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**Understanding the Experiences for Female National Athletes of a Team Sport in a Centralized
Training Camp**

by

Laura G. Farres

**Dissertation submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
of the**

University of Ottawa

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

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Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Review of Literature.....	9
Emotions and Athletes' Experiences.....	9
Enjoyment.....	14
Optimal Sport Experiences.....	15
Sources of Enjoyment.....	18
Stress.....	19
General Sources of Stress.....	20
Specific Sources of Stress.....	22
Burnout.....	26
Smith's (1986) Cognitive-Affective Stress Model.....	26
Silva's (1990) Negative-Training Response Model.....	28
Coakley's (1992) Unidimensional Identity Development and External Control Model.....	29
Burnout Studies.....	30
Moods.....	35
Coping and Athletes' Experiences.....	41
Coping Research.....	43
Coping with Performance Slumps.....	43

Coping with the Athletic Experience.....	44
Coping with Acute Stressors.....	46
Coping through Mental Preparation.....	48
Team Experiences.....	53
Conceptual Framework.....	60
Purpose of the Study.....	63
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	65
Qualitative Approach.....	65
Participants.....	66
Sport Team.....	71
Procedure.....	73
Interviews.....	73
Pilot Study.....	75
Data Management and Analysis.....	77
Profiles.....	78
Shared experiences.....	81
Verification.....	82
My Reflections on Centralized Training Camps.....	86
Chapter 4: Results- Profiles.....	88
Nathalie.....	88
Maria.....	110
Wendy.....	130
Rachel.....	150

Vonnette.....	172
Melanie.....	194
Deb.....	216
Maggie.....	239
Chapter 5: Results – Shared Experiences.....	261
Head Coach.....	261
Communication.....	261
Personality.....	266
Use of Power.....	268
Athletes and Other Relationships.....	271
Teammates.....	271
Staff.....	274
Environment.....	279
Structure.....	279
Critical Events.....	284
Focus.....	289
Emotions.....	293
Positive Emotions.....	293
Negative Emotions.....	294
Lessons Learned.....	297
Personal Journeys.....	298
Advice to Younger Players.....	301

Chapter 6: Discussion and Implications.....	304
Addressing the Research Questions.....	304
Question 1.....	304
Personal perspectives.....	305
Social influences.....	305
Organizational influences.....	315
Coping with the centralized training camp.....	318
Question 2.....	320
Question 3.....	323
Educational Implications and Recommendations.....	324
The Meaning I have taken from my Work.....	331
Choosing the Topic.....	331
Selecting a Methodology.....	333
Conducting the Research.....	335
Writing the Dissertation.....	337
Reflecting on the Experience.....	338
References.....	341
Appendix A – Demographic Questionnaire.....	360
Appendix B – Consent Form.....	361
Appendix C – Interview Guide.....	363

List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Demographic Profiles of Participants.	359

Abstract

Centralized training camps are occurring with more frequency at the national level in Canada. Indeed, a few studies have suggested that centralized training camps or residency training programs are a contributing factor in team success (Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, Dieffenbach, & McCann, 2001; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999). Despite the emerging role of centralized training camps in athlete and team preparation, our understanding of the experience of the athletes at these types of camps is limited. Research in sport psychology has given us some insight into athletes' experiences with respect to enjoyment (Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1989), stress (Gould, Jackson, & Finch, 1993; Scanlan et al., 1989), burnout (Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1996a), moods (Morgan, Brown, Raglin, O'Connor, & Ellickson, 1987) and social and organization issues (Gould et al., 1999; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Furthermore, research on coping with athletes has revealed a range of strategies adopted by athletes to deal with these different emotions and situations as they arise (Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1993; Gould, Finch & Jackson, 1993). Although some information can be gleaned from the research exploring athletes' experiences in sport, it is limited in application to the centralized training camp context. Furthermore, various ontological, epistemological and methodological constraints within sport psychology research place further limits on our understanding with respect to the range and diversity of athletes' experiences. The purpose of the current study was to describe how eight female national athletes of one team sport experienced the activity of a six-week centralized training camp. Specifically, the following research questions guided the study: (a) what was the process of the experience for each of these athletes and what strategies do they use to progress through the centralized camp; (b) how did the athletes experience the various contexts of their lives during the centralized camp and what strategies did they use to progress

through them; and (c) how did athletes come to understand and take into account their experience? What did athletes learn from the experience? This inquiry was guided by a social constructivist perspective informed by feminist theory in sport. The eight participants were interviewed using an in-depth phenomenological approach. Each participant was taken through a series of three in-depth 90-minute interviews and asked to describe her experience at the six week centralized training camp. Analysis occurred on two levels – individual profiles and shared experiences. The findings are discussed in terms of the research questions. With respect to process of the experience and the strategies employed to progress through the camp, social and organizational factors played a fundamental role in the experience of the participants. Moreover, the coping strategies selected by the participants' were related to their cognitive appraisal of the person-environment relationship. With respect to the various contexts of their lives and the strategies employed, the participants approached the centralized training camp by taking steps to minimize the distractions from their outside world before attending the camp. Further, during the camp, participants had limited contact with individuals outside the camp environment, followed routines and activities, and sought social support from teammates to maintain and achieve their desired focus while in camp. Finally, with respect to the meaning of the experience and the lessons arising, the participants highlighted numerous issues of both a positive and negative nature. The camp meant opportunities for personal growth; mastery experiences; feelings of anger, disappointment, and failure; and questions of continued involvement in the sport. In addition, participants stressed the meaning of the centralized training camp experience with respect to the opportunities to interact and share experiences with others and develop positive friendships and memories. The findings are also discussed in terms of initiatives for educating national team athletes, coaches and organizations on preparation for, and implementation of,

centralized training camps. Recommendations are made for examining the educational framework guiding the planning and implementation of national team centralized training camps. The proposal is to move toward an androgogical framework that recognizes national team athletes as adult learners and incorporates their needs within the centralized training camp structure. In addition suggestions are made for an ethical code of conduct that values the impact of the social and organizational factors within the context of the centralized training camp.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

High performance sport in Canada is changing and centralized training camps are quickly becoming the norm for many national team programs (Robertson, 1999). The centralized training camp allows athletes, who live in different regions of the country, a chance to come together at a common location where, collectively, they can be trained, monitored, coached, and assessed for an extended period of time. Centralized training camps give coaches valuable opportunities to analyze their athletes' progress and acquire discriminating information through which team selections can be made. Moreover, these types of camps for team sports provide a chance for athletes to train together on a consistent basis and develop tactical strategies and team dynamics necessary for success on the international stage. Unfortunately, little is known regarding the experience of athletes during these long duration training camps, the kinds of interactions and factors that affect their experiences, or the types of coping strategies they employ.

I personally became aware of the unique challenges of the centralized training camp after my involvement with a national team. For two years, I was the assistant coach and mental trainer for a national team, and during that period of time, I attended three centralized training camps with the longest being a six month centralized training camp in preparation for a major competition. Several issues became evident to me during these experiences: Athletes respond differently to the camps - some respond and cope well while others struggle with various issues and dynamics; challenges for the athletes exist both within the scope of the performance setting as well as in other areas and worlds; interactions with others on the team play a significant role in athletes' experiences; and the environment itself poses challenges beyond that which exist in regular, shorter duration training camps. As a result of these experiences, I was motivated to

focus my research on the topic of female athletes of team sports and their experiences during centralized training camps.

To guide this research it was imperative to grasp an understanding of what we do know about athletes' experiences in sport. Although these areas are expanded on in greater detail in the review of literature, they are worthy of mention here. First, we know that emotions are a significant part of athletes' experiences in sport and performance settings (Hanin, 2000). These types of responses vary from enjoyment (Jackson, 2000; Jackson & Cziksenkimihi, 1999; Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1989) to stress (Gould, Jackson, & Finch 1993; Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1991) to burnout (Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1996; Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1997), and to alterations in moods during intense training (Morgan, Brown, Raglin, O'Connor, & Ellickson, 1987). Second, we know that the sources of these emotions are varied and relate to both competitive and non-competitive settings (Gould, Jackson, et al., 1993; Gould, Tuffey, et al., 1996; 1997; Scanlan et al., 1991). Third, we know that social and organization factors play a central role in the athletes' experiences (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery & Peterson, 1999; Gould, Tuffey, et al., 1996; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Finally, we know that athletes use a variety of coping strategies to deal with the different emotions and situations as they arise (Crocker, 1992; Gould, Eklund & Jackson, 1993; Gould, Finch & Jackson, 1993).

Within these studies that have contributed to our understanding and knowledge of athletes' experiences, it also was essential to examine what we do not know and why. First, we do not know the extent of athletes' experiences within team sport settings. Much of the research has focused on the experiences of athletes from individual sports (Gould, Finch, et al., 1993; Gould, Tuffey et al., 1996; Scanlan et al., 1989; Scanlan et al., 1991). When team sports are explored, the focus often has been on the team cohesion-performance relationship (Brawley,

1990). Moreover within research examining teams, female teams have been poorly represented (Spink, 1995). Second, we are rarely given insight into the process of athletes' experiences: how they arrive at their emotions; how they interpret various situations; and how their personal histories and experiences shape their current perceptions. The research has focused mainly on the outcomes of these processes. Third, we have a limited understanding of athletes' experiences outside competition and outside the competitive domain in general. Much of the research has focused on athletes' experiences related to performances in competitions and less on their experiences in practice and training environments and other areas of their lives (Brawley, 1990). Finally, we remain unclear on the range and diversity of athletes' experiences. Theories and frameworks often are developed and applied early within a particular area of interest or even adopted from areas outside of the sport domain. As a result, little consideration is given to experiences that fall outside the range of the perceived majority (Dewar & Horn, 1992; Krane, 1994). For example, often research explores male athletes or combined samples of male and female athletes assuming that experiences are equal and interchangeable. Concomitantly, social and cultural variables that may affect athletes' experiences are rarely studied within the field of sport psychology, and therefore our understanding of the role of these factors in athletes' experiences is tenuous at best.

With respect to centralized training camps, only a small understanding of the experience of female national athletes can be gleaned from the current literature in sport psychology and as such, we remain ill informed regarding the experiences for athletes within this context. At the same time centralized training camps or residency programs within national programs are occurring with more and more frequency, and being seen as an important contributor to team success (Gould et al., 1999, Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, Dieffenbach & McCann, 2001). The

prolonged engagement of individuals within centralized training camps provides additional challenges beyond that of shorter duration training camps that need to be explored and their impact understood. Given the scope of the area, careful consideration needs to be taken as to how to explore this phenomenon. Care needs to be taken to minimize assumptions and preconceptions regarding the centralized training camp experience that may limit our choices within the research and consequently the extent of our understanding within this context.

One major concern of the research in sport psychology is that it continues reflect a positivist stance even within qualitative approaches. By adopting a predominantly positivist approach to research where the goal is to predict, explain and regulate behaviours, four basic assumptions are made that limit the depth and breadth of the research overall (Sexton, 1997). First, this stance assumes that there is only one reality and that the goal is to uncover that reality and find the truth; second it assumes that there is only one way to know something and that the researcher is the main interpreter and knower within the research paradigm; third, questionnaires and instruments used to explore the relationship between variables are assumed to be objective and reliable; and fourth, a positivist stance assumes that the field has a full grasp and comprehensive understanding of the experience of both female and male athletes.

Several researchers have advocated for alternative ways of knowing in sport psychology research (Dale, 1996; Dewar & Horn, 1992; Krane, 1994; Martens, 1987); and these challenges have resulted in an increase in alternative epistemological approaches and an acceptance of qualitative practices within the field overall. However, I would suggest that some researchers seem to equate the adoption of qualitative approaches with ontological and epistemological diversity. As Hardy, Jones, and Gould (1996) suggested, choosing to do qualitative research is about far more than just choosing a methodology. Rather, it is about exploring ideology and

paradigmatic influences that affect researchers' choices within data collection, analysis, interpretations and conclusions. For example, a number of the qualitative studies now being published present results primarily through frequencies, raw themes and higher order categories (Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, Dieffenbach, & McCann, 2001; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). Giorgi (1994) acknowledges this process as a "budget" approach that provides categories for researchers that are more manageable and comparable. However, he questions the impact of this type of presentation on our understanding of a phenomenon and has reservations with it as the preferred method of presentation within qualitative studies:

Do such categories really preserve those aspects of the raw data that are essential to and vital for the understanding of the phenomenon? Well as such no....If one wants to assert that the frequency of a behavior is a measure of its robustness, it is logical to do so, and logical empiricism has done this for years. My point is that it need not be the case. One could say that a phenomenon is present when its meaning is expressed, regardless of the form it takes. Whereas one could count the various manifestations that the expressed meaning takes, what matters is whether the meaning is present or not. (p.197-199)

The choice of a qualitative approach should reflect the researchers' theoretical approach and "alternative conception of the subject matter of the social sciences" (Kvale, 1996, p. 10). I challenge that even though we have come a long way in our theoretical approach to research in sport psychology, we still have a long way to go.

Although the goal of this study is not to address all of these issues, it is to take another step toward expanding the current scholarship through ontological, epistemological, and methodological choices that challenge the dominant perspective in sport psychology; choices

that are woven into all levels of the research process. To guide this study I have adopted a social constructivist approach that is informed by contemporary feminist theory in sport. This perspective attempts to counter the limitations of previous research in sport psychology by viewing realities as multiple, constructed and holistic; the researcher and participant as indivisible; the participant-context as inseparable; and methodologies as value-bound (Harding, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This perspective also places the participants at the centre of the analysis, allowing them to describe their sport experiences as they appear to them. Moreover, allowing women to express their sport experiences in their own voices enables differences among women to be embraced and social constraints and values to be acknowledged (Hall, 1996; Harding, 1991; Krane, 1994).

Using this framework, the primary goal of this current study was to explore how eight female national athletes of one team sport experienced the activity of a six-week centralized training camp; a phenomenon that has not been previously explored. More specifically, I wanted to investigate the details of their experience along with how they came to understand this aspect within the context of their current lives. The focus of this study was “to understand” rather than “to know” these athletes’ experiences. Perhaps it has been our comprehension of the meaning of the word to “know” that has confined the current epistemological and methodological choices in the field of sport psychology to date.

Schwandt (1999) distinguished between what it means to understand versus to know. “To understand is literally to stand under, to grasp, to hear, get, catch, or comprehend the meaning of something. To know is to signal that one has engaged in conscious deliberation and can demonstrate, show, or clearly prove or support a claim” (p. 452). Clearly, knowing something and understanding something serve two different purposes, both of which can contribute to

research in the field in general. However, I contend that much of the exploration in sport psychology seeks to know and that the current scholarship could be broadened if we began a quest to also understand phenomena. Furthermore, as Schwartz (1999) argues, understanding may serve a larger purpose by contributing to our perception of our sense of self:

Understanding requires an openness to experience, a willingness to engage in a dialogue with that which challenges our self-understanding. To be in dialogue requires that we listen to the Other and simultaneously risk confusion and uncertainty both about ourselves and about the other person we seek to understand. (p. 458).

The approach of this study has led to several unique findings that I feel will benefit the research in the area of sport psychology on a number of levels. First, seeking an understanding of the experiences of the eight national female athletes and their strategies for dealing with the centralized training camp has led to a first glimpse at the complexity of this type of context and the numerous factors that play a role within that context. Moreover, it has led to a greater understanding of the impact and meaning arising from such an experience for these athletes and an appreciation of the process, factors and interactions involved in that meaning making.

Second, the personal profiles emerging for each of the eight athletes provides a means through which readers could apply their own experiences by participating in the athletes' experiences of the centralized training camp. Peshkin (1985) highlighted the impact narratives can have in this regard:

My results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries. (p. 280)

Finally, this study challenges athletes, coaches, support personnel, researchers and sport psychologists to view centralized training camps in a new way and to consider the factors that can play a role in the experiences of athletes within this context. Moreover, the athletes' experiences emerging from this study can encourage organizers of centralized training camps for national team athletes to reconsider the educational paradigms guiding their planning and to promote social and organizational choices that reflect this new vision. Within those paradigms, national athletes can be acknowledged as adults and their experiences and voice given more weight within the decision-making processes.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although specific research on the experience of athletes at centralized training camps does not exist, there are a number of studies in the field of sport psychology from which some insight into this type of experience may be gained. Generally, these studies indicate that athletes' experiences are varied and the elements contributing to those experiences are broad and relate to both sport and non-sport contexts. Four areas in the literature will be explored that lend themselves to an understanding of the national female athletes' experience of a team sport at a centralized training camp. These areas are: (a) emotions and the athlete experience, (b) moods, (c) coping, and (d) team experiences. Moreover the research in these areas will be scrutinized from a social constructivist stance in order to identify the ontological, epistemological and methodological limitations of the current literature and to highlight the role of this study in addressing some of those limitations.

Emotions and Athletes' Experiences

Emotions are an integral part of the athlete experience. Athletes experience a range of emotions of both a positive and negative nature that can have an impact on performance (Hanin, 1995, 2000) and their experiences overall (Gould, Jackson & Finch, 1993; Scanlan et al., 1989; Scanlan et al., 1991). Research in sport psychology has focused extensively on measuring emotions that athletes experience just prior to, and during performance or more specifically on the anxiety-performance relationship (Burton, 1988, Gill, 1986; Jones & Hardy, 1990; Marten, Vealey, & Burton, 1990). Only recently have studies begun to explore emotions beyond this relationship. As Hanin (2000) described, "Balance in the study of emotions and athletic performance is clearly missing at this point" (p. IX).

Before exploring the studies on emotion in sport that may lend insight into the national female athletes' experience of centralized training camps, it is important to understand emotions and their role in individual experiences. Defining emotion is a challenging task as definitions are dependent on the theoretical perspective adopted to address the issue and no one definition has emerged as all encompassing. Lazarus (1991) distinguished between contextualist and mechanistic views of emotion. Contextualists view emotion as understandable only in reference to the context or setting in which it is experienced. Environmental factors such as social interactions; constraints on thoughts, feelings and actions, and available resources; and personality factors such as motives and beliefs fall under the contextualists' umbrella and are best understood through the recounted experience of the individual. The focus is on uniqueness and context of the experience from which a description of the phenomenon emerges. A contextualist's definition of emotion might be similar to the one described by Denzin (1984): "Emotion is self-feeling. Emotions are temporally embodied, situated self-feelings that arise from emotional and cognitive acts that people direct to self or have directed toward them by others" (p. 49).

Mechanists, on the other hand, view emotion as a universal mechanism to be unearthed, explained and predicted. Both structure (a blueprint of parts in the system) and process (functions carried out by each part) need to be explored and taken into account (Lazarus, 1991). The focus of this perspective is on finding the universal guidelines in the person-environment interaction and then using these guidelines to understand the human experience of emotion overall. A mechanist's view of emotion might be similar to that described by Deci (1980).

An emotion is a reaction to a stimulus event (either actual or imagined). It involves change in the viscera and musculature of the person, is experienced subjectively in

characteristic ways, is expressed through such means as facial changes and action tendencies, and may mediate and energize subsequent behaviors. (p. 85)

Perhaps the complexity and difficulty in trying to define emotion is best highlighted by Lazarus (1991). He attempted to define emotion in order to provide some direction for researchers addressing some of the more difficult questions.

Emotions are organized psychophysiological reactions to news about ongoing relationships with the environment. "News" is colloquial for knowledge or beliefs about the significance for personal well-being of the person-environment relationship. The quality (e.g., anger versus fear) and intensity (degree of mobilization or motor-physiological change) of the emotional reaction depends on subjective evaluations – I call these cognitive appraisals – of this knowledge about how we are doing with respect to our goals in the short and long-run, and on the action tendency that points to the terms of the relationship. This significance depends on the interplay of a person's goals and beliefs and a provocative environmental context. Emotions are, in effect, organized cognitive-motivational-relational configurations whose status changes with changes in the person-environment relationship as this is perceived and evaluated (appraised). (p. 38)

Lazarus never published the definition when he originally wrote it, but instead offered it in his book, Emotion and Adaptation, as a "hint of the propositions that comprise the system, which is subject to empirical evaluation" (p. 38).

Regardless of the approach adopted to understand emotion, many of which fall somewhere along the contextual-mechanistic continuum described by Lazarus (1991), three elements consistently emerge as central to the experience of emotion. Each element will be described briefly and the perspectives of mechanists and contextualists compared within an

understanding of that element. First, emotions arising in any given situation indicate personal meaning or relevance of the event to that individual. Fridja (1994) who falls closer to the mechanistic side of the continuum, described this process in the following way. “Emotions can be understood to represent a process of relevance signaling: of signaling events that are relevant to the individual’s well-being or concerns to the cognitive and action systems” (p. 113). Denzin (1984), more of a contextualist, suggested that, “lived feelings (feelings of the lived body) express a particular value content or meaning found in the world by the person” (p. 125).

Second, emotions are a result of cognitive processing. Lazarus (1991), whose perspective aligns more with a mechanistic orientation, described this processing as cognitive appraisal and identified that the intensity and quality of the emotion is dependent on a two-step appraisal process. The first step, or primary appraisal process, consists of an identification of the significance of the interaction to the person’s well being. If personal investment in the outcome exists, then emotion is aroused. The second step or secondary appraisal process consists of an evaluation of the options available to deal with the encounter and the potential impact of the actions in maintaining personal well-being (i.e., “What, if anything, can I do in this encounter and how will what I do and what is going to happen, affect my well-being”) (Lazarus, 1991, p. 134). Denzin’s (1984) view from a contextual perspective described the cognitive processing involved in emotions as follows:

Emotionality is a form of action, self-conversation, and interaction that is born out of the interplay of cognitions and emotional thoughts in the person’s field of experience. Emotionality is a dialogue with the world, carried on in and through emotional thoughts, acts, words, gestures and meanings. (p. 57)

Finally, emotions arise out of relationships. Fridja (1994) indicated that, “Emotions imply and involve relationships of the subject to a particular object. One is afraid of something, angry at someone, happy about something, and so on” (p. 60). Denzin (1984) described the relational element of emotion as follows.

All emotions are relational phenomenon. They are learned in social relationships, initially the primary group of the family. They are felt relationally. They are interpreted in terms of social relationships. The vocabularies of emotional meaning that people bring to bear on their emotional experiences are also relationally grounded. These vocabularies include both the terms and the feelings for such emotions as fear, anger, desire, shame, disgust, pride and love. (p. 52)

The majority of the extant literature in sport psychology has adopted a mechanistic approach to understanding emotion, especially in relation to the performance-anxiety relationship (Jones & Hardy, 1990; Marten’s Vealey, & Burton, 1990; Silva, 1990; Smith, 1986; Smith, Smoll, & Schultz, 1990) and more recently the performance-emotion relationship (Hanin, 2000).¹ Although results are intriguing, I would suggest that we have done the field a disservice by focusing the investigations too narrowly and not considering the complexity and richness of the emotional experience for athletes as an adjunct to our understanding. Furthermore, much of the research has simplified the relational element of emotion, considering only athletes’ reactions and responses to performance within the competitive environment. Indeed, researchers continue to be surprised by the social context when it emerges as a critical element of the emotional experience of athletes (Gould, Tuffey et al., 1996, Gould, Udry, Bridges & Beck, 1997).

The current study attempts to address some of these limitations by adopting a social constructivist stance informed by feminist theory in sport that views realities as multiple,

constructed and holistic; the researcher and participant as indivisible; the participant-context as inseparable; and methodologies as value-bound (Harding, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To fully understand the experience of athletes during centralized training camps, we need to allow them to describe their own experience, their own emotions and their process of adaptation within the environment. A few studies have afforded athletes this opportunity retrospectively by asking athletes to identify their sources of enjoyment, stress and burnout during their competitive careers. These studies have relevance here and will be utilized to more fully understand the scope of athletes' experiences during centralized training camps.

Enjoyment

Enjoyment is viewed as an important variable related to both youth sport and elite athletes experiences. It also is emerging as an important variable in the field of psychology, in general². For the most part, research in sport psychology has focused more extensively on negative experiences or relationships, a focus that perhaps reflects the clinical sport psychology perspective and its medical model roots that dominate the field of sport psychology (Thompson, Vernacchia, & Moore, 1998).

Positive experiences in sport have been explored and the bulk of this research has been on youth and children's sport (e.g., Gill, Gross, & Huddleston, 1983; Gould, Feltz, Horn & Weiss, 1982; Gould, Feltz & Weiss, 1985). However, there have been a few studies that have focused on the positive sport experiences of elite athletes, and currently, we are seeing more of an interest in enjoyment related to elite sports overall (Jackson, 2000; Weiss, Kimmel, & Smith, 2001). Two main areas, optimal sport experiences and sources of enjoyment, related to enjoyment and the elite athlete will now be explored.

Optimal Sport Experiences. Maslow (1968) described optimal experiences or peak experiences as moments of ultimate happiness that promote personal growth and self-actualization. Ravizza (1977) was the first researcher to explore this idea within the context of sport. He interviewed 20 male and female athletes from 12 different sports and different competitive backgrounds and asked them to describe their most joyful moment in sport. Complete absorption in task, control of self and environment, and self-transcendence emerged as common threads among the athletes' experiences. A few years later, interest arose with respect to peak performances and the common attributes within this framework for athletes. Hundreds of elite athletes were interviewed regarding their experiences of their best performances (Cohn, 1991; Garfield & Bennett, 1984; Loehr, 1982). Both physical and mental characteristics of peak performance emerged as common to these athletes such as confidence, physical and mental relaxation, heightened awareness, focus in present, control, and time disorientation.

A similar construct has also been explored in areas outside of the sport domain by Csikszentmihalyi (1990). He called this concept, "flow" and defined this experience as "the state in which people are so absorbed in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (p. 4). From thousands of interviews with individuals across various domains and using a unique methodology referred to as experience sampling method (ESM)³, he identified nine dimensions as defining the flow experience: (a) a balance between challenge and skill (i.e., activities and actions where the challenge of the task is equal or slightly greater than one's ability in achieving the task); (b) merging of action and awareness (i.e., body and mind acting as one); (c) clear goals (i.e., clarity of action and focus), (d) unambiguous feedback (i.e., information from own movements and environmental cues); (e) total concentration on the task at hand (e.g., full

attention to action or challenge); (f) sense of control (i.e., absolute confidence and efficacy in ability); (g) loss of self-consciousness (i.e., suspension of worry or from other world distractions or concerns); (h) transformation of time (i.e., altered perception of the passage of time); and (i) autotelic experience (i.e., experience intrinsically rewarding for its own sake). Research on this construct in the area of sport has supported many of the dimensions of flow (Jackson, 1992; 1995).

Privette and Bundrick (1991) found evidence to suggest that there is a distinction between peak experiences and peak performances. They indicated that peak experiences are defined by such characteristics as fulfillment and significance, and therefore related more to positive-emotion focus. Conversely, peak performances align more with performance and behavioural outcomes. Moreover, Jackson (2000) proposed that flow may, in fact, be a construct underlying peak experiences and peak performances. For example, athletes may experience “flow” but not be experiencing peak performances whereas when athletes experience peak performances, they are, in all likelihood, experiencing a flow state (Jackson, 1992). With respect to peak experiences, flow is suggested to contribute to the quality of experience through its intrinsically motivating characteristics and through its potential for psychological growth and change within the individual. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) indicated that flow experiences have the potential to precipitate a process of differentiation and integration within individuals, which can lead to reorganization of a more complex perspective and understanding of self.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described differentiation as the process where individuals view themselves as unique and separate themselves from others based on their experiences, whereas integration involves the opposite: a connection with others and a consideration of shared

experiences that transcend an understanding of self. Complexity or growth occurs when individuals are able to merge these two processes into their understanding of self.

The self becomes more complex as a result of experiencing flow. Paradoxically, it is when we act freely, for the sake of the action itself rather than for ulterior motives, that we learn to become more than what we were. When we choose a goal and invest ourselves in it to the limits of our concentration, whatever we do will be enjoyable. And once we have tasted this joy, we will redouble our efforts to taste it again. This is the way the self grows. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 42)

The research exploring athletes' positive sport experiences and performances lends insight into the possible experiences of female national athletes of team sport at a centralized training camp. Feelings of enjoyment, fun and joy often underlie reasons why athletes initially choose to become involved in sport and in all likelihood will play a role in athletes' experiences as they continue in sport. Flow, suggested as an underlying element of both peak experiences and peak performances, may emerge in some way during the centralized training camp experience for these athletes. Furthermore, experiences of flow, whether or not they lead to peak experiences or performances, may encourage athletes to reflect on, and learn from, these experiences with regards to their personal growth and development. What remains unclear, however, is flow in context, or more specifically, the factors that contribute to and detract from flow experiences within centralized training camps. In order to gain a fuller picture of the positive elements of sport experience for elite athletes it is imperative to understand the elements that act as sources of enjoyment for athletes within a sport context beyond that of simply the performance related framework.

Sources of Enjoyment. Much of the literature on enjoyment in sport has focused on children and youth and as such little empirical research exists that examines the sources of enjoyment for elite athletes. To address this dearth in the literature Scanlan et al. (1989) explored the sources of enjoyment of 26 (15 male, 11 female) former national champion figure skaters. They used open-ended interviews to allow the participants to freely express their own sources of enjoyment and Scanlan and her colleagues focused on the causes that were most salient to the athletes throughout their careers. Interview transcripts were inductively analyzed and results presented in terms of content themes and frequency data. The percentages listed with each source reflect the frequency with which a source of stress was mentioned across the sample. Five main sources emerged from the data: (a) social and life opportunities (92%), defined as significant relationships with peers and adults and/or having experiences outside the routine of sport allowing for personal growth; (b) perceived competence (88%), defined as self-perceptions of competence emerging from one's self and social achievement in sport; (c) social recognition of competence (81%), defined as receiving recognition for skating competence through others' acknowledgment of personal performance achievements; (d) the act of skating (65%), defined as sensations, perceptions, and/or self-expressiveness associated with the act of skating; and (e) special cases, defined by two important unclustered themes: (a) a sense of specialness (feelings associated with personal awareness of talent) and (b) coping through skating (using skating as an outlet for dealing with other world problems and challenges).

Several factors from this study (Scanlan et al., 1989) have relevance for the centralized training camp experience. First, sources of enjoyment are derived from a diverse number of aspects. Second, sources of enjoyment are not only related to achievement aspects of sport, but also to the social and kinesthetic aspects of sport. Third, sources of enjoyment can be both

general and specific to the situation; therefore, the more salient aspects of enjoyment are apt to vary from team sports to individual sports. What remains unclear is enjoyment within different sport contexts and more specifically, sources of enjoyment for athletes during centralized training camps. Moreover, the process through which athletes come to define their experiences as enjoyable also remains unknown.

Stress

Stress is found in a variety of circumstances in one's life and it can exist in both pleasant and unpleasant forms. Athletes experience stress in their competitive athletic worlds and in their worlds external to athletics. Predominantly, stressors occur in two forms: acute life events or life changes and/or chronic daily hassles.

Holmes and Rahe (1967) developed the Social Readjustment Rating Scale to systematically measure major stress in people's lives. The scale is based on the premise that major changes are inherently stressful. These events disrupt usual patterns and require major readjustments. Examples of these positive and negative changes include such experiences as serious illness of family member, end of a relationship, and change of residence. Although major life changes are uncommon, the impact when they do occur can be profound. For many national athletes, the requirements of their sport may precipitate major life changes on a regular basis; athletes may be required to travel frequently or change locations to train for extended periods of time (e.g., centralized training camps). Each change brings with it different challenges (e.g., a new living environment, long distance relationships) and these challenges, depending on how the athletes cope with them, can influence well being, performances and the overall experiences of the athletes (Miller, Vaughn, & Miller, 1990).

Chronic stressors or daily hassles are aspects that individuals have to deal with on a regular basis. Examples include such things as household issues, health, time pressures, inner concerns and financial security. The interest in daily hassles began when Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer and Lazarus (1981) developed questionnaires assessing both daily hassles and uplifts. They defined daily uplifts as “positive experiences such as the joy derived from manifestations of love, relief at hearing good news, the pleasure of a good night’s rest, and so on” (p. 6) and daily hassles as “irritating frustrating, distressing demands that to some degree characterize everyday transactions with the environment” (p.3). Results from the research using these scales suggested that daily hassles may actually affect individuals’ well being and performances more than major life events because they occur with more frequency (Miller et al., 1990).

More studies are beginning to explore sources of stress for athletes outside of the anxiety-performance relationship. These studies lend some insight into the experience of national female athletes at a centralized training camp. The studies have been divided into two main categories – general and specific sources of stress – and are explored in detail.

General sources of stress. Scanlan et al. (1991) examined the sources of stress in 26 former national-championship figure skaters (15 male, 11 female) through a semi-structured interview process. Participants were interviewed once with respect to their sources of stress throughout their skating experiences. Transcripts were inductively analyzed and content presented in terms of content themes and frequency data. Five major sources and their percentages with respect to the overall sample were identified as: (a) negative aspects of competition (81%), (b) negative significant-other relationships (77%), (c) demands or costs of skating (69%), (d) personal struggles (65%), and (e) traumatic experiences (19%). Scanlan et al. indicated that the findings highlighted the importance of considering the total sport experience of

athletes to receive a complete picture of the stressors they face. Moreover, they acknowledged the stressors experienced by athletes are diverse, encompass both daily hassles and major life events, and vary among individuals.

Gould, Jackson, et al. (1993) conducted a similar study with 17 former national figure skaters (10 female, 7 male). They examined sources of stress affecting these athletes before and after being a national champion using a structured interview process. Each participant was interviewed once over the telephone with interviews lasting between 90 and 180 minutes. The transcripts were analyzed both inductively and deductively and results presented in terms of raw themes, general dimensions and percentages with respect to the total sample (frequencies). Several of the identified categories of stress both before and after the national champion period paralleled those identified by Scanlan et al. (1991). Sources of stress for athletes before being a national champion were identified as: (a) high performance standards based on expected potential (77%), (b) environmental demands on skater resources (65%), (c) competitive anxiety and doubts (53%), (d) stress related to significant others (35%), (e) physical demands on skater resources (47%), and (f) miscellaneous or uncategorized stress sources (24%). After becoming a national champion the sources of stress changed slightly with relationship issues emerging as most important (23.7%) followed by expectations and pressure to perform (21.5%), psychological demands on skater resources (18.3%), physical demands on skater resources (8.6%), environmental demands on skater resources at elite level (8.6%), life direction concerns (6.5%), and miscellaneous or uncategorized sources of stress (12.9%). Overall, 71% of the skaters reported more stress after winning their titles than before doing so. Relationship issues, the most prevalent source of stress for athletes after winning, arose from negative interactions with parents, family, skating acquaintances, friends, coaches and skating partner.

Similar to Scanlan et al. (1991), Gould, Jackson, et al. (1993) highlighted the diversity of factors perceived as stressful by the athletes. Gould and colleagues also indicated that the frequency mentioned by the skaters as a group did not necessarily reflect the significance of the stress source for each individual skater. However, the investigative team did not explore the meaningfulness of the stressors for the participants as they “felt that stress source frequency and magnitude were related and convey the variety of factors that were perceived as stress-causing to the skaters” (p. 154).

Specific sources of stress. Sources of stress have been explored for elite athletes rehabilitating from season ending ski injuries. Gould, Udry, et al. (1997) interviewed 10 female and 11 male elite skiers who had experienced a season ending injury – an injury that had prevented them from skiing competitively for at least three months. Athletes were interviewed once for 60 to 90 minutes with 10 of the interviews done in person and the other 11 interviews conducted over the telephone. The interviews were structured and followed an interview guide. Transcripts were inductively analyzed and 183 sources of stress themes and their subsequent eight higher order dimensions were presented along with frequencies across the sample. The themes emerging were as follows (a) psychological concerns (100%), related to such elements as loss, social comparison, fear, and mental readiness; (b) social concerns (81%), related to such elements as others’ involvement viewed as overbearing, lack of attention, negative relationships, and coach changes; (c) physical concerns (71%), related to such elements as poor performance, pain, physical inactivity, and getting re-injured; (d) medical/rehabilitation concerns (71.4%), related to such elements as medical uncertainty, boredom of rehabilitation, and dealing with slow progress; (e) financial concerns (28.6%), related to such elements as loss of money and sponsorship concerns; (f) career concerns (23.8%), related to such elements as questioning career

and considering the options; (g) other (14.3%), related to such elements as losing training time and being stuck in the hospital; and (h) missed non-ski recovery (9.5%), related to such elements as missed opportunities to compete.

Gould, Udry, et al. (1997) placed particular value on the result that stress resulting from injury may be more psychologically and socially driven than physically driven. They suggested that health professionals and coaches should start to consider providing rehabilitation strategies of both a physical and psychosocial nature for athletes. As well, they emphasized the continued need to explore athletes' injury experiences within context, especially in relation to the social context of the sport environment.

A study by Rotella and Newburg (1989) exploring athletes' experiences of sitting on the bench was not intended as a source of stress study. However, the results indicated that athletes' experiences reflected stressful feelings associated with this type of situation. Rotella and Newburg interviewed three high level athletes: one female college lacrosse athlete playing in NCAA Division II, one male college basketball athlete playing in NCAA Division I, and one professional male soccer player. Sitting on the bench produced a plethora of negative feelings that resulted in a loss of identity and a decrease in self-confidence and self-worth for the athletes involved. Two noteworthy findings were: (a) all three athletes experienced a range of emotions from embarrassment, devastation, feelings of insult, to frustration; (b) communication, or a lack of it, from coaches, support staff, and other athletes emerged as an important source of stress for these athletes. Their experience overall involved a challenge to their identity and self worth, and this challenge was perpetuated by coaches who did not communicate effectively with athletes regarding the athletes' roles and responsibilities on the team.

Rotella and Newburg's study (1989) was unique for a couple of reasons. First, it explored athletes from team sports and highlighted a phenomenon that is unique to team sports – sitting on the bench. Second, the study adopted a case study methodology, recommended by Smith (1988), and it presented the experiences of the participants through their own voices through a personal narrative. Rotella and Newburg described the reason for presenting the findings in this manner.

In presenting the case studies, the use of content analysis was discussed. Although the content analysis often adds to the validity of an argument, it would lessen the human effect of the following case studies and therefore was not used. The importance of interviews is not something that can be measured statistically. Each story must be understood individually. Collectively, they present a problem in sports that has not been dealt with effectively. (p. 49)

Woodman and Hardy (2001) explored sources of stress for athletes in relation to their environment. This study was the first time in sport psychology research that organizational stress was investigated as a source of stress for elite athletes. Woodman and Hardy defined organizational stress in sport as “an interaction between the individual and the sport organization within which that individual is operating” (p. 233). Eight female and eight male international elite athletes from individual sports preparing for a major international competition were interviewed once using a semi-structured interview approach. Transcripts were deductively analyzed and results presented through themes and frequencies emerging within the four predetermined higher order categories. These themes were further supported through the presentation of athletes' quotes. The four main organizational stress categories were as follows. First, environmental issues identified as stressful were: (a) selections, such as late, lengthy or unfair selection process; (b) finances, such as differential or lack of funds and money used as

power tool; and (c) training environment, such as monotony and physical demands of training and tense training environment. Second, personal issues identified as stressful were: (a) nutrition, such as diets and guilt about food and supply of food; (b) injury, such as feelings of frustration, pressure and being discarded and training despite injury; (c) goals and expectations, such as pressure from others, tension in team and unrealistic team goals. Third, leadership issues identified as stressful were: (a) coaches, such as athlete-coach tension, coach not supportive or trustworthy, manipulation by coach and poor communication; and (b) coaching styles, such as inconsistent or unsuited style and coach making athlete feel more nervous. Finally, team issues identified as stressful were: (a) team atmosphere, such as athletes' negative attitudes affecting team, lack of social cohesion, and separate groups within the team; (b) support network, such as lack of support in general, lack of help from other athletes, and inappropriate support from staff and officials; (c) roles, such as unclear roles or lack of structure and individual roles within the team; and (d) communication, such as lack of communication between athletes and regarding organization of training, confusion, and lack of access to information.

