other sports like basketball. My endurance would be better if I came directly from high school to university but my volleyball skills would be 10 times lower because of the coaching and the repetitions.

When asked to describe what prior experiences helped him the most, Derek spoke of the confidence playing club volleyball for the university gave him before he began his season in the CIS:

I think being on a successful club team (helped me the most). That gave me a lot of confidence going into university ... I really appreciated that year. I started and we won the Nationals. That really put my confidence up. I thought I am not that bad, I can play CIS. If I hadn't played club I wouldn't have played CIS.

The opportunity to train and compete at a level superior to high school volleyball emerged as being an important component of the successful transition to the CIS.

For first-year student-athletes, training and competing in the CIS for the first time requires them to embrace uncertainty as they are faced with new obstacles and a list of unknowns. The challenge of balancing the dual role of student and athlete grows as academic demands and expectations increase. At the same time so does the volume and intensity of on-court training.

When reflecting on previous influences on the transitional experiences of the student-athletes in this study, the participants noticed the influence of their parents, the lessons learned from previous coaches, as well as previous playing experience that have all meshed together as being crucial to forming the foundation on which

they stood as rookies on their new team. In September, the end of the season seems very far away, but in the first weeks of the year, this foundation is tested as new demands and new challenges force the first-year student-athletes to discover and establish new comfort zones.

CHAPTER FOUR

First Weeks of the Pre-season

A new look to an old gym...

Derek had walked through the doors of the gym hundreds of times but never before could he remember entering with his heart pounding and his hands a little sweaty. His memories of the gym were more likely to include a teacher telling him to settle down as he was constantly goofing around and getting into innocent trouble. It would have been four o'clock and the school day would be ending for most students. Being a student-athlete, Derek would have been on his way to get changed for volleyball practice. He was lucky, Derek was part of one of the top programs in the province and he was a key player on a provincial championship contending team. His teammates were skilled and he had one of the best high school coaches in the country. He had developed into an all-star player in the province and he was proud to be a "go-to" guy on his team. He was even good enough to be noticed by some coaches from the city university club team. He was part of a community of elite high school volleyball players that had their sights on the next level. They were guys who loved being in the gym. Volleyball players are athletes who take pleasure in being able to jump higher than the next guy to hit the ball harder over a net and past the extended hands of the blocker as it crashes to the floor. They are athletes who find it fun to throw their bodies on the gym floor with no regards to pain, just to keep that same ball from landing. Derek was one of those student-athletes. Although, he had four high school years of memories in his old gym, today when he walked in, it was different.

Today, it was no longer the gym for a high school volleyball practice. No, today that same gym was the place where Derek would be training in his first university volleyball practice. The university gym was booked and the coach needed a gym and this was it. Somehow, the whole gym looked different. Much bigger, or maybe it was that he felt much smaller. He didn't walk through the doors smiling and goofing around. In fact, he shuffled in, found a spot on a bench next to the wall and quietly put on his kneepads and runners for practice. He was oddly aware of how long it took to tie his shoes; he wished it would take longer that way he wouldn't just be sitting there. He wouldn't have to walk on the court and not know what to do. He didn't want to have to say anything or do anything. He longed for the practice to start and he would be saved by the first drill the coach asked of the players. It was his only link to his new teammates and the only way he felt safe interacting for the time being. It didn't help that the other guys in the gym were players that he, as a high school student, had watched play in university. Now here he was on the same court as them.

They looked at him as he walked in. They were sizing him up. Although a few short months ago he was the "go-to guy" on this very court, now he was nothing. Derek looked up to see Riley, another high school recruit, and said a quick hello before slowly getting up and making his way to the ball cart. The veteran players looked at Derek gave him a nod, and carried on with their conversations. They were laughing and stretching, starting to play with balls. It seemed that they were already having fun. They seemed so big, so old, and so mature. They were men. Derek on the other hand kept pushing back the feeling but eventually he just had to admit it to himself; he was terrified!

When Riley walked in to the familiar high school gym where he had played in a couple of tournament finals, he was excited. Not exactly what he thought it would be like. He figured it would be on the university court but since it was booked here he was with his new team, in the high school gym. Riley was unsure of how he felt. Was he nervous? Yeah, a little but he knew he was good at his position and he felt more excited than anything else. He had been recruited by the coach and he had experience with the national youth team so he knew he could hold his own. He had been a starting left side hitter and was chosen as a top ten player in the province in his last year of high school. He wasn't thinking about that now though, it didn't seem to mean much standing on the court with the second, third and fourth year players. He was going to be changing position. As a left side he was very strong in the high school game but at the university level he was small. He was a great defensive player though and the coach felt he would be a great libero.

Riley made his way into the gym and saw a few familiar faces; guys with whom he had played club and provincial team volleyball. He nodded to Derek and made his way to the benches along the wall to get ready for his first practice. He noticed another player that had played club volleyball with him. He was from out of town. He gave him a quick, "hey, how ya doin'?" and carried on getting ready. He was anxious and excited to get going into some drills on court.

When Mark walked in, he felt quite alone. He had played club volleyball with some of these guys when he was younger but that seemed like a long time ago now. These guys all seemed to know each other. It made sense; they were all from the city. They had all played against each other. Mark got ready for practice and walked

slowly to the bucket of volleyballs that was on the gym court. The veteran players were laughing and sharing stories of their summer exploits. "Oh hey Mark, I forgot you were playing with us this year," said one veteran player innocently. Mark half heartedly chuckled to himself thinking, "Oh great, thanks a lot!" The rookies hung back and anxiously awaited the first drill that would give them permission to walk on the court and start playing.

After some preliminary greetings and direction from the coach, the players made their way to the court to start playing pepper.

"Hey, I'm Jon," said a tall middle player from out of province as he extended his hand to Mark.

"Hey Jon, I'm Mark. You wanna warm-up together?"

And so it began. A seven month season started, as it does every September, with nervous young feeling rookies putting on their best face trying to find the best way to become part of the team. This is the story of their first year.

The first two weeks: gaining entry to the new community of practice

When Derek, Riley, and Mark walked into the gym for their first university volleyball practice, their comfort zone was very small. They didn't have any ties that bound them to the team. Older, veteran players already had some gear from previous years and were re-connecting with teammates. The first year players on the other hand were seeking opportunities to make their first connections. This experience is consistent with the findings of Galipeau and Trudel's (2004) qualitative study pertaining to newcomers on a varsity team.

At the start of the season, the three athletes in this study were peripheral participants in their new community of practice (Wegner, McDermott, & Snyder 2002); the furthest level from the inner core of the team's community of practice. They were indeed peripheral because they did not yet have access to intangible team culture that was already, to an extent, in place and practiced by the veteran members of the team. Even if they could have begun to ascertain some of these practices, it would not be deemed "acceptable" to engage in the same team culture practices that the veterans do. This is because as Trudel and Galipeau (2004) point out, it is the coach who puts the players on the team but it is the athletes who decide if the rookies are to become legitimate participants on the team and progress to the inner core of the team.

When prompted to consider the season in terms of key moments of transition, the first two weeks emerged as being a critical period of time marked by unease for the athletes even in a positive environment. As we will see in the coming sections, it is in these first two weeks where there is a convergence of role ambiguity, goal formation, gym culture establishment, relationships with teammates and coaches, performance perspectives and opportunity. Once the two week period was over, the participants felt that things changed; not necessarily in a tangible way, but they were different. This early process of gaining entry into the team was experienced by all the participants of the study.

Work ethic and execution of skill

Interestingly, the fact that they were not yet accepted into the inner core of the team's community of practice meant that they were not comfortable to fully allow

themselves to be themselves. They expressed a preference to establish themselves on the court first. On court, they could establish two ways to slowly gain entry into the team and consequently expand their comfort zones so as to be able to let the team discover them in terms of who they were as people; that is, in terms of their individual personalities and qualities. The first way was by demonstrating their technical ability to play the sport and the second was through a demonstration of their work ethic, again on court, in training situations.

Regardless of experience or position on the team, when the coach set up the drills and the players began their training, there existed a link between all of the players. The nature of the sport of volleyball is such that players need to work together. To keep a drill going each player, be it a veteran or a rookie, will need to execute the technical skills of their position in the sport. In this capacity, the participants felt it was their first opportunity to show what they could do. Though they didn't yet feel comfortable expressing themselves in terms of their personalities, they felt that through the technical parts of the sport, they could gain entry. When presented with this interpretation during the member checking process, one participant shared, "I agree with that. That is bang on. If guys are coming in (maybe from out of town) and they don't know anyone, they stick to volleyball. If someone talks to you, it is all volleyball, that's it." Unfortunately, the feelings of fear associated with being so far outside their comfort zone added a challenge in that they now had to perform with anxiety.

In the first practices of the year, Derek, as did the other first year student-athletes, came to the team or rather, came to the first practice as an outsider on the

team. Although, he had spent countless hours working on perfecting his game, the first sessions with the new CIS team were spent in what Derek called an “out of body experience.” In attempts to avoid missteps, Derek did his best to look calm while all the while, a nervous, young player tried to figure out the first drill. He wondered to himself if this was how he would feel the whole season. He had been on new teams before; in fact many times in many other sports too (baseball for example) so he knew that this feeling of anxiety and the pressure of the unknown was temporary. What he didn’t know at that particular moment was how he could stop “sweating buckets” and just start to do what he had always done best. Derek explained:

In the first couple of practices I was sweating buckets before we even started. When people started to serve I was just on the verge of breaking down, I didn’t know what was going on. I was too nervous to talk to anyone...

He also realized:

...that was my reflex from being embarrassed, was to not say anything at all. And just do my job on the court. I was trying to get them to respect me on the court first before anybody became friends.

It appears that early on self-confidence is not high and players rely heavily on technical performance and work ethic to begin the integration into the established team culture. Here is another excerpt from an exchange between Derek and I:

Derek: I didn’t want to speak out loud. Then after about a week, I realized that I can’t just not say anything for the rest of the season.