Woodman and Hardy (2001) contended that organizational context is a significant factor that cannot be dismissed when considering the experiences of elite athletes in sport. Within that context, they suggested that the consistency of coaching styles both between and within coaches is an important element that impacts the experiences of athletes. Furthermore, they suggested that dealing with organization stress requires special skills and training. Athletes, coaches, and support personnel such as sport psychologists should be educated and appropriately prepared to deal with these types of issues.

In sum, the studies on general and specific sources of stress have relevance for understanding the national female athletes' experiences at a centralized training camp on a

number of levels. First, social interactions appear to play a significant role in athletes' experiences. Second, sources of stress are related to the context within which athletes function. Finally, the environment plays an equally significant role and should be considered in tandem with individual variables. In order to gain a more comprehensive picture of athletes' experiences with stress, it is also imperative to consider issues of burnout within sport and the factors that play a role in those athletes' experiences. Burnout may have some relevance to the centralized training camp experience given the high levels of intense training, the long duration of the camp and the importance and frequency of interactions occurring within this type of setting.

Burnout

Before exploring studies in the area of burnout, it is essential that we explore how we have come to know burnout in sport psychology and what models have informed our understanding. Three main models of burnout predominate the sport psychology literature and each is discussed below.

Smith's (1986) Cognitive-Affective Stress Model. Smith (1986) defined burnout as psychological, physical, and emotional withdrawal from a formerly enjoyable and motivating activity as resulting from prolonged chronic stress. Smith explored the concept of burnout from a multidimensional perspective. He paralleled the burnout response with the model of stress and coping and gave significant weight to the cognitive appraisal of the individual in mediating the eventual response. The model incorporates the relationship between the person and the environment by exploring the interactional impact of cognitive appraisal and physiological responses in this process and on the eventual outcome. Motivational and personality factors are given consideration at each level of the model with the belief that all the components are dynamic in nature, each impacting upon the other in a transactional fashion.

The first phase of the model explores the interaction between the person and the environment. Individuals, given a stress-invoking situation, weigh the demands of the situation and their resources for dealing with the demands. If the demands exceed the resources the athletes may experience feelings of discomfort, anxiety, guilt, or anger. Demands can be either internal or external to the athletes (i.e., individual goals and motivations versus expectations of others). The extent of the response experienced by the individuals relies significantly on how they appraise the situation. Individuals create their psychological reality based on their appraisal of the demands, their resources for dealing with the demands, the consequences if the demands are not met, and the personal meaning of the consequences to them. Closely linked to the appraisal is the emotional and physiological response that the individuals experience related to their appraisal. If the appraisal indicates a threat, then the individuals will react emotionally and physiologically to the situation. In turn this response feeds back into the appraisal with respect to the intensity of the emotion being experienced, thus facilitating the process of appraisal or reappraisal. The outcome of this cognitive appraisal and physiological response interaction is the behaviour or action selected to deal with this response. The coping behaviours act as a final product of the process. As well they continue to facilitate the entire person-environment assessment process. Tantamount to this entire interaction are the aspects of personality and motivational components unique to the individual. Smith (1986) defines these variables as predispositions to seek out certain situations and goals and to perceive, think and respond in certain ways.

Two distinct features of the model stand out for understanding the experience of national female athletes during a centralized training camp. The first salient feature of the model relates to its emphasis on cognitive appraisal and its subsequent interactional relation with

emotional/physiological responses and coping. Athletes in a centralized training camp are constantly appraising the situation and their place within it. These appraisals precipitate emotion and actions that, in turn, influence the experiences of athletes. The second salient feature is the recognition of personality and motivational variables at each level. Athletes bring with them characteristics and personal histories that influence their perceptions and experiences.

Silva's (1990) Negative-Training Response Model. Silva's model approaches burnout as a response to physical training. He does acknowledge the psychological factors involved in the process of adaptation, yet he suggests that primarily, it is the physical training that is responsible for the physical and psychological aspects with which the athlete must cope. In general, a response to a demand can be negative, positive or both, and the individual will respond to the imposed demand by making adaptations. Physical training applies a significant demand on the athletes, and its intent is to push the boundaries of physical response to increase the athletes' adaptation to the imposed demand. This demand is viewed as a natural part of training and positive adaptation is the intended outcome. Once the training stress is applied, athletes will respond with a physical and or psychological adaptive reaction which in turn results in a training gain if the athletes cope with the demand successfully. If athletes do not cope with the psychophysiological stress created by the demand, then the first step of negative adaptation, staleness, is thought to occur. In some cases the athletes may be able to train through this phase and return the body to a positive adaptive state. In other instances they will not, and if the training demand is continually applied, their stage of negative adaptation becomes increasingly worse.

Silva (1990) describes three phases of negative adaptation: (a) staleness, an initial failure of the body's adaptive mechanisms to cope with the psychophysiological stress; (b) overtraining,

detectable psychophysiological malfunctions characterized by easily observed changes in the athletes' mental orientation and physical performance; and (c) burnout, an exhaustive psychophysiological response exhibited as a result of frequent, sometimes extreme, but generally ineffective efforts to meet excessive training and sometimes competitive demands.

With respect to the experiences of national female athletes during a centralized training camp, physical demands placed on them are likely to impact their experiences. However, it will be important to not consider the physical effects in isolation but rather as just one of the factors that can contribute to the experience of the female athletes and their positive or negative adaptation.

Coakley's (1992) Unidimensional Identity Development and External Control Model.

Coakley's Model focuses on factors related to burnout in the young athlete and stress is not viewed as the cause, but rather as a symptom. Coakley maintains that burnout is a product of the structure of high performance sport that does not allow young athletes to develop normal multifaceted identities. Athletes begin to define themselves solely through their sport achievements and success. Consequently, threats to their identity as athletes occur when they are injured or experience poor performances. In addition, young athletes have limited control and decision making powers over their social environment. This powerlessness over their own development and direction may leave them feeling immobilized and frustrated. The continual frustration may be experienced by the athlete as stress with some cases ending in burnout.

Coakley's (1992) model is of considerable importance as it places the main emphasis of burnout on the social environment of the young athlete, thus offering an alternative to the stress based models posed by Smith (1986) and Silva (1990). He also offers three suggestions for changing the social environment of the athlete to facilitate their development: (a) change the

social structure of high performance sport for children, (b) change the manner in which the sport experience is integrated into the children's lives, and (c) structure the relationships between significant others and child athletes in differing ways.

With respect to the experience of national female athletes at a centralized training camp, Coakley's model offers some insight into the potential impact of the surrounding environment and structure of the centralized training camp on the athletes. As athletes become more elite, there is a shift away from the importance of environmental factors on their experiences and a emphasis on their personal abilities to cope with situations as an individual. However, perhaps that shift away is premature and the focus should remain a balance between individual strategies and the surrounding context.

Burnout Studies. Little empirical evidence existed related to the athletes' experience of burnout until three comprehensive studies by Gould and colleagues were conducted on the phenomenon – one qualitative, one quantitative and the other a case study methodology incorporating the findings from the other two studies (Gould, Tuffey, et al., 1996; Gould, Udry, et al., 1996; Gould, Tuffey, et al., 1997). For the qualitative study, Gould, Tuffey, et al. (1996) interviewed six female and four male junior elite tennis players using a structured interview approach. Interviews were inductively and deductively analyzed and results presented through raw data themes and higher order themes along with direct quotes. Four main factors emerged as elements leading to burnout. They were physical concerns, logistical concerns, social/interpersonal concerns and psychological concerns. Gould, Tuffey, et al. (1996) were surprised by the saliency of social psychological in the process of burnout. Their results led them to advocate for a special focus on social psychological concerns, such as inappropriate expectations and pressure and lack of enjoyment, when trying to prevent burnout.

For the quantitative study, Gould, Udry et al. (1996) examined 26 female and 36 male junior elite tennis players. 30 of these athletes had experienced burnout and 32 had not. The athletes completed several questionnaires such as the Eades Athletic Burnout Inventory, the Sport Motivation Scale, the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, the Sport Anxiety Scale, the Athletic Identify Measurement Scale and the COPE Scale. Results revealed that the burned out players, compared to the non-burned out players: (a) had higher burnout scores, (b) had less input into training, (c) were more likely to have played high school tennis, (d) were more likely to have played up in age division, (e) practiced fewer days, (f) were lower in external motivation; (g) were higher in amotivation, (h) reported being withdrawn, (i) differed on a variety of perfectionism subscales, (j) were less likely to use planning coping strategies, and (k) had lower scores on positive interpretation and growth coping. The evidence suggested that burnout was a result of an interaction of personal and situational factors, and not solely from a personality weakness.

Gould, Tuffey, et al.'s (1997) third study offered a unique opportunity to explore individual differences in the burnout of junior tennis players by examining idiographic profiles for two female and one male junior elite tennis players. The researchers considered both the information from the quantitative measures and interviews in scripting the profiles from each athlete. The profiles were presented as a third person narrative for each participant's experience of burnout with quotes from the interviews and references to the quantitative measures embedded within the text. Three cases were chosen and represented distinct facets of social psychologically driven burnout. The first case identified a female athlete whose burnout appeared to be psychologically driven by her perfectionistic tendencies. The second case identified a female athlete whose burnout was also psychologically driven but who was greatly influenced by

situational factors (parental pressure, need to be with friends). The final case identified a male athlete whose burnout was physically driven by means of overtraining.

Five main findings from these three burnout cases have relevance for understanding the experience of national female athletes at a centralized training camp. First, overall, excessive training was not a significant factor in causing burnout. Second, the complex interaction of personal and situational factors needs to be considered when monitoring for burnout as opposed to just focusing on the personality weaknesses of the athletes. Third, social psychological factors need to be given considerable weight when assessing athletes. Fourth, the importance of the social environment surrounding the athlete must not be denied. Finally, individual differences in response to burnout do exist and must be acknowledged.

Interviews conducted by Coakley (1991) in developing his model of burnout supported the role of the social environment as a precipitate of burnout. He argued that stress is but a symptom of the social construction of the sport setting. Coakley proposed that the way sport programs are set up lie in conflict with normal adolescent identity development and that it is the structure of the environment that needs to be challenged and changed and not only the athlete. Although Coakley's model focuses on adolescent athletes, his ideas are of considerable importance with respect to understanding the elite female athletes' experiences of centralized training camps. First and foremost, he views the social construction of the sport environment as tantamount to the athletes' experience. Second, he takes the emphasis away from the individual athlete, as burnout is no longer viewed as their inability to handle chronic stress. Therefore, stress management programs may address but one issue and not the most significant one in some cases.

Indeed, it may be too narrow a view to consider burnout as primarily consequences of excessive physiological and psychological demands placed on the individual (Silva, 1990; Smith, 1986). The climate that the coaches create endorses specific attitudes and actions that contribute to the context. Without considering the impact of that context and the role it plays, it is difficult to ascertain a complete and full picture of athletes' experiences. Henschen (1993) offered a list of causes of staleness that focused more on how the situation was structured. Included in his list are the length of the season, monotony of training, lack of positive reinforcement, abusiveness from authorities, stringent rules, high levels of competitive stress, perceived overload, and boredom. He goes on to advocate for the coach to evaluate the structure of their season with respect to factors that may contribute to staleness. Scheduled time outs from training, athlete input into training and decisions, mental practice periods, and controlling length and boredom of training were all recommended. Although not specifically addressing the issue of centralized training camps, Henschen's recommendations are easily applied within that context.

Despite these acknowledgements of the role of the environment, the burnout literature in sport predominantly has viewed the phenomenon from a stress perspective and the onus for change rests with the athlete. Perhaps this has to do with the ease and applicability of these types of models or a focus on the individual athletes abilities as the athletes mature. However, national female athletes involved in a centralized training camp inevitably will be affected by the structure of the camp and the context created by the individuals involved, especially considering the lengthy nature of centralized training camps. For example the tendency to overtrain may arise within athletic subcultures that promote a "more is better" attitude, or overtraining may result as a product of poor communication patterns between a coach and athlete (Brustad & Ritter-Taylor, 1997). Athletes' experiences within regular training camp situations are challenging enough.

Failing to acknowledge the role of the social influences within a centralized training camp environment can only serve to undermine the potential experience of athletes and provide a simplistic rationale for a complex interaction.

In sum, researchers have only begun to scratch the surface of the experience of elite athletes with respect to enjoyment, stress, and burnout. The experience for athletes from different sports and within different contexts is just beginning to unfold. One of the strengths of these studies is that they have adopted qualitative methodologies, and therefore we have been exposed, in some cases, to rich descriptions of the various experiences and to a broader understanding of enjoyment, stress and burnout overall. This choice in methodology has allowed such elements and social and organizational issues to emerge as significant factors within the athletes' experiences. However, one limitation in all of these studies is that the goal remains to find the common themes and shared experiences and in doing so, the information arising from the studies becomes de-contextualized and the voices of the participants fragmented and removed from their individual perspectives. This effect has been exacerbated overall when researchers choose to use frequencies as a means of presenting the results. Hardy, Jones and Gould (1996) suggest that choosing to do qualitative research is about far more than just choosing a methodology. Rather it is about exploring ideology and paradigmatic influences that affect researchers' choices within data collection, analysis, interpretations and conclusions. I suggest that in the field of sport psychology we have not challenged those ideological influences enough and that much of the qualitative research in sport psychology doesn't fall far enough from the positivist tree. The goal of this study is to challenge that ideological framework and allow the complexity of the experiences of enjoyment, stress, burnout and other emotions for athletes during the centralized training camp to emerge.

Moods

Before exploring the research on moods and athletes' experiences in sport, I would first like to briefly address the struggle in the literature to clearly distinguish between moods and emotions. Lazarus (1991) contends that moods are just a different type of emotion, but there is some debate in the literature regarding the exact distinction between these two elements. Ekman (1994) refers to moods as longer lasting and emotions as acute. Davidson (1994) suggests that emotions are triggered by events perceived as occurring quickly and unpredictably whereas moods are more likely to follow events perceived as occurring over a longer time period. Moreover, he proposes that each acts as a filter through which our thoughts and actions are influenced; "emotions bias actions, while moods bias cognition" (p. 54). Lane and Terry (2000) have argued that the distinction is even more clouded within a sport domain as "it is impossible to distinguish emotions from moods on the basis of inventories...because there is no way of knowing whether responses to items are a reflection of recent events (emotion) or feelings in general (mood)" (p. 20). Finally, Lazarus (1991) considers the role of cognition in the etiology of both elements:

I am inclined to interpret both moods and acute emotions as reactions to the way one appraises relationships in the environment; moods refer to the larger, pervasive, existential issues of one's life, whereas acute emotions refer to an immediate piece of business, a specific and relatively narrow goal in an adaptational encounter with the environment....Though the temporal focus and perhaps subject matter are different in each, both acute emotions and moods are reactions to appraisals about our well-being. (p. 48)

Regardless of the origin and interpretation of acute emotions and moods, it is evident that they play some role in how individuals experience the world and as such have relevance for female athletes' experiences of a centralized training camp.

Mood and Training Studies

Morgan (1985) has managed to link the physical stress of training to specific mood responses through the use of the Profile of Mood States questionnaire (POMS) (McNair, Lorr & Dropplemann, 1971). Investigations utilizing the POMS have provided some insight into the psychological effects of intense training over an extended period of time. The POMS is a 65-item questionnaire that provides a measure of total mood disturbance (TMD) and of specific mood states (McNair et al., 1971). It was developed as a tool to identify and assess six fluctuating moods or affective states: (a) tension-anxiety, defined by adjectives suggesting the perception of heightened musculoskeletal tension; (b) depression-dejection, defined by a mood of depression accompanied by a sense of personal inadequacy; (c) anger-hostility, defined as a mood of anger and antipathy towards others; (d) fatigue-inertia, defined as a mood of weariness, inertia or low energy levels; (e) vigor-activity, defined by adjectives suggesting a mood of vigorousness and high energy; and (f) confusion-bewilderment, related to organized-disorganized dimension of emotion.

Morgan et al. (1987) examined the responses of female and male swimmers to the POMS over the course of a season in a series of seven studies. A particular pattern emerged. At the beginning of the season the athletes' POMS profiles were characterized by the "iceberg" profile, high scores on the positive vigor scale and low scores on the negative mood scales (i.e., tension, depression, anger, fatigue and confusion). As the season progressed, the iceberg profile changed or inverted for many of the swimmers, typified by increases in their negative states and decreases

in their positive state. Results strongly indicated that the inversion was directly related to increases in the training stimulus. Decreasing the training stimulus resulted in a re-establishment of the iceberg profile for most athletes.

Morgan et al. (1987) have provided the groundwork for the conclusion that training stress experienced by athletes over a periodized training program will be reflected in fluctuations in their overall mood disturbance score and the positive and negative sub-scores of the POMS. Periodized training involves periods of high volume training contrasted with periods of high intensity and low volume training (Bompa & Jones, 1983). Overloading, the period where the athletes endure the highest volume of training, usually occurs in the middle of the cycle. Near the end of a training cycle, the training volume is reduced during a period referred to as “tapering”. This provides an opportunity for the athletes to physiologically recover from the intense training period and to facilitate the achievement of peak performance.

A number of studies have supported Morgan et al.'s (1987) findings that periods of increased training will result in an increase in the groups' total mood disturbance score or in specific negative sub-scores of the POMS for both female and male athletes (Berglund & Safstrom, 1994; Hooper, Mackinnon, Hanrahan, 1997; Liederbach, Gleim, & Nicholas, 1992; Morgan, Costill, Flynn, Raglin & O'Connor, 1988; Murphy, Fleck, Dudley & Callister, 1990; Raglin, Morgan, & Luchsinger, 1990; Raglin, Morgan & O'Connor, 1991). For example, Raglin et al. (1990) compared differences in mood and self-motivation scores for 22 women competing for a berth on a college freshman rowing team over a six-month season. The POMS was administered four times during the season. One week following the final assessment, nine rowers were selected to compete in a major regional contest. When a comparison of those who were selected versus those who were not was carried out, results indicated that in both groups total

fatigue. Three athletes, all female, out of the group were classified as stale. Only two of the stale swimmers showed higher scores for several of the POMS measures compared with the remainder of the non-stale swimmers, and these differences were actually evident throughout the entire season. The third swimmer's POMS profile did not differ from the non-stale swimmers. Hooper et al. contended that the POMS might not be a sensitive indicator of staleness under all circumstances.

Second, Raglin et al. (1991) monitored 84 female and 102 male university swimmers at three to four week intervals during a six-month training season over a four-year period. Similar to Morgan et al.'s (1987) findings, elevation in mood disturbance scores occurred for athletes as the training yardage increased. However for some athletes, tension did not decrease in response to training taper. A noteworthy finding was that tension was consistently higher for female swimmers in this analysis.

In general, the results from these studies suggested that not all athletes' mood profiles responded to increases in training in the same way; some remained relatively stable over the training while others who did experience inverted profiles, did not experience improved profiles with a reduction in the training (i.e., during tapering). Athletes whose total mood disturbance scores remain elevated even after tapering tended to experience performance decrements and team selection disappointments. Elevated total mood disturbance scores after taper is surprisingly common to the point where Morgan et al. (1987) indicated that it typically occurs in approximately ten percent of the athletes within a training group.

Indeed, these findings have important implications for female national athletes of team sports at centralized training camps. Over the course of a centralized training camp, athletes will, in all likelihood, experience mood fluctuations as volume and intensity of training increase and

decrease. These changes in moods and emotions are likely to affect athletes' performances and their day-to-day interactions and experiences. Furthermore, if an entire team is training together for an extended period of time while preparing for a major event, the potential that ten percent of those athletes may be stale by competition time has serious ramifications for athletes, coaches and the team in general.

However, the findings emerging from these studies are also limited in their applicability to our understanding of the female national athletes' experience at a centralized training camp. Certainly, there appears to be a relation between moods and training, but there is also a need for a broader understanding of this relation and an examination of the range of athletes' experiences and factors that contribute to and facilitate this relation. At a centralized training camp, training stress is far from the only element that can impact athletes' moods. There are a number of factors that have been suggested to contribute to athletes' experiences of training overall such as length of the season, lack of positive reinforcement, feelings of helplessness, monotony of training, boredom and high levels of competitive stress (Henschen, 1998; 2000). Indeed, Berglund and Safstrom (1994) contended that one of the major disadvantages of using the POMS as a monitoring tool is the unknown impact of external stressors on athletes other than intensity and volume of training.

Another limit to the applicability of the research using the POMS with respect to the female athletes' experiences at a centralized training camp is that a discrepancy exists in the exploration of female and male athletes' experiences. Recently, LeUnes and Burger (2000) explored gender representation in 226 data based articles that used the POMS from 1971 to early 1998. Their results indicated that males were the sole focus of 80 studies whereas only 46 studies focused solely on females. 75 studies utilized both female and male athletes and the remaining 25

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Interestingly, in instances in the POMS studies where gender differences did emerge as a factor, the finding was not explained in any detail (Hooper et al., 1994; Raglin et al., 1991). Raglin et al. (1991) highlighted their limited exploration of gender in the following quote: "The single instance of gender effects observed for confusion and vigor are not representative findings and these differences probably reflect change or a training effect particular to a given season" (p. 587). In a study by Hooper et al. (1994), three swimmers out of fourteen were classified as stale. All three swimmers were female. Hooper et al. made no attempt to explain this finding.

A final limitation is the reliance on one questionnaire, the POMS, to explore this phenomenon. Within this choice the complexity of the context is disregarded, individual experiences minimized and the impact of the athletes' past experiences overlooked. Moreover,

the meanings arising for individual athletes within various situations and contexts remain unknown and unexplored. Lewis and Michalson (1983) contended that it is unrealistic to anticipate that a single measurement system can be devised in which behaviour or situations will have a one-to-one basis with emotional states. Furthermore, they indicated that any measurement system that does not include participants' subjective reports of their emotional experiences is bound to be subject to error.

In sum, the research exploring the POMS lends us some insight into the impact of physical training on athletes' moods. However, we are still unaware of the diversity of athletes' experiences, the process of mood development over the course of training, and impact and range of factors that play a role in athletes' experiences over extended periods of time. Further, in order to fully understand female athletes' experiences of centralized training camps, we need to step beyond a single measure and approach the experience by acknowledging and exploring it through ways that allow for its richness and complexity to emerge. It is also imperative not to view athletes as passive recipients of emotions and moods, but as active players in negotiating their thoughts and feelings through various coping strategies.

Coping and Athletes' Experiences

Although a number of models exist to explain the process of coping, the transactional-process perspective continues to dominate the field of coping (Hardy et al., 1996). This approach defines coping as "a process of constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands or conflicts appraised as taxing and exceeding one's resources" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Coping is viewed as a dynamic, ongoing process that involves both cognitive and behavioural strategies to manage stress. The model also considers the impact of personal factors and the situation or context in which coping takes place

equally. Finally, all attempts to cope are considered equally and not judged by the outcome of the coping strategy.

The coping process begins with a person's cognitive appraisal of the person/environment relationship. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), there are three primary outcome appraisals: harm/loss, threat, and challenge: Harm/loss refers to physical or psychological damage already done; threat refers to the potential for harm or loss; and challenge refers to a potential benefit or opportunity for growth or mastery. The intensity and quality of the stress one perceives depends on two elements of the appraisal process, primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal consists of one's acknowledgement of the significance of the interaction (i.e., "what do I have at stake in this encounter?"). Secondary appraisal evaluates the options available to deal with the encounter (i.e., "what can I do?") (Folkman, 1992, p. 34). The type of stress perceived will in turn influence the coping process. The stress appraisal process is continuous, and therefore the coping process is also constantly adapting and changing.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also distinguish between two categories of coping, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping refers to the actions taken to address the problem causing the stress. Examples include such aspects as goal setting, planning and seeking information. On the other hand, emotion-focused coping refers to the attempts to control the emotions created by the stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) contend that individuals are more likely to engage in problem-focused coping if they believe the situation can change. Conversely, emotion-focused coping predominates in situations where change is unlikely.

In addition to these categories of coping, other dimensions have emerged in an attempt to capture the variety of coping strategies (Cohen, 1991; Endler & Parker, 1990; Folkman, 1992).

One particular dimension of interest is avoidance coping (Endler & Parker, 1992). Avoidance coping is defined as the mental or physical efforts to dissociate from the stressful situation. It is suggested that this type of coping would be more effective in dealing with stress that is of a short duration where the consequences will dissipate in a fairly short period of time. Conversely, non-avoidance coping would be selected if the stress is of longer duration and its effects less likely to disappear.

Other dimensions of coping also have emerged through the development of instruments to measure this construct. For the most part these dimensions fall within the three categories identified earlier (i.e., problem-focused, emotion-focused, avoidance). Folkman and Lazarus (1985) developed the Ways of Coping Checklist (WCC) which delineated eight different coping scales. Carver, Scheier, and Wientraub (1989) revised this scale to develop a sport specific measure called the COPE modeled after the WCC. They also identified eight factors – problem-focused coping, seeking social support, general emotionality, increased effort and resolve, detachment, denial, wishful thinking, and emphasizing the positive.

Coping Research

Research on coping in the area of sport psychology is fairly new and until the late 1980s very few studies examined coping as a process (Hardy et al., 1996). Since that time researchers have employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore the way in which athletes deal with sport related stress with research focusing on four main areas: performance slumps, athlete experiences, acute stressors, and mental preparation.

Coping with Performance Slumps. A few studies have measured athletes' coping strategies during extended periods of poor performance, commonly known as slumps. Madden, Kirby, and McDonald (1989) used the COPE scale to ask 9 female and 12 male ranging in age

from 14 to 20 years. Australian elite middle distance runners how they coped when they were experiencing a personal slump in performance. Seeking social support, problem-focused coping and increased effort and resolve emerged as the most popular strategies. The least used strategies were wishful thinking and denial. In addition, results revealed that older athletes tended to use more problem-focused strategies. Madden et al. suggested that older athletes perhaps have more knowledge of the application of various problem-focused strategies than younger athletes as a result of their greater experience. Evidence also emerged that female athletes were more likely to use emotional responses in reaction to injury than were male athletes.

Kolt, Kirkby and Lindner (1995) used the WCC to explore how 83 female and 32 male junior gymnasts coped when experiencing a performance slump. The most frequently cited coping processes were increased effort and resolve, wishful thinking, seeking social support and problem focused coping. Moreover, girls reported greater use of seeking social support than boys in coping with performance slumps.

Finally, Prapavessis and Grove (1995) interviewed 30 national junior and 35 semi-professional Australian male baseball players regarding the coping strategies they selected to regain their “form” during a batting slump. Results indicated that players utilized both internal and external coping strategies. Internal strategies involved such things as focusing on the technical, mental or physical aspects of performance while external strategies involved seeking assistance to deal with technical and/or emotional issues.

Coping with the Athletic Experience. A handful of studies have examined athletes’ coping processes in dealing with sport-related stress in general. Crocker (1992) examined how 118 female and 119 male competitive athletes from a variety of team and individual sports coped with stressful events using the WCC. He asked them to recall the most stressful event that had

occurred in their sport over the last three weeks and consider that situation when completing the checklist. Results revealed that athletes used a wide variety of coping strategies. Eight separate dimensions emerged: active coping, problem-focused coping, seeking social support, positive reappraisal, self-control, wishful thinking, self-blame, and detachment. From the results Crocker suggested that active coping and problem-focused coping are highly adaptive strategies since they can directly help manage environmental circumstances that contribute to their stress. Conversely, he expressed some concern for athletes who engage in such techniques as wishful thinking and detachment over a long period of time. Whereas he acknowledged that these strategies help reduce emotional distress, he also warned that they prevent the athlete from being an active agent of change and inhibit behaviours that are required to be a successful competitive athlete. Gender analyses were not reported.

A revealing qualitative study by Gould, Finch, et al. (1993) examined the coping strategies employed by 10 female and 7 male former national figure skating champions related to all aspects of their sporting experience. Athletes were asked to reflect on their experiences in skating and identify their sources of stress and coping processes employed. The categories of coping that emerged were: (a) rational thinking and self-talk, (b) positive focus and orientation, (c) social support, (d) time management, (e) pre-competitive mental preparation and anxiety management, (f) training hard and smart, (g) isolation and deflection, and (h) ignoring the stressor. Taking this study a step further, Gould, Finch, et al. then attempted to link the type of coping strategies employed with the sources of stress experienced. The results revealed that different coping strategies emerged to deal with different sources of stress. For example, skaters dealing with relationship issues utilized strategies such as positive focus and orientation, social support, isolation and deflection and rational thinking and self-talk. However, skaters, dealing

with the psychological demands of the sport, employed techniques such as precompetitive mental preparation, anxiety management, positive focus orientation and training hard and smart.

Finally, a study by Gould, Eklund, et al. (1993) examined coping strategies utilized by athletes at the Olympic Games. Miller (1997) has indicated that the Olympic games are an event like none other with many unforeseen obstacles arising to challenge athletes. Gould, Eklund, et al. interviewed 20 male members of the US national Olympic wrestling team once on how they tried to cope with adversity at the Seoul Olympics. The interviews were structured and the transcripts were inductively analysed. Results were presented through raw data themes, higher order dimensions and frequencies reflected through percentages across the total group. The results indicated that the wrestlers engaged in four types of coping: thought control strategies (80%), task-focused strategies (40%), behavioural-based strategies (40%) and emotional control strategies (40%). In addition, Gould, Eklund et al. found that successful wrestlers seemed to have well-learned or routine-like coping strategies. Gould, Eklund, et al. contended that perhaps automatic coping skills are important for athletes as the skills have to be utilized in a short period of time during competitions and therefore need to be readily accessible. This claim would support Miller's (1997) contention that athletes who are prepared for the challenges will cope better and hence perform better at such an event.

Coping with Acute Stressors. A few studies have explored the concept of coping related to acute stressors in sport. Anshel (1990) distinguished between acute and chronic stressors indicating that chronic stressors are factors that constantly exist in competitive sport such as meeting the expectations of the coach and teammates, fulfilling personal goals, anxiety about performance success and failure, and perceptions of winning. Acute stressors, on the other hand, are factors with which an athlete is suddenly confronted, such as dealing with the pain of an

injury, making a physical performance error, contending with poor officiating, and receiving unpleasant input from others (e.g., coach, teammates, fans).

Anshel (1990) contended that athletes need to have different coping strategies for acute versus chronic stressors as they do not have time to make decisions about what coping strategies to employ during a competitive situation. Consequently, he proposed and tested an educational-intervention program called COPE with 12 female college tennis players with promising results. Athletes first learned the program, which teaches athletes how to control emotions (C), organize input (O), plan responses (P), and execute skills (E) after experiencing an acute stressor. Two dependent variables were used to indicate the success of the program – tennis performance and mood as measured by the MAACL (Multiple Affective Adjective Checklist). Results indicated that the COPE program appeared to enhance performance accuracy while reducing negative feelings (Anshel, 1990; Anshel, Gregory & Kaczmarek, 1990).

Other researchers have approached acute stressors by recommending dichotomous training approaches. Tammen (1996) investigated four female and four male elite long distance runners' use of associative versus dissociative coping strategies. During associative coping athletes focus more on their thought processes and internal perceptions such as body sensations, muscular tension and racing strategy. Dissociative coping refers to strategies to distance oneself from internal thought processes to overcome discomfort created by the thoughts. Strategies such as thinking about far away places or pleasant images and talking with others are examples of dissociative strategies. Each participant ran three to four 1500-meter trials and then responded to a number of physiological and psychological measures. Results indicated that as pace increased runners used more associative techniques and less dissociative techniques. Each participant also indicated that slower paces caused them to use more dissociative techniques. Tammen suggested

that both associative and dissociative coping strategies may be appropriate under certain conditions.

Finally, Johnston and McCabe (1993) recommended educating athletes on avoidance or approach coping strategies and then training them to identify the appropriate strategy based on the situation. They contended that “the benefit of such a dichotomy is that it allows for the rapid categorization of potentially stressful demands and the efficient selection of an appropriate coping strategy thus avoiding any paralysis by analysis in the athlete” (p. 35). Johnston and McCabe took 90 female university undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology class through a simulated golf task. Participants were trained in either approach (mental rehearsal) or avoidance (attentional focus) strategies and challenged under different conditions. After completing the task participants were asked to complete a questionnaire assessing the difficulty and emotions involved with the task. Results supported the approach strategy as an element that contributed to the participants improved scores and decreased perceptions of task demand. The strategies or programs recommended by Anshel (1990), Tammen (1996) and Johnston and McCabe (1993) are in their exploratory stage and more research is needed to examine their effectiveness.

Coping through Mental Preparation. A large part of the success of elite athletes at competitions rests with their mental skills and their ability to effectively create a state of mental readiness prior to and during the performance. For the most part, the development of these skills occurs long before the competition day arrives. Athletes practice and fine-tune their mental skills day in and day out in practice and in their non-sporting lives. Although little is known about how athletes actually practice and develop these skills and what environments are conducive to this practice, there are a number of studies that have identified the mental skills and psychological

attributes associated with outstanding performances. These studies lend insight into the mental skills that athletes are attempting to refine and develop outside of competition settings.

Orlick and Partington (1988) were two of the first researchers to assess male and female athletes' mental skills and their contribution to performance excellence. They interviewed 38 females and 37 males using a semi-structured interview process. Transcripts were both inductively and deductively analysed. Results were presented through common themes and lengthy quotes from the participants. Results indicated that successful performances were not only linked to the mental skills used during the Olympics such as focus strategies and performance imagery, but also to mental skills demonstrated by athletes in training such as high levels of commitment, quality training, goal setting, imagery training, simulation training, pre-competition and competition planning, focusing and distraction planning. Orlick and Partington (1986) also published several of the transcripts of these interviews in their book, "Psyched: Inner Views of Winning". The presentation of individual athletes' experiences in their own voice with respect to their preparation and experience at the Olympics allows the reader to see individual and between sport differences in preparation and also highlights the shared experiences of top level performers.

A follow up study by Gould, Eklund, and Jackson (1992a; 1992b) supported the findings of Orlick and Partington (1988) in relation to one specific individual sport, men's wrestling. They interviewed 20 members of the U.S. Olympic wrestling team once, regarding their best and worst Olympic performances and the mental elements that contributed to those experiences. Transcripts were inductively and deductively analysed. Results were presented through raw themes, higher order categories and direct quotes. The findings indicated that athletes who achieved positive mental states prior to their best performances attributed the systematic use of

such elements as pre-competition and competition routines and motivation strategies to their ability to achieve that appropriate mental readiness.

A couple of other studies have identified the usage of mental skills in both practice and competition settings with respect to dealing with stress and the sport experience (Gould, Finch, et al., 1993; Gould, Jackson, et al., 1993). The mental skills arising in these studies for dealing with stressful events included: self-talk, appropriate focus, social support, time management, pre-competition and competition preparation and arousal management, training hard and smart, isolation and deflection, and ignoring stressors.

From his consulting and research experiences with many great performers from various domains, Orlick (1996) developed a model called, the Wheel of Excellence. The model serves as a guide to understanding the mental skills that contribute to mental excellence and a guide to understanding the experience of national female athletes at a centralized training camp. He identified seven key components of personal excellence. The two central components of the wheel are commitment and belief, and they form the heart of the structure. To excel at anything, Orlick has found that performers need to dedicate themselves to their goals; work hard, especially in the face of adversity; and believe in themselves and their surroundings. He delineated five remaining elements as contributing to the ability to be able to achieve commitment and belief, acting as the spokes of the wheel that guide excellence. These five elements include: (a) full focus, the ability to connect with, attend to, and focus completely on the appropriate elements when necessary; (b) positive images, the ability to experience or re-experience feelings, sensations, actions or skills that are essential for the desired performance; (c) mental readiness, the ability to consistently create, adjust and carry the most effective mental state into a performance situation; (d) distraction control, the ability to maintain or regain the

appropriate focus and state when faced with distracting elements, obstacles and/or feedback; and (e) constructive evaluation, the ability to effectively analyze performance and draw out valuable lessons that will facilitate future development.

In sum, results from these studies on coping reveal two important findings that are applicable to the female athlete experiences of centralized training camps. First, coping is a complex, multidimensional process, and female athletes at centralized camps are likely to engage in a variety of different strategies to cope, not only with performance demands, but also with other specific demands such as time management, interpersonal relationships, media, and finances. Second, there are potentially two different kinds of stressors with which female athletes will be coping with at the centralized camp: acute stressors and chronic stressors.

Although the studies on coping offer some applicability to the female athletes' experiences of a centralized training camp, they also are limited in a number of ways. First, although the development of the COPE scale has had a significant impact on coping research in sport (Crocker, 1992; Madden et al., 1989; Madden, Summers, & Brown, 1990) the psychometric properties of the WCC and COPE remain problematic and in question (Endler & Parker, 1990; Grove, Eklund & Heard, 1997; Stanton & Franz, 1999). For example, Stanton and Franz (1999) recently challenged the notion of emotion-focused coping in mainstream psychology indicating that a problem lies with the conception of emotion-focused coping strategy. They argue that measurement of emotion-focused coping often is confounded with measures of distress and psychopathology thus linking this type of coping with maladjustment. They have suggested a category called emotional-approach coping. Factor analysis has revealed two distinct factors in their category: (a) emotional processing (e.g., "I take time to figure out what I'm really feeling"; "I realize that my feelings are valid and important"), and (b) emotional expression (e.g., "I take

time to express my emotions”, “I let my feelings come out freely”) (p. 100). These factors did not merge with other known coping factors such as problem focused, avoidance or seeking social support. Results have indicated that women more than men reported use of these two factors in response to stressors. This issue has not yet been explored with inventories within the sport domain.

Second, the studies on coping in sport have focused primarily on the coping strategies selected by athletes rather than on the actual athlete thought processes that led them to their coping selection (e.g., Crocker, 1992; Gould, Eklund, et al., 1993; Gould, Finch, et al., 1993; Madden et al., 1990). As such, our understanding of the athletes’ experiences is removed from the context, and as a result, the complexity of the situations with which they must cope becomes simplified. This focus is perpetuated by a positivist paradigm that is looking to uncover the truth before a full grasp of the complexity of coping in sport is explored. In this regard the use of questionnaires and simulated coping situations do not provide a ripe environment for the complexity of coping to unfold. If coping is to be considered as a process, then understanding that process needs to entail more than simply measuring the outcome.

Third, the field of coping has been dominated by a quantitative stance and although a few qualitative studies exist, the researchers employing these qualitative strategies continue to adhere to positivist ideology. This focus has affected researchers’ choices within data collection, analysis, interpretations and conclusions. For example, interviews with athletes occur only once whether they are face-to-face or over the phone. The difficulty with this approach is that if other ideas or comments arise for athletes after the conclusion of the interviews, the athletes have limited opportunity to express those thoughts and this information. As a result, information that could potentially add to the richness of the interviews is lost. In addition, the one-shot interview

approach used in all the cited qualitative studies speaks volumes as to the importance given to the researcher-participant relationship. A positive relationship nurtured over time between researchers and participants can only contribute to the richness of the information derived overall and better inform our understanding of coping.