C.J.: Why did you think like that?

Derek: I don't know, my reflex from being nervous, like I didn't want to embarrass myself. I say a lot of stuff that I don't think through and I do a lot of things that are stupid. So I didn't want to embarrass myself in front of all the players. And I didn't want to look like a younger guy; I wanted to be at the same level as them.

Mark's comments were similar in that he also described a feeling of being an outsider at that first practice and not feeling comfortable with himself in this new environment to fully allow his personality to show through.

I was a little quiet going in but as soon as practice got a couple of weeks in, people started loosening up opening up and talking so that made it more comfortable; as soon as you could talk to people.

He also offered the following synopsis when asked to consider the season in terms of key moments in his transition:

At first you want to show everyone that you can do it. During that time you are shitting your pants trying not to make a mistake. That lasts a week or two. After that it is more technical. That is where you learn that a guy can rip on a ball. Once you know that a guy can hold his own on the court, there is a respect that goes with it. That's how it then gets carried off the court.

In addition to technical ability, on-court work ethic was another means that the first year players felt was instrumental in helping gain access to the inner core of the new community of practice. In the first few weeks there were such unknowns

pertaining to playing time, role, position and a host of other issues, that execution of skills and effort in training situations were the two things that were within the control of the first year players. At the mid-point of the season, each reflected on the pride they felt in the work ethic they displayed in the first weeks of the year. The participants felt that the work ethic they displayed communicated what they could not say verbally; that they were committed to working hard for the team. That they were for real:

I'd say like, two weeks into the practicing (I started to feel different – accepted). They just really got to know what kind of a player, what kind of heart I was going to put into the team and they realized that I wanted the best for the team and that I wasn't just slacking off. I think that's the main thing. Even if I slacked for two weeks now, I would lose all that respect right away.

Another participant shared how he also felt demonstrating a strong work ethic was important:

... just giving it your all in practice; that you have come to play and that you're not just a rookie guy that came to practice and just giving half ass at practice. You've come to show your all and give it your all at practice.

The reliance on work ethic as a means of access to the new community of practice was magnified by the fact that none of the three players were immediate impact players that commanded a physical presence by their dominating play (e.g., extraordinary vertical jump or attacking ability).

I think a lot of players are immediately accepted because they can bounce a ball into the roof. It doesn't matter if they are dumb as bricks. But someone like me, I tried as hard as I can and that's why I was noticed at the beginning but I wouldn't say that my skill was the thing that made everyone notice me.

Work ethic and technical execution were both factors that the first year athletes could control and they both emerged as the chosen method for them to begin their integration into the team.

The training environment: feelings of discomfort in a positive setting

One point that is important to understand when reading the above quotes is the fact that although they seem to suggest an uncomfortable or maybe even a negative feeling, this was not due to a negative training environment or toxic team culture. In fact, the opposite was the case. I was surprised when the participants told me how quickly it took to get over these initial feelings of peripheral participation and discomfort. My experience told me that they may have still been feeling that way until shortly before the break. In reality, the participants suggested that this was only something that existed for a few weeks.

Furthermore, they were also emphatic on how quickly their team closer and a level of trust and comfort was developed. When asked about the dynamic on his team Mark described it as, "Really positive. All the guys get along. No one has any hate on for anyone else. Everyone pushes each other on the court." Derek stated, "It was really easy to get to know everyone on the team because everyone really wanted to meet everyone else." In the second interview protocol, when the season was over,

Derek also reflected on how close the team had become saying, “it was special for me to play on the team this year with the people that were on it; so many great people. We really saw grown men come together and support each other.” It is interesting then to consider all that is happening to the first year player in the first weeks of the season.

First year players come in to the season full of conflicting dichotomies. They are nervous about the new team but excited to get going; they see familiar faces but also see them in new roles; they come in to practice as stand out players on their high school teams but are now unsure of their sport and role on the new team; they are playing a familiar sport but they have doubt in their ability. All of these dichotomies exist with the understanding that there are increased expectations from coaches and teammates and that acceptance from the veteran players is not automatic. The first year players realize this and that realization along with the inner turmoil comes to shape the goals they set for themselves. As well, it sets the scene for discoveries about new roles and different perspectives towards success, failure, and taking risks to become true members of the team.

New coach, new level, new expectations

The team on which the athletes of this study were members, had a unique situation. As the athletes transitioned into a new level of competition and training so did their coach. I include this because the athletes mentioned it as well in their reflections on their transitional experience. The head coach was also a new coach to the program and to the CIS level in general. Although new to the CIS, he brought tremendous experience from many levels of volleyball. He has been recognized

nationally and has had success at the high school and provincial team level.

Interestingly, he was also the high school coach of one of the participants in the previous season. I found this particularly interesting when hearing of that athlete's particular reflections pertaining to the coach's expectations.

I think it is also important to point out that other than two players on the team none of the other players had any previous experience with the new coach. This was not the point of the study but from a purely individual level, it is reasonable to suggest that this may have had an impact on the team development as every student-athlete regardless of his experience was going through a transition of sorts with the new coach. This transition included becoming familiar with his routines and ultimately his expectations. For the three first-year student-athletes, the relationship with the coach and the understanding of his expectations were integral parts of their transition experience.

Coach expectations and relationships

Part of the richness of qualitative, and in particular, interpretive research is the emergence of themes and the processing of experience that would have otherwise remained blurry or perhaps not even noticed. In this study, the main themes emerged as being the integration into a community of practice as a function of the athletes' ability to prove themselves and meet expectations of both the players and coaches. I begin this section with that caveat because the data provided by the participants through their stories came after reflection and discussion. Without knowing it, they described much of what the literature had been suggesting.

As I will describe in subsequent sections, the athletes endeavoured to transition and develop their ties to the team from peripheral participant to full participant within the athlete's community of practice. Part of that research posits that as the athlete integrates and moves toward the inner circle to become a full participant, the impact of the coach becomes far less (Galipeau & Trudel, 2004). In other words, a coach has far greater impact on a first year player than he does on a fifth year veteran player. This is why it is important to dedicate some discussion to the relationship the athletes in this study had with their coach in addition to the increased expectations that the athletes felt at the CIS level from their new coach.

Part of the important role coaches play in the first year for freshman student-athletes is creating a positive environment for training and growth and for instilling a level of expectation into that training and consequently in the performances of their athletes. More specifically, the coach's philosophy infiltrates the training by his actions, his words, and his decisions. In turn, the athlete's behaviour is affected and influenced (Pelletier & Bower, 2001). As Pelletier and Bower explain, coaches develop expectations based on the characteristics of their athletes and the behaviours that he observes from them, and the observations and comments from others.

Furthermore, they suggest that the interpretations of the coach's behaviours on the part of his players, influences the perception the athletes have of themselves. In the present study, each participant alluded to the fact that the expectations they felt from the coach were far greater than they had ever felt on their high school, provincial, or college teams. In particular, they outlined the fact that the expectation for performance was not in relation to their experience. In other words, through the

eyes of the first year players, the fact that they were freshman players did not mean they were afforded a lower expectation. The following quote illustrates these perceptions:

I have to say that I haven't really had a coach like him before. He's quiet in a way but then he'll be loud at times too. I've had a really quiet coach before, he doesn't say too much so you don't know what he's thinking like if you're doing bad or you're doing good. It's like, 'do you think I'm any good?' So you doubt if you're doing this right. With (this coach), if you do well he'll just let you know it's good job but if you do bad, he'll let you know you need to pick it up by saying, "let's go type of thing, it's CIS volleyball, start playing."

For each of the participants there was an obvious level of respect for the coach. They described intangible characteristics that had his players wanting to impress him; to never let him down.

Whatever he says is important. In a drill, he won't disrupt you unless it is something that will help you out. Whatever comes out of his mouth is something that will make you better.

..obviously you're excited and you don't want to let him down, so in practice like I said everyone likes him and he expects a lot and you're going to give it to him if you have respect for the guy. So everyone gives it their all in practice and no one lets him down.

At the same time, the expectation from previous levels (e.g., high school mentioned previously) is much different. Expectations regarding execution of skill and strategy as well as the training load are much greater. In that regard, the coach also emerged as someone who demonstrated a good ability to draw on the teaching components of coaching. Interestingly, the 'new' CIS coach is also a volunteer teacher-coach of one of the top high school programs with a proven longevity. One participant shared:

(The coach) has helped me as one of the smaller attackers (in the league) and trying to learn different shots and finding ways to score.

The (coach) has helped me out a lot. I haven't really had many people teaching me on certain shots and how to score.

The high level of respect is a reflection of the positive relationships the coach was able to develop with his players. As Roy et al. (2001) found in their qualitative study pertaining to university sport experiences, that in addition to the sport context and achievements, the relationships with coaches played an important role in the overall sport experience. Virtually all athletes who shared positive sport experiences made reference to their coach and specifically to good interpersonal relationships. Conversely, negative relationships with the coach contributed to an overall negative sport experience. The participants of this study suggested the supportive nature coupled with the expectation for precision in their performance as key elements of this positive relationship. They offered the following reflections:

They (coaching staff) were just really helpful in the first couple of weeks and encouraging. They said, "this is what we got so let's use it".

The athletes appreciated the coach's honesty and support and were able to contrast this with previous experiences in tryouts camps they had attended.

You don't want to make a mistake. With tryouts you're not sure if you are doing well or not though, because the coach is not usually giving you any feedback so you're hoping you're doing pretty well kind of compared to everyone else. But in our first week, our coach was giving us lots of feedback, and he's very encouraging so I think that had lots to do with our development as a team.