Finally, these studies on coping in sport are also limited in that they focus primarily on individual sports and male athletes. Once again we see the experience of female athletes eclipsed through assumptions of sameness of female and male experiences. Thus, “differences in life trajectories, actions and lenses for looking at the world that themselves may be engendered” (Stewart, 1998, p. 61) remain unexplored and undervalued.

Team Experiences

In order to understand national female athletes’ experiences of team sports at a centralized training camp, it is imperative to briefly explore the literature on athletes’ experiences of team sports. At centralized training camps, sports teams or squads are similar to other groups in that they “involve several individuals with varying relationships to each other interacting through various processes over changing times and environmental conditions” (Gill, 1986, p. 209). Nixon (1992) characterized the nature of these relationships as a social network, in which a web of interaction binds group members, structures communication patterns, and formalizes behavioural expectations. Aspects such as individual attributes, leadership, and the environment are but a few of the factors that will influence this social network and play an integral role in shaping the development of the group into a cohesive unit. Group dynamics, the study of group behaviour, then becomes central to the understanding of the athletes’ experiences in a group setting.

The factors contributing to the development of the group are complex. Various conceptual frameworks have been suggested to explain within group operations. For example, McGrath (1984) developed a framework that captures the complexity of the within-group process by highlighting the intricate connection between the group interaction process and various factors. He claimed that group interaction is the central element of group development with factors and relationships within the model both influencing, and being influenced by, the interaction processes. He hypothesized that individual characteristics, group structure, environmental properties and processes internal to the interaction itself influence group interaction, which in turn then influences individual members, the environment and group relationships.

Carron (1988) proposed a sport specific model to explain sport team development that is significantly less complex than McGrath's (1984) model. Carron (1988) displays group development in a linear fashion with the various inputs, "throughputs" and outputs operating within athletic groups. Member attributes (social, psychological and physical characteristics) and group environment (location) make up the inputs; group structure (positions, roles and status of members), group cohesion (group unity) and group processes (motivation, communication and decision making) constitute the "throughputs"; and group (performance stability) and individual (satisfaction) products make up the output category.

The majority of research that has explored Carron's (1988) model has used positive group cohesion as a yardstick for successful group development. Carron (1982) defined cohesiveness as a "dynamic process, which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its goals and objectives" (p. 124). The definition distinguishes between two forms of cohesion – task and social. Task cohesion is the degree to which members of a group work together to achieve a specific task. Social cohesion reflects the degree to which the

members of a team like each other and enjoy each other's company (Carron, 1982). These two dimensions of cohesion appear to work independently of each other and are linked with the objectives of the group (i.e., more socially or task oriented) (Terry, 1997).

Moreover, Carron and Hausenblas (1998) indicated that four main factors influence group cohesion: (a) personal factors, (b) leadership factors, (c) environmental factors, and (d) team factors. Unfortunately, the factors contributing to group development have not been well studied due to the primary focus on the cohesion-performance relationship. Concomitantly, there has been a lack of consideration given to the impact of practice and training environments in sport where culture and dynamics are created. As Brawley (1990) contends:

It seems unrealistic to presume that the dynamic nature of group cohesion can be understood if investigators continually ignore the periods of time when the greatest amount of intragroup interaction occurs...It involves the examination of the team's interaction during practices, scrimmages and other team functions that occur with greater regularity than competition. (p. 370)

Recently, three studies have lent some insight into the factors affecting group development within training. Already mentioned, Woodman and Hardy (2001) explored sources of stress for athletes' in relation to their environment. Eight female and eight male international elite athletes preparing for a major international competition were interviewed once using a semi-structured interview approach. Although they were training for individual sports, the athletes were training together within a group environment leading up to the competition. The main sources of stress identified were selection, training environment, finances, nutrition, goals and expectations, coaches and coaching style, team atmosphere, roles, support network, and communication. Woodman and Hardy suggested that coaches and governing bodies need to be

aware of and learn to balance the complex array of factors affecting the athletes' experiences. Their suggestions included clearly outlined selection criteria and process; effective team-building strategies; coach education, particularly related to individual issues of meaningfulness (e.g., weight control); compatible pre-competition plans; and realistic goal setting.

Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery and Peterson (1999) looked at factors affecting the performance of more and less successful teams at the Olympics. Three female and seven male coaches participated in a one shot semi-structured interview. A total of 12 female and 11 male elite athletes participated in focus groups ranging in size from two to four athletes. Similar to the interviews with the coaches, a structured interview guide was used, however the researchers were free to explore topics beyond the scope of the interview if and when they arose. Interviews were inductively analysed and results presented in individual team profiles as described by the researchers and through a summary outlining the positive and negative themes influencing all eight teams. Various individual team struggles and processes were highlighted in the individual profiles. Overall, teams that met or exceeded their Olympic performance expectations highlighted factors such as team training/residency programs, crowd support, family/friend support, mental preparation, and focus and commitment factors as contributing to their success. Teams that did not meet their Olympic performance expectations cited planning problems, team cohesion concerns, lack of experience, travel problems, coach issues, and focus and commitment as contributing to these failures. This study offers some insight not only into the positive and negative factors acting on the athletes but also how the factors interacted to create the performance environment. Gould et al. indicated that this study supports the need to expand our view of the athlete and consider environmental and team factors within the analysis.

Finally, Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, Dieffenback and McCann (2001) examined the lessons that athletes and coaches learned through their Olympic experiences. The study explored the experience of athletes from two different Olympics. For the Atlanta Olympics, 296 athletes and 46 coaches were surveyed through an open-ended questionnaire. In addition, 10 coaches and 8 athletes (4 that met or exceeded Olympic expectations and 4 that did not meet expectations) were interviewed. For the Nagano Olympics, 83 athletes and 19 coaches were surveyed through an open-ended questionnaire. Furthermore, individual phone interviews also were conducted with 7 athletes (4 that met or exceeded Olympic expectations and 3 that did not meet expectations). Interviews were inductively analysed and the most frequently reported lessons presented for both the athlete and the coaching groups. Athletes identified the following elements as lessons: (a) mental preparation and training (19.2 % - Atlanta; 21.8% Nagano); (b) optimal physical training while avoiding overtraining (18.3 % - Atlanta; 11% Nagano); (c) coaching (9.3 % - Atlanta; 11% Nagano); (d) distraction and performance awareness (4 % - Atlanta; 6% Nagano). Other lessons identified by athletes were the Olympic village, team cohesion and harmony, international competition, family and friend involvement, plans and adhering to plans, support personnel, team selection and trials, dealing with media, travel and opening ceremonies. Coaches also identified several factors of their experience as lessons: (a) general preparation (11.6 % - Atlanta; 12.5% Nagano); (b) optimal physical training and avoiding over training (10.9 % - Atlanta; 6.3% Nagano); (c) mental preparation (9.8 % - Atlanta; 14.6% Nagano). Other lessons also emerged with many reflecting the categories identified by athletes. Gould et al. identified that in addition to the elements of the literature that the finding supported, there were also several performance elements that have not received much attention in the literature such as family support versus distraction.

In sum, these studies have identified a number of important factors that have some applicability to the female athletes' experiences of a centralized training camp. First, team development is a complex and multifaceted process and the factors that affect this development are still relatively unexplored. Second, social dynamics and the social setting play an important role in the experience of athletes. Finally, the physical environment and the various structural aspects of the setting also influence athletes' experiences and group success overall. The centralized training camp offers a number of unique environmental factors (e.g., the location of the camp, the camp objectives, the living environment) that could serve to promote or discourage group development.

There are a few limitations of the research on teams in the sport psychology literature. First, until recently, the research on team development and cohesion in sport has relied mainly on quantitative methodologies to generate knowledge in the area. Given the dynamic nature of the field it seems reasonable to suggest that the research could benefit from entertaining different ontological, epistemological, and methodological approaches to the study of the group and athletes' experiences. Indeed, engaging in qualitative versus quantitative methodologies has already served to uncover aspects of this process that have not been previously disclosed in the literature (Gould et al., 1999; Gould et al., 2001; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Second, female teams have been poorly studied in the area of group development (Spink, 1995). Although a few studies now exist that examine exclusively female teams or groups, the current trend is still to explore combined samples of female and male athletes. Unfortunately, this liberal feminist approach to the research of simply including women in the analysis is not enough. This approach fails to acknowledge the nature of male-defined sport and the different experiences of females and males that may arise from this culture (Hall, 1996). Moreover, this perspective also limits

our understanding of differences among women, such as ethnicity, age and sexual orientation that lead to different expectations and experiences in sport (Dewar & Horn, 1992; Hall, 1996).

To summarize the literature review, it has become apparent that a number of factors play a role in athletes' experiences in sport. First, athletes experience a range of emotions from enjoyment and stress to burnout. The sources of these emotions are varied and can be related to both competitive and non-competitive elements. Second, physical training influences athletes' moods during intense training periods. In many cases these moods return to normal once training is decreased, however there are some athletes whose moods remain altered even after a reduction in training. Third, social and organizational factors have emerged only recently as playing a significant role in athletes' experiences on a number of levels. The full impact of these two areas is only beginning to emerge in the literature and more research exploring these elements needs to occur within different contexts.

The research has offered us some insight into the experience of national female athletes of team sports during centralized training camps. However, many questions still remain. The aim of this study is to continue to allow the diversity of athletes' experiences to unfold, not only through exploring a different and specific context, a particular gender and athletes from a team sport, but also by adopting an alternative paradigm that influenced my approach as a researcher on all levels of the research process. These findings from the literature and the suggestions for expanding the researcher in sport psychology have set the stage for the conceptual framework adopted for this study.

Conceptual Framework

I chose a social constructivist perspective informed by contemporary feminist theory in sport to guide this study. My hope was to broaden the current scholarship by studying national female athletes' experiences through an alternative paradigm that embeds ontological, epistemological and methodological choices throughout the research process. The reasons and resulting contributions emerging from adopting this paradigm are outlined below.

First, from an ontological perspective, social constructivism and feminism adopt the view that reality exists in multiple forms “depending on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors that differentiate the interpreters” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113; Harding, 1991). As a result, realities described by participants are diverse, socially constructed, evolving and changing (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 1998). Through a social constructivist and feminist paradigm, manifold realities are acknowledged and accepted and the goal is to highlight the uniqueness and meaning expressed by the participants. Moreover, informing social constructivism by contemporary feminist theory in sport (Hall, 1996; Krane, 1994) places women at the center of the analysis and allows for the correction of “both the invisibility and distortion of female experience” (Lather, 1991, p. 71). Moreover, emphasis can be placed on issues of power in human interactions and cultural pressures on females that can become restricted by preconceived categories that diminish and reflect the dominant culture (Harding, 1991).

Second, the epistemological stance of social constructivism and feminism is transactional and subjectivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Harding, 1991). It views the researcher and participant as co-constructing meaning during the process of the research. The researcher and the participant co-construct “in the way the researcher’s questions, observations, and comments shape the respondents’ actions, whereas the respondents’ answers and explorations influence the meaning

ascribed and interpretations negotiated by the researcher” (Manning, 1997; p. 96). Furthermore, trust, respect and mutual understanding between the participants and the researcher, developed over time, are viewed as necessary achievements in order for the full complexity of the participants’ meanings to emerge.

Finally, the methodological perspective of both social constructivism and feminism suggests that the products emerging from the research are a result of a mutually constructed process by the researcher and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Harding, 1991). It is through this recursive interaction that values, beliefs, insights, and meaning making for the participants and the researcher emerge. As a result the research product should represent a depiction of how participants have come to know their experiences within a particular context along with the researcher’s tentative explanations of the meanings made. These “topographical maps” of the participants’ experiences emphasize salient features of their meanings for them and within that, other elements of their experience are omitted (Kvale, 1996). These understood omissions also play a central role in how researchers come to know and interpret their participants’ experiences.

We often want to go beyond a simple description of what we see to develop an explanation which will help account for the things we see....When we do this, we must remember above all that “the map is not the territory,” that our explanation of a thing is not the thing itself. (Reason, 1981, p. 243).

Four assumptions grounded in a social constructivist perspective guided this study. They have been adapted from the ideas of Rigazio-DiGilio (1997) and modified for applicability to national female athletes of a team sport attending a centralized training camp. First, the female athletes’ experiences of a centralized training camp are a reflection of their own unique journeys.

Therefore, the athletes' responses and actions within that situation are based on their own world-views developed from their past experiences as well as their current cognitive, affective and behavioural processes.

Second, athletes attending centralized training camps operate within a variety of environments – training, competition, home and work/school – and interact with a variety of relationships – teammates, coaches, family, friends, roommates, bosses – within those environments. These two components together, the environments and relationships, are considered to define the various contexts within which athletes exist. The transaction between the athletes and their contexts is viewed as playing a significant role in the development of the athletes' world-views as well as the groups' collective world-view for each environment.⁴

Third, the female athletes' experiences of the centralized camp are a reflection of their specific world-views and of the salient aspects of the athlete-context transactions they have experienced. Female athletes are not expected to exhibit a particular pattern in their experiences. Rather their experiences are seen as a reflection of the impact of each athlete-context transaction and their ability to maintain a goodness of fit between their individual needs and the expectations of the environment.

Finally, difficulties experienced by athletes reflect incongruities between world-views and contextual demands. That is, the various world-views and demands held by the athletes may, at times, conflict with each other. This conflict may place the athletes in uncomfortable positions where they feel compromised by their individual world-views and limited by their resources (i.e., cognitive, affective, behavioural) to meet the internal and external demands for change.

In conclusion, an understanding of the female national athletes' experiences at the centralized training camps may lead to a greater understanding of the uniqueness and complexity

of this phenomenon. In addition, the alternative theoretical paradigm applied to all levels of the research may offer new insights and identify significant interactions within a specific context, the centralized training camp, which have not been previously identified or explored. Moreover, a clearer understanding of the factors contributing to the experience along with the process of the athletes' thoughts and feelings regarding these factors are allowed to emerge.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of eight female national athletes of a team sport in a centralized training camp. The following research question guided this inquiry: How do female national athletes of a team sport experience the activity of centralized training camp? This question was further subdivided into three specific research questions:

- a) What is the process of the experience for each of these athletes and what strategies do they use to progress through the centralized camp?
- b) How do athletes experience the various contexts of their lives during the centralized camp and what strategies do they use to progress through them?
- c) How do athletes come to understand and take into account their experience? What have athletes learned from the experience?

Chapter 2 - Endnotes

¹ Hanin (2000) broadened the research on the performance-anxiety relationship by exploring other positive and negative emotions, purposed to also contribute to, and/or detract from athletes' performances. His model, Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning (IZOF), is unique not only for its broader conception of emotion but also for its idiographic approach. Preliminary studies have sought to explore the emotional patterns and make-up of both male athletes and teams within different sport settings (Hanin & Syrja, 1995a; Hanin & Syrja, 1995b; Hanin & Syrja, 1996). The results of these studies have lent support to the idea that performance is affected by more than just feelings of anxiety. As well there is support for individual differences in positive and negative emotions influencing performance and across zones of optimal functioning.

² Martin Seligman has been a significant force recently behind the positive psychology movement when he became president of the American Psychological Association. More research in the area has emerged. For example, the January 2000 issue of the *American Psychologist* is dedicated exclusively to issues of positive psychology (e.g., happiness, excellence, optimal functioning).

³ The experience sampling method is a process whereby participants in the study wear a beeper that is programmed to go off randomly eight times a day. The participants record their feelings and experiences along with their current motivation regarding the activity engaged in at the time of the beep in log booklets. (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987)

⁴ "We co-construct individual world views by participating in the environment and we co-construct collective world-views by participating in resonating experiences within relationships that evolve in the environment" (Rigazio-DiGilio, 1997, p. 85).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Approach

In order to gain a rich description of the experience at a centralized training camp for female athletes of a team sport, an interview approach informed by phenomenology was chosen for this inquiry. Phenomenology is the systematic investigation of subjectivity, and its purpose is to study the world as it appears to individuals in and through consciousness (Burlington & Karlson, 1984). Phenomenological inquiry is guided by the question: “What is the structure and essence of the experience of this phenomenon for these people” (Patton, 1990, p. 69). The reality then, for each experience, will be defined by how athletes know and make meaning of that experience.

A phenomenological influence allowed for the exploration of the experience of national female athletes involved in a centralized training camp through their own voices. This influence occurred on three levels. First, the goal of this study was not to get answers to questions, to test hypotheses, or to evaluate, as these elements do not adequately reflect the complexity of athletes’ experiences. Instead, the goal was to understand these women’s experiences and to allow myself, and other readers, to develop their own understanding from the meaning the participants made. An underlying assumption of this approach is that the meaning people make of their experience is crucial to the way they act (Seidman, 1998). Moreover, this approach aligns with a feminist perspective that acknowledges participants as the experts of their own experiences (Bredemeier, Desertrain, Fisher, Getty, Slocum, Stephens, & Warren, 1991; Krane, 1994).

On the second level, I approached the inquiry by suspending any preconceived ideas, theories or personal experiences (Ashworth, 1996; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). I discussed and

explicitly identified my assumptions and preconceptions regarding the experience of female athletes at centralized training camps through conversations with my advisor and recordings in my journal. I included an identification of my biases about what I was likely to find, attempting to base these in the relevant literature and on my own experiences. I included a description of my own experience with centralized training camps along with a description of how those experiences may have influenced my view of the information derived (Ashworth, 1996; Nelson & Poulon, 1997). The suspension of presuppositions was an ongoing process throughout the research project, facilitating an understanding of the experience through the participants' perspective. This process, referred to as bracketing, was an attempt to open myself up to the experiences or "life-worlds" of the participants under study in order to encounter them as newly as possible and to describe them precisely as they were experienced (Giorgi, 1997).

On the third level, the voice of the participants was allowed to emerge by presenting the results of the inquiry in a descriptive fashion, revealing rich information that described the structures and meanings of the experience as they appeared to the participants. In essence, description is the articulation of the "given as given" in contrast to speculation or interpretation which accounts for the phenomenon in terms of some factor external to the "given" (Giorgi, 1997). Concomitantly, this approach was in keeping with a feminist perspective: women in the study are placed at the center of the analysis; their voices are allowed to emerge in clarity and fullness; and contradictions in and among these voices are recognized and acknowledged (Harding, 1991; Krane, 1994).

Participants

The participants in this study were eight female Canadian national athletes of one team sport who experienced the activity of a centralized training camp. Participants were from the

same national team and all attended the same six-week centralized training camp. All the interviews occurred within an eight-month period following the camp in order to facilitate participants' reflections, reconstructions and articulations of their experiences. An attempt was made to purposively sample participants on the team in order to ensure a broad perspective of the experience of the centralized training camp. Elements such as age, national team experience, home province, position, starting status and injury status were considered (See Table 1) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nelson & Poulon, 1997; Patton, 1990). Patton (1990) suggested that, "When selecting a small sample of great diversity, the data collection and analysis will yield two kinds of findings: (a) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and (b) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (p. 172).

Participants were identified through a personal contact. Both Seidman (1998) and Miller (1998) contend that, if possible, participants should be accessed through their peers rather than through "gatekeepers" in order to minimize participants' perceptions of a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the participant. I was able to gain access to the national team through a friend who was a member of the team. I contacted her by telephone and explained the study to see if she and/or some of her teammates might be interested in participating. We arranged to meet in person to discuss the requirements of the participants for this study and about sampling a select group from her team that would reflect a range of experiences from the centralized training camp. After our meeting, she proceeded to contact several of her teammates by e-mail or telephone to tell them about the project that I was undertaking. Once they e-mailed or called her back and indicated their interest, she passed along their names, e-mails and

telephone numbers to me along with a brief biography of each of the players and how she perceived that they might bring a unique perspective to the experience of the camp.

After careful consideration of a number of factors such as their age, experience and home province (see Table 1), I contacted eight individuals. Seven out of eight participants were first contacted by telephone and one participant's initial contact occurred via e-mail. The goal was to interview all eight participants in person. However, due to the location and the possible three-week duration required to complete the interview process, it was not possible to meet face-to-face with four out of the eight participants. I made the decision along with my advisor to conduct the interviews with four of the participants over the telephone. This decision was deemed appropriate in order to access participants who would contribute to the range of experiences from the camp. My advisor suggested that I include in my researcher's journal a reflection of the interviews over the telephone to identify any difficulties, ease or differences in rapport or openness on the part of the participants. A number of studies within the sport psychology literature have conducted telephone interviews either with half or all of the participant groups (Gould, Jackson, et al., 1993; Gould et al. 2001). A few researchers indicated that they detected no difference between the quality and depth of the data derived in comparison to the face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, Taylor and Bogden (1998) have contended that participants may actually be more forth coming in a telephone interviews due to their perceived anonymity.

I was initially a little concerned (and disappointed) that I was not going to meet face to face with each of the participants. I suspected that creating an effective rapport and relationship was going to be challenging enough within a face-to-face meeting. I imagined that the telephone interview format might pose additional challenges to rapport development. However, I can actually concur with Bogden and Taylor (1998), that participants seemed just as, if not more,

comfortable over the telephone. I had one participant who was “munching” in my ear as we discussed her reflections on the camp. I had another participant who was watching a playoff hockey game with the sound down and cheered when her team scored. Certainly, these actions could be perceived as participants who were distracted and not fully engaged in the interviews, however, I suggest that these actions actually reflected a comfortableness and openness with the process and with me that actually served to enhance the information derived.

During the initial telephone or e-mail contact, I introduced the study briefly and conveyed how I had gained access to the person’s name. All participants indicated they were expecting me to call. Originally, I intended the initial telephone contact to be an opportunity to try to arrange a time to meet to discuss the study in person and in more detail as recommended by Seidman (1998). However, this was not possible in the case of the participants whose interviews would be conducted over the telephone. In the situation where I was in the same location as the participants, most indicated they were on a fairly tight schedule, and therefore, would prefer to just begin the interviews. As such, I used the initial telephone contact as an opportunity to begin to develop the mutual respect necessary for the interview process. I introduced myself, and my background, and then proceeded to describe the inquiry. I described how their contributions would be important both on an individual and group level. The participants were provided with the full information regarding the study, their proposed role within it and the purpose of the three-interview process (Seidman, 1998).

All eight participants agreed to be involved. At that point I scheduled the date, time and location for the first interview. I made sure to be flexible enough to accommodate the participants’ choice of time and date and, in the case of the four face-to-face interview participants, the location. After the telephone conversation, I sent a follow-up package either by

e-mail, fax or regular mail to the participants thanking them for agreeing to participate and confirming the first interview appointment (Seidman, 1998). I also included a brief demographic questionnaire to be completed along with a detailed consent form (see Appendix A & B). In the case of the four telephone interview participants, I requested that they mail or fax the consent form back to me prior to the first interview, which they did.

Before the actual interview, each participant was once again informed regarding the purpose of the study, the data collection process and the intended usage of the data. Participants were fully informed of the study and of their role within it. In the face-to-face interviews, participants were asked to read the consent form thoroughly, address any questions to the researcher and sign the form if they were in agreement with the process. All the face-to-face interviews took place in the participant's home. In the telephone interviews, participants were asked to read the consent form thoroughly, address any questions by telephone or e-mail to the researcher, sign the form if they were in agreement with the process, and mail or fax it back to me before the first interview. As well these participants were asked if they had any questions prior to the start of the first interview.

Confidentiality was assured to the participants and pseudonyms were used to protect their anonymity. Pseudonyms will also be used in any publications resulting from this inquiry. Selecting pseudonyms was a challenging process, as I wanted to ensure that the names selected were not just random and arbitrary. It was important to me that they reflected the essence of the participant or at least my perception of that essence. At first I thought I would ask the participants to select their own names, however, I then decided that I would do it and if they had any objections, I would happily change the name to one suggested by them. So when I sent the profiles back to the participants for their feedback, I asked them to consider the name that had

been chosen for them carefully, and if they had any objections or would just prefer something else, to let me know. Thankfully, all of them actually liked their alternative name, and I use the word thankfully not because of any negativity toward having to change the names but rather because I had become quite attached to the names over that year; probably a reflection of the effort and consideration that I felt that I put into each selection.

Confidentiality was achieved through the careful storage of tapes and transcriptions and by assuring the participants that these materials were accessible only to the researcher. Participants were given the option of withdrawing at any time during the research process without prejudice. None chose to do so. To further promote an atmosphere of safety, participants were sent their transcripts and their individual profiles for verification and minor revisions.

Sport Team

The specific sport used in this study is not disclosed in order to further protect participants' confidentiality. The importance of this confidentiality to participants became clear when I viewed their feedback regarding their individual profiles. A number of participants highlighted changing particular features of their profiles related to elements that they considered to be personally identifying. However, I felt it is important to present some information regarding the structure and nature of the team in a more general sense with care taken not to reveal any distinguishing features of the team or individuals.

When this particular national team is not together, the athletes train independently and at national training centers located in various large cities throughout Canada. Each center has a coach who is responsible for the running of practices and for contributing to the technical development of the athletes. Athletes are also given a general physical training program from the national team head coach to follow throughout the year. It includes elements of strengthening and

conditioning related specifically to the sport. National team athletes are required to send the head coach their training logs and personal standards achieved on various physiological tests throughout the year. In addition, all the athletes participated in community teams and programs with training directed by their community coaches.

During the course of the year, the national team would get together infrequently, perhaps once or twice, to train for a short period of time (one to two weeks) and then, occasionally, be involved in an international competition. Travel, food, accommodation, and some additional expenses such as equipment needs and clothing are covered when athletes are together training with the national team. In addition athletes receive funding through a government carding system, which entitles them to a monthly stipend of \$550 each. All eight participants in this study were carded. Tuition fees for Canadian university programs and degrees also are covered under the carding agreement.

The national team also is sponsored by an athletic company who provides various clothing and equipment to the athletes free of charge. This brand of clothing and equipment is to be worn exclusively by the athletes during training camps and competitions. A few athletes also have personal sponsorship from other clothing and equipment companies, but due to the national team contract are not allowed to wear these brands at national team training camps and competitions.

All administrative and decision-making powers are carried out by the sport governing body or national sport organization (NSO). At the time of this study, athletes did not have representation on any board or committee within their NSO.

Procedure

This study explored both individual profiles and shared experiences of the participants. In-depth interviewing was the primary mode of data collection in this inquiry. All the participants were involved in three in-depth interviews each ranging in duration from 45 to 90 minutes. The first interview established the participants' experiences within the context of their lives. The second interview allowed the participants to recreate their experiences in detail within the context of the centralized training camp. The final interview encouraged participants to reflect on the meaning that their centralized training camp experiences had for them (Seidman, 1998).

Interviews

According to Seidman (1998) "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3). He considers interviewing as "a necessary, if not completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry" (p. 5) for achieving this goal. The method chosen for this inquiry combined focused life-history interviewing and in-depth interviewing informed by phenomenology (Seidman, 1998). It consisted of a series of three unstructured 90-minute interviews that allow the participants and interviewer to cover the range of the experiences and to place them in the context of the participants' lives. An interview guide facilitated the interview process. Each interview was guided by the primary goal of that interview, and therefore additional questions presented in the interview guide under each section were merely suggestions and only asked when the associated topics arose (see Appendix C).

Interview one was a focused life history of the participant. The goal of this interview was to put the participants' experiences of centralized training camp in context by allowing them to tell as much as possible about their life in sport up to the point where they became involved with

that particular centralized training camp. By asking how the participants became involved, I wanted them to recreate significant events in their past family, school, athletic and work lives that placed their participation in the centralized training camp in the context of those experiences (Seidman, 1998).

Interview two focused on the details of the participant's experiences of the centralized training camp. The purpose of the second interview was to concentrate on the details of the participants' experiences during the centralized camp. Participants were asked to review and bring into the interview any personal documents (such as journals, training schedules, scrapbooks, photographs and clothing) that they feel may help them reconstruct their experiences¹. I asked them to recreate the details of their experiences through such aspects as their stories about the centralized training camp and detailed descriptions of their day-to-day lives as a way of extracting the details of their internal processes and external dealings.

Interview three explored the participant's reflections on the meaning of the experience or more specifically on what she had learned from the experience. Seidman (1998) defined this as the "intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (p.12). The goal of the third interview was to ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their centralized training camp experiences in as much detail as possible. Through this process participants were required to make sense of meaning of the experiences and explore how aspects in their lives played a role in bringing them to their present perspectives. It also required them to look at the experience in detail and within the context. Even though interview two and three are the primary interests of this inquiry, they cannot exist in isolation from interview one. The act of reflecting and clarifying the past experiences established the conditions for interview two and three.²

Each interview ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length. It appeared that this time frame was sufficient enough for the information to be expressed in adequate detail (Seidman, 1998). For the most part, the series of three interviews were spaced somewhere between three to seven days apart as recommended by Seidman (1998). However, in two cases this was not possible due to the schedules of the participants. In these two instances there was up to a 14-day space between the first and second interview. It was felt, however, that this spacing still provided the participants with time to reflect on the previous interview, but not too much time to lose the association from the previous interview. To supplement the process of reflection and to facilitate association between the interviews, especially in the case of the longer gaps, all participants received a copy of the transcript from the previous interview, two to three days after said interview (participants also eventually received a copy of the transcript from the final interview). They were asked to review the transcript and make any additions, deletions or comments either in writing or at the beginning of the next interview. The three-interview process along with the transcript verifications also served to enhance the quality of the interview process as well as to develop a positive relationship between the interviewer and participants.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with one female national athlete of a different team sport. She had been with the national program for eight years and had attended numerous training camps of both a centralized and non-centralized nature as well as international competitions. The same procedures and interview process described above were used in this pilot project. All three interviews occurred over the telephone. The goal of this pilot project was twofold. First, it provided an opportunity to explore the interview process and to ascertain the benefits and challenges of employing such a methodology from the participant's perspective. Second, it

provided me with an opportunity to explore my skills as an interviewer and with this particular technique especially over the telephone.

At the end of each interview, the participant was asked to reflect on the interview process itself. Specifically she was asked to highlight: (a) the comforts and challenges with the process, (b) her perspective and understanding of the questions, (c) her comfort and ability in reconstruction, and (d) her overall evaluation of my skills as a interviewer along with suggestions for making the interview process better overall. A few modifications were made based on her suggestions. First, two additional questions/probes were added (“What advice would you give less experienced players attending their first centralized training camp?” and “What recommendations would you make to improve or enhance your centralized training camp experience?”). The participant in the pilot study indicated that these questions might enhance athletes’ reflection on their experience within the bigger picture of centralized training camps overall. Indeed, Seidman (1985) suggested that at times it may be advantageous to ask all the participants one or two of the same questions. This process may actually facilitate an understanding of both the diversity and shared meaning for the group. As a result both these questions were asked to all the participants. Second, a more detailed question was derived, and purpose given, for interview three. The participant from the pilot study indicated that the third interview was definitely the most challenging. She explained this had to do with the reflective nature of the process and the uncertainty with that process.

With respect to her evaluation of my interviewing skills, the participant indicated that she felt very comfortable talking with me over the telephone. As well, she indicated that my probing questions were good, challenging and promoted a more in-depth reflection on her part on certain

issues. She said the process overall had been good for her and had really made her revisit her experience in a different and more beneficial way.

Data Management and Analysis

Several researchers have recommended that the processes of data collection and analysis should inform each other, providing a recursive process from which new questions for future interviews can be framed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1984). However, in keeping with the phenomenological stance of interviewing, Seidman (1998) proposed the contrary. In order to avoid imposing meaning from one participant's interview to the next, I avoided in-depth data analysis until all interviews with all participants had been completed. However, I did not completely remove myself from the data. Rather, I listened to, transcribed, reflected on, and made notes about, the interviews. I recorded any thoughts, feelings and developing presuppositions in my journal and bracketed them prior to the next interview.

Tapes were transcribed verbatim. As previously indicated, a few days after each interview, participants were given a copy of the transcribed document. They were asked to read the document and to make any additions, deletions or comments to the interview that they felt would help clarify or better represent their description. Furthermore, at the beginning of interviews two and three, participants were asked if they had any thoughts from the last interview or if they wished to expand on any topics before beginning the next interview. Numerous copies of the transcripts were made with one copy stored on a separate disk for precautionary reasons and another disk used as the working copy. Two printed copies were made. One copy was used to make reductions and for analysis and the other remained untouched and was used as a contextual reference.

Analysis of the transcript occurred on two levels: (a) profiles of participants, and (b) shared experiences among the participant group. Profiles emphasized the contextually bound uniqueness of each participant's experience while shared experiences revealed the overlap of the various perspectives. The underlying purpose of the data analysis was not to make generalizations about the experience of female national athletes of team sports. Rather the goal was to present profiles and shared experiences so readers can make their own associations between their experiences and that of the participants. Presenting the experience in the participants' voices emphasized, more powerfully, the meaning they have made from their experience.

Profiles. For each participant I developed a profile of her experience at the centralized training camp. Profiles are self-contained narratives detailing each participant's experience at the centralized training camp and the meaning she made of her experience. A profile is more than an expanded account. "People's stories--their reconstruction of factors in their life, their bringing order to events, characters and themes-- convey knowledge and provide a path to understanding that is grounded in the concrete details of experience" (Seidman, 1983, p. 665). Seidman (1998) views this presentation of the material as the most consistent with the interview process. "It allows us to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time" (Seidman, 1998, p. 102).

In developing the profiles, the goal of the research was considered: To understand the experience of female national team athletes attending a centralized training camp. Interview one focused on the sport life history of the participants and as such was reduced separately and used as an introduction to each profile to place the participants' experiences within the context of their lives. I used the following steps to craft these life-history-in-sport narratives. First, the tapes were

listened to a few times and then the transcripts read and reread thoroughly. During readings, salient experiences and interactions within the participants' pasts were highlighted. Second, I asked the following question to decide which experiences to include in their life histories: "What is absolutely essential in the participant's history, for if it were missing, would not represent the life path through sport for this participant?" From the results of this question, I then crafted a third person narrative of the participants' life histories in sport, interspersed with quotes from the participant in question. Only the most salient elements of the participants' experience were included and the events and experiences were presented in keeping with a sense of process and time with respect to the participants' lives. Participants were sent a copy of their life history in sport narrative and asked to read the document and to make any additions, deletions or comments to the narrative that they felt would help clarify or better represent their life history in sport.

Interviews two and three dealt specifically with the centralized training camp experience and the meaning derived from that experience. Although the meaning of the experience for the participants was the focus of the third interview, meaning was embedded within both interviews two and three, and therefore these interviews were reduced together and served as the main content sources for the profiles. Profile development entailed four main steps.

First, the tapes were listened to a few times and the transcripts read and reread thoroughly. During readings, noteworthy sections were highlighted throughout the text. Second, certain parts of the text were deleted. Seidman (1985) proposed guidelines for omitting certain materials. Those materials falling into the following areas were omitted when deemed appropriate: (a) repetitious material; (b) ad hominem material; (c) material unconnected to other passages in the interview or to the larger context; (d) material that would make the participant vulnerable if she were identified; (e) material, if taken out of context of the interview, that was

not fair to the participant. Third, all the sections that were marked as noteworthy were gathered together in a single transcript. This modified transcript was then read and reread, applying the following question while reading the text: What is absolutely essential in this text, for if it were missing, would not represent the experience of the participant? The goal was to reduce the transcript to its most concise form. Only the most essential sections were retained. Finally, profiles were developed and presented in the first person narrative, maintaining the voice of the participants.

Profiles were edited where necessary to make them readable. Repetitions and syntactical irregularities common in everyday dialogue were deleted when appropriate. Furthermore, steps were taken to disguise the identity of participants. As previously indicated, pseudonyms were used and further to that, steps were taken to cloud the identity of the participants and their sport³. At some points I had to insert words or phrases to improve the comprehension of the text. For the most part the order of the material in the profiles paralleled the order of interviews two and three. In some instances material from the third interview was placed in the profile in an earlier position, but only if this modification did not alter the meaning of the original interview (Miller, 1998; Seidman, 1998).

A final check, as recommended by Seidman (1985), was made regarding inclusion of material by asking the following three questions: (a) Is the material fair to the participants, (b) does the material preserve the participants' dignity, and (c) is the material selected for the profiles an accurate reflection of the interview as a whole? Moreover, participants also received a copy of their profiles and were asked to make any additions, deletions or comments that would contribute to the accuracy of their reflection and to the fairness and dignity of their profile.

Shared Experiences. The second level of data analysis entailed an exploration of the shared experiences of participants at the centralized training camp. Again, the goal of this section was not to offer generalizations of the experience of centralized training but rather to develop an understanding of the female athletes in this study by providing a rich descriptive detail about the group of participants as a whole. Moreover, a further goal was to present the range and diversity of the experience within each of the shared elements and within the context of the centralized training camp.

I used the following steps to identify the shared experiences. After being read and reread several times, each transcript was divided into meaningful segments of information or “meaning units”. Tesch (1990) referred to meaning units as sections of text that have meaning on their own and can be understood even though they have been decontextualized from the larger interview framework. These segments or meaning units were then labeled by a descriptive phrase or category and filed together. The qualitative data analysis program NVIVO (1999) was utilized during this process. In the initial stages of the data analysis descriptive categories were kept tentative so as not to delineate shared experiences too early. This open coding strategy produced 42 categories or labels that incorporated the meaning units.

Once the meaning units were labeled and filed through NVIVO, they were re-examined file-by-file and connections between the labels and categories were made. Tesch (1990) referred to this process as ‘recontextualizing’ the data. The end result of this process was a set of thematic categories. During this process, the research questions and the relevant literature were taken into account in order to facilitate the connections. I was also careful to consider and search for discrepant data that did not align with the conclusions that I was drawing and the preconceived ideas, theories or personal experiences that I had suspended. Five core themes emerged through

this process: the head coach, athlete and other relationships; environment; emotions; and lessons learned. Within each of these themes, the range and diversity of experiences were considered and highlighted. Each of the core themes and their descriptive segments were then rearranged into an integrated summary of the experience of the centralized training camp for female national athletes from one team sport (Kvale, 1996; Nelson & Poulon, 1997; Seidman, 1998).

Similar to the profile analysis, a final check was made regarding inclusion of material in the shared experiences section by asking the following three questions: (a) Is the material fair to the participants, (b) does the material preserve the participants' dignity, and (c) is the material selected for the shared experiences an accurate reflection of the interview as a whole?

Verification. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have re-conceptualized reliability and validity for the qualitative domain, renaming it, “trustworthiness”. They defined trustworthiness as “methods that can ensure one has carried out the [research] process correctly” (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 245). For Kvale (1996), reliability and validity relate to an ongoing process throughout the entire research study rather than just a quality control check at the end of the research. Reliability relates to consistency of the research findings and validity relates to quality craftsmanship during the investigation. Wolcott (1990) adopts the term “understanding” as a better guide to his work. He suggested that the goal of his work is not to persuade but rather to understand and therefore treats validity as a distraction to the overall purpose of his research.

Regardless of the position adopted with respect to evaluating qualitative research, it is important to judge the value of the research against some yardstick. Creswell (1998) highlighted a number of procedures emerging out of various perspectives, and he suggested that researchers should engage in a minimum of two procedures in any given study. I have employed a number of them for judging the consistency and quality of this study.

First, participants were interviewed on three separate occasions over the course of a one to three week period. Although three meetings does not necessarily constitute prolonged engagement, it does take a step toward improving one-shot interview techniques currently employed within the sport psychology literature. The three-interview process and three to seven day spacing between interviews allowed for the participants to reflect on their experiences of centralized training and to articulate their reflections at the next interview. It also provided an opportunity for me to reflect on the previous interview and to clarify any points at future interviews. Furthermore, it provided a few occasions for the participants and myself to develop a working relationship leading up to the third, and more difficult, interview.