This type of positive training environment appears to be critical. As we already have discovered there are many factors impacting on the freshman athlete in the first weeks and throughout the season. In addition to the increased demands in terms of performance expectations on behalf of the coach, athletes new to the CIS must also contend with participating in their sport with a whole new perspective. This perspective includes new views with regards to training time, game preparation and competition against other teams in league and tournament play. First, athletes generally come to the CIS with the experience of training at a lower intensity of two hours in high school. The one participant who had played some college volleyball had additional experience with the increase in training load but the other two were experiencing three hour practices five times a week for the first time. The following comment was offered by Derek:

We've been practicing three hours a day with weight training on Mondays and Wednesdays for an hour and a half. I guess that might be normal...I don't know.

Mark offered how the increase in on-court training took a physical toll on him:

The workload (has been a surprise). Three hours a day. It just took a beating on the body for the first weeks of the season. The guys that live in residence usually go eat together after. We were all stiff to the bone, limping to go eat. It was tough. I've never done three hour practices ... The workload was unbelievable.

This increased training load is but one of the differences first year student-athletes will experience when they reach the CIS.

Once the season gets underway and competition begins, the athletes are exposed to the next big change from their previous experience. A different perspective towards match preparation and game day encroaches the freshman athlete. Whereas in high school game preparation consisted largely of arriving at the game and then simply stepping on the floor and playing, once these first year players arrived in university they quickly saw that practises during the week slowly became more focused on the team they would be facing that weekend. When on the road, they would leave either late Thursday night or early Friday and would have to make arrangements for their classes they would miss on those days. In addition to the training, they were now exposed to game planning which combined classroom sessions and video on the opposition. This added another dimension and importance to the matches for which the team was preparing. This was also one of the bigger

changes that the athletes highlighted as a part of their transition to the CIS. The following are some of their comments:

High school and up to provincial team is nowhere near the same thing, like with all the practices and the big games. Like game day, it's pretty big you have to get your mindset early in the day. You have to get ready for that. People are coming to watch. Like that's what you are doing this weekend, is playing those two games.

The importance of the league games was immediately felt by the players. In addition they had to learn how to prepare for the upcoming opponent in greater detail than they ever had before. Riley shared his impressions on match preparation:

I haven't really done that (game planning) before. Because we would do it a little bit in a hotel room for a couple of minutes, but this is like, you walk in and you're in there for an hour or so and you're taking notes and you're analyzing things you see on a certain team and their tendencies and that. Before I was never really focused in those meetings, but now you're talking to guys and you're watching, you're seeing what they see. The first time I didn't pay that much attention, but now everyone does and you see how important those meetings really are, how much you get out of them.

As the competitive part of the season began, the first year athletes began to see game day in a new light. The focus on preparation, both on-court and off-court, was a new and an important part of being a CIS level student-athlete.

I belong

When asked about their goals for the season, each participant shared that they wanted to get on the floor and make a contribution. Aside from the participant in a key position behind a fourth year player there seemed to initially, in the unknowns of the first weeks, be an inaccurate perception of what a realistic role could be and thus the goal fluctuated between, “just getting on the floor” to assuming a starting role. More detail on this will be provided in the following section pertaining to role ambiguity. One of the three participants, Riley, emerged as a starting left side player and did assume a large role. More detail in this regard will be given in subsequent sections.

The other two participants, Derek and Mark, played supporting roles as non-starters. Aside from playing time, the notion of proving themselves was reiterated a number of times. Beyond confirming to themselves that they could play at this level, the main goal emerged to prove to their teammates that they could play at the CIS level. By doing this, they could earn their trust and respect. One participant shared his goal for the remainder of the season at the break as follows:

My goal actually is to get trust from everybody else, so when I go in, if I have to go in for 6 points they have complete faith that I can do well. That's the only thing I actually care about, everybody thinking that I can do my job.

Another shared the following:

I try and impress them (veteran players), work hard in front of them just to show them that I should be there, prove to everyone that I should be there, that I am there.

In addition to teammates, the participants also felt the need to prove themselves to the coaches:

Every time I am on the court in game times I think I do at least one thing positive. I always try and do something positive so I let him (the coach) know, 'hey I am in there, I did something well, I can do it again, put me back in there.'

Once the initial weeks of the season had passed and the team was starting to settle into the first phase of the season, the importance of performance escalated as players began competing for roles that would be divided into starting positions and support roles such as coming in to serve and play defense for a couple of points.

Role ambiguity and establishment of new roles

The participants of this study were each key performers on their respective high school teams. Derek and Riley were amongst the top leftside hitters in the province and played on highly ranked teams. Mark, played on a rural team and after club experience in the city, quickly outgrew what his high school program could offer in terms of continued training. Needless to say, they were each very key players on their earlier teams. When they arrived at university be it via high school or college (in Mark's case), two things occurred in relation to their roles and performance. First, there seemed to be many questions around the potential role each would play; in some

cases there seemed to be an inaccurate perception of their potential role on the team. Second, there was a change in perspective towards success and failure. In the next section, a closer look at role clarity and its impact on the first year experience will be given. In the final segment, the juxtaposition of on-court feelings of the first-year athlete participants will be discussed.

Unawareness to acceptance – a key factor in a successful transition

In the beginning weeks, even months into the CIS volleyball season, there is very little competition. It is a time for training and as discussed earlier, it is when first year players are seeking ways to find their niche on the team. In the case of the participants of this study, they felt they were able to relatively quickly integrate beyond a peripheral participant towards becoming a legitimate participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991) by demonstrating competency in their sport specific skills as well as a commitment to the team through a solid work ethic.

Until the first competition, the only measuring stick for teams in comparison to other teams or players in terms of comparison to other players is within the training environment of the individual teams. In this situation, players do not necessarily have an accurate way of determining where they stand. Derek shared how he was unsure of what his role could be on any given day. Often, he was very fickle in his attitude which wavered depending on his performance at practice.

I had assumed that I was going to start when I was put on the team.

Your thoughts change so much – almost between every practice! I

mean, you can have a good practice and think you're going to start

and have a bad practice and you're not going to start ... There was no

set starting line so I thought I could beat out the other guy and after a good practice I thought I'm good – gravy! And after a bad practice I thought, man I don't know about the next game.

As the season progressed to games against other CIS teams in tournament and league play, a more accurate understanding of the role was achieved by the first year athletes. They understood the dramatic change in the competition level and came to accept their role on the team.

At the beginning of the year I'm like, oh I'm second string right now, but that's just because he was on the team last year, I'll beat him out. But now I'm starting to realize that yeah, he's a great player obviously if he has been playing university for a while, and I totally respect that. He's a great guy, so I don't take anything away from him. It would be nice obviously if I could play, but the best man has to go on the court.

Derek also had the added challenge of changing to a more defensive minded position than the leftside attacking position. At the mid-season interview, he was still dealing with that change and trying his best to accept the role he was to play. At that point he hadn't yet had the opportunity to play very much in competitive situations. He shares:

Throughout high school I have been leading in kills, you know I've just been the "go to" guy on the team. Now, I knew this was going to happen the whole time, like I knew in the summer I'm not going to be

the 'go to guy' and I thought I would get used to it. It's still super hard, even now, I'm not even playing power, I'm playing libero and I still want to get set and crush a ball. But in the last two weeks, I've realized what my job is; that my job is it just to pass, to pass perfect. So that's what I am for, that's my job. And when I come out, I'm happy if I did my job.

It wasn't apparent at the time but in the post-season interview it became clearer that Derek still harnessed a good deal of frustration in regards to his role. At the mid-point in the season he had not yet internalized the experience or attached any meaning to how he felt about it. By the post-season interview, however, things had changed. At that point, he could reflect and highlight how negative his attitude was during the first half of the year. In hindsight, he was able to identify the fact that although he didn't feel like an outsider to the team, he felt like a practice player. This was a far cry from the major role he had occupied on previous teams. This led to a negative attitude which in turn, had a negative effect on his performance:

I think it was past the half way point (that I began to change), I think it changed because my attitude changed. I was looking at it more positively on even just being on the team. I was starting to look happy about that. At first I was like why am I not playing, what's wrong? I was looking at the negative aspects of everything. Later on in the year, I was being grateful for just being on the team, meeting new people. I had a totally different outlook on it. I think that even changed the way I looked on the court in practice too. The people looked at me more

positively. When I went in, I happened to do well, I did my job and that's why he kept putting me in.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly why this happened, the fact that it did occur after the mid-way break can shed some light on Derek's situation. It was at that point that the team played in an exhibition tournament in the United States and although it was unfortunate for the other player, Derek benefited from a starting player in his position falling ill. This allowed Derek to play entire matches. This was critical and helped shift his mindset:

... The anticipation for the first point was the most gruesome, exhausting time of my life ... I don't think I even played that well that game, I got aced a couple of times but I got that monkey off my back. I played a full game finally. I knew it was going to come. I knew I was better than that first game and then a second and I eventually played better. My confidence went up 3000%! Just from playing ... I felt really, really good about myself. It may have been that that changed my year around.

For Derek, the fact he had not had significant opportunities to play was negatively affecting his attitude but once he was able to play unconditionally, that is, to make mistakes but be able to work through them and continue to play, his attitude and perspective improved.

This shift in perception is critical in team building. With only six players playing at once, a rookie player has a good challenge ahead of him to earn a starting spot on the floor. Subsequently, it is important for athletes to come to a certain degree

of acceptance of the role they are given on the team. The players in this study expressed the desire to prove that they were able to do their “job” on the team. This may mean contributing with solid serve receptions, scoring the big attack on game point, or coming in to serve. The sooner that “job” is accepted, the sooner the focus in training develops around becoming as competent as possible in that role.

Herein lays connections to literature surrounding communities of practice and team dynamics. The stories shared by the participants in this study indicate that their integration into the team, starting from peripheral participant towards legitimate participant, and then onwards towards a rookie-veteran relationship, until finally becoming full participants was a function of work ethic and proving competence their skills. This enabled them to fully engage in the team and assume a contributing role to the team. This is similar to Tuckmen’s (1965) model for group development which suggests stages of forming (members coming together without a common goal or purpose), storming (competing for roles, possibility of conflict), norming (role acceptance), and performing (synergy exists between team members where there is collective pursuit of a common goal and vision). As illustrated in previous excerpts, the participants in this study did not share any stories of outward conflict on the team but there were times of unease, inner conflict with feelings of doubt, before they came to accept their roles on the team and began to integrate towards becoming legitimate participants as the team began ‘norming’.

CHAPTER FIVE

Competition Season Begins

Opportunity knocks

It was early in the season so it didn't matter that they were getting crushed by the team on the other side of the net. They weren't even supposed to get 12 points on some of these teams. Derek's team had come a long way though in a short amount of time. They had to. They were a team. Well, as much of a team as they could be in a month and half and they had to step on the court together and see what they had. For a month and half all they had was each other in the gym. They didn't know how good they were. The veteran guys seemed to feel good about how they were doing so Derek was content. He didn't have a clue. He was just happy to no longer feel like he couldn't speak for fear of saying something stupid. That first Friday, when he put on the jersey, it actually hit him. Derek was exploding with pride just by wearing the jersey. He wondered if the other rookies felt like he did. He was actually wearing the jersey of a CIS player! Later that night as he had tried to fall asleep after their first game of the season, he got lost in his thoughts wondering who the person was that had worn the jersey before him. What position did he play? Did he play all five years? Was he an all-Canadian? Was he a big recruit? He had made a mental note to try and find out what he could.

The weekend was good so far. His team hadn't won yet but Derek was finally starting to feel like he was fitting into the team. The older guys and the coach knew he was working hard in practice and he was doing some good things. "Maybe I could even start," Derek often thought. He just needed that chance. He knew he could play

at this level. Heck, he was the go-to-guy in high school. Granted, there weren't any 6'8" 23 year olds in high school but he still thought he could get the job done.

No sooner had Derek finished longing for his chance to step on the court, did his coach look up at the scoreboard and then down the side line to the end of the bench where the supporting cast was standing. They were on the wrong side of a lop-sided score and he was thinking of making some changes. The coach got up from his chair and started to walk to the end of the bench.

"Is he walking towards me?" thought Derek. "I think he looked at me. Yes, he definitely looked at me. Oh boy, I hope I can pull this off. I don't want to screw up my first chance."

His coach put an end to any doubt that he was going in. "Derek, you're going in to serve and play back row. Are you ready?"

"You bet," Derek nodded with a look of confidence as his heart threatened to explode out of his chest. He had only been watching up to this point in the day, in the tournament for that matter, but he was nevertheless already sweating as though he had just finished playing an entire set and had served and dug every ball!

As he stood at the side line waiting for the player he was replacing to run up to make the substitution, he couldn't help but feel doubt from the other guys on the team. He figured they were just hoping he wouldn't make any huge mistakes that would cost them more points or embarrass them. He quickly looked across the net and felt the guys on the other team wondering, 'who is this shmuck getting subbed in?' Without knowing, Derek pushed those thoughts deeper inside and did his best to

concentrate on his play. The attacker on the other team had narrowly missed his target down the line and as a result, Derek was going in to serve.

The whistle blew and he tossed the ball in the air to serve. His arm felt like it was made of lead and the target on the other side of the net was in the other gym. Nevertheless, Derek opened his hand and hit the ball as high and hard as he could. The ball just made it over the net. It wasn't the toughest serve but it was over the net. The other team made a decent pass and the setter set it to the middle player who cut the ball around the block to the opposite side of where Derek was playing defense. The attack scored and so Derek's team lined up to receive serve. Derek took a quick look at his coach to see if he would be coming out but there was no indication that he was. He took up his position in the back right of the court and got ready to pass.

The first serve came over but not to him. The set went to the right side hitter but unfortunately he didn't score the point. There would be another serve coming over. Derek could hardly contain the anxiety he felt. He absolutely did not want to blow the pass or he may not get another chance but he had something to prove. He needed that player to serve him the ball. Finally, in what seemed like an eternity, the ball left the server's hand and was coming into his zone. Derek felt like he was in junior high, learning to pass all over again. Luckily the ball, with what seemed like a mind of its own, bounced off his arms and sailed perfectly to the net where his setter connected with the middle hitter. When the ball hit the floor, a rush of relief flowed through Derek as a huge weight of anxiety and nerves was lifted from his shoulders. All he wanted to do now was keep playing and keep passing.

*Integrating into the team: a function of role acceptance
and dealing with mixed emotions*

Derek's first on-court experience seemed to be typical of some of the feelings that were felt by the other two participants. This feeling hinged on the desire to prove to teammates and coaches their ability (as explained earlier) as well as the mixed feelings of success and failure involved with getting an opportunity to play. The participants used words such as 'excited' and 'anxious' to describe their first moments on the court but they also used words such as 'nervous' and even 'terrified'. This lends support to Bruner et al. (2008) who found that for rookie collegiate hockey players, "the adjustment of receiving less playing time when entering elite sport impacted their confidence" (p.244). Once individual ability was proven, the ability to do his job, the feelings of competence and thus self-confidence increased as did the orientation towards achieving success. This marked a change from the early part of the season that was dominated by an orientation towards a fear of failure.

Furthermore, these experiences shared by the participants speak to the fact that their focus is largely individual until they feel satisfied that their ability has been proven. They do their best to integrate into the team but at an emotional level, full integration – or at least a movement towards having what the community of practice research would call a rookie-veteran relationship – is delayed until they feel proven. In the member checking process this was confirmed by one of the participants who agreed that with the increased opportunity to play came integration into the team. He said, "With games it comes along. At the beginning, in the first game you are not playing like yourself. For a first year player playing you are not going to play the way

you would like to. I felt that came naturally with games.” Given the limited opportunities that typically are associated with a first year experience this can cause increased anxiety. It is somewhat of a double edged sword until a certain degree of individual success can be achieved by rookie players. They are caught in the middle of a conundrum that has those wanting opportunities to play while at the same time being nervous about not performing once given that opportunity.

In the previous narrative, Derek demonstrated this inner conflict by at once wanting to be served at but at the same time, being very nervous about not being successful on the pass. Furthermore, the pressure to perform is magnified given the fact that he didn’t get numerous opportunities to play in competitive situations. Derek explains this feeling in the following quote:

I know I’m at par and above in high school but in university you just, you could be good in high school and just be mediocre in university. It’s really scary that that can happen. That’s what I’m afraid of. No one even knows if I’m mediocre or if I’m good or if I’m bad because I haven’t gotten in there.

Underlying this was doubt in the trust that his teammates had in him. Mark shared the following observation when reflecting on his first experiences in the first part of the season:

Nobody says anything if you do bad and nobody says anything if you do good; but if you do bad you get a little bit of cold shoulder and you know and you sense it. You even sense it if you’ve done badly in the past and you’re going in. They’re just like, ‘oh ...’

These are all signs that the first year athlete has not yet achieved a level of individual success that allows him the perspective to be able to neither fully celebrate and accept his role nor integrate beyond a legitimate participant level towards a rookie-veteran relationship.

With time and proven success however, this did come. In that light, it required a post-season reflection to recognize the evolution. Also, from a team development perspective, the group will not fully transition into Tuckmen's (1965) fourth stage of performing until athletes have fully embraced and accepted their role in the norming stage. Thus, it is important for coaches to balance the needs in the early season for result focused success (e.g., wins) and the process it will take to empower first year players to accept their roles and have their teammates accept them as well. This process appears to include providing a patient environment for athletes to gain opportunities to show what they can do. It is also important for the coach (and the team for that matter) to appreciate that the first year athlete is trying his best to capitalize on that opportunity while also trying to cope with the added pressure to perform given his limited experience.

Fear of Failure vs. Approaching Success

The juxtaposition of emotions explored above highlights a journey from a strong motive to achieve success to a fear of failure and back again. In the initial literature review, the topic of achievement motivation and more specifically needs achievement was not considered. As the interpretive nature and process of this study unfolded, it became clear that elements of achievement motivation were indeed an important component of the first year experience. No psychometric tests or

inventories to determine levels of achievement motivation were performed. Rather, it was some of the descriptions and characteristics of this precept in sport psychology that emerged as the players spoke of the way they, without meaning to, had moved away from the confident success oriented perspective they played with in high school to playing with a degree of fear of failure.

In the literature, it has been suggested that fear of failure has been viewed to influence achievement behaviour (Conroy & Elliot, 2004). Conroy and Elliot summarize fear of failure as representing, “a dispositional tendency to experience apprehension and anxiety in evaluative situations because individuals have learned that failure is associated with aversive consequences” (p.273). In this particular setting, this could be interpreted as not starting or having reduced playing time or diminishment of one’s role on the team. Achievement motivation is also commonly referred to in sport as competitiveness which progresses from a trait oriented view of a person’s need for achievement to an interactional view between goals and situation. From this point of view it is considered a personality factor (Weinberg & Gould, 1995). Gill (1986 as cited in Weinberg & Gould, 1995) has defined achievement motivation as, “a person’s orientations to strive for task success, persist in the face of failure, and experience pride in accomplishments” (p.74). Weinberg and Gould (1995) summarize three main theories involved in achievement motivation as being 1) *Need achievement theory* (an interaction between personality factors, situational factors, resultant tendencies, emotional reactions and finally achievement-related behaviours, 2) *Attribution theory* (how people attribute their successes and failures as a result of stability and locus of control, 3) *Achievement goal theory* (an interaction

between achievement goals which are either outcome or task oriented, perceived ability and the resulting behaviour).

Achievement motivation theory tells us some interesting things about high and low achievers. For instance, high achievers have a high motivation for success, they focus on feelings of pride of success, they have a low motivation to avoid failure, and they attribute success to stable, internal factors they can control. Failures are attributed to unstable and external factors out of one's control. They will usually adopt task goals and will seek out challenges and take risks. They will also perform well in evaluative conditions. On the other hand, low achievers tend to demonstrate a high motive to avoid failure and tend to focus on the shame and worry that result from failure. They will also have a tendency to attribute success to unstable and external factors that are out of their control. Failures are attributed to stable and internal factors. Low achievers tend to adopt outcome or result goals, they will avoid challenges and thus take fewer risks. They will also perform poorly in evaluative conditions (Weinberg & Gould, 1995).