Second, interviewing participants over the course of one to three week period provided opportunity to check for consistencies in their reconstructions and to account for information that may have emerged particular to one day or time (Seidman, 1998). Over the course of three interviews, the participants reconstructed and articulated events, experiences, thoughts and feelings similarly and, in some cases, in more detail. It was possible to get a more comprehensive picture of various situations through this process and rule out contradictions or idiosyncrasies that may have arbitrarily arisen or been misunderstood.

Third, prior to the interviews and over the course of the data collection, I bracketed my presuppositions (Ashworth, 1996; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). I was also cautious during the course of the interviews not to lead participants toward predetermined conclusions. However, that said, I was not opposed to asking direct questions in some cases when a participant opened a door to a particular topic or area of interest related to her experience. Although this only happened on a couple of occasions, I propose that it actually allowed a noteworthy issue to be described in more detail. Kvale (1996) suggested that too much emphasis has been placed on the

negative impact of leading questions. He proposes a different view with respect to evaluating this issue.

In an alternative view, which follows from a postmodern perspective on knowledge construction, the interview is a conversation in which the data arise in an interpersonal relationship, coauthored and coproduced by interviewer and interviewee. The decisive issue is then not whether to lead or not to lead, but where the interview questions should lead, and whether they will lead in important directions, producing new, trustworthy and interesting knowledge. (p. 159)

Fourth, various member checks were also employed in this study (Creswell, 1998). Participants were given the opportunity to read their transcripts and make additions, deletions or comments both between and after completion of the three-interview process. Participants were also sent copies of their profiles and asked to consider the elements of the interviews that had been maintained and whether or not the profile accurately captured their experience. They were asked again to add, delete, and comment as they saw fit. A few modifications to both the initial interviews and profiles emerged from this procedure such as modifying the profiles to increase the participants' confidentiality, discarding sections where participants felt they had inappropriately described a person, and omitting material that participants described as too harsh or negative regarding a situation or the program overall.

Fifth, informant triangulation (Kvale, 1996) was also used as a method for evaluating the quality and consistency of the research in this study. The method revealed consistencies among the sequence of events and similar perceptions of the phenomenon of the centralized training. Kvale (1996) referred to informant triangulation as different participants from different perspectives locating a phenomenon similarly within a given context. This was the only

triangulation method that I used because I did not feel the other forms of triangulation aligned appropriately with the purpose of this study. Indeed, Richardson (1994) has questioned the terminology “triangulation” overall from a postmodern perspective with respect to its geographical connotation and underlying assumption of a fixed point or object that can be triangulated. Rather she suggests that we gain a more complex and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon through “crystallization”. “The central image is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities and angles of approach” (Richardson, 1994, p. 522).

Sixth, primary data were included in the form of participant profiles to allow other readers to interpret the data accordingly. Through rich descriptions of the experience of a centralized training camp, readers are able to extract the salient issues and parts of the experiences for them and then apply it to an understanding of their own setting. Moreover, the readers could also begin to identify the shared experiences emerging for the participants through the profiles. The readers then were able to judge for themselves whether the shared experiences identified flowed logically from the profiles.

Finally, the interview process was personally meaningful for the participants involved and for myself, and it precipitated an understanding of those experiences in a new way. Manning (1997) suggested that, “In the creation of giving his or her meaning voice, that perspective is discovered and created” (p. 105). A number of the participants mentioned at the end of the process how much they had enjoyed the interviews and appreciated the opportunity to talk about their experiences. I myself found some resolve and a greater understanding of my perspective on, and experience with centralized training camps. Seidman (1998) suggests that is the most we can hope for, for the participants and for ourselves as researchers.

Overall, Seidman (1998) summarizes how the three-interview process serves to address the issues of validity or trustworthiness of the research.

It places participants' comments in context. It encourages interviewing participants over the course of 1 to 3 weeks to account for idiosyncratic days and to check for the internal consistency of what they say. Furthermore, by interviewing a number of participants, we can connect their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others. Finally, the goal of the process is to understand how participants understand and make meaning of their experience. If the interview structure works to allow them to make sense to themselves as well as to the interviewer, then it has gone a long way toward validity (p. 17).

My Reflections on Centralized Training Camps

I have come to know centralized training camps through my experiences as an assistant coach and mental trainer for two years with a national women's team. My view of centralized training camps is not positive. I believe centralized training camps are incredibly demanding on many levels. They present overwhelming physical challenges of training day after day as well of the mental challenges of motivation, toughness, and focus. They consist of environmental challenges such as living arrangements, nutrition concerns, and relationship struggles, just to name a few. Furthermore, they present organizational and leadership challenges with respect to financial support, staff management, and issues of power.

I also believe that both coaches and athletes are ill prepared to deal with centralized training camps. This lack of preparation is due to two basic assumptions. They assume that centralized training camps are similar to regular training camps of shorter duration and that physical preparation is the main type of preparation necessary for success at camp. Moreover, I

think athletes and coaches underestimate the impact of social and organizational elements on the experience of everyone involved.

Chapter 3 – Endnotes

¹ One participant brought out her day planner during the second interview to help her recall specific dates. Another participant ruffled through handouts of schedules and itineraries from the camp to recall specific locations and dates. And yet another participant showed me pictures from the camp and the sport psychology workbook that they had been given. Finally, one participant told me she had taken a video camera along and had taken various clips throughout the entire camp. I asked if I could view the tape and she said it needed to be transferred to a VHS tape first, but then she would be happy to show me. Unfortunately, I never had a chance to view it.

² Interview three was definitely the most challenging for some of the participants. I made several references to the difficulty of this process in my journal. For the most part, it appeared that the older athletes had less trouble with the process. A couple of athletes had actually taken some time to read through the transcripts of their first and second interviews and made notes either throughout it or on a separate piece of paper. I had one participant pull out a long list of recommendations and reflections from her camp experience during the third interview.

³ The attempt to disguise the sport was a contentious issue for me. Obviously, my first concern was to protect the confidentiality of the participants. This was especially important with respect to the participants still involved with the national team. However, as Nespor (2000) suggested in diluting the specific context of the athletes' experiences, I have actually taken away some of the uniqueness and vitality of the experience and ultimately to our understanding overall.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Selected Profiles

This chapter presents the profiles of the eight participants. The participant's stories focus on the day-to-day realities of female national team athletes of one team sport attending the same centralized training camp. The underlying goal in presenting profiles is to present contextually rich descriptions so readers can make connections between their own experiences and that of the participants. Themes common to participants are discussed in the next section. Many of these themes emerge in the eight profiles presented.

Nathalie

At the time of these interviews, Nathalie was 28 years old and had been involved with the national team for eight years. Previously, she had attended numerous training camps, however only two of them had extended longer than one month. She worked full-time for a company that organizes an annual sporting event catering to both recreation and elite athletes. She took a leave of absence from the position to attend the centralized training camp in this study.

Life History in Sport. Nathalie first started playing her sport when she was five years old but in the beginning it was not her number one sport, "I grew up always drawn to sport in some way shape or form. I started with [different] teams when I was in kindergarten. Even though I was playing a bunch of different sports throughout grade school, squash was always my number one sport." Nathalie described her early self as "quite shy and quiet. I enjoyed small groups and I don't think I exuded a lot of confidence at that point. If you took a picture of me at that point, you would probably see me with my head down and rounded shoulders."

Nathalie was very successful at squash and competed at the national level and made the junior national team. She really enjoyed the individual nature and competitiveness of the sport and she developed some solid friendships from the experience. She also indicated that her squash coach had a positive impact on her even though he wanted her to choose squash as her main sport.

He taught me a lot as far as individual strengths. He was positive. He probably would have been a lot stronger with me if he knew that squash was my number one sport. He was always disappointed in the fact that I played other sports as well, but I think in his heart, he knew that I was never going to be squash player. I just enjoyed other sports too much to focus on one. I wouldn't have enjoyed it.

Nathalie competed in a number of team sports during her elementary and high school years but "none emerged as any more important than the other." It wasn't until grade 12 that the sport she now plays started to emerge as an important one.

In the summer before my grade 12 year, a younger team that was a far better team than mine asked me to come and try out. I thought this is the big time. Even though this team was younger they were a lot better and in a stronger league. I made the team and my skills developed and I decided I really quite enjoyed it. I kept improving with the sport and ended up being an MVP at a provincial competition and we also won the provincial championships.

It was at the provincial championship where Nathalie first became aware of the provincial program, "I asked the coach about the provincial team jackets I saw around. What team are those girls from? He said those are provincial team girls. And I'm like well how do you try out?" The coach told Nathalie the times of the provincial trials; she went and tried out for the Under 18 provincial team. Nathalie made the provincial team that year, which she credited to the provincial coach taking a chance on her athleticism rather than her skill in the sport, "I guess the coach saw a green player in an athletic

body and chose me for the team.” It was that summer with the provincial team when Nathalie was identified by the national team coach at the Western Canada Games competition and asked to attend a camp, “I guess I kind of flourished that summer.” She decided to attend her first national team camp even though she still considered squash her number one sport.

Nathalie described her first national team camp experience as follows:

I absolutely loathed [the camp]. I hated every minute of it. Training twice a day and the coach was a tyrant and I didn't know quite how to take him. It was tough training coming from my youth player [background] and not knowing really what to expect...so I wasn't physically nor probably mentally prepared for what a training camp would bring. I came from a really fun, positive experience with the provincial girls and then you get thrown into [that]...You just count down the days....I didn't really know anybody at that time. Everybody is interested in making the team so it's a very individual experience. You might be competing with that person for a spot not that I was competing with anyone at that point. I just wanted my own bed. It's not a warm experience and I don't think the coaches really helped that either.

Nathalie was not selected for the team; however, she continued to balance her involvement in both sports, but the challenge became increasingly difficult. She really started to feel the pressure to choose.

The National coach said if you want to become a player on this team you have to commit solely to this sport and I was like okay but I didn't quit squash. Squash people were saying you have to move to Calgary in order to compete at our high performance center in order to move on. All these people were tugging me in different directions.

Trying to balance both sports, Nathalie found herself going from one event to the next, “I had just competed and won at the nationals for squash and then I was on a plane back home to go to Florida for

a national team camp.” Nathalie did not feel prepared for the camp physically so again her camp experience was not that positive, “It was a miserable experience at the training camp.” However, this time she made the team and traveled to a competition in Central America. That experience was equally as challenging for Nathalie, “It was just horrendous. A lot of people got sick, including me.” As the pressure to choose between the two sports became increasingly more difficult to manage, Nathalie responded to the pressure in a way she described as “surprising”, “I decided to go away for a year. I was having so many tugs between the two sports I thought, I’m just not going to do either.” This decision ended up being fairly significant for Nathalie because during her trip, she had a cycling accident, badly injuring her knee, “I ended up ripping my knee open...They stitched me up...with dirt and gravel still in my knee. Eventually, I received the infection causing gangrene...and I almost lost my leg.” In essence the injury actually helped Nathalie make the decision between her two sports, “I just made the decision at that point that squash was perhaps not the most fun and probably harder on my injured knee so I just slid into [the sport I play today] without much of a decision.”

Nathalie also played her sport at a Canadian University. The first two years she described as “a real blast”, but her subsequent years were more challenging. Her university coach and some of her teammates asked her to take on more of a leadership role to combat some of the other not so positive personalities on the team. The challenge was difficult and the added responsibility came with resistance from a few of the other players. Nathalie recalled one particular instance that highlighted the resistance to her leadership role, “It was the first time I was ever told while playing to fuck off...and I was mortified. I never swear at people. I just couldn’t believe it.” The experience ultimately contributed to Nathalie as a person, “Somebody handed me the role, saying we want you to take more of a leadership role. I thought, okay I’ll try and work on it and I did...I think [through that] the playing personality came on and the leader in me came out that wasn’t there before.”

Nathalie's cycling accident also made her re-evaluate the effort she was putting into her academic opportunities and challenge her confidence in the area.

I wasn't really confident in myself as far as school was concerned before I went away and had that little accident. After I came back I realized that I had been sort of cheating myself as far as not really putting effort into school. So once I started to do that my confidence gained. I'd gotten into university just doing what I needed to do and then in university I'm like, if I get sixty percent I'll be okay. Whereas when I came back anything under eighty percent was so unsatisfactory...I think my first two years at university I was just not into school or even my sport but just into having fun and going drinking with friends.

Nathalie experienced a number of successes in her sport while balancing her national team and community involvement with her university team. She won a couple of national university competitions with her team and she attended the world university games with the Canadian team and won athlete of the year for her university in the same year. On the world games team, she met a woman who is still one of her closest friends today. She described close friendships with teammates as something that is quite unique for her even though she has lots of fun and really enjoys her teammates.

In sport, I wouldn't consider a lot of my teammates good friends. It's like high school, you are there because that's what brings you together, not necessarily because you are drawn to each other but there was something between Megan and I that clicked...It was just wonderful to get to know her and she developed into one of my closest friends today.

The University games, themselves, she described as unique and similar to an "Olympic-type event" with a number of different sports and countries in attendance." Two elements defined that experience for Nathalie. First, she began what was soon to become a long trail of injuries, "I tore my quad...you will find out later that's a bit of a running theme. I'm constantly injured." Second, she had some

challenges with the national team coach, “For whatever reason the head coach didn't like my style. She would choose me for all these teams but would then kind of be hard on me. I don't know if it was her intention to make me stronger but I didn't need the strengthening.”

Nathalie's experience with the national team continued with more training camps of both a short and long duration. Nathalie's perspective on training camps was fairly consistent throughout.

I never really found training camps that much fun until later. I used to hate getting letters in the mail, thinking oh I've been invited to this camp. Oh my god, here we go again. It's very regimented and I'm more of a relaxed person. That military sort of schedule is not for everybody.

She did remember one training camp that was quite enjoyable. They were preparing to qualify for the world competition.

We were in [one city] for quite some time. We got to choose our roommates. We were living in apartment style residences for about a month. It was the most freedom we'd ever had and probably the happiest the team has ever been as far as flexibility. Once you'd done your training you'd go off and into your own lives. Everyone was located in the same area but you could still have the freedom to do whatever -- lounge, make your own dinners. That was a fun experience.

The team qualified for the world competition the following year and that fall Nathalie's mother was diagnosed with cancer. So the next year was extremely challenging for Nathalie as she tried to spend as much time with her mother as possible and still train with the national team as they were preparing. The whole experience started to make Nathalie examine her values and what was important in life.

A lot of the national team preparation was in the [city where I lived] but the team would travel to Europe and Asia. I didn't travel with them. When the team was here I would be doing three

hours of chemotherapy with my mom and then going to national team training after. I would listen to people saying this sport is life and death and I was just like, give me a break. No it's not....That kind of changed my perspective on sport and what was really important.

Nathalie attended the world competition which she described as "such a bad experience because we underachieved." When she returned she made some choices based on her mother's illness and also her own needs. She quit her old community team and started a new team, which provided her with a chance to play locally and minimize travel time to and from practice. Nathalie was a bit disappointed with some of her friends at this time and their reaction to her choices.

I was sort of disenchanted with the world I would say, especially with people from my sport who claimed to be your good friends. They didn't really ask or maybe think to ask what I was going through. Some had bitter feelings because I left the community team, but I didn't see driving two ways for 45 minutes as being paramount to my life. I thought it was a waste of time. Time I'd rather be spending with my mom.

Over the next year Nathalie balanced her involvement with the national team with looking after her mother:

My mom and I just hung out and I looked after her except when I was away with the national team. I spent my entire days being with her and I would have done the exact same thing for 10 years if I could have had that opportunity. Sport was not important. I didn't need it...She passed away that October.

During that same period, a new coach was named to the national team and Nathalie described his involvement as "breathing new breath into [the experience]. It was just more fun...Maybe I bought into it a lot more...Maybe I wasn't seeing other stuff and how he was treating other people. I certainly enjoyed the experience."

After her mother passed away, Nathalie experienced a number of injuries related to her knee. She acknowledged the mental impact that her mother's death had had on her focus and the role that played in her injuries during that period:

I was still focusing on my mother's death and I think when you're a slight fraction behind mentally, physically your body can't really keep up and that's when all my injuries occurred...I injured my knee that spring and then went out with [the national team] in the summer and blew out my ACL (anterior cruciate ligament); a near complete tear. I then saw a surgeon and he said to just rehabilitate it. In October I ended up completely tearing it. I had surgery in December and then hurried back from that and fractured my knee. So that was the beginning of the whole knee saga. I think it's how he demands his players to train...Eventually it takes its toll. On me it certainly did. But it was a fun experience nonetheless.

Nathalie coped with the injuries and developed both awareness and skills in dealing with these types of situations. Her process involved normalizing injuries by viewing them as "just a part of an athlete's life" and seeing the "small amount of depression" that comes with them as a natural part of the process. She was also aware of how people's identities can play an important role in how injuries are dealt with:

For a lot of people they define themselves by their sport. I'm Suzie Smith and I'm a rugby player. I don't consider myself one of those people. I think you can have a healthier perspective if you do not define yourself by what you do. So I just say well this is something I have to deal with. I just take one injury at a time. I'm very short-term goal oriented. I set my goal for that day or that week and then accomplish it, feel good about it and move on. I wouldn't be disappointed if at week one I can't walk because that's too depressing. You just take off little bites.

Nathalie's role on the national team was also beginning to change. Her teammates viewed her, as did the coach, as one of the leaders or veterans on the team. As the team struggled with issues surrounding the coach, Nathalie was asked to lead some of the discussions. Her university leadership experience played a role in her ability to take on this challenge as did her life experiences:

I was more comfortable with myself as compared to with my university team and I was able to be that role and not be timid or quiet. Plus I'd been through a different experience than probably most of the players so I was less disturbed by what was going on because in the big picture it didn't really mean that much.

Nathalie's rash of injuries continued and she ended up missing the next world competition qualifier because of a deep bone bruise that can be "career ending for many athletes." At this point she took the advice of the doctor, taking time off, modifying her training, and thinking less with heart and more with her head:

I started doing what activities I could. I would be on the stationary bike for two hours at times just doing what I could to strengthen it. Four months from the camp, the doctor said continue to listen to your body, but try and play...I totally changed my training because he said the impact activities are the most damaging. So I did a lot of biking and didn't do running. I don't think the National coach fancied that.

This is Nathalie's experience of the six-week training camp.

Nathalie's Profile. I was coming off a serious injury so a lot of my preparation was ensuring that I was physically ready for the camp. I was attending physiotherapy [a lot]. As far as work was concerned, I had to arrange my job. I took a leave of absence. They are fairly understanding. One of the bosses used to compete with the track and field national team. I also had to arrange the household and then the care of my grandmother.

I really didn't know personally how my body was going to hold up because of the [type of] injury that I had. I had a lot of doubts about how it would hold up with two to three training sessions a day. Leading into the training camp, the coach had basically said "all I want you to do is get yourself ready to play. I don't care if you train once a day", but, I didn't really find that reassuring. It conflicted with how I feel about always going out there to prove yourself.

I was having problems sleeping before the camp, and I had injured my knee competing at provincial tournament the day before. So, I was pretty anxious as far as that was concerned because I wasn't really sure how my knee would hold up. But I was looking forward to seeing people, and the fitness testing on the first day doesn't really bother me. It's like cramming for an exam - once you're there, you're there. You come in with all you've got. You just go out and run, it doesn't really faze me that much.

In the morning, we all get up as a team. Everybody's woken up at a certain hour. It was pretty early, like 7 o'clock in the morning. Breakfast is served at 7:30 and I hate eating breakfast that early in the morning. We then start training right after. So, 45 minutes after ingesting your food, you're supposed to be out there warming up, and I prefer a couple of hours in between eating. At any rate, you start to walk towards the practice facility at 8, then get ready to play.

We finished the first training session and then we had a sport psychologist come in. I was very hopeful because I think it's an essential thing at a higher level to have that type of mental training fulfilled. I didn't really learn anything from them actually. There were a couple of sessions where I thought, yeah there's some quality stuff there, but it was mostly theory based and, I figured, if you were taking a university course it would be very valuable, but we had very little time and they were not practical enough. That was a big disappointment.

Then we would go on to lunch. I would spend a lot of time at physiotherapy. Then we would get ready for the next training session that afternoon. Dinner would be right after our training session. The evenings would usually be free, although the coach would often stick a meeting in there somewhere. They could be either individual meetings, where the coaches would tell you where you stood, or there could be team meetings. Physiotherapy was always there for those who needed it, so there wasn't a huge amount of down time even though the coach claimed there was.

The coach treated training as more of a 9 to 5 job, but some of the players joked that it was a 5 to 9 job. Also, on Tuesdays and Thursdays there were 3 sessions a day. So, in the middle of the day, another technical session was squished in. It would be a light session, but it would still add up, you know, you're still there pounding your body somewhat.

The training sessions, in hindsight, were a waste of time, but at the time, I would have bought into anything. I was there for the team. A lot of the sessions were very technical, but not really game specific. They weren't necessarily physically taxing, although I found them to be because every time I would move quickly or reach out, I would re-injure myself. But they weren't extraordinarily difficult. Sometimes I think we just did training for the sake of doing training. Tuesdays and Thursdays were harder days because they were fitness days.

The first two days of any camp are always high anxiety. I find it's a huge melting pot to start, but as time goes on, players tend to separate themselves. I don't compare myself to other players. I'm just very self-focused on what my body is saying. Of course, I read cues from the coaches, but I think everybody does that. I don't sit there wondering who the four cuts will be, I assume that I'm going to be one of those cuts, and then try and fight to prove myself. After the first two days of training camp, I was really concerned about my knee, and the doctors had told me to listen to what my body was saying.

It's a big shock to get thrown into a camp situation where you're training 2 to 3 times a day, and I found it especially difficult.

For me, physiotherapy at the camp was a bit frustrating. I found that there wasn't a lot of hands-on treatment. Instead, I was hooked up to a machine - it's very much a routine that way. So I felt very constrained by the situation. I found it difficult and an enormous waste of time because the time that might have been spent stretching, resting, or sleeping was constantly soaked up by physiotherapy twice a day. I mean, it was a fun atmosphere because people would hang around and talk and the physiotherapist was very nice. I spent a lot of time with her.

The coaches brought a stationary bike to the practice for me. I had sort of demanded that I needed the equipment. I spent a lot of time warming up on the bike, and if I wasn't involved in practice, I would bike the whole practice and then watch what was going on in practice. But I got the sense, at that point, that the coaches saw the bike as a weakness. For the physiotherapist and myself, it was a long-term way of helping me heal. The coaches saw it in terms of my incapability to heal short term, which wasn't really the case. I was just trying to cover my bases so that I could last for the long term. As it turned out, they did see as a weakness, which made me practice a bit differently, and which probably led to more injuries.

In my individual meeting, the head coach suddenly changed his original position of, "I don't care if you only practice once a day, I just want you to be able to play, you're a valuable member of this team" to "you may not even make this team", at least that's what he led me to believe. He didn't think that I was going to last the whole time and, eventually, he wanted to see me training two and three times a day. So his thinking changed drastically, so I thought 'well, that's fine, I'll go out and practice two to three times a day and hopefully my body will hold up.' I knew I could do it; it just wouldn't be the most logical thing to do to my body. Some of the players recognized that and were upset. I don't

think I was in the group that was going to be cut; I really thought that I had something to add. And the coach denies that that's basically what he was telling me. But I'm very introspective and I try to read, maybe to a fault, into what they're trying to say and that's how I saw it.

After Friday evening, we were basically free until Sunday afternoon. So that's a good mental break, which I think is necessary. You would work hard all week, achieve small goals, have something to look forward to, and then start the cycle again. One weekend, I came back home, another weekend I went away with my friend and a couple of girls from the team. I think it's important to get away from that atmosphere because then you're not trapped in the same environment all the time with nothing to do. It was unfortunate that some of the players would be stuck there, but I would leave my car for some of them.

Each week, it was the same routine. You just had to take each day at a time. It was very regimented. You would wake up, eat, play, come back, eat, play, and come back. There would be meetings in between, physiotherapy in between, obviously personal hygiene involved in between. But I found that, being at physiotherapy as much as I was, there wasn't a huge amount of personal time although I would try to get involved in a book or something.

I pulled my hamstring over the weekend and that started the second week for me. That was sort of the beginning of the end. It's unfortunate because if you just take a few days off as opposed to trying to work through things, it's healthier down the line. But I don't think the coaches think too highly of players who are sitting out. And if you're not complaining about it, they assume that you're okay so you're sent into the drill. That was really frustrating for me.

After the second week, the coach did a round of cuts on Sunday. Certain players weren't affected, and didn't concern themselves with it, but a good majority were worried. Often, those who worry shouldn't be worried. I wasn't too fearful of getting cut because the head coach and I had another

individual meeting and he said at this point, "Well, I see you as part of my team." So he'd bounced from what he had said the second time to a more positive perspective.

At this point, I was just really concerned about the hamstring because it was not getting any better. What should have been a week to two week long injury was lengthening. So I found that really frustrating; the physiotherapist and I would specifically agree together that certain sessions would be taken off and then, in the middle of the session, I would be handed a yellow pinnie and be expected to go and perform. So there was a lack of communication among all the staff members, which really made it frustrating for me. I just found the injury really frustrating. It was something that needed time and I was not given that time.

A few days later, the team was scheduled to travel to a city close by to play two exhibition games against Italy. We stayed at a very nice hotel. We had roommates at that point. You're more into a competition phase so you train once a day, sometimes twice, but it's more recovery-based, not trying to gain fitness but just maintain what you have.

The days on which we played evening games were very long, and drawn out, days. We would get to sleep in a bit longer, breakfast was a bit later, but it was usually chock-a-block packed with meetings. Sometimes we would have a meeting in the morning, and a meeting in the afternoon, and eat three times before going out to play. It was a bit much, but it was very routine-like. For earlier games, we would wake up earlier and usually get a couple of meals in before, say, a noon game. But we would cram in meetings. There would be a team meeting on what the other team looked like and how we were going to play against them, and then we would break off into individual positional meetings.

For the first game, I was sitting on the bench so I got a good view of what went on. I thought the team played fairly well at times. The second game didn't look as good as the first game. I knew I wasn't going to be playing at all. I was just a little bit embarrassed deep down just sitting there. He

cleaned the bench throughout the two games. I think everybody got an opportunity to play and then there was me, sitting there, realizing that I wasn't even on the list. I just wanted so badly to be out there helping out. So I was embarrassed and frustrated knowing that I could not physically perform. We had just come to the conclusion that I wasn't going to be ready.

Leading up to this, one of the girl's mothers was very sick and was in a coma. There was a huge discussion between myself and the coach and this player. They were recommending that she should stay another day and a half and fly out at that point to go see her mother. I found that really disappointing - that they were choosing the sport ahead of her mother's illness. I basically approached the coaches and said, "She needs to go home." They didn't know if her mother was going to make it through the night. She went home. The last week before we came into the city to play Italy her mom passed away and she was able to be there. After the whole Italy series, half the team, or so, went to her mom's service. My heart just went out to her. I thought it was really important that she had been there and that I had taken up the cause for her with the coaches and really stood firm on what I thought she should do. She had been fearful of asking for what she really wanted of the coaches, which is sad. I think sometimes we get very consumed and we think that this is our life, and our whole world, and that's just not the case. You have opportunities throughout your life to play a sport. You only have one opportunity to be with your mom on her deathbed.

After the games, we would have an opportunity to sit around and talk with the people we knew in the stands. We would then board a bus and always eat a meal right away. Sometimes the coach would say some words but otherwise we would just start the routine again. The next day, typically, was a recovery day, getting on a stationary bike and just spinning for a while.

We travelled back to Kingston for a few days. It was the same sort of training sessions. We were back in the training phase. We weren't staying at the dorms anymore; we were staying at a hotel.

The coach still had two more players to cut so certain players were on edge. The final cuts were made after three or four days, right before the team went down to Boston. One of the cuts, I would say, was a surprise and the other was a self-cut due to injury. The team went down to Boston right after that.

I think the world competition seemed so far off, even though every day we'd wake up and signs would be posted on the physiotherapist's door saying how many days left to go until the world championship. I was still injured. I could sense that the coaches were growing a little bit, not impatient, but all of a sudden they were telling me one thing which was, "you're playing your role and we appreciate what you do behind the scenes, even if you don't play a minute, you bring so much to this team blah, blah, blah." And then a week and a half down the line they were telling me that things had changed and they needed me to play that day in order to see where I was. It was just very confusing and mixed up. I was riding this roller coaster and, based on what they were saying, I would change the way I performed in training. Not the performance itself, but how I would go out there and exert myself.

In Boston, we had two international games. We stayed in the same hotel for both of the games. We still had a roommate. Hotel eating is different from dorm eating because everything is buffet style and you can have as much as you want. You don't have to control your meal and make sure you have the right amount of items. The training wasn't too crazy, but I just kept re-tearing and re-tearing [my hamstring]. I just shouldn't have been training. It just kept getting worse and worse. And what should have been a two week long injury turned into a seven week long injury.

The first game against China was a fairly good one. I think those were a couple of our best games against the Americans and the Chinese. The US game was phenomenal. I would have liked to have been involved as a player, but it was still great to be there. Then things kind of went downhill from there.

I think some of the players were growing restless from sitting on the bench. I think the coach almost looked to me to try and calm them a bit, but I was experiencing the same feelings as before sitting on that bench. I was embarrassed that I was not healthy and frustrated that I couldn't go out there and fill the role. At this point right after the games, he was saying, "We need to see you. We need to see if you can play." This was a drastic change from the last time he talked to me, but one of the players had become injured and it just changed the picture a bit, which I understood. He had a job to do and I was a pawn just like the rest.

So the next day we travelled back to Montreal from Boston by bus and flew out to Calgary. That was a horrendous day. Our National Organization is trying to save money so instead of flying us directly there, we took the milk run back to Calgary. That day really took a lot out of the players. The coaches saw it as a day of rest. The players didn't. Travel days are just big waiting days; they drag on and they take a lot out of you. To pass the time you end up socializing with people that you're comfortable with. People go on Starbucks runs if you're at an airport or read magazines together. You just try and spend the time as enjoyably as possible.

We were at a very nice hotel about an hour out of Calgary. We were heading into a new series, coming off a high point, and we hoped to keep building. So we trained. There was a bit more media exposure. Our first game was really terrible so the coach hit the roof. He could barely talk to us. I think he was very disappointed with what the team had just done and that just affected the mood of the entire team. He had a tendency to get extremely angry at times. In situations like this, I find that female players really play off of somebody; especially somebody's who's in a power position. So I felt that the players were very aware of the coach's moods and emotions and he was really upset. He said not to hang onto things from games, but there he was really hanging on to something.

It was a little different for me. I sat there and watched that game and having basically said, leading into it, that I couldn't be ready for it. I would, however, no matter what, try for the next game. But physically I just couldn't for that game. I was slowly getting better and if I went out and played I would have dinged it right there. So it was different not having played in the game at the time and wishing that I could have done something other than cheerleading. I was just so focused on wanting to get better.

After that game we had a day off, but it just didn't feel like a day off because we were constantly wondering what the head coach was thinking, what was going through his mind. Now the practice before the second game, he'd mentioned to me that the coaches were looking at playing me in a different position and I kind of laughed at him. He told me the reasons why he thought it would be good for me and I still didn't believe him.

On the day of the game, the first thing that he did was bring me into his room. I thought he wanted to talk about this position. Eventually he did, but he had brought me into the room to have an absolute go at me. He just tore into me, swear words, blah, blah, blah. He was extremely upset with the team and he wanted some player to bring his emotions out on. He was really upset with one player in particular and angry because the team had performed so badly the game before. He said if we didn't perform well this game, we would be in a lot of trouble with him. He also said we wouldn't enjoy ourselves for the rest of the world tournament. So he was basically threatening me. He said that he was thinking of putting me in a new position. Also that his blood pressure was really high and that he was under a lot of stress. I thought 'oh gees sorry, what can I do?' He was concerned that the players weren't thinking about the game. I thought the majority of players were focused on this game.

So game day arrived. There was lots of fan support and the game was televised. Just before half time the coach said, "You're going in at this position." So I ended up playing that about half of the

game. It was exciting. We ended up winning and I contributed to the scoring. I felt a huge amount of relief, not for myself, or that I contributed to the point total, or that I got into the game, but because the team performed well and we weren't going to get it from him. I just didn't want the team to suffer because he was basically threatening the whole team through me. This was something that I couldn't tell the team about. I think I told one or two players, just because I was shocked at how he had just behaved with me. But I took the attitude that he picked the right player of all the players to get angry at because I had really nothing to lose. I hadn't been playing. I just took it because I could probably handle it more than the vast majority of players. They would get extremely angry and or extremely emotional. I was just fairly indifferent. I felt badly for the team and I felt badly about his blood pressure, but there was really nothing I could do.

It was an amazing feeling, to get in the game, play at about seventy-five percent and know that I could still improve and that I hadn't suffered any major setbacks. That was really good. So, we moved on and ended this whole situation on a high note instead of a low note.

Although I don't think that I got the best attention for my injury, I really enjoyed talking with the physiotherapist. I thought she was a supportive individual. I really spent a lot of time with a couple of players. One got cut due to injury, so I missed her. Two others were probably two of my closest friends on the team. I got along with basically everybody on the team. I also enjoyed spending time with my roommate.

When I came back from the camp, I didn't really want to talk to anybody about it. I just didn't want to hear people's opinions. There was still a lot of bitterness involved. A few weeks later, a bunch of players were de-carded from the program and I think that was the final slap in the face. I was one of the players. For no reason some of the players got cut and then a couple of weeks after that the coach got fired. You go through different emotions.

I think as time went by and the bitterness dissolved somewhat, I realized that it was kind of an accomplishment. But right now I can name so many things that were going on. For example, the coach's personal perspective on selections often doesn't go beyond a certain group of players. So you end up with a familiar name, a familiar body and just reselecting those same players over the years. I think he kept choosing certain players hoping to make them skilled players and on the international scene, you just can't do that. You can have players that are natural athletes, but you still need players who are made for the game. After the competition, the head coach was quoted as saying that he had learned a great deal, but that we were just not a skilled team. He had chosen us - the group of players that he thought was the best - then all of a sudden he went against the players for not being skilled enough.

Also, the way he treated players and the way he communicated, or didn't communicate, to certain players left a lot of disparity between the players. You end up just fighting for yourself because the person next to you is getting treated very well whereas you're getting a strip torn off of you for no real reason. So I think that took a toll on players. In the end, I could see how some players, because they were treated poorly, ended up comparing themselves to other players and saying 'well I produced this, this and this even though I was injured.' I wouldn't really do this during the camp, but I was doing it after. So I can understand how certain players throughout the whole training camp were doing that. You need a unified force, everybody for each other as opposed to everybody for themselves. I saw that as being a problem. The coach treated some players very poorly. I also think the sport psychologist didn't work for the team. I thought the concept was excellent, but I think it needed to be more practical than theoretical. It ended up being just another thing that added into people's days. The players just didn't believe in it.

Also, I didn't think that the practices prepared us well for the international game. There was a lot of wasted time doing, and redoing, drills because a lot of us couldn't do them. If you are not skilled enough to do something so simplistic then initially the problem is selection phase. There are always opponents in your face and we never really practiced that way.

I found the coach's communication with me, and how his impression or opinion would change day-to-day, very difficult. I didn't know what was going on from one day to the next. And I understand he's got a job to do and we are all pawns, in a sense, but you believe what they say and then all of a sudden it changes. Your attitude or what you put into your sessions changes as well. Communication ebbs and flows and my relationship with the head coach dictated how I went on to train. I found also the lack of communication between and among the staff members, the physiotherapist and myself really poor. I think that hurt me as well. The physiotherapist and I would agree on one thing, like I wouldn't take part in a certain training session. This is my rest. She would apparently talk to a coach and then during training another coach would hand me a pinnie for a drill. By that time, with my personality, it's too late. If someone hands me a pinnie, I think 'well, suck it up and start performing.'

At training camp, I found the experience with the groups of people very good. I tended to just get to know a few people really well. In Kingston, we were living in our own rooms so we tended to socialize with the people that were close with us. Then, when we were on trips, we had roommates so we would end up socializing with them. But I enjoyed spending time with everybody. So it wasn't the players that I had a negative experience with. I really liked all the players.

Three and a half weeks is a long selection phase. It takes away from a lot of team preparation because the team doesn't really start forming as a group until a month into the six-week preparation. I think, because the team wasn't formed early on, we ended up essentially with two and half weeks when every player was there. I understand that mental toughness and battling, but I think it takes away from

coming together as a group when you're just fighting as an individual to make the team. Also the preparation against Italy was good, but because it was the easiest set of games that we saw the entire time, I think that got us - the staff and the players – salivating, and thinking that we had something special here. But on the measuring stick it was way down there. So I think perhaps we, the players and the coaching staff, started to take things for granted.

I take away some of the good friendships. I guess for me, I had a bit of a unique perspective, more so than any other player because I got to watch a bunch of players and how they reacted. I got to know their practice personalities more so than they know themselves just because being injured and riding the bike during practices, I was always there at the side. So I found that quite interesting, seeing the different personalities of the different players. I got to analyze that quite a bit.

It's different to be on the side at practice, having no role, having no choice about it. And you can't really do anything about it either because it just takes time. When you're pretty much slotted in as a starter and then on some games not even being on the roster, it's a different role. You keep things in perspective. You still need to do a job and your job is to perhaps be captain of the bench or whatever, and you try and help out in that regard. There's just nothing much you can do about it. You just sum it up to really bad luck and I've had a lot of bad luck. So you can't get angry about it. Sure there were times when it really upset me but I didn't tell other players about that. I would just keep it to myself because they had their own worries and it was just something that I had to deal with.

If I could go back, I wouldn't tear my hamstring. Perhaps even before camp, ideally, I would stop my job a month early and prepare my body better instead of sitting in a chair for 12 plus hours a day. Preparing my body might have helped the in-camp experience. Because I was coming off an injury, I was even more behind the eight ball. One teammate would always tell me, 'you don't really have to prove anything'. Maybe I should have just held off, but that's a very difficult thing for me to do.

I definitely feel that communication is incredibly important. And I think there's nothing wrong with telling an individual or a team that they are awful. But I think you have to also say 'you're a good player and I chose you because of this and this and this, and this is what you can bring to the team, this is how I see you improving, and this is what I need you to do to improve so as to get yourself out of this awful category'. The coach didn't really bring out the best in players. He tended to try and bring out the best in a select few and rip down others. So if, in any way, I could try and prevent that so that there was more of a unified force versus a solitary force, it would help. The coach was constantly changing his thought pattern within short periods of time. He had said, three months before, that it was going to be different, that he was going to be more positive. I think, sometimes, that he was, but just not all the time.

I think it will be a better experience as time goes by. I think what makes it so much harder is thinking about how close you were and how just a few little details could have made the experience a lot better. I think that's what you end up focusing on. It's a difficult pill to swallow. It doesn't paint the picture a different colour. It just makes a bad situation not much better.

Maria

At the time of the interviews, Maria was 23 years old and had played with the Canadian National team for four years. She has attended three national team camps none of which were longer than one month. She had just graduated from university and was looking for full-time work.

Life History. Maria started playing this sport when she was five years old, "I'd always been around [the sport] because my older sister and brother used to play so I would follow them." She started off playing for a youth community team, "We were called the strawberries but we were blue."