While these descriptions of high and low achievers within the perspective of achievement motivation goes beyond the objective of the current research project, psychological profiling, self-report measures or any other data collection tool on these topics were not used for data collection. Nevertheless, many of the notions covered within the three theories described above can serve to inform the comments and reflections from the participants of this study. As I show in the following interview excerpts, the athletes speak of the pressure of "evaluative others", the role of perceived ability and the shift from external-internal and stable-unstable attributions.

As previously mentioned, the participants in this study were players who occupied important roles on their previous high school teams. In fact they were not only skilled players on their teams but they were recognized throughout the province by other coaches as being amongst the top volleyball players in the province. Their reflections from high school prior to playing at the CIS level speak to different sets of perspectives and mindsets in the early part of the university season.

Riley, who held a starting role on the team, had a different early season experience from the two non-starters. He also shared the feelings of nervousness and narrow internal focus in the first weeks and especially in his first opportunities on the court. He had a role, however, as a starter and thus did become a key player who rarely left the floor. He expressed the conflicting emotions of wanting opportunity and success but fearing the repercussions of failing. In his case however, it was short lived as the number and quality of opportunity was much greater. Nevertheless he still experienced the same fluctuation in his perspective towards his motive to achieve success and avoid failure. He reflected on the early part of the season and offered the following:

...the first couple of games of the season obviously you're not going to be confident. I'm a first year guy, these are big guys you've been watching for the last couple of years, and now you're playing against them.

As the season progressed, Riley's outlook shifted to a more confident perspective we can see in the following comments:

Before I was kind of playing it safe to not screw up; you're the young guy out there and you don't want to make any mistakes. But, now it's just put the ball away, don't worry about making mistakes and you don't even notice the crowd anymore.

Riley became much more invested in the team at an earlier point than the others. His goal quickly changed from just getting on the court to wanting to maintain and expand on his role as a passing left side attacker. In fact, he stated his second half goal as wanting to lead his team in areas demanded of his position.

Derek and Mark, who did not have starting roles, shared how it took a long time to adjust to not being a main player on the team. Derek offered that, “for the first month that (not starting) was very difficult because I am just so used to being a starter and first time being a bench player; it took a long time to get used to that. Similarly, Mark offered the following reflection: “Every time coach would show the line-up card I would look for my number; what position am I in? But, it wasn’t up there.” The reduced role from starter to support player meant that the opportunities were fewer. Riley offered the following reflection in the post-season interview:

I think that in high school or college it is ok to make mistakes because you know you are the best player and you will have a chance to make up for those mistakes. At the university level, a lot of the guys are afraid to make one mistake because they think that, “ok I made one mistake he’s going to pull me.” I think guys get that in their head and they don’t try as hard as they could. You are trying not to lose instead of to win

The desire to prove themselves combined with fewer opportunities to do so seemed to stimulate a shift away from the confident, risk taking success approaching motivation that all of the athletes demonstrated on previous teams, towards an orientation that was defined by a fear of failure. Derek shared his first CIS playing experience in the following interview excerpt:

Derek: When I went in, we were down by two and it was also at the end of the game. This was the first time I was going in to play in the CIS. So I was just terrified and everyone was like, "Why are you putting him in? It's almost the end of the game." No one was saying that out loud, but I knew... I may have made this whole thing up in my head because I was so scared. I was even thinking the other teams were thinking, "Who's this shmuck?" Negative, negative, as soon as I got subbed in there wasn't a positive thing going through my head, I was just so scared.

C.J.: Is that typical of who you are as a player, like when you were developing and growing up as an athlete?

Derek: Even when I was not a good player, like when I was in grade 8 and first starting I was never scared of going in. I loved starting and I still do.

C.J.: What do you think the difference is?

Derek: It's the level. The amount of change from university to high school is just unreal and I realize that and I think that's what scares me. Because I

know I'm at par and above in high school but in university I could just be mediocre.

Not only was this a factor in game situations, but it carried over into the training environment. Derek also shared an honest feeling from the beginning of the season:

I hated going to practice. I'll be honest, I hated going to practice only because of me not talking to anyone... going in and being scared and no one likes to be scared. So I'm in there for three hours terrified if I'm going to make a mistake and I don't say anything. It was terrible.

Fear of the unknown also affected his confidence level:

At the beginning of the year you are doing university drills that I have never done before in high school and they will just say, "let's run this drill." I'm thinking that I don't even know the drill and they want me to go in the front to start it off. I don't want to though. I don't know what's going on so I'll ask someone and nobody says anything and so I feel like I am in the dark and I get nervous again because I don't know what is going on. I always need to know what's going on.

As I mentioned earlier, the three players were very positive about their coach, their teammates and the environment in which they trained. Based on that, we can isolate the feelings of fear of failure and perhaps attribute them to the fact that in this case, Derek didn't yet know all the drills or the routines of the team. As a result, he wasn't able to integrate into the team culture as he had not yet satisfied his desire to prove himself to his teammates and coaches.

Mark also shared similar conflicting feelings but appeared to have an easier time accepting his role. This is probably due to the fact that it was clearly stated from the onset and there was never any confusion. The change in role from his previous high school and college team created some challenges in so far as it was new but acceptance of the role seemed to be quickly achieved. He almost immediately embraced the competitive rivalry in training situations and with increased opportunity became more invested in the team. Having said that, he reflected on the fact that he didn't often have the opportunity to go into matches in his actual position. He did, however, develop into a very strong server and so that became his role in competitive situations. This was acceptable to him though as his goal initially was to get some playing time and prove to his teammates and coaches that he could play at this level. By the end of the season, he felt he was doing both.

As the players shared their experiences on this topic with me, I could immediately relate on two levels. First, reflecting on my own experience as a first year CIS player and secondly, as an assistant coach on another 2007-2008 CIS volleyball team. At the time, I wasn't aware of it but as I was talking to the participants of this study, I found myself re-connecting to some of the same conflicting emotions I had experienced. I remember, as did these players, feeling a lot "smaller". I felt this way not only physically but also mentally when I first stepped on the court. In those first opportunities, I was full of doubt. I didn't yet believe that my teammates believed in me in a competitive sense. Similar to Derek in the above narrative, I felt confident in what I brought to the team in practice but not yet in what I could contribute in the game. As time went on and opportunities increased, I slowly

began to develop the same confidence that I could bring to the court in game situations and felt that my teammates also began to develop confidence in me.

I have informally observed the same phenomena in my experience this past year as an assistant coach in the CIS. Players whom I know very well from my experience as a teacher-coach in the high school and provincial team community dealt with the same emotions. They clearly had changed from a confident high school performer who easily and appropriately shifted attentional focus to the correct cues and who appeared immersed in playing, to players who were much more internal now and unwilling to be as aggressive and assertive both on and off court. It wasn't until the end of the year in a junior season where it was only first and second year players competing, that I could begin to see flashes of that confidence and success driven player that I knew was inside.

In all three cases (the aforementioned players, my own experience, and the participants of this study), it wasn't until the student-athletes had proven and achieved a degree of personal success and felt the confidence of the team in them that they began to embrace their roles and truly look at their experience from an authentic team performance perspective. For some, it happened quickly. For others, who did not initially have as much opportunity, it took a little longer. In each case however, becoming a full team member was achieved and the evolution of the team towards 'performing' ensued. At the same time as this group evolution and development, it can be suggested that the players took another step towards the inner circle of the community of practice as they began to develop veteran-rookie relationships. In the final months of the season, these relationships and the involvement deepened to at

least a perceived, if not a realistic, integration to a full participant into the team's community of practice.

CHAPTER SIX

Full role acceptance and integration into the athlete community of practice

Coming full circle

“We’re going to need you at some point tonight Riley. How is your shoulder?” Riley looked at his coach and reassured him that although he hadn’t practiced in two weeks that he would be ready to go. Who would have thought before the season began that the coach would be talking to Riley like that. Early on he caught himself thinking about how he wasn’t even playing in the position he thought he was going to be playing when he was recruited to play. Not only that, he had established himself as a starter. It seemed like an eternity ago that he was standing on the court for the first time in the CIS feeling small and insignificant in the huge gym with all those people looking at him. He no longer worried about making mistakes, he knew he could perform, and he did. Unfortunately, his shoulder had begun to act up and so he had been told to rest it heading into playoffs. The second leftside hitter would be taking his spot on the floor that night on the road. It was a big game, and in a season filled with ups and downs, this was a must win to keep the team’s hopes alive.

On the bench Derek thought about what a difference a couple of months could make. He no longer felt terrified stepping on the court and he knew his teammates trusted that he could do his job. In fact, they depended on him to do his job, and he consistently did. Ever since his six point run in Edmonton, Derek felt a shift in the way he felt and acted. Even his teammates noticed. He was much more positive. At first, he worried that since he wasn’t a starter that his teammates may not take him as

seriously but that wasn't the case. His job was to come in to serve and pass. He had done both of those things well. Once he had gotten the monkey off his back and played some full matches during the tournament at the Christmas break, he felt like he was part of the team. He had been able to do it again tonight. He went in and drove a tough float serve that resulted in a point for his team.

"Great serve Derek," Mark said as he slapped hands with Derek at the end of the bench. Mark hadn't gone in yet, but he new he would. The coach had put him in, in nearly every match. He too felt like he had an important role on the team. He wasn't setting but that was fine, he had a fourth year guy ahead of him and he had developed quite the float serve during the season. In the last set of matches on the road, the coach had put Mark in when it was 22-18 for the other team. He then strung together four straight points off his serve and his team ended up winning 25-23 in that set and then on to win the match. The feeling after the match was something that Mark knew he would never forget. He got his opportunity and he had made the most of it. Some of the guys even suggested that he had won the whole match for the team after those four serves. The guys knew that when Mark was put in to serve, they were probably going to score a point or two.