Maria had a number of early successes in her sport, winning the league competition four years in a row and one year qualifying to attend a Canadian Championship with her team. When she was 10

years old, she was identified and asked to play for a team whose players were two years older than her.

Even though she was the youngest and smallest on the team, her talent still stood out:

I was so short. It's funny because I have some film and the girls who are two years older; they're much taller than me. You could tell I was talented in the sport. I was fast and...it didn't matter that they were twice as big as me. I was still taking them on.

Maria's successes continued and she attended a provincial trial. It was during this provincial experience that she received the first taste of training camp life and the stress involved in trying to make the team:

Provincials is when I actually started experiencing the camps and for two weeks being with the same girls in the dorms and having to get up every morning, getting into a routine. It's not a great feeling. I mean you are stressed out and you want to make the team and it's all very competitive. It's hard physically and mentally. I wasn't very confident. I was very self-conscious [wondering], am I going to make this team? I always gave one hundred percent, but the first year I didn't know why I was kept on the team. I knew that in my community team I was good, but it's different when you are being selected because all the girls are talented. So I was looking at everybody and [thinking], I'm never going to make this team. I was really, really stressed out. I was very happy that I made it, but at the time I never thought I was going to make it.

Maria gained a number of experiences with the provincial team. She traveled to Europe and various other places, which she recalled as a good learning experience, "Traveling was a great experience. Being so far away from home and I was still pretty young. Being away and being on a different schedule, having to adjust and still perform." She also identified friendships and enjoyment as an important part of her provincial experience and as a critical element for her overall, "I always had a

lot of fun with the girls... You have to have fun with the girls you are playing with to be successful.

That's always been important for me, that I am enjoying what I am doing."

Maria described how her confidence developed through her provincial experiences and through the support of the provincial coaches involved in the program:

So with the years I gained confidence through playing and through the coaches. I'm happy because I really had some good coaches on the provincial teams...The first team coach I had had faith in what I could accomplish and he helped me see the [playing area] differently...[Overall] they gave me a lot of confidence just by saying, that's really good or maybe try this. I always listened and I always wanted to improve.

Maria was invited to train with the national squad while playing for her provincial team. It was at this point that Maria made some significant decisions with respect to giving herself the best opportunity to make the national team:

The head coach told me I had to put in about 20 hours a week and there was no way I was going to say no...It was a world competition year and that was my goal. Making the national team was a huge step but making the national team competing at a world competition was even bigger. So I decided to give myself the best chance. I knew that if I was going to be invited to the camp that I was going to miss too much school so I knew I couldn't really do both. So I decided to put school aside for a while...I had a talk with the national team head coach and she thought maybe it would be a good idea...I was wondering what my parents would say and luckily they've always been very supportive of all my decisions.

Maria was very happy with her decision because she indicated it would have been very difficult to do both. Her commitment paid off as she was invited to her first national camp. Her first camp experience was challenging. She spoke very little English and was trying to keep up with what was

going on, along with trying to make the team. She was fortunate to have two older players who took her under their wing:

I started to have shin splints because the surface was so hard. I was really stressed out because all the girls were experienced and older. I was by far the youngest and I didn't know that much English...so I was struggling with that. So the stress of doing everything right but also looking and watching what the rest were doing. I was lucky to have two girls who were on the national team for ten years who were my role models...They were from my province and they were like big sisters for me always making sure I was okay and translating everything for me...I don't know what I would have done if I had not had them. Also it was a big plus for me that I knew the head coach. She knew how serious I was about the team and how I was training and I guess my personality. So maybe that helped for the selection too.

Maria was selected to that team and she remembered calling her mother and both of them crying on the phone, "It was huge...Every section of the camp they were cutting girls. So it was stress all the time and competition and you try and forget about it but it's always there."

That first experience with the national team Maria recalled as "hard mentally." Because it was a world competition year, the team trained together over a longer period of time and was away a lot more than usual. So Maria had to adjust to being away from home for long periods of time. Maria also experienced some personal struggles with the coach related to her being the youngest on the team:

Since I was the youngest player, the coach made me make a schedule of everything I was doing that day. It was ridiculous...I had to write it out everyday and bring it back to her so she could look at it...But she was the head coach so I didn't want to argue. I think I was more stressed out away from the practices and games than when I was playing just because you had to do everything right. It was hard to talk to her because I never felt comfortable with her...I finally

told her that I was old enough to take care of myself but it was a bit too late...When the older players found out about me doing the schedule they were really mad and they went to see the coach so I knew I had the team backing me up.

Maria acknowledged that she learned a number of lessons from that experience and that it was an important first step in her career and in her maturity:

I think it was good. It gave me confidence. I wasn't confident enough. But it was my first year and I was not very mature. I matured a lot that year, hanging out with all the older girls. I don't see it as a negative today...[At the world competition] I didn't get to play, but that was not a big deal for me because I was just happy to be there....I think that whole experience was a huge step in my career and in my life too.

After returning for the world competition and the long training period, Maria experienced symptoms similar to burnout. She was confused by her feelings toward, and frustrations with, her sport. She credited her provincial coach in helping her through the experience:

When I came back from the world competition [the head coach from the national team] made me play with my provincial team. She indicated that if I didn't make the provincial team then I couldn't be on the list for the next national team. But after three months of day after day, practicing twice a day [with the national team] I was fed up with the sport...I didn't want to hear about it. I hated it...It was just something I didn't need...So I was not very nice and I felt bad because I'm like what is going on with me. This sport has been my passion for so many years. How come I am reacting this way? A former provincial coach helped as he was like, "Don't worry. It's normal. You had so much of the sport, just take a break and in a couple of months [the passion] will come back." And that's what happened. After two or three months I actually felt like I couldn't wait to play.

That year Maria finished off her college diploma and started to consider going to a university in the United States to play on the advice and encouragement of a former teammate from the national team and the national coach. She was unsure about being so far away from home and being in another country but she decided to take all the necessary steps and went to visit a university where she had made contact with a coach. She enjoyed the visit and was offered a scholarship, so she decided to go. She described the experience as "the best four years of my life." However, the first year was definitely the most challenging having to speak English all the time and not knowing anyone there:

The first year was really hard. I had to think in English twenty-four hours a day and I didn't have anyone to speak my language with. It was hard to make friends too because when you make a joke that you think is funny, it ends up not being funny when you translate it. So people thought I was kind of weird. They made fun of my accent when I was speaking English. That was hard and I thought they were really immature because they didn't support me. I was really frustrated because a few girls gave me a hard time...I didn't feel respected.

When Maria returned home for the summer, she found herself to be more verbally aggressive. Her interactions at university had caused her to bottle up her feelings of frustration and anger because she felt she could not communicate them properly. However, at home she could express herself freely and in her own language. This opportunity to communicate, along with her frustrating year, led to changes in her communication patterns that her parents noticed: "My parents were like wow what's wrong with you...Because I could express myself now..., it was coming out a bit too hard." Despite the difficulties however, Maria returned the next year promising herself that "nobody's going to step on my toes." And it worked. That year and the subsequent years were much better and Maria developed strong friendships with the same girls who had given her a hard time initially, "They are some of my best

friends today.” Maria also had a friend from her province join the varsity team, which made a significant difference:

A big thing happened that helped me was the fact that Wendy transferred from her university in Canada. I took an apartment for both of us and oh my god things were much better. I could talk to her [in my language] and she could help me and she knew where I was coming from. It was so much easier. She probably saved my life actually. I knew I had somebody who would back me up if something happened.

Maria acknowledged the importance of her university experience on her skill level. In addition, she credited much of her development and success to the university coaches and the head coach in particular whom she described as “probably the best coach I’ve ever had.”

The coaches were always in a good mood. They made me feel good about myself and the training was fun so it makes it fun to go. They always told us when it was time to have fun and when it’s time to work. I thought they drew the line well and we always understood it. You know that if you work hard the head coach is going to respect you. He doesn’t stress you out.

Her national team experiences continued alongside her university. There was a new national coach on board and Maria’s university coach was brought on as an assistant, which provided some additional support for Maria. In addition she had earned a starting role with the national team, a role she has managed to maintain. Her most positive national team experience was at a qualifying tournament for the world competition. The tournament was held in Canada. During that tournament the team was very successful but on a personal level Maria felt she had one of her best performances ever. “I was so fit and fast that I could run forever. I felt unstoppable.”

Being a starter with the national team gave Maria a lot of confidence and she used the experience as best she could and learned from it to make her a better player overall:

Being a starter was my chance to prove that I can do it. I got yelled at a lot. I knew I made a lot of mistakes but then I learned from them. I learned a lot. I was more mature and more confident about my ability and where I stand on the team. I think I carried what I learned from the girls that were more experienced too. I learned a lot from them.

Maria also identified that sometimes being a member of the national team is about sacrifice and that sometimes those sacrifices are difficult:

It is always my sport first. I mean that's what you have to do I guess for the national team. You have to make sacrifices and make choices. I don't know how much longer I am going to be able to do that just because sometimes it is very hard. You make sacrifices that later you regret because you're like, I should have been there. I missed something important...I know that this sport is still a big thing in my life but I also want to experience other stuff. I don't know if I want to keep making the same sacrifices.

The following is Maria's experience of the six-week training camp.

Maria's Profile. Two months before the training camp I had to have surgery for my knee. That was a challenge because I knew I had to be in my best shape for the camp. The surgery went well. I didn't have too much swelling in my knee, so I could start doing my rehab earlier. But then I went on a vacation and had to put a hold on my rehab even though I was still doing something while I was away. I was happy with the way things were going with the rehab and, two months later, I was able to start playing with my university team.

In the meantime, I was still doing rehab, like riding the bike and doing anything I could to get my fitness level up. So I played in my first university game since my surgery, and I dislocated my shoulder. I had a hard time with that. Plus I had some personal things with my boyfriend. Anyway, it

was just a big mess. A lot of things happened together that I had to deal with before the world competition.

I wasn't feeling very good. I was very depressed. Everything was going wrong. It was actually one of the worst times of my life because I had to deal with a lot of stuff. I separated with my boyfriend of a year and a half, and I had to deal with this injury and with being away. Wendy, a friend of mine from my university and national team, took care of me, but it was still hard on me. I had to deal with these things all by myself and then handle the rehab.

Because we were leaving early from university, we were missing a whole week of exams. On top of my rehab, I had to write my papers and exams a week in advance, so it was a really stressful time trying to get ready. I talked with the head coach of the national team about how I was feeling physically and with my injuries. He was really supportive so that helped. I thought that I had to be one hundred percent, but there was no way I could be a hundred percent, so just having the support of my coaches, and knowing that they knew where I was coming from helped me to go to camp. I thought I'm never going to make the team. I can't even run. It was just a lot of stress for that little period of time.

Three of us flew into the camp together from our university. At that point, I was just going to do as much as I could. I had the advantage that they knew what I was capable of. I still had to prove myself, but at the same time I didn't have as much pressure on me as a first year person coming to her first camp. I had the experience and they knew who I was. I was counting on that advantage. I had to struggle though because I hadn't really played for almost a month and a half and you lose your technique. It was so frustrating to come back and not be able to do things that I used to do easily. That was very hard and I got yelled at. After a while I asked myself 'what's going on?' I didn't have a good camp. I think I probably would have been cut if they hadn't known me and known what I could do.

People arrived at roughly the same time. It's always nice to see each other and catch up on what we've missed because, usually, we haven't seen each other for a couple of months. It was nice to see the coaches too. One of the assistant coaches came to pick us up and he just drove us to the university dorms where we were staying. We were not very pleased about staying in the dorms. I didn't think it was too bad. You had your own room and if you wanted to take a break from everybody, or just wanted to be by yourself, you could go and lock yourself in your room. The dorms didn't have the comfort of hotel rooms, but they weren't too bad.

I brought my Walkman with me because music is a big part of my life. I had some books. Actually, I hadn't completed one of my classes at university. We had to leave and I had a ten-page paper that I had no time for. I was supposed to write it during the camp, but I never did. I ended up with a "B" instead of an "A." I had pictures too. I'm a big pictures person; I also had pictures of my friends, my family and my nephew and niece. They are things that I like to look at sometimes.

Everybody is happy to see each other, but you can see that everybody's stressed. That next morning is the hardest day. It's the fitness test and nobody likes the fitness test. You just want it to be over with. It's funny because there is a bit of competition there. It seems more stressful for the new ones, the people who have never been to a camp. They are more silent. We might be talking about things that happened in the past, or something funny, and they wouldn't really be able to relate to it. They would just be standing there and listening. We would get to know them a couple of days later.

On the first night, we had a meeting. This always makes me feel more nervous because the coaches are really straight forward, which is fine, but you still think about how hard the next day is going to be. Especially when you're not a first year, because you really know how hard it's going to be. The coach told us about how the week was going, that there were going to be some cuts at the end of the week, and that we were going to have individual meetings with the coaches. Individual meetings

don't usually bother me because I don't mind talking to the coach but, personally, I didn't know how good I was going to be because I wasn't one hundred percent.

The next morning, we got up to eat but nobody was very hungry -- more sick to the stomach. You don't want to eat too much because you don't want to get cramps. I hate that. After eating, we went straight to the track. The coaches separated the group into two teams. I just tried to take the attitude of who cares, whatever happens, happens. We had good results. Some were not too good, but it was not the biggest test. The coaches only wanted to see who was fit and who wasn't. I don't think it had a big impact on who was staying or not.

In the afternoon we did speed stuff, like accelerations. I had good results. I was happy with my performance so that kind of gave me a bit of confidence for the next day. After that day, everybody was way less stressed, we were playing around by the end of it which loosened everybody up. It's always such a relief at the end of the day. When we went to eat, you could tell that everyone was more relaxed because people were laughing and less silent. So then we had another meeting. It was the same thing, what the coaches were expecting and what was going to happen the next day.

We had a sport psychologist with us. We had to have meetings with him and write down how we were feeling. You could tell that he was a good person, but it was hard to fit his sessions into the schedule. We didn't have very much time. Our time off was used to get some rest and sleep. Sometimes we had homework that we had to give back to him, like how you felt and blah, blah, blah. Before a game, you had to fill out about two to three sheets about how you felt. Then after the game you had to evaluate your performance. I'm sure it was a good thing, but at some point we just thought it was too much.

We could feel some tension among the coaches, and between the coaches and the players. The coaches never really showed us anything, it was just things that I would hear from the physiotherapist.

You could see that, when they were all eating together, there was some tension. I'm so bad with that stuff because very often when there are things going on, I try not to pay attention. A lot of things happened between coaches and players, but it never really happened with me so I never wanted to pay attention. I wanted to just concentrate on what I was doing. The players were talking about it a bit. It just seemed that the coaches wanted to separate themselves from us so much.

We didn't have very good communication with the head coach. As we got closer to the world competition, he became more stressed. We had some things going on with our national organization [during the camp] about how they weren't treating us fairly. I thought everything was blown out of proportion, but again, I just had to push that away because it was ridiculous. The national organization owed us some money and we had to sign something and we had an attorney who was taking care of us, but we were against our national organization. It was just things that we didn't need to be bothered with. We should have been focusing together as a team. Instead, we were all separate and we were against each other. That probably had a big impact on how badly we did.

In a sense, all the players worked really hard to keep us together, to try and make things easier for ourselves, and to try to have some sort of communication with the coaches. We had some meetings with just the players, and then we relayed things that weren't working for us to the captains and they passed it along to the coach. But it seemed like the head coach didn't really care. I think he was just getting really nervous. He had difficulty handling the pressure of not knowing how we were going to be, especially as the tournament got closer. I guess his job was in jeopardy if we didn't do well.

Personally, in addition to dealing with all that stuff, I had to continue doing my rehab and trying to heal my shoulder. I had to wear a really annoying brace. My knee was doing okay and my performance wasn't too bad. And then to add to everything, we did a recovery practice for one of the training sessions. It was just a little of activity, but my body was cold and I pulled my hip flexor. I

thought I was okay, so I tried to do some sprints. I tried a couple of times, but it was just killing me. So I had to stop and, again, I was out for about a week and a half to two weeks. So I had to add that to the pile.

We would be woken up at about six in the morning. The coaches would wake us up and it was so annoying. They would knock on our doors, so you would hear the first door being knocked on and every door all the way to your door. So you were up like five to ten minutes before you should have been. Every minute of sleep counted. So we went to eat at 7 a.m. Breakfast for me always had to be the same thing because I would know that I was going to react well to it - toast and cereal and juice. We would train for an hour and a half and, after that, we would have a half hour session with the sport psychologist. We had a big book that we had to follow. I didn't immediately think that what he was teaching us was very useful. Our time was so short. We didn't have a year to prepare. So we just felt that what he was teaching us didn't have an impact right away.

It was awesome the way the coaches set up the camp. It was like a job. Monday through Friday were working days, like nine to five, and then we had the weekends off. Tuesdays and Thursdays were our hardest practices because the fitness was emphasized. By the end of it, our legs were dead, but we were happy that we had worked hard for ourselves and worked hard for each other. So the intensity was always hard. You could sense that people were working hard, so you would work hard too. There was a lot of encouragement.

After the psychologist's session, we would go shower, eat, and then have two to three hours before the next practice. That was kind of short. I think I took a nap every day. Then I would get up from the nap, get my uniform from downstairs, come back, and get ready. I would have to get both ankles taped plus include physiotherapy treatment. So after that practice, camp was done for the day. We would have half an hour, come back, go eat, and then have the rest of the day off. Some people had

to rest, or have physiotherapy. We were staying on two floors, and each floor had a lounge, so we would just lie there and watch our soaps and talk.

The first weekend off, a bunch of us just stayed in the dorms and then went shopping in downtown Kingston. It's so beautiful. The next weekend my boyfriend surprised me by coming to visit me. I didn't think he would buy a really expensive ticket, but he did and we had the whole weekend. We rented a place downtown and just walked. We ate good food. Oh, it was just great. It was so nice to be away from the sport, not necessarily away from everybody, but just away from the idea of the camp.

On the Friday of the second weekend, we played a men's team. It was really frustrating because even though they were seniors, they still were much faster and stronger. The coaches divided us into two teams. We hadn't had cuts yet. The first team consisted of new players, or people who had never really played on the national team, and then we played the next day. Most of us on the second team were the more experienced players, but we still didn't do well against the men's team. It didn't help our confidence. We were playing a team that we couldn't really compare ourselves to.

When we came back on Monday, everybody was just happy to be together and to work together. I like to know what's going to happen and the coaches were really straightforward with the schedule. It was okay that the next day was going to be a hard day because I could do it and because I knew Wednesday would be an easier day.

After the second week, the coaches made the cuts. We were talking amongst ourselves as to whom we thought was going to be staying. One of my good friends got cut, so I had to try and support her as much as I could. You just go with the coach's decision. You don't argue because you're happy to be on the team. You don't want to jeopardize anything. Everybody meets with the coach, and then he tells you what is expected of you. Personally, I had a good meeting with him because I had had a good performance in the competition the year before. The coaches put a lot of pressure on me by telling me

that they were expecting no less than what I had accomplished the year before. I told them that that was my intention, but that I wanted to make sure they understood that I was recovering from another injury so I was not one hundred percent. They were really supportive about that. I was feeling pretty confident. Everybody talks about how hard it is to talk to the head coach, but personally, he has always been pretty nice to me. I wasn't nervous at all. I've known him for three to four years. He knows me. But I had a harder time, closer to the tournament, having the same relationship with him. He was really moody and unapproachable. That was hard. It was hard on everybody.

After the first round of cuts, we started to get into more teamwork and team tactics. Before the cuts, we played a lot, but it was always against each other. I don't like playing against each other because I don't want to hurt the other person. It's always different if you hate the opponent. That pumps you up. But you can't really do that to your own players. You could start to tell who was going to play where. You could tell because it was always the same people who were put in the same positions in practice.

We traveled to Montreal for a two game series against Italy. We played okay the first game. The second game was better. We made a lot of mistakes defensively. It helped a lot to watch the videotape. I like to watch myself and see my mistakes. The coaches were not afraid to show the mistakes to everybody. But it's okay because you need to know and you try to adjust. Personally, my fitness was not the greatest because I couldn't play very much. I only played the second game against Italy. I was on the bench the other game.

My roommate was Mishi, and she didn't show up until much later because her brother-in-law died like a month earlier and her grandma and her mom died almost at the same time. She was a really good friend of mine from university. I was her roommate and I think she asked for me because she wanted to be with somebody she knew. So for a long time I was by myself. I mean, in one sense, it was

nice, in another sense I was kind of apart from everybody. Everybody was doing things together, but I didn't have anybody. A lot of times, I was by myself in my room and I'm a people-person so I missed that a little, just being able to talk to people.

We went to the service and that was hard emotionally. We didn't have to go, only if you wanted to, but I really wanted to go. That was hard. Personally, I thought that Mishi was one of the strongest people I'd ever met, which kind of helped me out. Just seeing her, and how she was handling the situation with such maturity and strength, gave me strength. I was just injured and you can get through that stuff. It's not a big deal. So it gave me a push to stop acting like such a baby. She came back after the Italy series, and then we went back to Kingston and trained for another week. I got injured then.

When we went to Boston, we were staying in a hotel. Australia was also there. We were saying that it was weird that we were both going to Calgary to play against each other. Mishi was back and we got to room together. Initially, I was rooming with Nathalie but eventually, we just switched because her and Vonnnette have similar schedules. They don't sleep very much, so they go to bed at 1 a.m. and get up at 5 a.m., which is not my case nor Mishi's either. So we switched because it was better for everybody. Mishi and I always had a good time together.

We always leave early, like an hour and a half, for games depending on travel time. The day before we would usually try to adopt the same schedule as game day. We would drive to the venue and look at it. We would have a little practice, especially for the people who were going to start. The starters usually would play some fun games. It's always fun. The ones who knew they were not going to get to play too much would have a harder practice, more physically demanding. I was injured so I just watched the practice.

I remember that morning of the game against the United States. The coaches really wanted me to play, so I had to go and run to see if I would be okay. I could have pushed, but I knew that the world

competition was soon so I didn't want to push it. The coaches were pretty understanding about that. I explained it and didn't play, so that was kind of disappointing. I played against China, for the first bit, and then I couldn't do it. I was hurting too bad. So I had to come off. It was bothering me so much that it was hard to concentrate on what I had to do. I couldn't really give my 100% so it was really frustrating. I was feeling my fitness going down so I would try to do things to keep up with everybody, but it was never enough.

We had the greatest game ever against the US team. I didn't play because of my injury. That was frustrating, not being able to be part of it, but I was very proud of how we played. I think I screamed so hard that I lost my voice. All I could do was cheer for my team, so that's what I did.

One person that was a big friend to me, and very supportive, was the physiotherapist. She was the only woman on staff, so she was sitting with the coaches and hearing all the stuff. Then she would tell me what was going on. She was always trying to be helpful to the players, trying to get us things that we needed, or things that we couldn't get. She's been really helpful in many ways throughout the whole experience.

My university coach was our assistant coach. I really have a lot of respect for that man. He's such a great person and a great coach. It was nice having him around because he was the one who would laugh with the players. It was so much easier to talk to him. He was always easy going, he was the link between the coaches and the players. He was often on our side. Sometimes I would talk to him about my injuries, and about what I should do. He would always help me make the decisions. So he was a good resource for me throughout the whole training camp and world competition.

After Boston, we went to Calgary. That day was such a long travel day. We had to drive, I think, seven hours to the airport in a bus. We watched movies in the bus. Then we had to fly to Calgary and take another bus to where we were staying. It's always fun traveling with the team. You either

sleep, or talk, or talk about what you're going to do after the tournament. A big topic with all of us was how much we missed home or our boyfriend or husband or family.

I was excited because we were going to Calgary, and a little bit nervous because after Calgary we would be starting the world tournament. I was excited to play again. I ended up only playing one game out of the two against Australia and it was the second one. We played awful that first game. Gabrielle was my roommate this time. We had a good time together. I've known her for a long time.

My family came to see us play. We won that second game. We played awesome. We had a big crowd and a lot of kids watching. After the game, we went to another hotel that was close to the airport. Early in the morning we had to get up, and get into the van all dressed up with travel suits since we were going to the world competition. I was very excited. I couldn't wait to be in the competition. I thought we were pretty ready. You could see the head coach getting really tense. I don't think that he's a bad person or anything, I just think it's hard for him to handle pressure. It wasn't our fault, but he was just so stressed out about things. He wasn't very comfortable to be around.

When I look back on the experience, I see that there is a lot of pain and a lot of hard work: Physical and mental pain. There were a lot of things going on, difficult things that I had to deal with. It should be an incredible experience, the best time of your life, but I don't feel that way. I feel like it was a bad time in my life. I'm happy that the year was over. I mean, I'm still really proud that I was part of it. That's probably what I will tell my children one day. But I think, in my heart, it just seems that it was a really sad time too.

I had to deal with injuries and other injuries. I was just recovering from my knee surgery and then I dislocated my shoulder and I pulled my quad. So I was out and I couldn't really give a 100%. It was dealing with that that had a big psychological impact on me. You have to be strong mentally sometimes, and yet you feel really weak. Just the fact that you're not as good as you were makes you

think 'well I'm not good enough.' You just have to talk to yourself and push yourself even if it doesn't seem like you can do it.

I had some personal issues, too, that I had to deal with. I talked with my friends. I just tried to push it away even though it was always on my mind. At first it was my sport, but then it was personal issues. Usually, whatever problems I have outside of practices and games I am able to put aside and totally forget about while I am playing. But the fact that I was injured and I couldn't play, made it seem like I had no way out. All I could do was talk about it, and just try to deal with it that way. It hasn't been easy. You're stuck, and you have to travel, and you're away from home. I mean, it's nice traveling, but after a month it gets a bit old. I think I should have withdrawn totally and completely from those issues while I was at camp. I should have just stopped calling that person and started to focus on myself and on finding ways to be happy. I needed to stop thinking about what happened before, and focus on what things I felt were most important. I think it affected me too much. Maybe even how I dealt with my injury. Normally, I would have just laughed about my injury and said 'yeah, I'll be okay,' but I just approached everything so negatively because of it.

When Mishi lost her mom, I think her strength helped me to go through what was going on in my life. It seemed really little compared to what was in her life. I don't think I've ever been so close to that kind of experience before. It was just something that I really didn't know how to deal with. Her strength really helped me deal with everything. Anytime you go through some personal thing, I think, in the long run that it's always going to give you more strength and more confidence to go through other stuff in life. I think that is what happened. Little things that maybe before would have bothered me, now just didn't seem to matter. You just went on. You would be okay.

I hate camp. I hate it all. It's just like, practice, practice, practice, no rest, which is what a camp is, but I just hate it. When it gets to games, you have much more rest. The coaches want us fresh, so

they're not going to run us into the ground during practice. We get into more tactical stuff. We're not running, we were doing some fitness but not as often since we were playing. You would just go eat, come back, rest, have a work out, and take care of your injuries. In my own personal experience, I don't think anybody is excited about camp. They're frightened. They're frightened about the first day and if they're going to make it through the next day. I don't think it should be that way. You should be excited about going. It's true that it's going to be hard work. You don't get anything without working hard. But I think anybody would agree to give one hundred percent if they were enjoying themselves. I think they would do it unconsciously.

I was really disappointed at the end, but I was so happy that I was coming back home and I was driving back with my parents from the world competition. All I had in mind was that I wanted to have fun. I just wanted to see my friends. I wanted to go out, meet people, and just have fun. What kind of surprised me was how much I missed playing. I was really disappointed about the results, but it didn't affect the passion I had for the sport because I came back and, a week later, was playing with my friends. But there was no way I would play with a serious team who wanted to win. I just wanted to play for fun.

I thought that we were the greatest team in terms of personality and chemistry. That's what I remember. I'm not somebody who keeps bad things in mind too much. That's why I forget things that happened. All I remember is that we had a good time together. I try to take a positive view of it. If our performance had been better, everything would have been better. My feelings, the program, the media would have been better. It feels like we failed, and that people were ashamed of us. Maybe in twenty years, they will realize that 'hey, those girls did something great' because we haven't been in the world competition since then. I still have some good memories. It's pretty hard because it seems like I

suppressed some emotions about the whole experience and now it feels like I'm replaying those emotions. Sometimes, I bounce from good to bad emotions and I don't know which ones are stronger.

Wendy

At the time of the interviews, Wendy was 22 years old. She had been a member of the national team for 1 year prior to this camp. She had attended 2 training camps previously, neither of which was longer than one month. She had just completed her final year at university in the States.

Life History in Sport. Wendy started playing this sport when she was six years old. At that time her hometown did not divide teams by age groups nor by gender, "It was from 6 to 10 years old and it was co-ed." She also competed in a number of other team sports but she described this sport as "always one of my favourites...I just wanted to be a part of everything in it and play every position."

Wendy indicated that her parents were very supportive and attended all her games, "I can't really remember games that they weren't there...my support system was very active and I still enjoy that type of thing even now." Wendy recalled one example of the kind of support her parents provided as she tried to balance a number of different sports:

Sometimes I didn't know how my mom did it, driving me around to everything. There was one day, I had a ringette game in the morning and from there we had a final at the basketball tournament. Then we figured out with the schedule of ringette that we'd have to leave at half time. So I played half the basketball final and then was driven back to the arena to play our next ringette game. It was like that all the time and I loved it. I wouldn't have had it any other way.

In addition Wendy had three sisters and a brother who were also involved in sport and she credited her older brother most for her sport participation, "My older brother had a lot to do with my involvement in sports in general. I just completely idolized him because he was involved in all kinds of sports so I always looked up to him."

When Wendy was 10 years old, she joined a traveling team, “I was really thrilled to be a member of that team... We would play all-star teams here and there. We played in hot pink uniforms and we thought we were the best.” It was after the traveling team formed that a local league started to develop and Wendy began playing games and tournaments on a more regular basis. She also joined her high school team and played other sports as well.

Wendy was involved in both team and individual sports and through her different sport experiences, she began to develop more of a preference for team sports:

In the individual sports it was nice to know you only had to worry about yourself, but I always gravitated back to the team ones... When you step on the field or court it's not all on your shoulders. You depend on your teammates and they depend on you and there is that unity there where you go out and fight for each other. It's always something I've loved about it.

At this stage in her life, Wendy described herself as “a determined little kid, really enthusiastic and driven for someone who's 10 years old... I had a lot of fun, but when I played I was very competitive.”

Wendy identified two coaches who stood out for her during her youth experiences. One was a young woman who was only five or six years older than Wendy, but who acted as a positive role model and friend, “She was more of an older sister-type. She would have us over for sleepovers and stuff... We'd go and see her play and realize, wow we can be like that. It was really fun.” The next coach who took over after the younger coach stepped down changed the way Wendy viewed the sport:

He just opened up a new world for us in terms of our knowledge of the sport... That was actually the first time a lot of us had had a male coach. He was stricter than we were used to and he made us do fitness and these innovative plays that we just thought were great.

Wendy also played for her high school but only after she and a group of girls got together to petition the school for a team. There had been some resistance to starting a school team in Wendy's

sport by another teacher, however, their efforts were successful and a school team was formed. The team actually ended up being very successful, “When I was in grade 10 and 11 we didn't lose a game the entire season...It wasn't a great level but it was still cool to have a school team.” The wide range of abilities was sometimes frustrating for Wendy who was very competitive, “Sometimes if we were losing, instead of stepping back from the whole game and just finding the enjoyment from playing, I would just get mad. I would get angry that we were losing and try and do everything.” Wendy described herself in high school as friendly person but still with that competitive nature, “I wouldn't say perfectionist, but I knew if I did something, I wanted to do well.”

Wendy was also quite talented at several other sports and at one point she had to make a choice between ringette and two other sports:

I was trying out for the Canada Games team with ringette. The coach said you've earned a spot on the team but it's a big commitment and in order for me to select you I need to know that ringette will come first. It was hard for me to say but it was really an easy decision because I knew I didn't want to give up my two other main team sports. So I said thank you but, I can't do that so he kind of made it a bit easier for me.

Eventually, Wendy had to make that same choice between her other two team sports which was a little bit of a harder decision. She decided that it would be easier to play one of those sports recreationally later on in life and that is when her current sport emerged as number one.

Wendy continued to be identified as talented in this sport as she was asked to play for an elite team after being identified from her community team. It was that experience that Wendy described as contributing significantly to her development, “I think that winter I improved so much. On this elite team I learned so much and my game improved a lot as well. I kept playing with them and then got noticed and played for my provincial team a couple of years later.

Provincial trials were Wendy's first real exposure to a formalized selection process and training camp. At first the experience was challenging as Wendy struggled with her confidence and believing she deserved to be there. But as she gained more experience in herself and knowledge of the process, she approached the situations with more confidence:

The first time I went to [a camp] I was just so overwhelmed. I was just like I don't belong here. Look at these girls they're so good. I was like, what am I doing here. You're all tentative and don't know if you can do it. After awhile you inevitably grow out of that and realize you can do it. I just kept improving and I began to realize that I was one of the better players and I can do this and I can play and I'll just come out here and try my hardest.

It only took a few years of playing with the provincial team before Wendy was scouted as a potential invitee to a junior national camp. Two other girls, who were Wendy's good friends on the provincial team, Lisa and Emily, were also being considered for that same camp. So when Wendy was called into her provincial coaches office to hear that she had been officially invited to the camp, she met the news with mixed emotions. Lisa and Emily had not been invited:

I was like, wow. I wasn't expecting [to be invited] and I was really, really happy. Then I asked the coach have you told Lisa and Emily yet as I was just as excited for them. He told me their names weren't on the list. I was like, oh my god. I was torn. I was thrilled because it was my dream since I was little to go play for my country and this was a first step in that direction. And then my two best friends with the same hopes are not going to be there with me. I didn't want to look them in the eye. I didn't want to be the one to tell them. I mean, they were happy for me, but I could tell at the same time they were like, why her and not me? So that was tough.

Wendy's first junior national camp was a fairly positive experience for her. She initially experienced some of the doubts and worries similar to her first provincial camp but soon came to

realize that she was capable of holding her own in this setting, “I was like oh my gosh, can I do this and I went out there and realized that I could. I was the same ability and had a lot in common with the girls. We bonded really quickly. It was a really great time.” Wendy acknowledged that the camp was tough but not unreasonable so, “I had this image in my mind of what it was supposed to be and it really fulfilled that. I had a really good week of training and a good first experience.”

It was at this camp that the assistant coach approached Wendy about attending university in the States. At that point she had already planned to attend university in her home province so never really gave it a second thought. However, she came to question her choice of university shortly after the start of the university season, “I went to my first practice at university and about 30 to 35 of the people trying out had never played the sport competitively before. My whole ideal of a university team went poof. I was like, oh my gosh, what am I doing here.” The year did not get any better and Wendy indicated that her sport skills suffered. She decided to transfer to a university in the States the following year and took the necessary steps. The only uncertainty in the decision to go arose when her scholarship was reduced, but it was her parents who really encouraged her to go:

I was set up pretty nicely [for money for university in my home province] and I didn't want to put my mom and dad into financial difficulty because I wanted to improve my skills. So I was ready to say no and then my parents were actually the ones who said, Wendy, if you don't do this you're going to regret it.

In the interim Wendy was invited to her first senior national team camp, “I was ecstatic because it was the next jump.” However, the camp did not turn out the way Wendy would have liked. First of all, the newer players were put in dorms whereas the older players were billeted with the local athletes on the team so “that division was already created right from the start.” The living arrangement meant that the only time available to get to know the other players was during the two practices each day, “It

was hard to get to know people and form that bond. I didn't like that very much...I became very close with the girls in the dorm. I still keep in contact with them. That was one thing I gained from that."

Wendy had a "disastrous camp" and was concerned about what her soon to be university coach, who was there as the assistant coach, was thinking:

I had the worst week of playing...I think part of it was probably nerves and I was playing with all these great players and wondering if my talent really measured up. Lacking self-confidence didn't help...I just didn't play very well. I knew I wasn't going to make the team and my future university coach was there and I was like is this man doubting his decision.

The final straw for Wendy at that camp was how the national team coach communicated to her that she didn't make the team:

He just trashed me completely. He didn't know what had happened to me over the year but I was a better player the year before than now. I was not going to give this man the satisfaction of showing that I'm upset. I said, okay, well thank you. But when I went back home I was a wreck.

I was like, I am not playing again for a long time. That probably lasted four or five days (laugh).

Wendy managed to turn the whole experience into a learning opportunity, one that she used to motivate herself at the next camp:

Looking back on it, it was probably one of the best things that could have happened to me...It forced me to re-evaluate my priorities, like what is really important...I had never been cut from anything in my life and there's a different kind of feeling...Once I gained perspective on it, it allowed me to rededicate myself to improve as a player...I just said, you just work harder and show what you can really do.

The next year Wendy attended university in the States and the decision was very positive for her:

Looking back on it now, it was the most important decision of my life and I made the right choice...I could not have asked for anything more out of it. The people, the facilities and the coach. A great coach and a great person to me and the entire team...I've never been on a team that has such great respect for one another.

Wendy developed some strong friendships and bonds with the other athletes on her university team, especially Maria who became her best friend and was also a teammate on the national team, "We are really close and I just love her to death." In addition Wendy indicated how important the head coach was to the team's success and to her university experience overall:

He's very low key outside of practice and competitions and you can talk to him as a person. In practice and competition I don't think there's anybody who's more intense. There's just such a drive in him and he's such a motivator...After he finishes his pre-game talks, I'm just like okay I'm ready to go. He makes players want to go out and win for him, but he is also very clear in saying, I'm the coach but this is your team, play for each other.

Wendy's positive university experiences helped Wendy go into future national camp armed with more confidence. After her first year at university in the States, she went into the next senior national camp ready to play and made the senior national team:

That camp I was much more confident in my abilities because I had played a full year at the collegiate level and established myself. I was like, well I have a whole year under my belt and I am a better player. I know I'm a better player and I am going to come back and I'm going to show the national head coach and other players that I can play at this level. I had a really good week.

Wendy continued to play well, making the team and then earning a starting spot. The national team experiences that stands out for Wendy was the world competition qualifier. It was in Canada and

"the atmosphere of the final game was unbelievable...It was very exhilarating and a fun time...People were almost playing with something to prove. People didn't think that the Canadian women could establish this program and qualify, so it was like beating the odds."

This is Wendy's experience of the six-week training camp.

Wendy's Profile. I was at university prior to going to camp. I was just training. We had a spring season where we played five games against the top teams in the States. I went through some vigorous training at the beginning of the semester where I was weight lifting four times a week, working on my speed, agility and endurance. It was tied in with my college team training, but it was very good preparation for me knowing that I was going to be attending the national camp.

It was hectic for us. When I say us, I mean myself and the other girls from my university who were going to the camp. We had to forgo our finals, worry about getting everything taken care of, plus prepare for the camp and get all our things together. It was very stressful, so it was almost a relief to get out and go to camp.

I'd been with the full national team for a year and I knew what to expect. I'd been on a trip earlier to Australia, I knew all the girls on the team, and I was very comfortable with them and the coaching staff. So I wasn't very nervous about going to camp. I was almost just eager to get there and already be in the swing of things and be in that routine. As much as I was dreading the fitness day when we do all the testing, I just couldn't wait to get into the two-a-day practices, even though they're really tough.