On this night though, with the score at 22-20 for the other team, things were not looking good for Riley, Derek, and Mark's team. Their coach sat pensively weighing his options. Riley saw him quickly look at him and then motion for him to run up to the substitution line. Riley didn't know how his shoulder was going to hold out but he was about to find out.

On the first attack, Riley got a nice set and managed to slip the attack between the blockers to the seam in the block. No pain in his shoulder yet, it was a good sign. On the next point, they weren't so lucky so they now had to sideout. Riley got the play call and cut inside for a 33 along the net. He saw the blockers stay outside at the antennae and as he jumped he knew he was going to score. Both teams scored back and forth until Riley looked up at the scoreboard and saw that it was now 24-23 for his team. On the final set, the ball came from deep in the back row and Riley sized up the set and began his jump to meet the ball. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a slight opening down the line and knew he had a shot at a kill high off the setter's hands. He leaned in hard and cut the ball across his body wiping off the setter's block and scoring the game winning point. It was a thrilling win for the whole team. Mark and Derek jumped in the middle of the circle that had surrounded Riley and felt the arms of the captain around their shoulders holding the team in tight and celebrating the win.

Establishing the rookie-veteran relationship and full participant status:

From "me" to "we"

In the above narrative, we discover the evolution and development of Riley, Derek, and Mark in their roles on the team. It shows the change in perspective vis-à-vis success and failure and brings to light how they felt they had succeeded in establishing a rookie-veteran relationship and finally achieved full participant status. In the comments of the players below we can begin to see how they developed stronger relationships with the veterans of the team and became more integrated into the community of practice. For the first-year players on this team, gaining the respect

and developing a relationship with the captain and fourth year player on the team was a crucial step in creating the rookie-veteran relationship.

In all three cases, the athletes felt that they had succeeded in becoming core participants who were deeply involved in the workings and decisions of the team (Galipeau & Trudel, 2004). This occurred both on the court as well as off the court in social situations. Derek shared the following:

I don't know (when it happened). It's not a certain day but suddenly you realize that, 'hey! I'm getting calls from the guys' and you feel like you are getting depended upon for something. Somebody depends on you for next practice. Even the conversations change.

Mark also felt the shift in confidence his teammates had in him and consequently the increase in the confidence he had in his own role and abilities:

On the court, for the first little bit they (veteran players) are like, "you're a back-up, you don't have a shot at it." Maybe not that harsh but it is there. Then after that, once the team starts playing and you come off the bench and you serve a couple of aces or get a couple of digs it changes instantly....Guys started expecting the run, a tough serve. After that it was like, 'ok that's what you do.' When I am in, they bring it down a bit. I feel like they are thinking, 'Ok, we got this now.' That's how I feel. Some guys may just think hey it's just a serve, but I think for myself coming off the bunch, it is big to think that guys are thinking that. It gives me a boost of confidence.

This marks a substantial change of perspective from the early part of the season. At this point, players seemed to return to the confident feeling with which they played on previous teams. Riley, the starting leftside agreed and shared that once he had proven his ability and connected with the team, he felt the same confidence he had when he was playing on the 18U provincial team the summer before. As he stated, “it is just a matter of time, of playing.” It is also at this point that we can observe a full acceptance of the individual roles of the players. Mark, who had a substantially different role from his high school and college team had commented in the post season interview:

Whatever role you have, it is important to embrace the role. If you're not the starter, then you have to be supporting and if you are not supporting (the team) then the guys are wondering what you are about. That is not a good sign for the team. If you are thinking, 'I am better than that guy so why is he starting?' Then that is a recipe for disaster.

In the post-season interview one of the interesting things I noticed was that the reflections of the players had also “transitioned” in a sense. The participants were not referring to their veteran teammates as “they” anymore as they had in the mid-season break before Christmas. Even questions pertaining to goal accomplishment were not immediately interpreted as individual goal attainment. To a man, each participant communicated his progress in terms of their team goal. It was clear that they were not the same athletes I had spoken to at the mid-season break. It was clear that they had moved to a different place within the team. They no longer felt the need to “prove”

themselves; rather, they felt the need to contribute their piece of the puzzle. This reflects a shift from evaluating their performance and experience in terms of impact on themselves to performance and experience in terms of the team success or failure and their role in that success or failure.

Unexpected dimensions and other “uncoverings”

Throughout the interpretive research process, Ellis (1998) suggests that after each loop of the interpretive spiral, there may be findings or *uncoverings* which are unexpected which she refers to as *surprises* (p.22). The following sections present some of the unexpected uncoverings that emerged during the interpretive process.

Personal development

Interestingly, the themes that emerged from this study lend support to a recently published phenomenological study mentioned earlier, where Bruner et al. (2008) examined entry into elite sport. Through focus group interviews with male rookie hockey players, they presented five common themes which parallel the on-court themes which emerged in this study. They are a) readiness for elite competition; b) demonstrating competence; c) earning playing time; d) evaluation of performance; and e) comments from coaches (p.243). It makes sense therefore to suggest that athletes in different sports are living similar experiences.

Moreover, Bruner et al. found that athletes felt a sense of maturity and personal development within their elite sport experience. This theme also emerged with Derek in this study. He commented on how he felt young in relation to his older veteran teammates in the early stages of the year. He shares that he, “felt less mature than them. Not just immature as in cracking cheesy jokes but that they knew way

more than me.” In the mid-season break, Derek offered a comical synopsis that gives us good insight into the recent high school graduate heading into his first year of university:

There's one guy who's married on my team. It totally blows my mind how someone can have a wife right now. I'm coming out of high school and some guy has a wife and is buying a house. I'm still living in my parent's basement!

Although Derek saw this as ironic, he also shared how his teammates had opened his eyes to new perspectives by sharing their experiences travelling, listening to different music, and considering career and life plans. As the season unfolded, Derek had the opportunity to room with the two captains on one of the final road trips.

I actually got to room with the two leaders and I felt really good about that. I just felt a lot older with them too, because we were in the dorm room so we had a kitchen and stuff. I'd buy groceries and come back. I just felt a lot more mature.

Derek also commented on how these types of interactions influenced him as a person:

I think everybody on my team has influenced me; I just want to grow up now. Even though we joke around and do some stupid stuff, everybody's really mature on my team and I really want to just be...I just want to grow as a person.

It appears that Derek was very much impacted by this experience and in his comments we can see the links to the Bruner et al. (2008) study.

Reflections on lived experience as a tool for performance enhancement: Not just statistics... Perspective, Processing, and Priming

Bruner et al. (2008) suggest that, “coaches, sport psychology consultants, and support staff should make certain rookie athletes are educated on process and performance goal setting and evaluation strategies” (p.247). In that light, I would suggest that reflection should be included in that list as throughout the course of this study, there was an unexpected realization that occurred for the athlete participants. Mark, Derek, and Riley each expressed how participating in the study had given them much greater insight into their own experience. It allowed them to appreciate to a greater extent some of the smaller aspects of their season that would have otherwise gone unprocessed and never made its way into their long term memory. Also, considering the first year in terms of “experience” and not just statistics, game tapes, and results, allowed the athletes to reflect on their own interpretations of the intangibles of the year. It was not uncommon for the participants to inject comments during their interview responses such as, “I’m just thinking out loud...” or “Now that I think about it...” What followed was often a new understanding or an initial realization that may have gone unnoticed or appreciated.

After the post-season interview with the participants, there was a realization that the reflective nature of the study had impacted to a degree, the way they perceived the second half of the season. They were at that point ready to share a more thoughtful and complete picture of the time around the mid-season break. When it

was in fact the mid-season break and the first interviews were being conducted, the participants could emphatically talk about the first weeks of the season but had not yet internalized the most recent events leading into the break. In a sense, they were still living those moments. As van Manen (1990) tells us I was, “forcing (them) to be aware of (their) experience while (they) were experiencing it” (p.35). By reflecting on those experiences later in the post-season interview the participants were able to interpret the meaning behind their experiences in the first half. It was clear that they had developed a much deeper and holistic perspective on the events around the mid-season break, as they had been able to do on the first weeks of the season at the time of the first interview.

In the first interview protocol, questions revolved around the athletes’ integration into the new team environment, their first weeks at the CIS level, and some specific recollections of their first time stepping on the court to actually play at that level. The interview questions prompted the athletes to internalize and process the experiences of the early part of the season. This in turn, appeared to have accelerated the learning process as the athletes became aware of factors in that first half of the season that may not have occurred until much later or perhaps not at all. This helped lead to a “priming” of the athlete for the second half of the year.

The student-athlete as a reflective practitioner?

In the literature there is a body of research that has been conducted on the idea of the *reflective practitioner*. It is typically discussed and analyzed as tool for enhancement in professional practice; in other words, enhancement for the teacher as opposed to the student or the coach as opposed to the athlete. This research has been

carried out in teacher education, nursing, and medicine. The term *reflective practice* from the education and pedagogy literature and introduced by Donald Schön (1983) in his book *The Reflective Practitioner*, consists of a theory describing the interaction between knowledge, problems, and reflection. He defines knowledge as, the bulk of what we know and what we need know to execute our daily actions (knowledge-in-action). Gilbert and Trudel (2006) summarize the three prongs of Schön's (1983) theories of reflection as being 1) reflection-on-action (retrospective reflection), 2) reflection-in-action (thinking that occurs while in-action), and 3) reflective conversation (reappreciation of an experience).

Although these foundational theories are often spoken of in terms of professional practice for teachers, nurses, doctors, or coaches, it could be suggested that the student-athletes who participated in the study engaged in reflective practice. This process had an impact on the way the athletes perceived the second half of the year (from the first formal opportunity to offer their reflections in the first interview protocol) and then how they perceived the year in its entirety. This in turn, sets the groundwork for the subsequent years as student-athletes.