Fitness testing is always the most nerve-racking part because everyone can play the sport, but one facet of playing the sport is the endurance. You need to have it. You need to be able to play for the duration of the game. So the testing is necessary but everyone always dreads it. So it's always nice to get that out of the way. It's strange because you would talk to people and ask 'have you been doing your

training, have you been doing this, what have you been doing and how have your times been in your testing?' You're talking with your friends but at the same time you're almost looking for reassurance. So it's always funny. It went very well.

We always start with two practices a day. You just start to get into the routine. We'd wake up, have breakfast, and get taped if needed. People from different rooms would have to bring the equipment down. We'd walk down to the facility, which took us about ten minutes. A lot of people would leave early for the sessions and it didn't irk me, but I just wondered why everyone would leave so early. I would just go and I'd make it on time, but at a leisurely pace. I didn't like to be rushed. So I would usually leave a little bit after people. A lot of people would warm up on their own before the warm up would actually begin. The coach would want us working a little bit, and doing a little bit of a physical warm up, before we actually started so that we were warm and so he wouldn't have to take us through a group warm up. But I used to do a minimal amount of that.

The morning session would last an hour and a half to two hours. Then the coaches would set up this thing with a sport psychologist. After our morning session, we'd go over and listen to him talk for about half an hour to an hour. This was a new concept that they were introducing and I'm not sure how successful it was. He wanted us to fill out these forms prior to every game, and then we had post-game and anxiety forms to fill out. For me it was like, 'well I wasn't thinking about these things before, but now that you've brought them to my attention, I might be nervous about them.' So it was a bit weird. Not that I didn't need it, but a lot of the stuff he talked about we had covered in university. I think I felt insulted that he would reiterate everything. I found it elementary at times. I didn't like the sheets at all. They were really tedious and they broke up the way I wanted to get ready for things.

The coaches would sit in on the meetings with the sport psychologist. I think if they hadn't been there, the sport psychologist probably would have had more trouble getting his ideas across to us. Not

that we wouldn't be receptive to him, but I think we would have been a little more cynical. It was hard, because we'd go in there right after training, then sit down, and have to listen to him. I know a lot of people would doze off in the meetings and it wasn't because they weren't interested, it was fatigue.

Then we'd go for lunch, or shower and then go for lunch, and then have a little bit of free time. If we did have free time in the day, it was after our lunch and before our afternoon session. You could unwind, listen to music, or watch TV in the lounge on the dorm floor. I read a lot between sessions. Then, we'd have the afternoon session and then, usually, a meeting about how the day went with the Head Coach. At night, we'd have dinner, and then at night, there was free time. Sometimes we'd have individual meetings, where the coaches talked about our progress, and other times it was just group stretching to make sure you're body was doing okay and that you were getting treatment if you needed it. I tried to stay away from the physio's room as much as possible. At night, I just watched TV and then, because I was so tired from the day, I would end up crashing pretty early.

I had a really good time for the first couple of weeks. I was training and playing well, so that was a good feeling. I just felt really in sync with my body, with my thoughts, and with everything that was going on during practice.

We would train twice a day for the five days and then we'd have Saturday and Sunday off. It was nice to get away from the sport for a while. You knew you were still there for the camp, but it was nice to have the two-day break so that you could do whatever, or do absolutely nothing if you wanted to just give your body a rest. That first weekend, I was supposed to go with my friend into Montreal, but she got sick so it didn't end up happening. I just did some laundry and walked around the campus a little bit. I don't know why it's so clear in my mind, but I went to the library to see if I could hack around with e-mail for awhile, but I couldn't get into my account. So they had this really beautiful fountain outside and I ended up sitting out there and just writing thoughts down in my journal. So it

was good in that sense to get your mind away from it, and you didn't see the same people or the same faces, so it gave you a break from that routine aspect too. I started out keeping a journal and then it didn't work out.

The second week was pretty much the same as the first week – two-a-day practices and getting more settled into the routine. You get to see the coaches in their routine too, and you're in a better position to gauge how they're going to react to certain situations. For example, if the team is not doing too well, are they going to be patient and let us reset and maybe start off on a better foot, or are they going to get fired up right away and shoot the whole practice because of one drill that wasn't performed well. I think your body is more adjusted to everything you're doing too because it's hard work. The first week, you experience a lot of soreness and, mentally, you're often not as attuned to everything as you'd like. But in the second week, I think, you get into a nice groove.

I knew that I didn't want to spend the second weekend there again. As nice as it was, I didn't think I had much more to explore. So I ended up going to a friend's place near there. We just hung out. It was a lot of fun because we were just in a completely different place. You weren't sitting in your dorm room, you were somewhere else sitting down. It was just a change of scenery.

The dorms were nice, in the sense that we were one to a room, so we had privacy. You could prepare for everything the way you wanted, and you didn't have to worry about anybody else. But you also had freedom. If you wanted to go talk to someone, you just went next door. It was kind of refreshing to be by yourself for a while. You knew that you were going to be there for a while, and you didn't have to worry about being paired with someone that you didn't get along with. You just had to concentrate on yourself.

I tried to individualize my room. I made sure that I brought pictures. I brought pictures of my family, my friends back home, and my boyfriend. I brought a card from one of my friends that wished me luck, and I just tucked all that stuff in my journal and opened it up whenever I was feeling lonely.

Anna was in the room right next to me so we hung out a lot, and it was the same with Kelly and Nathalie. Kelly and I always managed to find each other at camps and we would end up hanging out all the time. We used to room together a lot. Then the coach realized we were having a bit too much fun and we didn't get put together anymore. We hung out a lot and my sister was there too. I hadn't seen her since Christmas, so I got to spend a lot of time with her.

The selections were going to be made the third week of training. We had played a couple of scrimmages by then. The head coach was big on charting things during the game. He was very keen on statistics and how certain statistics reflect your performance in a game. It was something absolute that we could all look at, and he'd post it. So if you thought that you had had an alright game, you would go to the trainers door and see that 'oh well, I didn't do as well as I thought in a particular area' or 'maybe I should have done more of this.' It was right there in front of you. It was something that you couldn't argue with.

That was sometimes hard to take because you don't keep track in your head of the amount of times that you do particular technical or tactical maneuver or the amount of times that you win possession. So we had that to look at, and in addition to that, he put up his view of how you played and then gave us a rating from 1 to 10. The highest anyone ever got in a rating was seven. It was hard. Playing at university, a lot of stuff is charted, but I'd never been exposed to something that was so harsh. If you weren't used to it you were like, 'geez, he picked apart my entire game, broke it down into all these categories and you can't see my whole game'. But you just accept it and you realize what you have to work on. It's also hard because everyone else sees your rating. You would go up and read your

own but then, inevitably, if I did really crappy then I would want to see how everyone else did, so I would start reading everybody else's. At first, it didn't create any tension between girls, but sometimes it would, especially if you were battling for a specific position. It was very rare that someone would actually make a point of avoiding someone because they felt they should have done better than they did on the reviews, but it was so hard. I guess we gradually got used to it. Unfortunately, even when you knew you played poorly, you had to go up there and read it and know that everyone else had read it. It's hard to look people in the eye immediately afterwards, that's why private rooms were good. You each got to vent on your own. I think the atmosphere became even more competitive after that as people tried to pick it up a notch.

A couple of girls had gone down with injuries that week, so that whittled away the numbers. When things got down to the nitty gritty, we started talking about the cuts amongst ourselves -- like who we thought would make the team and who was playing well. I can't say that I was really stressed out about it because I was confident that I'd had a good three weeks of training. I'd also spoken to the coach and he'd said that if I kept playing the way I was playing that I'd have a spot as a starter. So that really bolstered my confidence, and even probably helped me to play better because I didn't want him to think that I was over confident or that I had started to lay off or drop the intensity with which I was playing. But I don't remember it being particularly stressful for me.

Actually, during that time, my friend Mishi who also was trying out for the team had a really tough time because her mom was sick and ended up dying later. On top of that, on our way to camp from university, she had stopped in to see her half brother and, the night she left, he died of a heart attack. So, she went home and had to deal with her mom being sick and then also finding out that her half brother had passed away. Then, a week later I think, her mom died and then her grandmother died within 2 days of her mom's death. I was pretty close with her. She's one of my good friends at

university. Fortunately, the camp was located reasonably close to her home so she could go there when she needed to. But she still had to deal with all that. I think it affected some of us. We wanted to be there for her. I remember when that was going on. Her mom died that week that the cuts were going to be made. She made the team, and then later when we moved from the dorms in Kingston to a hotel in Montreal to prepare for the exhibition series, we actually ended up attending her mom's funeral. So, even though we were on the outside, she was a part of our team and it was still something that had to be addressed and that we were dealing with too.

Everyone was welcome to go to the funeral, but a lot of people felt like they would be overstepping their bounds because other than those girls who are from university and a couple of girls who knew her from community teams, no one knew Mishi that well. It didn't really tear the team in two, but there was a little ill-will. We would think 'why is she saying that?' or 'why won't she just come?' It's a very touchy subject. I think we got to see sides to people that maybe we wouldn't have seen before, just because we were dealing with death. We were traveling that day, so whoever wanted to go to the funeral went and then the other people went sightseeing. I know a lot of people felt uncomfortable because they already felt guilty that they had decided not to go to the funeral, but now the only option for them was to go sightseeing. I think the whole situation just brought out a lot of feelings in people that I don't think they really wanted to deal with.

When you're with the national team at camp, you are in this bubble where things on the outside world don't matter, or at least you are not really affected by them. Then something happens, like with Mishi, and it trivializes everything else. We get so caught up in our sport, like our moods change based on our performance, and there is just so much more than that. So, I think it just put things into perspective. I think it really did affect me. I just realized how strong Mishi was and how proud I was of her. She was going to come back and play after going through this and I thought that if that ever

happened to me, I didn't know if I would be able to do that. That is something that I will forever associate with that camp.

We then went to a hotel, two to a room. I was with Jennifer most of the time, we just got along really well so the roommate situation was never a problem. It was nice to room with someone new. I had not been home for a while, so any sort of loneliness or missing of people started to get to me a little more. But then when we got to go to the hotel, it was a pleasant change of scenery. It was as if you took little steps towards your goal. If you lost sight of your goal, you could have these little things to look forward to. It was also exciting to be playing real international games at last, so we could apply everything that we had done and see how far we had progressed.

Loneliness didn't really come often. It would come mostly during the down time because, otherwise, I was caught up in everything that was going on with the other girls around me. So, it wasn't at the forefront of your mind, but when you were by yourself, before you went to bed, you would start thinking, and then it would get to you. Then you would make the call home, and that would hold you over for a bit, or you would write letters telling people what you were going through. That always helped me. But loneliness wasn't something that really bothered me, it is just an aspect that's there because you're away for so long. I probably spoke to my parents once a week or so and kept them updated with what was going on. Actually, I found out through them what was going on at home. I missed my little sister's graduation from high school. I was really upset about that, but obviously I couldn't do anything. I just found out through them what she was doing, and how everyone else in my family was. I talked with a couple of my friends from home, but the focus was really on the sport and the people who were there at the camp.

We would have a meeting, the night before our games, where the coach would announce the starting line up and then go over more specific stuff before the game. You knew who was starting and

you knew who was going to be on the bench. Quite often, we would have our team meetings before the game, but I have always found that hard. The coach would motivate us and we would talk about what we needed to do in the game. Immediately following the meeting, I would think 'okay, well, I'm ready to go, I want to go play now.' Then we would go back and have a couple more hours or even three or four more hours before the actual start of the game. So I would struggle with that a bit. I got used to it after a while though, because the coach would talk to us a bit right before we would step out to play, but it was just very brief and even then it was mostly individual.

When we traveled to games, most people listened to their CDs or walkmans. When we arrived at the facility, we would have time to get taped, and check out the facility, if you wanted to. That part is very attuned towards your individual needs, it's only later on as a team that we would warm up. I would read, if I was really into a book, or listen to music. It is so different with the national team. At university, we would listen to music all together before a game and get really pumped up as a group. With the national team, it was really different because no one would say a word. I would try to talk to a couple of people and then they would put on their headphones and you would get the hint. Everyone is very into their own thing, they know what they need. They do their own thing and they know what works for them, so that is what they do. But sometimes, that was a little too intense for me so I would just listen to other conversations that were going on. I like knowing that there are other people around, instead of just closing myself off into my own world. I always have this little thing that I do before we go out to play. A lot of people get ready really early, but for some reason I'll just stay in my flip flops and I'll only get ready right before we go out. I have no idea why I do that, I just do it.

We played well against Italy. I don't think we played with a lot of passion or drive. I think people's legs were sore. It was strange to go from competing against one another, or scrimmages against other teams, to the full game. That took some adjustment. It was a good way to measure how

far we had progressed since the beginning of camp. These games were really good chances to prove yourself. It gave people new goals and new things to shoot for. I was happy with how I played. I had a so-so first game. The coaches pointed out a couple of things to me on tape, and I adapted to the changes pretty well. I played much better my second game. I think my goal after that was just to keep improving in every one of the games we played.

At this point, people were starting to get antsy. Any doubts and problems that individuals had with the coaching staff started to emerge. Initial positive feelings around being excited, or glad to be training, faded and these negative things surfaced. Even though we were in camp two and a half months before our first world tournament game, some of the older players said it was not enough and started pointing fingers at our national organization. It was talked about amongst the players and then there were some stories published in the press. Our national organization had to defend itself by saying, "no, we have prepared the girls well," but there was no continuity with our training. Even though we were in camp two and a half months, the last time we had met as a group was four months prior to that. So there is that gap and, in Canada, not everybody has a facility where they can practice, hone their skills, and maintain that same high skill level that you get when you're in training camp. Also, the players were getting tired, some had nagging injuries and, on top of that, the weather was really cold. We weren't preparing to be able to play in the heat that was anticipated for the world tournament. I remember that being negative.

I just adjusted. I was always thinking about it myself and I thought 'well, does this mean that I'm not really involved?' I was one of the younger players and the coaches kept telling me that I needed to be more of a leader, but I didn't really know about all these problems. I hadn't been involved in the program for ten years so I had not been dealing with it like some of the older girls had. So, I didn't get involved with it on that level. It was only a while ago, after the tournament and when the stories were

coming out, that I really thought back and questioned when all of this emerged. I wasn't oblivious to it going on, but I didn't really get involved in it either. I think I just stayed focused. It was something that you had to do. You had to say 'well, I'm not going to let this affect me, I'm going to just keep plugging away and practice the best that I can and try to stay on track.' I think, at that point, that if anything was bothering you, like your body was sore or you were sick of the coaches or somebody was getting on your nerves on the team, you just had to, mentally, be really tough. That's where it really came into play. At that point, I think I made a pointed effort not to get involved in this. I was just going to try and stay focused. You have to because it's your teammates and you need to be at one with them. So, I'm sort of contradicting myself here but, you try not to be involved but you really are because they're your teammates.

Next, we bussed to Boston. We knew the US was the best team in the world, but I think everyone on the Canadian team just wanted to see the US team fall. We always want to be the ones to do it. Sometimes, when you are the big underdog, people just strive to keep the game close, as if you don't want to go out there and try your hardest. But no one thought like that. So when we went out and played them, everyone was so fired up to play that it was one of the best games I think I've ever played with the national team. We just had our individual assignments. We went into the locker room only down by a few points, and we realized that we could play with them. So it was just huge for us. We knew we could do it. We ended up losing, but Vonnnette played really well and was our top scorer. I think maybe we proved to people in Canada that we were doing all right and that we were progressing fine. I was feeling good. I don't remember ever feeling really tired, or that my legs were feeling badly or anything like that. The crowd was crazy. It was the biggest crowd I had ever played in front of and it was deafening. Everyone was on a high, so we were very excited to be playing. We were looking

forward to it because, for two months, we had been training and this is what we had been working for and the moment was finally here.

It was the first time that I'd been in a camp of that length. I came away from it tougher, mentally. I was more in tune with how I adapt to my surroundings, to new things and new people in the environment of training, and to competition. You think you know yourself really well, but then you are thrown into a situation where you have a lot of time to think. Sometimes that can be good, but a lot of times it can be bad if you're not going through a good period. This sport is your life. I can say, now, that everything I do revolves around this sport. But when you are put into a camp where that's all there is - you sleep, eat, and breathe the sport - it just eats away at you. You get almost consumed by it because if you don't have a good day and you don't have a good practice, it turns into a bad night's sleep, and then it just keeps accumulating and accumulating. Then it can just eat away at you. I think, in the small camps, it was more intense, but I was able to adapt to that and not let that get the best of me. So, I think the camp made me grow a lot and see the mental aspects of training that I hadn't seen before. I realize that the mental side is such a huge part of the game. You can be feeling your best, you can be feeling great physically, your legs can feel great, and you can be performing your best, but if you slip up, mentally, or if your last skill wasn't good or wasn't on, it can really affect you. So you just can't do that. You have to clear your mind and keep plugging away.

Before the camp, I would just show up and then play. That can work when things are going well for you, but if something goes wrong and suddenly you wonder what just happened there, you are forced to take a step back because you're not ready for it and you haven't anticipated it. So, I started taking time to myself - just a little bit before practice. I would just visualize what I wanted to do and how I wanted to play. Then I just started doing that for practices and finally, when it came time for the games, I didn't feel awkward doing it. It was almost second nature. I took a couple of minutes to

myself to regroup and visualize, go through motions in my head, how I wanted to win situations, and pictured myself doing these things so that when it came time for me to actually do them, I thought about it and it just came. Then when something did go wrong, I was ready for it because it had been part of the process. You are not always going to do things right. If I'm visualizing turning and I don't do it right, or don't lift my head and make a wrong decision, I say 'okay, next time I want to do this.' I think I really learned over those two months that we had to do that. I use that now and I don't even think about it, but back then I had to say 'okay, I'm going to do this, I'm going to make sure I have these fifteen minutes free and then I can just do this.' Now, I don't even have to think about it, I just do it naturally.

When I think about the camp, I wonder, if the problems that emerged between the head coach and one of the high profile players had been addressed immediately, if it would have affected how we did later on down the road. One of the players wouldn't talk directly to the head coach. If she wanted to tell him something, she would have to go through our assistant coach and then he would tell him. If the head coach wanted to say something to her, he would have to talk to our assistant who would tell her. Basically, it was not a very good environment to train in because everybody knew what was going on. but it was never addressed, so it just sat there. You can't dwell on it, but at the same time you are surrounded by it in practice. As a team, we should have addressed the issue. For the good of the team, whatever personal strife you have with the coach or things that you hold against him, you have to just get rid of them for the moment. I think it would have done a lot of good because it would have aired the grievances between them and then maybe opened the door for other people to bring up things that they weren't happy about. Instead, it was kept inside and allowed to boil up, to the point where it came out in a bad performance or a bad practice.

The people obviously have a lot to do with how successful you are at camp and how happy you are. I got to know a lot of people very well, people I consider friends now that I hadn't even known before going into the camp. So, I think these camps are a bonding experience. You have to play with these girls and be willing to sacrifice your body. You know that you are going to get chopped from behind, but you send the ball anyway because you know that they are going to beat the opposition to get it. When you're in a camp, you are in close quarters and you really get to know people. That's a good thing about the camp.

These people experience it all with you, and they understand. So, naturally, they're important. You can look at those people and just know how they're feeling. It's almost like all-knowing, in a sense. You can just look at them and, not know exactly what they're feeling because it's not on that level, but know if they don't do something well in practice and get yelled at, exactly how that feels. I cherish a lot of the friendships I made there. That is something I think about when I look back on it.

Rachel

At the time of the interviews, Rachel was 27 years old and had played with the Canadian National team for three years. She has attended four national team training camps none of which had extended longer than one month. She has her teaching certificate and had just left a full-time position within a health organization to attend this centralized training camp.

Life History in Sport. Rachel started playing this sport when she was 9 years old, "I wanted an activity that was a little more active." She started out playing in the community on an all boys team. Overall she described the experience as really fun, "I just remember having fun. I enjoyed it. When you went you ended up laughing." Rachel described herself back then as follows:

One hundred percent tomboy. I hated wearing dresses, hated anything girly. I didn't play with barbies or dolls...I probably enjoyed doing more of the boy things than girl things but that's just because sports interested me and that's what boys did at the time.

Rachel eventually moved to an all-girl team and started playing on a community team. As she described "I didn't even know that there were girl's teams so this was exciting for me." Switching from boys to girls teams meant the sessions were "a little less serious and a little bit more fun." In addition Rachel felt she started to stand out more partly because of her position and her ability to score points.

Rachel recalled one teacher early on who encouraged her to not specialize too early and to try other sports in order to develop overall as an athlete. She was somewhat resistant at first but finally realized and appreciated the suggestion:

I think every student liked [this teacher] and he really liked athletes. He said why don't you play other sports? And then he said if you are going to be better at your main sport you should play all these other sports and I laughed at him. He said you don't believe me and I said no. He then pointed out famous athletes that did all sorts of sports when they were little so I kind of started to believe him. I always liked the other sports but didn't want anything interfering with my main sport. He did get me into to a lot of sports, which I think in the end helps...it makes you a more coordinated athlete and you build confidence that way. I think you can pick up things from other sports that complement what you do.

Despite being involved in other sports, Rachel knew that this sport was her favourite. She thought that probably had a lot to do with how successful she was at it, "If you're successful at doing something and it makes you feel good then you stick with it. I think that is what happened. At that age I was very successful and it gave me positive experiences and I took it from there." In addition sport offered Rachel a lifestyle where she felt she fitted in. She began to define herself more as an athlete

and started becoming aware of differences between people who choose to play sports and people who do not:

I finally started to realize that there's a difference between athletes and non-athletes. Even in school you could just tell that most of the athletes acted or behaved or did things differently and that was the group I decided that I liked hanging around. They didn't go outside and smoke at lunch or that sort of thing. It was the athletes who fit in best with my lifestyle.

Rachel was selected for her provincial team and competed at various tournaments. Overall her provincial experiences were positive, "At that time you think it's the Olympics for you. You get free track suits and free gear and you're thinking wow this is just the best." In addition her provincial experiences increased her awareness of future possibilities in her sport such as the national team:

I didn't think that there would be a national team. You never saw them on TV. I remember the same year as my first provincial experience they were playing at a stadium in my hometown and we were there helping out. I remember thinking I really want to play for them one day, not realizing of course that you had to be invited. I just remember thinking I was going to try out.

Rachel's most important provincial experience occurred at the Canada Games, a multi-sport event that occurs every four years in Canada. She identified the coach as the reason for its significance:

Our coach basically brought us together when the team was picked and said to us, for a lot of you this is going to be your Olympics. This is going to be your world competition. So for a lot of you, it's not going to get any bigger than this. This is the highest level you will achieve and he said, savor it, enjoy it and treat it like the gift it is. And so we realized at this point, this is pretty big. It took this coach to make a lot of people realize that our sport can be serious and you have to take it seriously. He was the first coach that instilled a work ethic in me. He just

brought in the perspective that if you're going to get any further, [hard work and practice] is where you have to start.

It was at this point that Rachel really started to focus seriously on her sport:

I started basing my life around it more. I had fun while I was in school but I didn't do a lot of the outside things that the other kids did. That stuff didn't interest me. I think I've always walked a different line.

The impact of teacher-coaches in Rachel's life continued with a high school coach who, she indicated, taught her to enjoy the sport at high school by aligning her expectations with the situation:

He made me realize that there is a time and a place for competitive sport. I might get mad or upset if other players weren't able to do things [on my high school team]. He said you have to understand there are not enough top-level players to make this a totally competitive environment. So for me I had to realize that there are different levels. I think that is when you start realizing what kind of person you are. So maybe I'm not the best person to be a captain or a leader but I'll do my part.

Rachel went to university in Canada and it brought her to "a new competitive level." It was her first experience of training every day over several months with the same team and she was also exposed to more high-level competitions. It was also the first time she had been put on a training program with weights and conditioning schedules. Rachel clearly enjoyed this type of environment:

I loved it. I thrived on it. I got a program for weights and running. It was the first of the kind for me. It was just a different environment, the university environment. There was no one to hold your hand anymore. It's a whole new world. That's why it was so exciting.

It was during university that Rachel became aware of the national camps that were organized for university athletes. University players were identified through the course of the season and invited by

the national team coach to a national camp exclusively for university athletes. From these camps athletes were selected for the world university games, “It was a good opportunity to get noticed and I always received a national team program after that, but I was never selected to be with the team. So that was my first bitter taste of not being selected.” Rachel highlighted one of the more painful experiences of not get selected at these camps:

It was a big tryout. Some of the people that I'd gone to these camps with for a few years got selected and I didn't. It was quite devastating actually for me. I remember going back to the room after the selections were made, putting on my walkman and crying, thinking oh it's all over from here. I was a little bit dramatic, but it's what it feels like at the time especially when everyone else around you is being selected and you're being told you're going home tomorrow.

Rachel managed to turn this experience into a positive one by focusing on what she could do to try and get selected next time:

I started realizing hey you know what, those people made it and I'm not far off of them. I started realizing if you work a little harder and you work on certain aspects a little harder and you can make it too. It was a horrible experience but at the same time probably good for me. It was a great learning experience.

Rachel described the experience of her first camp and how it was unlike anything else she had ever attended:

The first camp, I didn't know what to expect. That was my first experience of military camp. You got into trouble if you weren't on time. The head coach watched everything you ate...I was like wow this is pretty serious, but at the same time I was thinking does it really have to be like this. I think my first camp was a bit overwhelming in the sense that it was so military like.

Attending these camps also exposed Rachel to the depth of talent across the country and she realized that at this level it was going to be harder to stand out, "It's a camp full of standouts, so all of a sudden you don't standout anymore." In addition, she started to doubt her own talent as she compared herself to these other athletes, "I remember going wow she's good or I'm not near as good as her. You start, for the first time, second guessing yourself like do I really have what it takes and you realize how hard it will be to make this team."

The disappointment and frustration of not getting identified at the national camps continued through Rachel's university career and extended over to her community experience after university. She was tired of being told to just keep working hard by the people around her and yet still not getting selected. One occasion specifically highlighted the frustration and despair of the situation for her:

We were [in a meeting] and our coach said congratulations to all the people on the team who had been carded. There were probably four or five players who started getting financial support and I just remember thinking that I wasn't one of them. I was done with university now and had nothing else at this point. I was thinking, what am I missing that all these other people have. I've put my time in. You start to feel cheated because all I had ever gotten out of it was to attend the [national] camps for university athletes. I just kept thinking I'm done. I was getting sick and tired of people telling me, just keep working at it, you will get there. I'm not exactly a player booming with confidence and on the national team I'm average at best so when all these players whom I'd always been ahead of started getting carded and I was getting older and they were all younger, I started thinking well it's done. At this point, I still went to train because I love this game and not because I still had aspirations to play for the national team anymore.

Finally after five years of trying, Rachel received her first invitation to a regional national camp when a new national team coach was brought on board. From there she was put on the squad and

invited to a full national team camp where she was selected to the team for the first time, "I remember I was named to the team and I was shocked. I called home and I was like, 'I made it, I made it, I made it, I made this team.' I was so excited I couldn't believe it." Rachel interprets her national success cautiously and does not take her place on that team for granted:

I've never felt I deserved to be here. You know we go to camp and I'm always amazed I make a team. I never use to feel that way [trying out for other teams]. But when you're trying out with that caliber you second guess yourself. I probably drive people nuts when I'm like, oh I'm getting cut. I'm done...I am my own worst critic and I can't see myself play and I still don't understand why I'm on the national team. I never feel as good about myself as maybe other people [feel about themselves]...I just keep hoping I get invited next time.

Her first tournament and her first game with the national team stood out in Rachel's mind for a number of reasons:

I remember it because my grandpa was really sick and ended up passing away while I was there. So that was really traumatic for me. And you're always going to remember your first game. I was petrified and so nervous and scared...I was pulled from the game [pretty early]. My first international debut was really horrible. It was humiliating. Afterwards the head coach pulled me into his room and I was already emotional because of my grandfather. He told me basically [only] certain players make it to this level and that basically I was only a community player [at best]. Of course I started bawling. I finally got my chance and he was telling me I suck...I got another chance to play toward the end of the next game...but I was so nervous because the head coach is quite militant so we were all afraid to make mistakes. It was just overwhelming. So I was quite surprised when he asked me back.

Rachel credited a lot of her opportunities at the national level to the new coach. He gave her the first opportunity and then invited her back to camp after her first playing experience with the team even after she felt her performance did not necessarily warrant it:

As much as we've had problems with the head coach, I thank him for giving me that first chance. If there hadn't been a change in coaches I never would have had an experience to be talking to you about....I can also thank him...for asking me back....After the tryouts [for the second camp] he said, he wasn't even going to invite me to camp, but that he had to give me one more chance.

Rachel was quick to recognize her role on the national team and be thankful for the opportunities she was given. She knew she wasn't going to be a starter but she also knew she wanted to continue to be on the team and would do what was necessary to prolong her involvement:

I was nowhere near starting. I came in some games as a sub. I wasn't an impact player, I just kind of worked hard. I wasn't the fittest player on the team. I didn't really have any special skills. You know you look at people and think this is what they do. I've never been told this is what I do. So I'm assuming nothing stands out. I know my biggest role is defense and putting pressure on the other team. So I call it a work ethic. You realize your role and when you go out there you do it. If you are going to stay on the team that's what you have to do. You get a taste of what it's like to be on the national team and the excitement of it all and the camaraderie. And just the prestige and the way people look at you and are proud of you and just the whole thing...Once you've got a taste for it, it's really hard to give up.

The following is Rachel's experience of the six-week training camp.

Rachel's Profile. I moved to Kingston, and stayed with my aunt. I wanted to go into training camp fully prepared. The opportunity to live in Kingston presented itself. Moving there, I got a chance to train more with one of the assistant coaches and with Robyn, another player from the team.

I decided to quit my job back home. I didn't really ask them for a leave of absence because I knew that they don't grant leaves of absence. I just told them what my plans were and I asked them what my options were. They basically said, "We totally support what you're doing, but we just can't hold a spot for you." I moved with the hopes that I would be able to get unemployment insurance, but when I got there, I found out I couldn't do that. I tried to get on the teacher on call list near where I was staying, and I was able to get on the list, but unfortunately they only called me twice the whole time I was there. It was a little bit financially restraining, six months without a wage, but I really do think it was worth leaving the job and moving out there. I think I became a better player. I was more focused. The only thing I really had to do all day was train. I didn't have a job. I wish that it was like that every day. I would get up at my own leisure, do my workout, come home, and wait for practice in the evening. Working with the assistant coach, and then working with Robyn, was great and, I think, I did get more focused on my goal. In my hometown, I was starting to go into the doldrums. It was all becoming very blah-like, all the training and the fact that it was winter. I was starting to lose focus.

The week prior, I moved back to my hometown temporarily. I wanted to be around my family and friends for a week. I hadn't seen them in a while. Their support always means something to me and they were excited that I was going. It got me excited too. I was really nervous because I hate fitness tests. I probably didn't sleep very well the week before, maybe a few hours a night. I would always wake up in a cold sweat, thinking 'oh my god, I have this fitness test coming up.' You want to look beyond that, but at the same time you have this thing you dread coming up first. I guess you always

look at what you dread. The week before I had been really pumped. I was excited. I had worked out harder than ever and trained with the girls in my hometown who were also going to the camp.

All the people from my province flew out to the camp together. The head coach was on our flight. He was asking us all these questions like "so, are you fit?" His comments made it all that much more fun to think about the fitness testing. That first day, everyone says hi to everyone again and you see new faces at camp and think 'oh god, I have to try out all over again.' Every single time you come to camp it's a new tryout. I just look at the new faces and I wonder where they play, or I wonder if they're better than me.

We were staying at the university dorms. There was only one phone in the whole building, so it was always this mad rush for the phone all the time. I just never find dorms very homey. We didn't spend too much time in our rooms anyway. I bring photographs. I had a little photo album that my sister made for me one year, so I brought that along. I also have another photo album because when I was living out there my sisters and my mom would send me photos and I would just put them in a photo album so I brought that with me. I also brought a little sheet that reminded me that I am good enough and smart enough. One of my old coaches made me write down ten positive statements about myself. So I brought that with me to read when I was feeling down or when I was feeling inadequate. That's kind of nice just to believe, or not believe it necessarily, it's just nice to say it out loud to yourself. I also brought a beaded Canada chain necklace. It just made me feel like I was part of this right now.

That night, we all had something to eat and then went to bed. The next day, of course, was fitness testing so I didn't sleep very well. When you wake up, that's what your big thing is for the whole morning. The head coach puts a lot of emphasis on the fitness and, if you're someone like a Samantha,

Nathalie or a Haley, you know that you're going to do awesome. For me, it becomes about how I am going to finish compared to other people in my position or other people on the team.

We all went to eat, but your stomach doesn't want to take in food. It was really windy that day. The coaches split us into two groups, and I was in the second group to run. I'd rather go in the first group and get it over with, but it seems like I always end up in the second group. You loosen up, limber up, go for a little bit of a run on your own and try to get sorted out. The weird thing was that the sprinklers came on just as we were all about to start the run. The first group had to run with the wind blowing the water at them, and it was already a cold day. I went for my run. I was a little bit more nervous than other people because I have a medical condition where my stomach feels like crap when I run. So, I was just praying that I wasn't going to get it, but I did. I just struggled through the whole run. The first few laps actually felt really good, I felt really strong. Then, half way through the next lap, it started. I wasn't the worst; I wasn't the best. I was slower than my fastest time, so that was disappointing. Once that was over, everything just looked much more positive. All you think about is the sport, that's what you're there for, so it's just great. It's what you love, so it's fun.

Typically, we had two-a-day training sessions. Twice a week, we did fitness drills and once we did jumping, bounding, and leaping drills. Our routine was to wake up, have breakfast, go train, come back, have lunch, maybe have a nap, go back out, train, come back in, have supper and then, often, have meetings in the evening. Some days it varied, and we only had one training session a day. It depended on how hard we had worked and how much the coaches thought we needed a break. And sometimes there were inter-squad games or games against men's teams.

The first week was about trying to figure out where you belonged in the pecking order. You always doubted yourself and thought 'this girl is way better' or 'oh, has she ever improved, now I'm in

trouble.' It's almost about getting the practices over with. In one sense, you love doing them, but at the same time you are nervous the whole time you are doing them.

It was a very tough group -- by far, the toughest training camp that I had ever been to. In the past, you could say 'yeah she's gone, she's gone, wow she made it.' But there, anybody could have made that team. It was a very friendly, positive atmosphere, but at the same time it was a very competitive atmosphere. The first week, I was still very nervous because there were a lot of players in my position at camp, and I know my biggest weakness is my scoring. So, I was very nervous when I saw people scoring a lot. I would think 'god, she's scoring left and right here, I'm out of here.' I think you have to keep a positive attitude or else it's going to go downhill. I'm kind of a pessimist so it's hard. I view things in different ways. In one moment, I would be thinking that I had had a really good week, and then the next I would be thinking how tough it was. I just didn't know how it would go.

I've worked with a few people on trying to be more positive, for myself. It's really hard for me in that, when I see someone doing really well I get down on myself and, if I'm not picked with certain players that are going to be on the starting line up, I question what that means. I read into things way more than I should. It's a big fault that I have, but I do try to keep positive. I would call home, and I would call a coach, or just call someone if I felt like I needed to talk about it. People are very supportive of me, mostly my mom or my sisters, and my community coach, Bob. He's known me forever and he's encouraged me in many ways. He asked about all of us.

We had the weekends off. It didn't seem that we got as many days off as we would have liked. I pretty much stuck around. I went to visit my relative who lived close by, and brought a couple of players with me for something different. But we really didn't do much, maybe went into the town for a movie or for dinner. Not a lot of people had vehicles, so we were pretty limited as to what we could do.

We always found things to do like dye our hair, but I think we would have gone stir crazy had we been in that situation everyday.

After quite a few of our practices, we had a sport psychologist come in and he would do some team sport psychology with us. Right after practice, we'd go to a classroom. We also had individual meetings and group meetings with the coaches. During individual meetings, they would let you know how they thought you were doing. I was not envious of them in terms of having to make the cuts. It was very tough. More than once, I thought I was going to get cut myself and I cried, thinking I was out of there.

After the first week, it got to be a lot of the same thing. For the first three weeks, practices were more physical. There were a lot of battles at practice, a lot of physical fitness, and a lot of technical drills. The fitness drills were very hard and very taxing on our bodies. When people got tired, they would get a little bit sloppy and they would start to injure each other. I think the coaches started realizing that they had to either add more people to this, or maybe make it less physically demanding. In general, you got into a routine. You would get up, go train, and eat. Everyone had different days where they had to carry the equipment. After the cuts were made it became more team focused.

Throughout the camp, I had the same feelings. I never really felt overly confident. There were times when I felt like I was getting cut. I was very excited to be there and the anticipation grew from week to week. The coaches would have a countdown, like there were so many days until the world tournament, and they would post a quote or message of inspiration for the day. It started getting more real as the time ticked down.

I actually got into a routine at the camp. I would set my alarm for a few minutes earlier than our wake up call so as to feel a little more awake. Also, I hate getting woken up by someone walking down the hall, pounding on your door, and saying, wake up. After breakfast, sometimes I'd have time to go

back for a little bit of a nap. It depended on how well I had slept the night before. Sometimes, I would get an extra half an hour of sleep and then I'd get ready, get my contacts in, go pick up a clean training kit with the socks, the shorts, and the shirt. Twice a day we changed our clothes. If you had equipment you'd go get it from the equipment room. You would walk over in groups. The coaches expected you to be a little bit warmed up before they started, although they did a warm up with us. Warm ups were pretty light. Then we would get into training for, usually, an hour and a half. We would then pack up, and sometimes go straight back to the dorms, or sometimes go to the meeting room. Then we would go for lunch, change out of our training kit, bring it down for laundry, go for lunch, come back, and watch a little TV, or sometimes read. Occasionally, I would just feel like chatting. Sometimes, I would just find someone to chat with or go into the TV room and chat with people there. Then we would go back downstairs, pick up a new uniform, come back up, change, get back out there, train, come back, and then go eat. Depending on how wired you were from the day, you went to bed. It's not easy for me to fall asleep when I'm excited or anxious. I read a lot. Reading is a relaxing experience. We swapped a lot of books. I would listen to my CD's. The coaches expected the lights to be out at 11 p.m. You would get into this routine; it might sound monotonous, but in essence you didn't really have to think for yourself. It was just like 'this is what you are doing at this time.' It was scheduled in there for you and you just did it.

That weekend we went to a movie. We had a really good night out. We went out for dinner at a restaurant right on the ocean. It was expensive, but it was really good. It was just something different from dorm food.

We started to get into some more inter-squad games and games against a men's team. You would look to see who was playing and who wasn't and you would think, 'I wonder why I'm not playing, I wonder why they're playing all the time and I'm not playing.' Again, you would read too

much into things. You would start playing the games and looking at who was playing where, and you would think 'wow, she's being looked at for my position.' Then, I was put in a different position and I hated this position. But I was going to try and make the team any way I could, so if that was how I was going to make it, then I was going to give it my all. I think it was just more for them to try people out to see where they fit in best. Reading into it was not a good idea. It just wasn't necessarily the way things were. You would just make yourself sick and nervous for nothing.

We played the men's team and we lost quite badly. The coaches took some positives out of it but mostly negatives, of course. When we played each other it was very competitive. It was just a way for you to show them what you could or couldn't do. I remember playing absolutely horribly. I just felt lost in the different position. We were trying a little bit of a new system, but I felt really lost. It wasn't where I normally played. I felt really depressed after the game. After that, I was not put in certain positions in practice, and Jennifer and I were completely left out of a practice once. Everyone else got rotated in and we didn't. At this point, there was only two people left to get cut and we both thought 'yeah, it's us.' But, as it turned out, we were just missed. However, a million and one panicky thoughts went through my head and I, basically, needed peer counselling from the team. It was horrible because I was such a pessimist.

I talked mostly with girls from my hometown, just because I knew them so well. The captains were, obviously, great people to talk to. Breanna, [one of the captains] was very helpful. She was a very calming person. That's why the captains are there because you can go and talk to them and feel good about yourself after you've left. I talked to Deb a lot. Melanie is great to talk to. She has a great ear for listening. The only people I stayed away from were the people in my position, except for Maggie because we were friends, and other players that I normally didn't hang around with. You just kind of go to people that you know understand your situation better, or maybe understand what you need.

For the first group of cuts, the coaches basically walked around and told people. People were a little bit upset by the way it was done. It was so public, as opposed to each person being spoken to individually. The coaches walked around saying 'I want to talk to you' or 'I'd like to see you,' and once the first person was cut, it got around that it was happening. It was a horrible time. There was also a sense of relief, like 'wow, I made the first portion, that's great.' I'm sure there were girls that thought I should have been cut, and others who should have made it. It's tough. No twenty people are going to agree that the people picked are the only people that should have made the team. So you look around and you think 'that person probably thinks I shouldn't have made it.'

During this whole time, there was other stuff happening with the national organization and trying to get contracts sorted out. To be honest, I was disappointed with the whole thing. I just think it could have been handled a lot earlier. I think our national organization dragged their heels a little bit. We just wanted a contract to compensate us, but I just wish it hadn't been the primary focus and that it had been done earlier. Basically, there was a very committed group of players that were trying to get a sum of money for us while we were training and competing. We were going into a two-a-day training situation and there really was no opportunity to work. Although they were paying for our food and residency, most people had other payments to make, like mortgages, but we weren't making any money for that whole time. So there was a group that was looking to help us recover some lost wages. Finally, we got it sorted out, but I think it was a bit of a distraction for everybody, an unnecessary distraction.

After the cuts were made, we did end up going into more of a tournament phase. Training really focused on the team. It became more of who was playing where and what we wanted as a team. It got a little more structured. We traveled to Montreal for a two game series against Italy. We beat them in both games. I scored twice in one game. That was very exciting for me. I think we took a lot of

positives from those games. It wasn't exactly the stiffest competition, but it was a good start for us. It gave us confidence.

We then went back to Kingston for a few days and then traveled to Boston. It was a very long trip. Most people slept for a bit of it. We just sat and talked or read. When we drove all the way to Boston, Massachusetts for games against China and the US. We had a team dinner that night. We only trained once that day because the next day we had a game. So at this point, it was more tactical than actual training.

I was really nervous, not like sick to my stomach nervous. I guess just apprehensive. I was very excited because the last time we had played China it had been a close game, and I really thought we had come leaps and bounds since then. So I thought that we had a really good chance of winning. It was a really good chance to see where we stood. When I walk into a tournament, I have all these expectations and the outcome is unknown, so it's exciting. I didn't know whether or not I'd be starting, but during training you get a hint because they put you in a starting line-up formation for certain drills. So you have an idea that you'll be in but you're not too sure.

We were in a hotel with two athletes to a room. The next day, we had a really big pre-game meal just to make sure we had enough energy, and then more meetings. At this point, the coach lets you know if you're starting. Sometimes, he'll tell you the night before who's playing and sometimes it's the day of. The China game was a tough one. There were times when I thought 'wow, they're all over us' and there was other times when I thought 'wow, we're holding our own.' We lost the game. I had an okay game. I don't want to say I had a really good game. It is a little disappointing when you don't score a lot of points and that's your job. The coaches harped on the fact that that was my weakness. We finished that game and watched part of the US game.

Before a game, I have to shower and brush my teeth. It's just two things that I do no matter how stupid they are. I like to listen to music. I don't do that in community games, which is weird. Maybe my focus is different, which it shouldn't be. I definitely like to focus by listening to my music and tuning other people out.

We trained for the next couple days and had quite a few meetings. The next game was against the US and we knew it was going to draw a big crowd. The game was early, so there was not much time before. We got up a little bit earlier to go for a walk, but basically we didn't have much time to think about the game, which is what I like. I like getting up and playing a game because you're fresh. You haven't had time all day to drag out.

Our game against the US was very exciting with tons of fans. I really thought I had a good game, especially the first half. Unfortunately, Breanna got injured in that game. That was a very sore point for us throughout the world competition because she never did recover from it. At the time, we didn't know how bad it was. We scored a number of points on the US. Vonnnette was the top point getter. Everyone was doing her job. It was just like we were on fire. So it was a really good first half, and then the second half we played really well for the first part and then fitness took over. We really struggled at that point to keep up, but we lost. I just remember feeling incredibly tired, but thinking that that had been the best game we had ever played.

There was nothing but positives after that game. It just seemed like we were on a roll and, although we lost, it was a respectable loss. The US players came up to us after the game and complimented us. We really thought 'wow, we're going places.' It was like the excitement that you have before an event, like Christmas, before the presents are open and all the anticipation about what's in the boxes. Then, afterwards it's either good or bad. So at this point, it was really good.

We left Boston and went directly to Montreal, then flew to Calgary for a two game series against Australia. I remember feeling apprehensive about playing. You are always worried about something. We stayed in a very nice hotel, and prepared to play Australia. So we arrived and trained twice the next day, and then we played Australia the following day. It was an evening game and we had a training session that morning. Game day routine again. The first ten seconds into the game I pulled a muscle in my neck. I played the first half, which was probably very stupid. I took two or three bumps that game too. I don't know how the coaches didn't notice because I was only looking in one direction. It was quite painful and I remember, at break, asking our physiotherapist to fix this. So I was lying there and it was just too painful, so I came out. We lost. I just remember thinking 'crap, I've blown it.' It was this dreadful feeling because I did not play very well even though I was injured and that's what the coaches were looking at. I just hoped that I would get another chance. Harriet was playing forward at that time and she scored points and I didn't. I was supposed to be the next forward, and Breanna was hurt. I started getting really down on myself. It wasn't the best experience for us. I think it was disappointing for all of us because we really thought we could beat Australia.

We had two more days of training with two-a-day practices. We had a lot of work to do. Then we played Australia again and, this time, we beat them. Nathalie came in and contributed to the scoring, and she'd been injured for so long so that was awesome for her. My neck was feeling better, so I got to play and it was exciting. It didn't seem like we were getting closer, but we were. We all knew that this was our final preparation, but we weren't there yet. We still had time to improve. I just remember feeling that things were going to go well.

I really wanted to believe in what the coaching staff was saying, but there was a lot of dissention going on within the team at this point. I might have believed in them more than the others. I felt that what we had done was okay within the timeframe that we had. I wanted to be positive and

look at everything in a positive light and, like I said, that's not the easiest thing for me to do. I was really excited because I was playing. I know other people have different experiences which may not be as positive, but I got the opportunity to play and it was good. I enjoyed it.

I really loved that centralization. I thought it was the best thing for us. I only wish that we had more of it. I wish we had funds like the US where we could be together for six months because what we could have done would have been phenomenal. We might find those US players cocky and arrogant, but I think they all have an internal confidence in themselves and in their team that, even when they are down, they can rely upon. We couldn't rely upon it because we didn't have it. We did get better though, the longer we were together.

I felt bad for the people that weren't getting in, and who weren't getting to play, but at the same time I felt good for myself. I'd been in that boat before and struggled. If there was someone who had been on fire, I could have just as easily been on the bench. Anybody at any given time could have gone in and done a good job. I felt that I was doing what they were asking and that's why I was out there, so that was good. I loved it.

Overall, I think the pre-experience was really good except it wasn't long enough and I just felt that some things could have been done differently. I want to say that we needed more time together. I try not to think of other countries but it's hard not to. The camp was revolutionary for us. We'd never had a camp that long. I think it gave us a fair opportunity to see where we stood. More importantly, I think it actually gave us an opportunity to get to know each other better and to refine things. In the past, certain aspects of the game we normally never touch because we're always working on basics. This camp was really good because it gave us an opportunity to review, go on and then, for once, go further. I also think we got more quality time with each other as opposed to just sport time. We had some days off, or we would have just one training session on a particular day, so we would get to do things

together and have more bonding experiences as a team, like going out for supper or walking around. They were basic things, but things that, in the end, made everyone feel a little bit more at ease with each other.

I think it was also a really good experience in terms of feeling like you were a part of something. It was really a lifestyle. It felt like this was our routine. We would get up, eat, train, eat, and train. We would get into a routine, and it became a way of life as opposed to participating in something for two weeks and never quite getting used to it because it was so short. The camp also gave you a really good opportunity to feel like you were a part of something big. I made this team that's going to the world competition. I just kept thinking 'don't get injured, play hard, and you'll be playing.' It was very exciting. In the past camps, I couldn't wait for camp to be over because all I want to do was play in the games. In this case at the beginning, I couldn't wait for the world competition, but by the end I felt as though we needed more time. So it was different. We were prepared but we didn't feel prepared.

Looking back, you second guess a few things, like 'this is the thing we have been waiting for for four years and now it's here and are we ready?' Or 'oh, I wish that I had done this more.' The money issue had a negative impact. Although I was happy it was taken care of, at the same time I think most of us would have played for free and not given two hoots about the extra money. I appreciate the work that everyone did for us, but at the same time I wish it hadn't been the distracter that I think it was. It was always there, something negative in the air. It seemed unresolved, like something that wasn't right. It felt like it should have been over with before the camp.

Another thing was the comments made by Vonnette. She was making comments in training camp about how the team should have already been picked. I just wonder how good it was for us to be doubting our coaches or our teammates at that time when we should be rallying for each other. So for

me that was a bit of a distraction. I'm not going to say it wasn't. At the same, I think it was more of a distraction for the coaching staff and the national organization.

There were definitely a lot of positives. Making the team, and just feeling part of something so big. When I see my past, I see how I didn't get to start and didn't get to play for the first couple of years and then how I finally got my opportunity. It was really good to actually make the final selection. The coaching staff didn't give you very much confidence. They were always saying 'if you want to make the team next time, you have to improve on this and this and this.' I never once went into a camp thinking, 'yeah, I'm going to make this team.' So, to finally hear it was a very memorable moment. I just remember thinking 'wow, I made it.'

I thought that the camp for the most part had a positive spin to it. The coaches were joking with us and they were being more positive than I think they've ever been. We tried fun things in practice as well as the serious stuff. That was new too because normally we don't do too much fun stuff. It was fun moving around a lot. I don't know how many people would agree with that, but we got a chance to see new places and even if it was just a hotel, it was a change of scenery because the dorms were getting pretty stale.

I was glad that I had moved prior to the camp. I had nothing else to focus on but training. My workouts were more positive. I just kind of decided to pick up and go and do it, and better myself and better my chances. I only wish that I could have had someone to work out with on a regular basis, to just push me harder. The other day when I was doing these sprints, I did the first set and a half by myself and I thought, at that point, 'I can't do anymore, this is tiring.' Then my friend showed up, and all of a sudden I figured I could do it. I'm not the most self-motivated person. There are definitely other people that are just so intense and so focused and I just don't know how they do it. I guess that's why

I'm not in an individual sport. I wish I could learn to be more focused. Learn to be more self-reliant, self-confident.

During the camp I wish I could have been more focused. The times when we were trying out and I thought I was getting cut I would work like a dog, like I was going to show these guys that I deserved to be there. That's when I started believing that maybe they made the right decision not to pick the team before. But I wish I could have had that intensity and that focus the whole camp.

I kept a journal. I didn't want anyone else to read it because sometimes it was more of a bitch session than anything. Just frustration or, when I thought I was getting cut, I was down on myself. I think for the most part it gave me an outlet to say things that I would never say to someone's face. Not necessarily that I was upset at people and writing about it, it was just more about myself. I liked it and thought it would be a really cool thing to look at years from now, but I lost it.

I think I learned a little bit about myself in that I thought I was better than I was, or maybe I thought I was worse than I was, at times. I don't really know. I didn't meet the expectations that I had set out for myself. I don't know what I can attribute that to, whether it's mental or physical. I don't think I believed in myself enough. But physically, maybe I wasn't strong enough. Maybe I don't have the speed. Maybe I'm not tricky enough. I didn't score enough and I'm a forward, so I started to wonder what it was. But I can't pinpoint it. So, for me I left camp with a few doubts. Obviously, I was lacking in something and so was the team. But I just don't know what it was.

Vonnette

At the time of these interviews, Vonnette was 32 years old and had played with the Canadian National team for 13 years. She has attended 12 national team training camps, three of which were longer than one month. Vonnette makes a living through competing, and coaching, in her sport.

Life History in Sport. Vonnette first started playing her sport as a young girl while living in a country overseas. She went to an international school where there were people from all over the world who played this sport, “I think while we were waiting for our parents after school, we all played. So I’d be out there in my dress or skirt with all the little boys. It was only boys who played. I didn’t even realize girls played.” When she returned to Canada, she passed a group of girls playing the same sport:

At this time I was about 12 years old and I didn’t even realize that girls played. I saw a bunch of girls practicing over at the high school so I went over to the coach and asked if I could play. I was very shy back then so I never would have done that if it hadn’t been this sport. She said come tomorrow. There was a game the next day and I ended up being top scorer. So that was my first game and the start of it all.

That same year, Vonnette started high school a month or so into the semester but immediately tried to join the school team:

I went to the coach and he said the team’s already been picked. I was really shy and maybe he thought well she doesn’t look like a good player...I think the coach should have at least given me a chance. I played the next year and did well...I wonder if he’s seen me play today and thought wow, I told that girl she couldn’t play because I’d already picked the team.

Vonnette developed her skills and talent through community teams and her high school experiences. The thing that really stood out for her from those experiences was the tournaments, “Especially traveling to tournaments. It’s something I really miss. Just being with the girls and enjoying winning.” Her second highlight was the coach. She was impressed by his volunteer commitment and the amount of time he put out without any reimbursement. She was equally impressed by his coaching style:

He related well to players. He was almost like one of the girls, but at the same time the girls respected him as the coach. I think it's important for the coach to try and be on the same level as the players. He got along well with the girls and I think the girls wanted to win for him. I think that is important for a team, a good coach-team relationship.

Vonnette quickly emerged as a talented athlete and always played with older players on many of her teams. Her talent was recognized in her high school through various awards and also locally as she received a city award for the most outstanding athlete in her sport, the first time a girl had ever won that award. Her talent was something that ran in the family as her brother had won the same award a few years previous to that. However, when she was about 18 years old, she was unsure how to improve anymore, "I thought to myself, I've actually hit my peak and I couldn't improve and I didn't know how to improve. Now I understand I just didn't have the coaching to take me to the next step."

Vonnette also competed for her provincial team and she recalled the first-ever national tournament for girls in the sport with all the provinces, "That was the very first year and our province won it. It was a big thing for us and our team was very close." Training with the provincial team was a little challenging because Vonnette had to travel 5 hours to and from on the weekends to train with the team, "I didn't really have much of a weekend when I was growing up. I enjoyed the training and meeting with the other girls. Unfortunately we didn't have that kind of training in my city." It was at that first national tournament where Vonnette was identified by the National coach and invited to attend her first ever national team camp. She described her first camp experience as follows:

That camp was just a miserable experience. Maybe it was because it was the first time at camp and my first time having to train every day. I think at that time we were training three times a day. We don't even do that today. You are just not used to it and you are sore for probably half the camp. Mentally, it is really stressful because you have got to think okay I have to go out

there again. So you're not really thinking about playing, you're just thinking about surviving. I don't think the coach really helped matters either. I think he probably made up for about eighty percent of the miserableness that everybody felt. Everything was just very negative and people were very intimidated. I know I was very intimidated....The coach either made it or would break it for a lot of the girls.

Vonnette took a number of lessons from her camp experiences with the national team and applied them to how she approached other camps:

Over the years, I have learned from that. It made me go to camp with a different mentality, just preparing myself and probably taking it differently. I didn't go in expecting the worst or expecting to hate it, but rather I focused on taking each training session one at a time and going from there...I think you learn each camp...I didn't know what to expect when it came to training or to the fitness. At the time I thought I was in shape but I look back now and I was not in the shape that I probably should have been...The bottom line is you have to be fit and prepared when you come to camp.

Her first competition with the national team was also not a positive experience for Vonnette. After making the team, they traveled to a tournament in Asia, and during the tournament Vonnette did not play very much. The biggest challenge for Vonnette was trying to understand why she wasn't playing and how to deal with her confidence as she sat on the bench:

It was a miserable experience because I never played very much and I couldn't understand why and the coach never really said why. So at that point I was really confused and just questioned my abilities. I just didn't enjoy it. It was my first time not playing and I think everybody goes through that but when you should be a starter and you're not it's worse I think... I think the

coach needed to be up front and explain to players what the problem was and why I was not playing.

The one element of the national team experience that Vonnnette consistently mentioned as enjoyable was the athletes, “The one thing I really enjoy about playing with the national team is coming back and meeting up with all the girls after six months to a year. Just seeing everyone and the whole camaraderie, that’s the part I enjoy.” Other than the athletes, Vonnnette described most of her national team experiences as unhappy, “I just remember the unhappy things most of the time.” One particular incident that stood out for her was after losing a big game against the United States:

We were leaving to go to the locker room after the game and the coach told me I had no anticipation and no this and no that. Well after losing by a big score everyone is really down and that’s the last thing you want to say to a player. It was bad timing on her part. I said well how the fuck do you expect me to do anything when there is three people on me. That’s how I felt and I was very upset. So the next day I was prepared to go home and I didn’t really care at the time. I think that’s really bad to feel that way if you’re playing on a national team. I think just a lot of the time the girls were so discouraged from just negative feedback that they care after awhile.

Vonnnette also attended university in the States. At that time very few players from Canada went to the States to play and she felt that her decision was negatively scrutinized by some of the players and the coach:

I think that people looked down upon it...almost like you were a traitor...I even think the coach did....I was cut from the national team after going to the States and I couldn’t understand why. No one could really understand so I assumed it was because I had left Canada and went to the

US....Today, it's different. If you've gone to the US to play, you are going to get looked at by the national team.

Her university experience overall was great, "It was a very good experience and I would recommend it to anyone...It was a great four years...Thank god I didn't listen to what people were saying." Vonnnette earned a number of honours while playing in the States. She was named Most Valuable Player for two years in the league and she won the most outstanding female athlete award for her university. She also mentioned winning the conference competition and losing a hard fought semi-final game at the national championships to one of the best universities in the country, "We lost the game in double overtime. It just went back and fourth. That game really stands out because we had never won a national championship and that was our chance right there."

After university Vonnnette gained a number of different experiences playing her sport professionally in Europe for a year and then in Japan for four years. It was in Japan where she experienced a shift in perspective as far as maintaining her health:

One thing that really made me sit back and think twice about my health was the fact that they were paying me all that money to practice for two hours a day and play a game on the weekend. I thought, all I have to do is stay healthy and take care of my body and continue to do well. That's when I realized that we take our health for granted. All it would take would be for me to get hurt and I wouldn't be able to do that.

Japan turned out to be a positive experience with a coach that the athletes "respected and wanted to win for."

Her national team experiences continued and over her career she competed in numerous camps and tournaments such as in Central America -- "I was sick the whole time, diarrhea, throwing up every single day. I thought if I could play feeling like that then I could do anything. If I feel a little bit tired or

achy during a game, I just need to think about that time" -- and at the world competition in Europe, "We got our butts kicked by the team that eventually won the whole thing." Vonnette sees the national team success or lack of it as a product of the way the training is structured and the inadequate time the team spends together preparing for major competitions:

For years our program has been like a vicious circle. We come to camp for maybe two weeks at a time and then we go back to where ever we are from and we won't meet together as a team for maybe another 6 months at a time or more. To me that's a waste of time and money. For any team, no matter how good you are, if you can't play together as a team you're not going to be very successful...I just feel that every time we leave and come back we have to catch up to where we left off, so we are never really moving.

It has only been recently that Vonnette has been more open about her discontent with the training and shared it with individuals other than her teammates. During their qualifying tournament for the world competition the team had been doing very well winning easily and by fairly large scores over the other countries at the tournament. Vonnette felt it was important to voice her concern about using this tournament as the measuring stick for their progress:

I think a lot of players were basking in all the glory and I was like the little sour apple that came out and said, look just because we are winning so easily doesn't mean we are good. I wasn't saying we were bad either, I just said we are still struggling in a lot of areas. That's the first time I said we need more time together as a team and if we don't get it we're not going to improve and we are not going to be successful.

Vonnette has sought as many opportunities as possible so she could continue to develop as a player and improve her skills. At the time of this interview she was the only member of the national

team that was able to make a living playing her sport. She attributed much of her success to training with men:

Since I graduated from university I have been playing with and against boys. They're faster, quicker and stronger. So you have to be that much quicker. You may not be as strong but you have to be quicker and faster and smarter to try and beat them. Plus you are constantly being challenged. Whereas when you are playing with people of your same ability or less, you're not being challenged, you're not being pushed so it is very easy to fall back into that little comfort zone. And if you're in a comfort zone all the time you are not really improving. I found that when I train with these guys I'm a much better player and I am forced to be at my best every single time I go out there to train with these guys.

This is Vonnette's experience of the six-week training camp.

Vonnette's Profile. The main thing that I had to take care of before the camp was my fitness. I practiced with a guys' team during the winter. We were all required to come into camp fit because we had to do the dreaded timed run. I think, if your fitness isn't there, nothing else matters. You had to send your fitness results in, which I really don't agree with simply because it seems as though you are being checked up on. You are national team athletes, so you should be responsible for your fitness and your own well-being. If you don't do the stuff, it's to your own disadvantage. In the past, I have hated coming to training camp, but at this point training camp for me was not a big deal. I didn't stress out over it. I was just excited to come back and see all the girls.

We all met and had our fitness the very first day. Everyone's always very nervous and I think that is too bad. A lot of people seem to feel that if they don't do well in the fitness then their chances of being on the team will be gone. It is not good to have that in your mind because, if you don't do very well, for the rest of the camp you're just going to be very nervous about everything. That makes it

worse. It's a tough situation for the new people when they come into camp. We've got the fitness and everyone is just so serious and quiet and not very outgoing at all. When the fitness is done, everyone is relieved and you can tell, just by the way everyone acts, that the hardest part is over. I felt that the fitness was just a big waste of time because it was important to use every little bit of time that we had. We only had about six weeks, so I thought it would be best to go right into our training and get comfortable with each other.

Typically, we would all be up at about 6 a.m. or 6:30 a.m. I might be up earlier because I would be on my computer. I would either e-mail or play around on the stock market. So, I would be online just fiddling with that stuff. We would go to breakfast at about 7 a.m. Then we would have a training session for about two hours. After the first session of practice we would probably go to lunch, or I would get on my computer quickly and check a couple of quotes. I would either do that before or after lunch depending on how anxious I was. After that, there would be another training session later on in the afternoon. We would have dinner at about 6 p.m., and then at night there might be a meeting. Usually, I would go to bed at about 11 p.m. or 11:30 p.m. I can go without much sleep, but I know it's not really that good to do. If I found myself starting to get tired and maybe a little worn down, I would just give myself a little bit more sleep at night.

I thought the training sessions were pretty good. The fitness was incorporated into the playing and I think that's great. I think we needed to do more of that instead of a lot of the running that we did. We would do running fitness once a week. I don't think you can really do hard fitness only once a week, because when you do, you get sore. I think that's how people started to get hurt. They would get sore and then they would do something else, whether it was playing or something that we did only once a week, and that would cause problems over time.

After the first week or so, the camp started to become really repetitive, just the same thing over and over. The excitement of practicing started to go. At the beginning, everything was new so you were a little bit more motivated to go out there and see what was to come. We didn't have very much time, so I thought that it was important that we make the best of the two hours that we had, every time we went out there. Six weeks is not much time to get a team prepared. The coach said it was more than enough time, but it really is not. I just wanted everyone to do well together so that we could move on, instead of just coming back to the basics. We were never able to move on in the past. It was always that we would come together for two weeks or so, and then we would be apart for about six months. When we would come back again, we wouldn't be able to move on from where we left off the last time. Every time we came back, we would have to get caught up again. It was just a vicious cycle every year.

When I'm at the camp, I always try to enjoy myself regardless of how much I'm actually not enjoying myself. I enjoy catching up with everyone and enjoying each other and our time off together. I think the reason why I don't remember a lot of stuff with the team is because it's all been really disappointing stuff. I spoke to a teammate in the past about this and she said 'well, maybe your mind has just blocked out a lot of that stuff because it wasn't very pleasant.' For me, it really wasn't. Being with the national team for over 13 years has been the most miserable and disappointing experience of my sport life. So I think I've blocked out a lot, and not been able to remember a lot of that stuff. But I remember the enjoyable times that we had. I think those are probably the things that I've chosen to remember.

I remember going out for dinner with the team, and that practices were pretty intense which was good. I thought I had a pretty good camp because I felt that I was really prepared for it and that I was pretty fit. I trained five days a week for three months and I think that that really prepared me for the camp. I think I was probably at my fittest, but at the same time I was injured. I had nagging stress

fractures on my shins, which I basically played through. I have been doing that for years now, which is not good.

I enjoyed the fact that the practices were intense and competitive. Things were a little different so it made me more interested. Also, we did a lot together as a team. We went out for dinners, or for meals, and we were able to do things on our own. There was a little shopping centre nearby, so we were able to take the van and just drive down as a team and go without having the coaches there with us. I thought that was good for the team.

The first week, a reporter came by and he put a microphone on me for one of the practices. A lot of times I forgot I was wearing this microphone, and I remember saying to one of the girls on the team that the first two days of practice were just a waste of time because we could have been doing this stuff during those two days. Then she asked, "do you have the microphone on you?" and I said, "oh yeah." So they heard me say that on the microphone. Maybe that is what they wanted.

Saturday and Sunday were both off, so it was pretty quiet. You could do whatever you wanted. People who lived nearby went home. I did some fitness on the Sunday, which was probably not good. On Saturdays, I would go into the city with some of the girls. On Sundays, we would probably go to the little mall nearby. One thing I really liked, was when a couple of us would get together and make milkshakes. We would go to the store, buy a thing of ice cream and some milk, come back and just make milkshakes. That was great.

On Mondays, after the weekend off, I definitely think you're more refreshed and ready to tackle the day. Mondays weren't bad at all. I think going into the second week we were expecting our fitness testing to be increased, but it wasn't too bad. I think that the fitness probably went up a little bit. We had a couple of scrimmages and then we also had cuts coming up. I'm sure everyone had it in their minds to make it a good week and do well. By the end of the week, it was getting really tense because

some people were hurt, so they figured they would be the first to go, but that wasn't really the case. That whole second week was a pretty tough week. I think after the second week your body starts to feel all the training. So I think we took it easy that weekend.

I was actually looking forward to playing some exhibition games the next week. After two weeks of camp, it was getting a little boring, practicing all the time. It just gets old, so it's usually nice to get out and play some games. It just seems like everything is the same from week to week. It becomes monotonous and, I think, you get into a rut. You're doing the same thing everyday, but just a different day. For me, it's important to have something to do, like e-mail, or just to have my computer with me. I usually work during my spare time, and then maybe just sit and chat with either my roommate or the girls on the team. I think, at this point, we've accepted what each day brings and how it's just very monotonous. I think we've all gotten over that part. So we are all able to deal with the monotony.

I think it is important to have good camaraderie with the players on the team, especially outside of practice and competitions. If you have good camaraderie away from the game, I think that you will get along well and be more successful in the game. I have always believed in that. I think that if you look at a team that's very close away from the game, they would probably be very successful in the game.

For the third week, we went across to Montreal to play two exhibition games against Italy. The games were fine but, even though they were fine, I thought that we were not as good as, or at the level that, we should have been. One problem we had was controlling the play, and I really think that controlling the play comes with playing together more. I think that was the biggest problem - not being able to play together as a team or even being able to play more efficiently.

Depending on the time of the game, we would get up, and maybe have breakfast at about 9 a.m., or whatever time you wanted to have breakfast. There would be a meeting at some point in time, either in the morning or after lunch. Game days were pretty slow days and people napped. I never napped, so I was always hoping that whichever roommate I got was the type of person who never napped, or that she was the type of person who stayed up pretty late. The meetings were pretty repetitive, maybe just a little bit of a scouting report, and after a while everything became the same. After the game, one thing that I just could not stand, and which I think was really bad for a lot of the girls, was that the coach would post a report on how you played during the game. I felt a lot of people took this really seriously, and because of that, their confidence was just shot, sometimes in a manner of two seconds. The coach would grade you on your play; give you a number grade plus a critique. I, for one, can take criticism and feedback whether it is positive or negative, but when he started grading players compared to other players, it made me wonder how he was grading this. A lot of people started to question themselves, and I know that after the first one or two times of reading it, I just decided I'm not going to read that thing anymore. Why even bother going there. It was interesting to see what was written for other people. I think that, sometimes, the grade depended on whether the coach liked that person or not. So my advice about the little report was just don't even bother reading it because people got too upset and too worried. So you had to listen to people complain and ask 'well, what was I not doing right?' They wouldn't go talk to the coach because they didn't feel comfortable speaking to him about it. I thought that was just a bad thing. I will probably never forget that. It wasn't really good for the team. I think it's important for the coach to have some sort of a relationship with the players. Instead of just writing the information on the wall, s/he should just speak to the players directly so that they can find out what the problem is and then go from there, as opposed to the players reading it, getting all upset, and having it on the back of their minds for the next week or so.

Once in a while, we would see a sport psychologist. He was quite the interesting character. He would want us to fill out these forms explaining how we felt in certain situations. We had to fill out these forms before and after the games. So it was something I didn't really care to do. I wasn't trying to be rebellious or anything, but I just felt that that was not really going to change me or help me. So I went to speak to him about it because he kept asking me for my forms. I talked to him and said that I'd prefer not to do them. He said that that was fine. We ended up talking because I wanted to talk to him about the questions that were asked. We had a pretty good conversation about it. I explained that I thought the way the girls felt had a lot to do with the coach.

On the form there was a question about self-confidence, and I said 'well, I think a lot of the girls don't have very much confidence because of the coach.' In practices, if they made a mistake, he was right on them. But everyone makes mistakes, so then they made more and more mistakes because they were that much more nervous, and it was just an ongoing process. The coach made the girls feel useless. I think that if you're afraid to make mistakes, you're not going to do well. I think it was hard for some of the girls to block him out because he was always there and always had something to say. I thought that he created a lot of the insecurities, and sometimes a little bit of animosity, between the girls because he would compliment less skilled players and shoot down much better players. He would build up their confidence a little bit and then, with one comment, just shoot it down. I thought that was just terrible, especially since we didn't have very much time in the first place to prepare.

I spoke to the coach about this. I said, "I don't think you should be as hard on a lot of these players." He said, "Well, you notice that I only do it to certain players." I thought that he was doing it to the younger players and you would think that the younger players would be the ones that you would try to build up because they're young and new, and you're trying to bring them along. He wasn't really building their confidence. And I said to him that this is the time when you're supposed to be bringing

people along instead of shooting down their confidence. He just didn't have anything sensible to say about it. I don't know why he was doing it. I thought it was his way of having control because I think the older players were just not going to deal with it because they had dealt with it for so long.

I was at the point where I could not care less if I played for the national team anymore. It would not be a big loss to me. So that probably explains why I came out and said that our program was not well supported because it didn't matter anymore to me. For the good of our program, we needed to have people in the program who were going to look out for the women's program and help to bring it along. And I just don't think that our coach was doing that.

I think the sport psychologist understood. I explained to him that I felt pretty confident in myself, and the situations that happened between the coach and the team. I didn't let it affect me, because I felt that that was his way of trying to have control. I said that I thought that I was pretty confident in myself, not in a cocky way, but that I just felt confident that I knew what I could do and I knew that, if he said something to bring me down, it would not bring me down. I thought the sport psychologist was a good character to have because he made us laugh a bit whether he was trying to make us laugh or not. He agreed with me when I said that I thought the coach had a lot to do with the way the girls reacted in certain situations.

There were some cuts made. Cuts are never easy. It's not a good time at all because there's a lot of disappointment and a lot of sad people. This is going to sound kind of weird, but it was really strange that the people who were cut were people that I was pretty close with on the team. I just thought, 'is he trying to get at me through other people?' It sounds far fetched. So I was kind of wondering about that. I probably would be cut too, but he would have had to answer to a lot of people if he had cut me.

We went to Boston to play two games, one against the USA and the other against China. In Boston the training did change. The practices were not as intense and they were not as long. We played China in Boston. We lost that game. I thought we should have had a better showing against China. I'm not sure what the problem was, but I remember it being really warm. Warmer than we were used to. When we were in Kingston for training camp, it was cold. I don't think people were as sharp because it was warmer. I know I was not feeling as sharp. I felt kind of sluggish and I just don't like that at all. I think it was from not being prepared for the heat.

The US game was next. To be honest, I went into that game expecting to get blown out, and I did not want that because this game was televised. So I dreaded the result. I did not want to get blown out. I spoke to a couple of other players about that and they were saying the same thing. Of course, I would only discuss that with certain players because I think if you were to say that to newer players, or less experienced players, they would be so nervous going out there. It would probably be best not to even say anything like that to them. We ended up losing, but it was a really good showing because we stayed with them. I thought that was a really big confidence booster.

One thing about that win was that I was top scorer in that game, and I had never been top scorer against the US while playing for Canada. Earlier in the year, I had played with the world all-stars against the US team and I had been top scorer against the US team in that game too. So it was great to have achieved that in my second game against the US. Two games in a row. That was a pretty big moment for me. Plus we came close. You don't know when points are going to come, and having scored those points, I was just so excited. It would have been great if we had won but that didn't happen.

When we played against the US, it was an unusually cold day so we were so thankful of that. We were tiring in the second half. As a team, we had not played enough international level games to

really develop an international fitness. If it had been hotter there, we would have just died. That's one thing we talked about after the game. The entire three weeks prior to this, we had been training in cool weather. It made a difference. I think it is best to be prepared for the worst because you can deal with anything else.

The people who played the entire game or most of the game, didn't have to practice too hard the following day. But the people who didn't play, or who played about half a game, had to do fitness. That was one thing that I just really disagreed with. I thought it was embarrassing. First, they didn't play very much or they didn't play at all and, second, they've got to do fitness after the game in front of all these people in the stands. They could have done it the next day when we were all together at practice. So I felt bad for the players who didn't play very much or who didn't play at all because we were supposed to be a team. I think that when you do that, you separate the team into starters and non-starters. I don't think that that's a good way to build good team morale and togetherness.

We drove to Montreal from Boston, and then we flew to Calgary that same day. It was just a ridiculous trip. I slept a little bit, at least as well as I could sleep on the bus. If I had enough battery juice, I could be on my computer for a while. I remember talking to my roommate all the way back to Montreal. She was one of the ones who was hurt, and it had been a pretty miserable time for her just because of her injury. Of course, the coach was making her feel even worse because she came into camp hurt. Then we talked about the game a bit.

We were just dead when we played against Australia. Everyone was expecting us to kill Australia because we just had stuck with the US in the last game. If anything, we were just really slow and sluggish and not the same. I think people were wondering what the problem was. I thought that it could have been a number of things. People were tired from that trip, and maybe not as motivated to

play against Australia as we had been to play against the US. We played the Australia team twice and the second game was a whole lot better.

After the first game, I think we felt a little bit discouraged. I think people realized that we were pretty pooped. Some of us spoke about it amongst ourselves, about how we felt in the game. Most people were a little bit tired. This is why, after that first game, I thought we were able to group together and decide that we needed to have a good showing in the last game. So we went out, did well, and that was what did it for us. We were just a lot more confident. We felt a little more ready for the competition to start.

In Calgary, I realized that there was a lot of fan and media support. I think it was good to see a lot of the younger girls out there supporting us, maybe looking up to us, and looking at the national team as a possibility for the future. In the past when people had said, “wow, you play for the national team, you're so lucky,” I would think, ‘I am?’ Considering all the bad things in the past, just the bad experiences, I would think ‘you know what? It really isn't all that.’ But at that point, I thought it would be great if these younger players actually strove to be on the national team at some point in time in their lives.

I should be really thankful for what I have achieved up to this point. I think this sport has really brought me a lot over the years. I've been able to travel quite a bit. I have been able to see different parts of the world. I've also been able to make a living, which is something that not many female players in this sport have been able to do. I think most of all I should be thankful for my health, because without my health I would not have been able to do these things.

Usually camp is supposed to prepare you for competition or even just skill-work. Looking back at that camp, I believe it was able to prepare me for the world competition both mentally and physically. I think if we hadn't had that camp before the world competition, without a doubt, we would

not have been as confident as a team. I feel that the more training you do, the more confidence you have. I myself felt much fitter. If I'm fit my confidence level increases. When I say confidence, I mean I feel that I am able to do more. I don't feel that the other team is fitter than I am, or that the other players are fitter than I am on the other team. That's what gives me confidence. I'm an experienced player, but I'm not really the type of player that would lose confidence and, if I did, it wouldn't be because I wasn't confident in the way I played, or in my abilities. It would really come from fitness. As long as I'm fit, I'm able to do anything. I need to be in shape in order to do what I can do, or what I would like to do. And if I'm able to do that stuff, then I'm able to act confident.

At camp we were training every day, twice a day, sometimes three times a day, so I felt that I was fit going into the camp and just felt a little fitter after the camp. The bad thing was that, during the world competition, I felt tired. I never really slept very much because of the anxiety, which probably made a difference in how I felt in the game. The day before the games, I didn't really sleep very much and then after the games, I wouldn't be able to go to sleep very early; I would just think about the game. The next morning after the game, I would wake up early because I was too busy thinking about the game. So that went on for about a week and a half. Once I came back, I was so tired. I've never been so tired in my life. When I did continue with my season here, I just felt so out of shape but I don't think it was that I was out of shape. I think it was that my body was just drained. I had been training probably for a year straight without a break, and I think that it just finally caught up to me. I don't think it was the preparation beforehand, I think it was just myself going for so long. I felt fit at the camp, but I think everything, all the training and all the tiredness, just hit me at the world competition and not sleeping very much didn't help at all.

Even if you feel that you have prepared well, I think that, in the back of your head, you think that these teams have trained longer than we have and that they have an edge over us. I really think

that plays a part in your confidence. We only had six weeks to train for the world competition meanwhile the teams that we were playing against had had way more time to train.

I spoke to the media about how our training program was just not up to the international level. We weren't training enough. I just felt that the money that our organization would put into our training was a waste. They would put a little bit in and expect a great result with very little training. It's impossible. So I felt that if they didn't want to put the amount of money in that we required, they might as well not put any money in.

I really don't think that any of us had game fitness, and the reason for that was just not being together very much as a team. The US team had probably played 100 games or more since the last world competition and we had probably played about 20, if that. When we played against the US, you could see that we died in the second half and that was simply because we didn't have the game fitness and that makes a huge difference. You want to do everything to prepare yourself for the worst. I think you should go in there preparing yourself for the fittest team, the best team defensively, and the best team offensively. I think that once you get tired, all that skill goes out the door. You stop thinking, and you start hoping – hoping that the play doesn't come to you, and hoping that you don't have to get back on defense.