Sport psychology

Another of the unexpected themes that emerged was the potential for sport psychology as a component of performance enhancement for the first year athlete. In this case, Mark was the only participant who spoke of his experience using mental skills. It did however figure prominently in both interview sessions and appeared to play an important role in his first year transition.

Although the student-athletes in this study had limited exposure to sport psychology or formal psychological skills training, the themes that emerged from their experiences suggest that there is opportunity to integrate them into the overall CIS experience. As the experiences of the first-year athletes have shown, there are a number of characteristics that differ from the high school or collegiate athlete and the CIS athlete. The following is a non-exhaustive list of some of the key differences that emerged in this study:

- 1) There is a greater emphasis on pre-competition and competition planning at the CIS level;
- 2) There is a greater emphasis on game planning (strategy) at the CIS level;
- 3) The training load (time and expectation) is more intense at the CIS level;
- 4) The demands of both the student and athlete roles are magnified in university;
- 5) Players live through an adjustment period where their focus is largely narrow and internal until they feel they have the trust and respect of their teammates and coaches;
- 6) There is an increase on the demand for precision and the execution in the athlete's role (which may have changed from the previous level)

Within this list, there are a multitude of challenges that the student faces and where sport psychology support could help. For one participant in the study who took a sport psychology course during the year, learning a refocusing plan and being more attuned to attentional cues helped him perform his role as a support player. He shared how he had learned about attention and focusing plans in his course. He found that he was often not paying attention during game planning sessions or on the bench during

the game when he wasn't playing. As a result when he did get in to play, he wasn't fully ready.

Mark provided the example of a front row setter on the other team who would easily score on a dump to his position because he didn't know that he was in the front row. He simply wasn't paying attention to it while he was on the bench. As he progressed through the sport psychology course, he saw direct applications for what he was learning in his experience on the team. He met with his professor who had experience consulting with professional athletes and together they made a focussing plan. It had him considering his warm-up routines, where the players were on the other team, and what the player in his position was doing (should he have to go in).

In the first interview protocol, he shared how reflecting on his best performance in the past and visualization had become an important part of his match preparation. The following are the comments from Mark who had the experience:

It was good for me. It made me look at the other side of the court and pay attention to what was going on. Next year that will help me for preparing for matches because I know I have to pay more attention to my preparation.

Mark felt he was more focused on the appropriate tasks and cues:

When I do those things (that are on the focusing plan), my eyes are not wandering on the crowd, crowd surfing. I am more focused on the game. I think all athletes should take that course. It affects your intrinsic motivation. It made me want to get out there even more. You are visualizing yourself out there and now you want to be out there.

Though difficult to mandate, there are examples in the literature (e.g., Curry & Maniar, 2004; McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004) where courses that cover topics such as arousal control, trust, flow, goal setting, imagery, life-skills, and time management amongst others have been successful and well-received when athletes are given choices and supported by competent professionals. In university settings, students in general have the opportunity to take courses in sport psychology. Student-athletes may be a captive audience. In this case, new knowledge pertaining to sport psychology emerged as an important factor in a successful transition.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Implications and Final Thoughts

Implications for athletes

The stories, anecdotes, and discussion in this research study hold some valuable information for athletes, in particular, athletes who have dreams and goals of playing in the CIS one day. The experiences shared within this study hopefully paint a compelling picture that shows some of the realities for a first year athlete. It doesn't appear to matter the level of skill of the player coming into the CIS; the first year appears to be somewhat of an anomaly. There is a time when the first year player is an outsider and that can be difficult, especially for a student-athlete who was a key player, perhaps even a star-player on his previous teams. Understanding that this is a common process for first year players to go through and that the veteran players on the team have all gone through the same experience may help maintain some perspective. If athletes can have access to stories of transition such as the ones in this study, they will see that regardless of what role they assume, their ability to maintain a positive attitude and a realistic perception of the process of becoming a CIS student-athlete will help them manage the dual role they will have.

In the post-season questionnaire, the participants offered advice and reflections pertaining to the dual role of the student-athlete. First, in regards to seeking a balance that allows the two roles to converge and integrate, they offer the following advice:

Get used to the workload quickly. Find the balance. How are you going to go about your business? Both volleyball and academically because if you don't, you will get the boot!

The challenge of maintaining a balance was also mentioned:

Balancing your time... it's different from high school with being away. You are on the road Thursday and being on the road until Sunday and then being on the road again the next week. You only have three days to get caught up and get all the notes and realize what's going on in class. It is tough to know before you get in to university.

The participants also shared advice for future rookies in regards to keeping perspective on the season and integrating into the team. For example, they mentioned:

- be patient with yourself and be yourself
- don't try and do too much too early (this will increase stress), it will come with time
- be outgoing; it helps with team bonding
- it's a long year and anything can happen (both positive and negative)
- don't worry about starting right away. Just play and then you can set your goals
- if I could start over again, I would try and have a more stable focus. I would focus less on starting (result) and more on getting in there and playing my best (process)

When asked by a friend who was contemplating playing in the CIS, Derek responded:

I told him that this year has been one of the greatest experiences of my life and I wouldn't trade it away even though there has been ups and downs, and there has been weeks of downs, it just builds you as a person. I would go again in a minute.

Having a successful transition means navigating the tumultuous waters of role change, academic demands, managing of multiple relationships, and perceptions of success and failure amongst others. Adopting reflective and engaging habits during the first year can help the student-athlete become more self-aware and thus transition successfully.

Implications for coaches

As the stories of the lived experience of the first year student –athletes show in this study, coaches play a very important role in the transition. The comments of the athletes in regards to expectations and training environment speak to the underlying importance of developing good relationships and communication with the athletes. This in turn, helps establish the culture of the team. The athletes in this study appreciated the high expectations for performance and precision that the coach had for them. This was due, however, to the respect they had for their coach. To a player, each mentioned the positive and encouraging environment that existed in training situations. This was particularly important at the beginning of the training camp as the first year athletes might not have known how they were performing on the team.

As we hear consistently in professional development in education and coaching, it is important to focus on the *process* of development as opposed to the *results* (in the win-loss column for example). It goes without saying that performance

results are important, especially at the CIS level; having said that, it also appears that given the right climate and a good process, a positive result can be achieved. It is important for coaches to appreciate that creating *real* teams means, “encouraging and reinforcing people for being authentic” (Botterill & Patrick, 2003, p.52). Moreover it is a process of creating synergy between a group of people. Reducing the gaps between the first year players and the veteran players appears to be a key part of that process. If we are to draw implications and recommendations from the current study, then a number of realizations are important for coaches:

- Players feel that they are outsiders when they first arrive, regardless of ability;
- Players will integrate at different rates;
- Technical ability and work ethic emerge as being the key tools to begin the integration and team building process for the first year student-athlete;
- Players are trying to prove to coaches and teammates that they belong and that they can perform. This places stress on them and can affect their performance;
- The change in role can have a negative impact on self-confidence;
- Players often are playing with a fear of failure in their first playing opportunities;
- Players are seeking feedback from their coaches

In view of these observations the proactive coach can help in the transition process by providing opportunities for first year players. Players in this study commented on the desire for opportunity and appreciated when that opportunity lasted more than a couple of points. Patience is crucial as mistakes will probably occur (as they do for any player) but with the added anxiety and initial tendency

towards a fear of failure, a number of opportunities to settle into a groove is important.

Secondly, feedback for athletes is important. The reason for this appears to be twofold. First, athletes are often living through a role change which can affect self-talk in a negative way and can narrow the perspective of the athlete. Having clear and honest feedback in regards to their role on the team helps centre attention and focus. Also, technical feedback in practice was especially important for the first-year athletes. At this new level, new “tools” were needed to help adjust to the bigger and better athletes they were facing on the other side of the net. At the same time, the dialogue between coach and player helped strengthen the relationship and thus, developed trust and respect between the coach and his players.

A third consideration was suggested by the athletes who felt that networking early with a veteran player helps in the transition process. Key moments when athletes felt they were being accepted into the team occurred on road trips and in the locker room where players were in close proximity and communicating with each other. Coaches may want to consider this when organizing rooming lists and when planning competitive schedules. Furthermore, coaches may benefit from having veteran players connect early in an informal or formal way with first year athletes. Galipeau & Trudel (2004) support the idea of mentoring opportunities saying that it can help newcomers to varsity teams integrate towards developing stronger bonds with the veteran players who have already gone through the transition process.

Bruner et al. (2008) also write that athletes found that support from veterans and other rookies was very important. Athletes in that study highlighted interactions

with veteran players who had gone through the same experience as important components to their transition experience to the new level. Feedback given by one of the participants in this study speaks to the idea of mentoring;

Maybe there could be a program where a fourth year player got

buddied up and a couple of leaders buddied up with younger players.

It would be good on a road trip. It would force a first year player to be in the middle of the team.

Opportunities for rookies and veteran players to connect and share their experiences may enrich the experience of both parties. By participating in the interview process of this research project, Mark, Riley, and Derek had a deeper understanding of their first-year experience. Whatever its form, interviewing (formally or informally) can pay dividends to those engaging in the discussion. Botterill & Patrick (2003) suggest that interviewing can be seen as a win-win process for both the interviewer and the interviewee. The process can provide insights and new understandings. In the present context, interviewing need not be seen as a formal activity but perhaps in the informal discussions that could occur between rookies and veterans if the coach made it a priority to create those opportunities.

Implications for university programs

In the initial proposal for this study, I wrote of an important experience in meeting “King Carl” Ridd in my first year as a CIS athlete. He had come down to the floor after my first CIS match and welcomed me to the university. It took writing this thesis to realize how meaningful that was for me. I was entering something that was bigger than me; something that had a history long before I arrived. The same sort of

pride in the history of the program was shared by the participants of the study. From a program perspective, this may have some implications.

The following excerpts speak to the pride the players felt in their new “family”:

...accountability and pride...that's when I realized that I'm a (team name)! I think the only reason why I'm proud of it is because we are the home team we are, that's where I grew up, that's what I have watched this whole time. I just feel really proud also, and I want to prove it every single time.

I wanted to know who wore number (player's number) before me, and because number (player's number) was my number my whole life and I wanted to know what kind of person he was.

The first year student-athlete appears to come into the program in a sense of awe to a degree and begins his engagement and commitment to the program very early. The new recruit to the program is ripe for acculturation and in the early weeks of the season, could quickly become engaged and feel part of the larger university body.

Academic support

Another area in which universities can play a supportive role is by establishing academic support services for student-athletes. As I have described in the review of literature, the academic portion of the dual role is a critical component to address. Furthermore, the eligibility of the student-athlete hinges on an academic standing being achieved. Interestingly, in this study the participants identified the challenges of the student role primarily in the first half of the season. This same

challenge did not emerge in the post-season interview suggesting that they had adjusted to the new academic demands and learned strategies to be more effective in that role. Similarly, Bruner et al. (2008) expressed their surprise that issues pertaining to school were not identified by the participants in their study as critical in their transition experience. They suggest potential reasons for this including the level of importance placed on academics by the athletes, the fact that the team may not hold their athletes accountable in this regard, and third that the team and the social bonds therein had an impact.

Future Directions for Research and Final Thoughts

The richness of qualitative research is also its own challenge. As the project progressed, and in particular as the writing process took me through the hermeneutical loops of interpretive inquiry, the challenge arose to maintain a balanced perspective on what to include in the final report. This has important implications in that the decision of what to include is a reflection of both my interpretations and on some level, my biases. Nevertheless, I found the data from the interviews and questionnaires to be rich in their reflective nature and in the stories the student-athletes shared. As I navigated through the interplay between interpretation and representation, I came to identify future directions for research that surfaced as the interpretive and narrative themes of this project emerged.

One future area of valuable research would be in the area of interventions that exist or that are created to help first-year students in their transition to the next level following high school. Such interventions could include a sport psychology skills training intervention, time management counselling, as well as opportunities for new

student-athletes to actively reflect on their experiences. These strategies and interventions may exist at least in part but an interesting study might look at a program that is developed with these ideas in mind.

Another direction for future research could provide the prequel and sequel to this research study; that is to say, a thorough investigation of the lived experience in their high school setting as athletes before they arrived to the CIS. In addition to that, the lived experience of the athlete transitioning from the CIS to a professional or national team level could serve to complete the picture of lived experience from grassroots to the elite athlete.

An athlete-centered approach was taken in the writing of this study. This was done intentionally to control the amount of data and to allow a more thorough exploration of the lived experience of the athletes to be represented as opposed to a more broad exploration of multiple viewpoints (e.g., the coach or parent). Future researchers would be advised to acquire the perspective of the coach at different levels. Notably, more extensive research could be done with parents to explore more precisely their intentions, interventions, and interactions before the athletes' transition to the CIS. The same might be done to clarify what high school, club, and provincial team coaches are doing (or are not doing) in terms of physical, psychological, tactical, technical, and social preparation for their student-athletes who will transition to the next level. It would also be interesting to have a grasp on what coaches would like to see occurring, or at least what they perceive to be important as occurring at the levels before their own. As well, the coach who is experiencing the same season alongside

the first year athlete would offer an additional angle regarding the first-year experience.

Finally, the nature of the participant pool in this study provided insight into the lived experience of three student-athletes who successfully transitioned into the CIS. Another area of important literature that has not been investigated would be the alternative experience to that of the participants of this study. That is to say, a research project that looks at the lived experience of those that do not successfully transition even though they may have all the tools that would suggest they should be successful. This angle of research would further help to establish the support network for student-athletes as well as help with the development of coaches and practitioners.

The first-year in the CIS after high school or college is an anomalous year in that it requires an expansion of the athlete's comfort zone, it is a journey to the inner circle of a culture and of a team, and it is a process of self-discovery. In the end, coaches, athletes, and support networks interact to create the intricate web of lived experience that is the tumultuous but rewarding first-year for student-athletes in the CIS.

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Appendix A

Informed consent form

Research Project Title: **Transitioning From High School & Collegiate Sport: The First-Year Experience of Male CIS Volleyball Players**

Researcher(s): Cameron Johnson

Sponsor (if applicable): N/A

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The study, for which you have volunteered to be a participant, will be undertaken to look at the experience of first-year players as they enter Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS). The study will use a relatively small sample size so each case will be looked at individually (case study). If you agree to become involved in this study you will be asked to partake in an approximately one hour interview in December. You will also be asked to complete a questionnaire in February and an approximately one hour post-season interview in March. Following the December and March interviews you will receive a summary report of the interview so that you can check and verify that the information I have taken from the interview is accurate and that my interpretations are a credible representation of your experience. We will arrange interview times and locations that are mutually convenient. The first interview will be to establish background information and reflect on your early season experiences. The questionnaire and post-season interviews will be to reflect on the season as a whole and to offer feedback for future student-athletes. I will be asking you for your permission to tape record the interviews. Those interviews will then be transcribed. You will have the opportunity throughout the study to clarify your responses to assure the accuracy of the research being done.

Aside from the researcher (myself), other participants or coaches will not have access to your interview recordings. They will be confidential. All transcriptions and final reports

will be done using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Your team name will not be used in the final report. All recordings will be transcribed and then destroyed upon completion of the final written report. Transcriptions will be kept under lock and key in my work office. The data will only be made available to the researcher and the thesis advisors of this study. Once the study is completed, the final report will be given to the participants of the study.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal Researchers: Cameron Johnson

Phone: 257-0124 email: cameron.johnson@lrsd.net

Supervisors: Dr. Dennis Hrycaiko

Email: hrycaik@mail.ms.umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature

Date

Appendix B

Transitioning from High School and College Sport:

The First Year Experience of Male CIS Volleyball Players

Interview Guide: Protocol #1 – Mid-December

A) Introduction / Background

- 1) Tell me a bit about yourself. How old are you? What school did you attend?
- 2) Can you describe your progression in volleyball from the time you started playing, up to when you started playing this year in university? For example, when did you first start playing volleyball? Did you attend any camps, etc.?
- 3) How did you choose this particular university? Volleyball program?
- 4) How well do you know the other players on this team?
- 5) What are your hopes/goals for this year? How do you see your role?
- 6) How do you deal with being a student and an athlete? What are the challenges of playing both roles?

B) Thinking back on the first weeks...

1. Can you describe your first interaction (practice, meeting) with this team?
How did you feel?
2. Tell me a bit about your team.
3. Have there been any surprises in this first part of the season? Things you didn't expect?

4. What are some of the challenges you've faced in the first part of the season?

How did (are) you deal (dealing) with them?

5. How helpful were your teammates/coaches, especially I in the first weeks?

Can you give me an example? Was there anything you wished you had more help with but didn't receive?

6. In regards to volleyball, are you happy with where you are? (are you achieving your goals?) Why? Why not?

7. Has your goal, vision changed throughout the first month of the season?

8. How does the training in this environment compare to your high school, college, or club teams? What are the biggest differences? What are the biggest similarities (Example?)

9. Can you walk me through a typical day as a first year player on this team?

After the first semester

1. How would you describe your first semester overall in the CIS?

2. Can you describe a high point of the first semester/half of the season?

3. Can you describe a low point of the first semester/half of the season?

a) how did you deal with this?

4. Would you say you have had a successful first half? Why?

5. After finishing a semester, how do you deal with being a student and an athlete? Is it challenging playing both roles? Explain.

6. Who provides you support? Who do you wish provided more support?

7a. What do you bring to the team?

7b. What do you feel you need from the team? Are you getting it?

8. Who do you feel closest to on this team? Why?
9. Have your teammates influenced you as:
 - a) an athlete?
 - b) a student?
 - c) a person?
10. How has the coach influenced your first three months at this level?
11. Who/if anyone, helped you the most through these first three months? How?
12. If you could change something from the past three months, what would that be?

Relationships

1. Describe your relationship with the more veteran players on the team? How do veterans have an impact on the new players?
2. What have you done/are you doing to fit into the team?
- 3a. How is your relationship with your coach?
- 3b. How does this influence you?
- 3c. What do you think his expectation of you is?
6. What are your goals for the remainder of this semester?
(Athletic? Academic?)

Appendix C

Transitioning from High School and College Sport:

The First Year Experience of Male CIS Volleyball Players

Interview Guide: Protocol #2 – Mid-March

- 1) Do you feel you accomplished the goals you set out for yourself?
- 2) Would you say you had a successful first year?
- 3) What does a typical first year look like? Are there critical steps of development?
- 4) What additional challenges exist in your first year at the CIS level?
- 5) What would be helpful to freshmen athletes?
- 6) What do you think will be the greatest differences in your 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th years?
- 7) What will people that never experience CIS sport as an athlete not understand about this first year?

Appendix D

Transitioning from High School and College Sport:

The First Year Experience of Male CIS Volleyball Players

End of Season Questionnaire

1. What will you remember most about your rookie season? Why?

2. Did you accomplish your goals for the year? Explain.

3. Do you feel you met or exceeded your coach's expectations? Explain.

4. Do you feel you had a successful transition from high school? How did you decide that you did or didn't?

5. Did you feel like you were part of the team? When did this occur? How did you know?

6. Were there any experiences from your first year that you didn't anticipate?

7. In hindsight, did you feel you see things differently now then you did at the half-way point in the season?

8. What/who helped you the most in your rookie season? How ?

9. What message or suggestions would you give to next year's incoming rookies?

10a. What can coaches do to help freshmen athletes?

10b. What can teammates do to help freshmen athletes?

10c. What can universities/faculties do to help freshmen athletes?

11a. Overall what was the most challenging aspect of playing this year?

11b. Overall, what was the easiest aspect of playing this year?