I don't think we get the best out of our players, or get the best players, simply because players aren't willing to give up their job to go to camp for nothing. A lot of these players are paying rent or mortgages or they simply have bills to pay. I lost money because I was with the national team. I guess it's okay, but I can't say that it's okay to lose money because you're going to represent your country. From the very first year I played, up to this point in my career with the national team, I went to camp asking what I was doing this for. Was it really worth it? I understand that you're supposed to feel privileged to play for your country, but I always wondered 'well, okay, do I feel privileged? Do I really

feel privileged?' And maybe, to some extent, I do feel a little privileged, but at the same time it's been more of a headache than anything else. And is it really worth it? Not at this point in my career. I play professionally, and when I do leave to go play for Canada, I don't receive very much. So when I get to camp, every game that I miss here loses me a lot of money. I feel that it's not really worth it anymore to lose money here and get nothing. Now I'm weighing my priorities, wondering if it's really worth it to play for the team. So that's probably not a good thing to be thinking about. I've been off for two months now and not really missing the game too much. Am I really going to be very motivated to go back and play for the national team? I think that once the time comes for me to go back out there, I'll probably be motivated because I still want to play. I still like to play in the league here. So, who knows? Maybe my mind will change in a few months. But for me, right now, whether I'm going to be paid or not is becoming a big thing. I have to pay a mortgage. So now I have to just make a decision. Do I want to eat or do I want to play for Canada? Feeling privileged doesn't put food on the table. You have to choose between being paid and not being paid. I think if I was younger, I wouldn't think this way. I've been on the team now for so many years. My priorities are kind of changing.

I've actually learned to be turned off from negative people. I just didn't respond well to the head coach just because he was very negative. I felt that he used his authority to keep the players in control, not that anyone was out of control or anything. I felt that he thought he needed to have one up on the players because they were depending on him to be on that team. So he felt that he could mistreat them or say whatever he wanted. So, I think I developed enough confidence in myself to learn that whatever he said to me was not going to break me. I told myself not listen to whatever he said that might upset me. I learned to just turn that off whenever I heard anything negative from him. I'm probably stronger, mentally, and a better player because of him. I am a better player because, for one thing, he cut me back the first or second year. So, I think, maybe I wanted to come back and prove to him that I was a better

player than he had made me out to be. I remember him saying, when he cut me, that I was too nice. I was young, and I'd always thought that you were not supposed to be very physical in practice. I would always ease up on defense, or maybe not score as much against the other team in a little scrimmage, and I think that went against me. Of course, if you're not trying to score too much, it's definitely not good, now that I'm looking back at it. So I've learned not to be nice. I've told other younger players not to be nice because it will go against them.

I just don't think the head coach realized how important confidence really is. If he's not giving these players confidence, then he's taking the confidence away from them, and there's no way he can have a successful team or a team that's going to get better. I let these players know that they're doing fine, and let them know when they did something well. For me, it's really important to give those players confidence. The thing about camp is that there aren't many players giving other players that type of feedback because it's such a competitive atmosphere. A lot of players are not thinking about giving anyone good, positive feedback, they're just thinking about what they can do to make themselves look better, which is not a bad thing because of the situation or the circumstances. But this is why I think it's important for me to just speak to these younger players and give them some positive feedback during, and after, practices. The coach really doesn't give any positive feedback, to be honest, and if he does you're just shocked.

Camp used to be a miserable experience. I was sore, oh it was just miserable. It was just because of not being prepared physically. If I had been in much better shape ahead of time, it would have made things much easier, or much better, for me. Just going out each session and having a good one was really important to me. The coach would say that six weeks was not very much time, so we needed to make each session count, and I agreed with him there. I just wanted to go out each time and

make each session a good session, whether it was to try and get as much out of the fitness as I could, or to just play as well as I could.

I really think that the coach is a big part of the team because, as I've learned, when the players do not respect the coach, most likely, they don't want to play for the coach. I think if the coach had had a good relationship with the team and with the players, and not separated himself so much from the players, they would have looked up to him and, in turn, he would have gotten that respect. Players would then want to play for him and listen to him, but he did not have any of that.

It was really disappointing for me that we didn't have a good outcome because I had really trained a lot for it and I think, at the same time, that I had put a lot of the burden to help the team qualify on my back. I just felt as though it had been a losing battle from the start. The very fact that we just didn't qualify made me wonder if I really wanted to continue playing for Canada. Like I said before, it's just a vicious cycle. We don't have much training, we're not very successful, and this is repeated every year. So it just makes me start to rethink. If we were more successful, I would be thinking a lot differently.

Melanie

At the time of the interviews, Melanie was 29 years old and had been with the Canadian National team for seven years. She had attended 4 national team training camps, one of which was longer than one month. She is employed full-time by the city as a community facilitator.

Life History in Sport. She first started playing this sport in junior high school and before that she had mainly played other sports such as baseball and usually with boys. But it was at her junior high school tryout where she was identified by a community coach. After seeing her at the trials, he asked her to come and play with a local team:

He was fanatical about this sport and he would go and scout all the different fields and games. After my [junior high school] tryout, while I was doing some extra practice by myself, he came up to me and he said he would like me to come and play for his community team....He turned out to be my coach for probably the next sixteen years....So that is kind of where it all began. I got to play at a higher level with better players and athletes because he also coached a senior women's team and we were able to play on that team as well as with the youth team.

Melanie remembered her community experience fondly. The team overall was very successful and did very well at national tournaments often winning silver medals. She contributed much of their success to the coach:

He was a very outstanding coach and had an ability to get the most out of players. He was very good at teaching the basics. I think his demeanor was such that players respected him. He was never condescending or demeaning, but he still managed to be demanding of his players. He was always positive and always encouraging and his love for the game, you couldn't help but feel that and learn and grow from that....He had a good ability of, rather than pointing out the things that people were doing poorly, he corrected them but emphasized the things you were doing well and built your confidence in that way. Players were not afraid to make mistakes or try new things...He created an atmosphere you wanted to succeed in and not just for yourself but for the team and for the coach.

Melanie compared the atmosphere on that team to a family:

It was just a very special team. A lot of those players who played on that team are some of my best friends...I just remember days training and my coach always brought his dog to the sessions....As well his wife was the assistant coach/manager so it became almost like a family. The players always joked they were like our second parents because they were always there and

always supportive...He's still a really good friend, both him and his wife; a relationship we still maintain even to this day.

Melanie described herself as "a little quiet and shy" in her early years with a little "mischievous" side. She loved the game and often didn't want to come off if it was her turn to sit out: [Our coach] would yell for a sub and I'd hear him but I'd ignore him (laugh). Then the other girl would be over there with her arms crossed, like it's my turn. Eventually I'd be totally exhausted that I'd come off. No one wanted the same shift pattern as me because they knew I never came off.

She stayed with this community team all the way through youth and into her twenties. The coach was also the provincial coach and he took the provincial team to a provincial championship as well as to the Canada Games. However, at that time there weren't that many playing opportunities in the sport. Provincial teams did not start until Melanie was a bit older so she actually competed provincially in another team sport, "When I first started in this sport, there were not the same opportunities as you find now. There were no provincial teams so I played ringette. I actually played Canada Games ringette. I stuck with ringette because there were more opportunities for the national championships."

There were a few players from the same province who, prior to Melanie, had also been named to the National team or had attended various selection camps. Again she credited her community coach for a lot of the success achieved by these players, "I think it goes back to the coaching we had there. For a relatively small province I think we did quite well considering." Melanie later came to realize just how successful they had been after moving to another province where there were more opportunities to play the sport, "Canada Games was a good experience but disappointing because we came away with

the silver medal, but after moving to a new province you realize it is pretty difficult to compete with a team who trains in the proper facilities 12 months of the year.”

Melanie originally planned to attend university in the States but due to personal circumstances she decided to attend university in her home province. She was fortunate to be able to compete in two university team sports while there -- ringette and her main sport today. For a relatively small university, they did quite well in her main sport winning the conference one year and going on to the national university championships. Despite her athletic success that year, Melanie had a challenging year personally as her mother passed away, “It was tough year. It was one where I was questioning, do I even play. I had really supportive teammates and coaches and it was nice to do that well as a team.”

Melanie described herself during university as follows:

Competitive and pretty intense...There is no question I wanted to win, but not at all costs...I think I was pretty encouraging [with teammates]. I don't consider myself to be a negative player. I feel you get more out of a teammate by encouraging them than you ever do by saying discouraging things.

As a leader Melanie viewed herself as more of a silent one, “ If need be, I could be quite vocal but usually I tended to stay back somewhat and observe and become involved if I felt the need to.”

Balancing two sports at university was a little challenging for Melanie. She believed however that playing ringette made her a better athlete overall, “It gave me better footwork, better speed, better power.” She had supportive coaches but even her community coach found it difficult sometimes that she was playing two sports. The real pressure to focus on one sport came more from the National coach at the time:

[The national coach] indicated, not directly to me, but through my community coach, that I had to make a decision between the two sports unbeknownst to me. My community coach just never

really told her what we were doing [laugh]. I just played both. I don't think my [game] suffered. I think I became a better athlete. If anything it was ringette that suffered because it was somewhat secondary.

Melanie acknowledged that the situation is different today because "there is a lot more opportunity in this sport than when I first started...and [players today] don't have the flexibility and freedom that I had because there is no question [they] have to make a choice as a result of more opportunities being available."

After university Melanie decided to move to a new province for a number of reasons, "It was personal, it was professional and sport was a main focus as well." The new province offered Melanie a few more opportunities to train with some of the top players in the country on a day-to-day basis, "When you are training on weekends and during the week with national level athletes, and not just one or two but eight or nine, you can't help but get better." Prior to her move, Melanie had been invited to a few different national camps during her last couple of years at university, but she considered herself as "on the fringe of being in or out" of the team. She described the difference in her mindset at national camps after moving to the new province and training with the players as compared to when she first started with the national camps:

At the national camps, it was a lot of players you knew well but didn't know well. So I was definitely nervous the first two years knowing that I was on the cusp that probably wasn't going to be staying but I still fought to get a position. Then moving to the new province and training with players who make up the majority of the team, completely changed the way you look at and perceive where you fit within the team. It's just more comfortable because you know you've been training with these players and you know you can compete against them if not with them. It's not only physically that you improve as a player, but I think mentally your mind set changes

and you realize that, yeah you are as good as and could be better than any one of the players you are playing against...So within six months of moving to the province I was involved from that point on.

Shortly after making the team, Melanie attended the world competition with the national team.

The experience of the world competition was mixed, "It was fantastic in that it was my first world competition. The atmosphere, the organization and the level of the different teams was neat." She also described it as "not a great experience because we didn't do as well as we were favoured to do." She indicated that prior to the world competition, there were some issues with the coach that created a "disruptive atmosphere" which carried over into the tournament:

A lot of players disliked [the head coach]. I think she was put in a difficult position. She was the first female national team coach and I think she was feeling a lot of legitimate pressure from different sources and perhaps had difficulty dealing with that pressure.

Melanie tried to stay out of the controversy as much as she could and focus on the task at hand, but it was difficult given that it was such a focus of the team's conversations. For Melanie it came down to the issue of respect, "It's difficult when players don't respect a coach. It creates a disruptive atmosphere for everyone. I guess I was always brought up to respect my coaches. Maybe I don't agree with what they do or I would do things differently but it's their decision." The success of the national team or any team for Melanie rests with the "ability of the coach to deal with the individual personalities of the team. Unless you are able to control the personalities I think you really have difficulty...I think being a coach is a very difficult position."

In her new province, Melanie worked full-time for a period with a sport organization, which was supportive of her national team involvement and allowed her to take time off as necessary. Later she changed her job and began working for the city as a community facilitator where she continues to

work today. This organization was equally as supportive of her national team involvement and the time away from work.

The national program was fairly quiet for a few years after the world tournament with only few short term training camps and exhibition games although local training continued for Melanie on a regular basis at the national training center. There was a new coach on board at this point who was "very authoritarian" and his style brought with it a number of issues, "He tended to be vocally negative. I think it was his belief that would enable him to get the best out of the players. I don't think it did that." During an international tour prior to this six week centralized training camp, Melanie described the coach's behaviour, "He would be negative generally but very specifically negative to people that he knew would accept it, quite often the younger players, which really bothered me." Melanie indicated that his negativity did not affect her as much due to some of the skills she had developed in her job, "Through work, I am somewhat used to people being negative and I have developed a good ability to block it out. But what did affect me was what it was doing to the players around me and to the team specifically."

Through her national team experiences, Melanie has developed some very positive long-term friendships especially with one player in particular, Breanna. They train together on a regular basis and work with a personal coach. They also provide each other with support. Overall she indicated that this sport has given her many opportunities to learn and grow:

It has taught me commitment, it's taught me responsibility. Emotionally, it's taught me how to work through things. Through this sport I have probably had some of my happiest moments and probably some of my devastating moments. It has just opened me up to a whole world of emotional experiences and given me an opportunity to see a lot of the world. It introduced me to people who I've developed long-term friendships, outstanding people who I respect and care

for tremendously. I think whenever you find people who have the same passion you always build something special.

This is Melanie's experience of the six-week training camp.

Melanie's Profile. Before entering the actual training camp, you did a lot of the training as an individual. There were community team games and practices, and the national training centre one day a week. The coach provided an overall program for all the players but it wasn't an individualized program. I incorporated most of what he asked, or required, in the program but I also tended to individualize it more for myself, particularly the weight training and the running.

In preparation for the camp, I had to do a lot of organizing and shifting and shuffling to try to arrange work while being gone for that period of time. I was able to schedule off the amount of time that I needed. Fortunately, I had people within the workplace who were supportive and who helped me to arrange things and to get the time off. From a training perspective, it was a busy time for me. Obviously, going into the camp you wanted to try and be in the best shape that you could, technically and tactically. I trained with Breanna, another player on the team, and a coach. So the three of us would go and do various sessions.

It wasn't until just weeks before that we had a good idea of exactly where we would be and what would be happening for the camp. No full list of players is ever distributed, and it's usually through word of mouth that you come to find out who is, and who isn't, going to be in the camp. It's always interesting when you arrive there to find out, and see who actually is there.

We went to the training camp in Kingston. It's always fun to see old faces and meet maybe a few new ones. It's fun to catch up and see what people have been up to, and what's been happening. It's difficult in some ways because you know that eventually, some of those people won't be with you after

the training camp is over. It's not easy to see people you've trained with work hard and then fall short of their goal.

We were housed in the student residence at the university. In this particular setup, each player had her own room. If I was tired, or if I wanted to rest, I would close my door, but if I wasn't resting I would usually have my door open. I also had my computer with me so I would use that sometimes. It was a means of keeping in contact with people outside the camp through e-mail. There was one phone in the whole residence, so there was a bit of a hunt if you wanted to make a phone call. You would have your buddy on the team. Usually, there was a group of us that tended to go together, whether it was to training sessions or meals. So, it was nice to just have someone that you always knew you could rely on if you slept through your alarm, or whatever.

The first day is fitness day. All the players dread the fact that we've got to do this run. It's somewhat of a feeling of completion when you finish it, and everyone's glad to have it over with. After that, they're pretty full days. You would wake up early, eat breakfast, train, shower and then rush back to the residence and into the cafeteria for some lunch. You would pretty much pack up again, and be off to your afternoon training session. So it doesn't leave a lot of free time. It's very obviously sport intensive, as it should be. Then, we would have the afternoon training session, dinner, and then usually meetings in the evening. So they were very long days, certainly in the first week anyway. I know, personally, I found it pretty taxing and tiring.

I think, initially, I was excited to be there. I was looking forward to what awaited us. I was optimistic from previous camps, as I had heard information that the coach was going to come in with perhaps a more positive and encouraging outlook. I did see some of that in the initial few days of the camp, but I think as the camp started to wear on, I started to see a change in his demeanor and in his treatment of players. I think the running of the camp began to change somewhat. Initially, he was more

willing to sit back, observe and watch so as to make decisions surrounding players. However, as we got further into camp, his coaching style seemed to become more like his previous coaching style, with him being quite negative and quite demeaning of players, rather than being positive and encouraging. I think, in his case, it was easier to point out negative things rather than encourage the positive things.

For the first two weeks, the coach approached camp as a nine to five job but it became evident, quite quickly, that it wasn't a nine to five job. It was going to be like most jobs; it was going to be nine to ten p.m. The first two weekends were actually off. So, we were able to get away from the camp. I thought that was really a good idea. I think the two days away allowed us to return on the Monday refreshed. I was fortunate to be able to come home and spend time with friends, and be in my own surroundings. It was just really nice to be away from the atmosphere and the situation. It was a good opportunity to clear your head, come back on the Monday and feel refreshed and ready to start again. For me, it seemed to work really well.

For week two of camp, we still had two-a-day training sessions on the Monday and Tuesday and then, on Wednesday, we had one training session and then a game. I think it starts to become quite evident where players fall, in the scheme of the team, and in the coach's opinion. I found that, specifically with this coach, your treatment as a player depended on his perceived importance of you on the team. So, I think some players were perhaps treated differently, maybe given more preferential treatment than others, or verbally aggressed upon and attacked more than others. It became difficult because players were trying to figure out where they were in the scheme of the team, and whether or not they would be one of those players released.

It's actually a really interesting dynamic because, in essence, you are competing against each other because you are fighting for a position on the team, but on the other hand, there is also a great

amount of respect and friendship among all the players. Everyone was just trying to do the best job they could to try to win themselves a position on the team and, hopefully, on the starting line up.

Towards the end of the second week, we started to have some scrimmages. You began to see where players fell within the pecking order. That was the first indication I got that perhaps the coach, at that point, didn't see me as one of the players who might be in the starting line up. You could tell that just from the set up of various drills, and where he had certain players positioned and playing. In speaking with him, he had said he just wanted to try new things and new players, and that he was just feeling things out. So, at that point, I didn't really put too much thought into it. I was actually enjoying being in camp. It was a nice change of atmosphere. It was almost like being back in university, in a way.

The two-a-day training sessions were physically hard on your body. That was the first time that, perhaps, I didn't recover quite as quickly as I might have five or six years before. I was, for the most part, injury free but I was having a few problems with my toes. The problems were from our trip, earlier in the year, where I broke a couple of bones in my foot. So, everyday training sessions were painful. It would be nice to not have to deal with pain and injury, but it's just the reality. It didn't really affect me in the sense that I couldn't play for the most part, it was just a constant feeling I had that was sore and bothersome.

There was this big secrecy as to when he was going to cut players. I just focused on what I was doing and on the players around me. Myself and another player actually went to him because a lot of the younger players were coming and asking us when the cuts were. They wanted to know, and we didn't know, so we went and asked him. He said he had some difficult decisions to make and that he would require the weekend to make them. When I arrived back on the Sunday night, a few of the players had been notified of the fact that they were going to be released. Obviously, there were some

pretty upset people. I spoke with our physiotherapist because she always had an inside perspective on what was happening. She wanted to let us know which players had been released so that we could have an opportunity to go see them and talk to them. There was one player who had not been in her room when the coach came looking, so he had left a note on her door requesting that she come and see him. By the time she arrived back to the dorms, other players had all heard and her door was the only other door to have a written message on it. She came to the deduction quite quickly. That was a difficult way for a player to find out. I think problems started that night. Some players felt that other players shouldn't have been released, and a lot of people were upset about the way the coaches had told the players about the cuts.

It's never easy. I've been there. It's a really funny dynamic because you have players who are obviously ecstatic about the fact that they've made the team, but then you also have this feeling of disappointment for the players who haven't. It's difficult because what can you say other than the fact that you have been where they are. Everyone's feelings are so individual. So you try to be there, and be supportive, but it's really difficult for those players. I think it's really difficult to be surrounded by your teammates. They're obviously encouraging and supportive, but I certainly remember feeling somewhat embarrassed and very sad about that fact that I hadn't met the mark. I think, when you get to that level in a training camp, the reality is that it could be anyone.

At that point, we departed for Montreal as a group to participate in a number of exhibition games. We stayed in a hotel. Breanna and I were roommates for the entire time. It was really nice to room with someone you knew really well and were comfortable with, someone to talk with about things that were happening at the camp, and with whom they could confide in.

Game days were very busy days and very scheduled. There wasn't a lot of time left in our schedule if people wanted to sleep in the afternoon, prior to a game, or if they wanted to do their own

individual physical or mental preparation. It was the coach's opinion that we didn't require more during the day, but he was willing to give us a little more time in the end so we ended up having, maybe, a 2 hour block off.

The game was the first real indication of where people fell on the team. I think, depending on where those individual players fell, it began to influence their mental states including my own. Unfortunately, the coach didn't do a very good job of making the players feel that they were an integral part of the team, whether they were playing or not, so I think a real division between starters and non-starters formed. For the non-starters, it was an ongoing joke at training sessions because we would be divided up and the non-starters would always be given the yellow pinnies, so we would start joking that we were the mustard community.

The Italy games were the first real indication, or foreshadowing, of what was to come for me. Prior to the games, the coach had indicated to me that I would be playing half the game. Indeed, I did, but it was for the second half. Personally, I felt kind of embarrassed. Right or wrong, it was how I felt. The game was in the city where I reside, so I had a lot of friends and family coming to the game. Also, given the fact that I'd obviously been in a starting role for a number of years, it was disappointing for me that I wasn't starting. I didn't take that for granted, but on the other hand, I hadn't really been provided with any explanation as to why. I just wasn't started. So I went into that game, and I think my performance reflected a lot of how I was feeling. I don't think I had a particularly good performance during that game.

During the games, I began to see a recurring theme; the coaching staff on the sideline, particularly the head coach, just screaming at the players who were playing with no words of encouragement. For the players sitting on the bench and listening to the coaching staff, it wasn't

positive, it didn't create a positive atmosphere whatsoever. You had players who would actually hope that they would be away from the coach while playing so they wouldn't have to listen to him scream.

I think I had a good ability to block it out, but there were certainly times where I would hear him and I would just think to myself, 'that's unbelievable.' Afterwards, I would discuss it with my own confidants and friends within the team, as well as friends outside the team. There were certainly people that I spoke with in the sports community who really felt that his behaviour bordered on harassment, and that it shouldn't be stood for. But unfortunately, as players, it was a difficult situation because, ultimately, the coach holds your fate in his hands in terms of your positioning on the team, or if you're even on that team for that matter. So players tended to remain silent, as opposed to coming forward and speaking about how they felt. I indicated to him, a couple of times, that I thought he was extremely negative. I thought that he was affecting the players in a negative manner. He would say that he would take it for what it was worth, but it wouldn't seem to change his approach or how he behaved.

After some of the games, everyone would go back to the locker room and the players that had played a full game could come back out and talk with media and/or friends and family. The players who had not played a full game, or who had not played at all, had to put on their running shoes, and complete some interval running. Then those players would do a cool down and return to the locker room. By the time they got back to the locker room, all the players who had played a full game were showered, changed, and socializing with their family, so that just caused a huge rift. Obviously, the players who played partially or part of a game were tired. If you played half a game, you were exhausted and to then go and do sprints was tough. Also, for the players who hadn't played at all to go into a locker room, come out, and all of a sudden do sprints didn't make a lot of sense.

I played part of the game and was embarrassed about the fact that I hadn't played the entire game. Then I was required to go out and do these sprints. Meanwhile, family and friends were waiting

for me. By the time I had finished, all I had time to do was get my stuff and hop on the bus because the coach had determined that it was time to go. So, you never actually have a chance to talk with your friends and family. The other problem was that there were men's games after the two Italy games. They had tons of fans out, so you had to go out and sprint in front of all these people. I was actually pretty embarrassed. I was just like 'oh my god.' I think, what it created, was this hierarchy between the players who started and the players who didn't. It was very interesting for me because it offered me a whole new perspective that I just never had. In some senses, I'm glad I had it because it gave me a real respect for, and understanding of, the experiences and difficulties that these players had experienced in prior years. This practice was eventually stopped after the captains approached the coach and expressed how destructive it was to the team.

Right after those games, we returned to Kingston and immediately started training twice a day. I don't think the coach had been that impressed with our second game. It seemed to become a pattern. Whether we were able to get time off or not often depended upon how well we performed. If we didn't perform well, then we would train twice a day, but if we had a good performance and a good game, then he would give us the next day off. So, training was almost used as a punishment. We trained fairly hard that week. We ended up playing a game against the Canadian junior team and, in that particular game, he sat a number of what would later become his starting players. I think he used that game somewhat as a gauge to make his selection for the final cuts. There were two cuts that still needed to be made. For myself, I wasn't necessarily concerned with actually being cut, it was more about trying to make it into the starting lineup.

When we went into camp, we had a couple of games where I felt like I actually had a very good performance, perhaps one of my better performances. But I felt that the coach's decision not to start me wasn't based on my performance. It was based on decisions that he had made for other reasons. I think,

when he got something in his mind, it was very difficult to change that perception. In my case, I felt that his decision had to do with factors not necessarily related directly to me, but which were outside, and surrounding, me. I really felt that, given the performance in those initial games, what he ended up doing shouldn't have occurred. But obviously, he's the coach and he had a different idea of who he wanted to go with. From there, I think my confidence started to falter.

We had been in training camp for almost a month. It was difficult enough when the first cuts were made, but more players had to be released. Personally, I questioned how effective that tactic really was. We only had six weeks together as a team before the competition, and it was my feeling that, as a team, we never really had a chance to become a cohesive unit because by the time the coach made the final cuts we were almost at the competition. The final team never really had an opportunity to be together as a team. He felt it was an effective strategy because players didn't take their positions with the team for granted. It would put a constant pressure on players realizing that, if they didn't perform, there was another player ready to step in and take their position. I think, in theory, there is something to be said for that, but given the limited time we had together, we really needed a time period, even a six week time period, as a team to build as a cohesive unit without having all this underlying debate about who would or wouldn't make the team.

This time, players were informed of the cuts in individual meetings. There was some dissension because friends of players on the team were released, and they were upset because they felt maybe someone else should have been released. Depending on what camp people sat in, discussions were going on about who should have been cut. I think that really took away from the focus of our goal. And people became concerned with a lot of other peripheral issues, rather than dealing with, and focusing on, the goal at hand.

So we headed to Boston. In the coach's opinion, a travel day is the same as a day off. In the players' opinion, a travel day isn't a day off. It's a very long and taxing day. I think it's really grueling, regardless if you are traveling as an athlete or for business or personal reasons.

We were able to choose our roommates at that point. I thought that was an excellent idea, but I also thought it was a little problematic because there were players who ended up feeling left out. For me, it was an ideal situation, but I knew other players would have liked to room with other people. I could see that too because, unless you room with other people, you don't really get to know them. At one point, there was a mistake in the rooming list and I ended up with one of the younger players. It actually turned out to be the girl from my home province who I had coached when I was in university and she was in grade six. It was actually really neat because I got to know her on a totally different level than perhaps I would have had I not roomed with her. It was a lot of fun.

On the Thursday, we had a game against China and we ended up with a loss so, no surprise, we ended up training the next day. We trained for two more days, practicing once a day and then we had another game against the US. For the game against the US, the coach pulled me in for an individual meeting and said that the quad of a player he had starting in a certain position was bothering her. He said she may or may not play depending on her injury, but that he would let me know before the start of the game whether or not I would be starting. So we went out and warmed up for the game and, when we were heading back to the locker room, he pulled me over and said 'well, just so you know you're going to be starting this game.' It was nice to play that game as it was pretty high profile, but on the other hand, it was difficult. I actually had a good performance, but what he had said to me was basically that if, and only if, this player couldn't play would I be put in, otherwise I wasn't going to play. I can think of a few different ways where, potentially, he could been a little more positive or provided a situation where I felt more confident about his belief in my abilities. We, as a team, had a

really good performance, but we lost. Nonetheless, I think everyone walked away from that feeling really positive and that, as a team, we had come together, played well, and made a lot of good things happen. Obviously, the coach was ecstatic about our performance in this game. I felt really positive about our performance. I felt that, given the circumstance, I had gone out and had a good personal performance. I think, in some respects, I'd made a statement to him that 'yeah, I can play and maybe I should be playing.' But that was not to be.

The next day was our day off, but it wasn't really a day off because it was a travel day. We got into Calgary, and then we trained the next day. The following day, we had our first of a two game series against Australia, which we ended up losing. That was not a good game. The coach was just beside himself. These two games were our last two big preparation games before the tournament. There was obviously a lot of pressure on the team and for him, as a coach, to have the team perform well. I didn't play at all in the game. It was difficult for me because my family is from Calgary and they obviously had all come out to the game. I had told them a little bit of what had been happening. They were obviously very biased. I was very angry and upset with the fact that I wasn't playing. I had my little nephew at the game, and he asked me "Aunt Melanie, how come you're not playing?" I thought 'well, where do I begin?' He asked my sister, "Mom, can I boo the coach?" She said, "no you can't boo the coach, but I can." Actually, it was also hard because I felt like I had played really well in the US game, but the coach wanted to go with this other player and return to his original starting line up, and the player had recovered in time to play that game.

We had the next day off, so that was nice for me because my family came to see me and I spent some time with them. It gave me time away and I was able to talk to people with a different perspective. I actually, quite honestly, didn't want to talk about it. I think, at that point, I started to get quite frustrated. Since it was a situation that I didn't want to become negative, or to affect players on

the team, I tended not to discuss it. I would talk to Breanna, my roommate, about it a bit, but beyond that I think I internalized it, and I would talk to people away from the team. I had seen it happen in the past where a player wasn't playing and they became really negative. Ultimately, I wasn't happy and I wanted to play, but if I wasn't going to play, then I wanted to remain positive and I wanted the team to do well. So it was a really difficult position to be in. And it is not one that I had ever been in before nor is it one that I care to repeat.

We came away with a win the second game, so obviously the mood of the coach changed considerably. His mood swings were just unbelievable. You never knew what you were going to get. I think, from a head coach, you require some consistency in terms of demeanor and how players are dealt with. After the game, I ended up going for a run with a couple of the other players who hadn't played in the game either.

So that was the end of the six-week training camp. I felt pretty dejected. I think I was angry with the coach, but probably more so with myself. If I had been one of the top players on the team, I wouldn't have been in the predicament that I was in. But I was on the cusp of starting. Obviously, I had not performed in the coach's mind at the level where I could fall into the starting group. As the camp progressed, I tried not to let where, how much, and when I was playing affect me, but I don't think you can help it. I think, mentally, it had a huge impact on how I did perform in both games and training sessions. I think it was also difficult because, in some respects, I felt that no matter how well I trained in a session, the coach's mind had already been made up.

I don't think that, as a team, we developed as much as we could have in six weeks. I don't think we were a cohesive, collective unit. I felt that players didn't respect the coach, and because of that, it became a very divided team. There were two teams. There were the players and there were the coaching staff, and they were two distinct camps. For example, even during training camps at meal

times the coaching staff sat at a separate table. I think that there has to be interaction. I think that the coach needs to get to know the players, not only on a professional level, but also on somewhat of a personal level. I think someone needs to be in touch with how the players are feeling and what they're thinking. In our case, in our training camp, our physiotherapist became the sounding board. She became the person that people went to talk to with issues and concerns. They would never go to the coach, and it was either because he wouldn't be responsive or they just didn't feel comfortable.

There was no consistency of behaviour from the head coach either. Even when traveling, he would get extremely stressed out with airports. When we would travel, he would be completely unable to deal with things. Finally, the coaching staff ended up buying him a first class ticket and saying 'go to the lounge, we'll deal with it.' I think that any time you deal with a group of individuals, it's difficult. Probably a group of women is even harder, but I think coaches have to be somewhat aware of what the players are thinking and what they're feeling so they can deal with issues that arise.

There was about four of us who would, consistently, go to meetings with the coach and he would listen but he wouldn't hear. Maybe he did process and think through the information we gave him, but he certainly didn't implement changes or try to improve things. It was almost as if the six-week camp was a digression from start to finish. I think we probably would have been better off had we gone into the world competition as we were in the start, than the way we were at the end of the camp.

There were a lot of different feelings for me. A lot of the feelings centered around embarrassment and disappointment. In some senses I felt that, not only had I failed as a player, we had failed as a team. I think I did a lot of reflecting about the camp and about the world competition. What had happened, or what had gone wrong? I really believed that we had the opportunity, as a team, to do a lot better than we did. I think we all failed. I think that is more difficult to accept when you feel that it

was because of our own inadequacies or our own inability to perform that we were not successful. I think that, had we worked and been cohesive as a unit and as a team, things could have been different.

I have not had anything to do with the sport since. I have made the decision not to play at this point. I find myself at a stalemate, trying to decide whether or not I want to proceed in playing. I think sometimes you emphasize the negative, but there are a lot of positive things that happened. I think about teammates I played with, friendships I developed, and things that happened within the training camp. It's those memories that I will always carry with me, and always think back on, and they are not necessarily all negative.

I think an athletic team is a unique experience. It is different than a professional setting or job. It's different than university. The bond that you create with people is unique and special. Not only are you sharing the same goals and expectations, but you're also competing against each other and competing for a place in the starting line-up or, in some cases, competing for your place on the bench. You just form some pretty unique bonds and friendships and, no matter how disappointing an event turns out to be, no one can take that bond away. And for me, I think that is something pretty special that comes out of it.

I think any major thing that happens in your life puts certain things into perspective. I don't think you ever lose your passion for the sport, but I think what happens is that your priorities change a little bit as you get older. I think you get to the point where your love for the sport hasn't changed, but the responsibilities in your life have. Maybe the balance starts to change. I think that's the point where your decisions start to change. You decide whether or not to continue with the program or team. If I were in a younger player's situation, I would be absolutely ecstatic about being given the opportunity to be on the team and, if I hadn't played, I would have just been happy to be there. But having been in that situation before, and having played a more integral role in the team, it was more difficult. I mean, I

think every player on the team is important and everyone plays a unique role, but to me, personally, playing is important.

I wish that I had not gone through it, in a sense. But when I reflect back on this camp, I think it gave me a good perspective and a respect for players that I had played with in the past and the difficulties they had with not playing. I think, because I had never experienced that, I never really had the insight, understanding, or appreciation for the difficulties that they were experiencing. I think it left me more acutely aware of the roles and responsibilities that people have on the team. In saying that, however, I think that no matter what role you play, everyone's got to fulfill their part and if you don't, the team isn't going to be successful.

When you go into a training camp, it's somewhat like a family. You have to treat people with respect and if you do you should, for the most part, get it back in return. Like with any family adversities, you work through them or you should work through them. If you do work through them, I think you become stronger as individuals and stronger as a unit. If you don't, I think the difficulties begin and that it is a downward slide from there. I think that the turning point of a successful team is whether they are able to grow together, or whether they grow apart. Whichever route they take will, ultimately, determine the success of that team.

I think, despite my own individual disappointments, I was able to look at the bigger picture and be excited for other players around me, or for the team. In some ways, it just confirmed what I already knew - that I don't like to lose. I think when you believe in something so strongly, and I really believed that we would qualify for the Olympics, you can't help but reflect on the experience and try to understand things. In an individual sport, you only have yourself to blame. In a team sport, it's different because there are so many factors and variables that are beyond your control. You can only have a certain amount of impact and, inevitably, you've got to rely on the people around you. Sometimes,

things don't work out quite the way you hoped or wanted. I guess, in this situation, all I can do is sit back, reflect, learn from it and move on. I guess that's what I'm attempting to do. Despite anything, and everything, negative that transpired during the event, nothing can ever take away from the experience itself. Even though we didn't obtain our goals, I think we still walked away richer from the experience than when we started. We also probably knew more about ourselves and about the people around us. It teaches you more about life. Sport is special. It's very unique.

Deb

At the time of the interviews, Deb was 35 years old and had been a member of the Canadian National team for 13 years. She has attended 12 national team training camps, 2 of which have been longer than 4 weeks. She is a high school teacher.

Life History in Sport. She spent the very early years of her life growing up in a country where her current sport was extremely popular. She started playing at about three years of age until she moved to Canada when she was seven years old. It was her father who used to take her and her brothers to the park to play:

When my dad would come home from work he would take my two older brothers and myself over to the park just across the street from us. It was just an amazing complex. So we got out and all the neighbourhood kids would come out and play with us. I was the only girl there.

When Deb moved to Canada, her aunt asked her if she would like to play on an organized team: I didn't know what an organized team was because where I came from only boys played on organized teams. At first I said no, I didn't want to play because I thought I'll just go out and play on the street but I soon found out that didn't happen in Canada.

When Deb realized the situation was a little different in this country, she decided that she did want to play. At that time not a lot of girls played the sport, therefore when Deb attended her first practice, she

was playing with girls anywhere from eight to eighteen years old, “It was great. I loved it. We had practices and games every week and that's how it grew. I just kept playing after that.”

When Deb was nine years old she met a girl on the team who she ended up playing on teams with for the next 25 years, “We went through the process together.” Then at 13 years old, Deb made the first ever women's Under-18 provincial team and was one of the youngest members. She looked up to a number of the girls on that team (literally and figuratively) and they served as role models with respect to the skill level Deb wanted to shoot for:

We trained for a couple of months for four games. I played with players that I thought were just amazing, and of course they were very tall. I met a couple of those players years later and it was like oh god, I thought you were 6 feet 6 inches and two hundred pounds and you're not. You're like 5 feet 6 inches and one hundred and fifty pounds. It was a good experience for me being so young and seeing those players and what level I could get to.

For Deb that was her first and last provincial experience for many years to come as there was no provincial program for girls at that time. She continued to play with her community team and was quickly identified as a talented player. She received a number of invitations to play with other teams but remained loyal to her original team:

Every year a coach would phone and ask if I wanted to come and play. I never did. [The other team] was a good team and they won but I never wanted to leave my friends and the players that I had been playing with all through the years. I think I learned a lot from playing on a team where it didn't matter what level you were. You learn how to play with good players, you learn how to play with bad players and you learn how to be a team player and you are not just there for yourself.

Deb indicated that in a way her experience on her community team and her exposure to the eclectic group of individuals who played for different reasons, allowed her to stay grounded in the regular world and not be consumed by the sport:

Some people just played that sport for that one little period of time and then went on to other things and other people weren't very athletic but their parents just put them in the sport. Just seeing the different people that were there, you get the atmosphere of what's going on in the whole world rather than just in this sport.

The team actually did achieve some success, making the provincial tournament in the last year in the Under-18 age grouping and winning the high school championships, "That was the first year they ever had girls play that sport in high school."

Deb's family was very supportive of her athletic pursuits and she indicated that they contributed, in large part, to her skill development. Her dad coached her community team and every Saturday she would practice with her brother and dad, "I think that really developed me as a player having that time even if it was just a couple of hours to work on various skills."

Deb moved from a youth community team to a women's team. The new team was filled with a "great bunch of characters." The team worked hard and the people made it fun, which Deb identified as an important element of playing for her, "I think you have to enjoy the sport to continue playing and I think that the people make it fun and if it's not fun then there's no point in playing." At that time she also attended university, however she did not play her sport at university because at that time the university team was not involved in an intercollegiate league. Instead, she decided to play ringette. She has no regrets about that decision and believes it contributed to her maintaining her love for her main sport, "Ringette was a great experience. I would still choose to play ringette instead of my other sport. Maybe that's why I've played my main sport so long because I didn't have four intense years of it." In

addition she learned some things through her ringette experiences about herself physically and mentally:

The ringette coach had played on the national team that went to the Olympics so she was very keen on fitness. Our first two weeks all we did was conditioning. That really taught me that you can really push yourself. That even though you think you are tired and you can't do anymore, you still can. Because she basically pushed us to the brink of exhaustion...It was a lot of hard work and it is something I had to work at because it didn't really come as naturally to me as my other sport. I mean I had athletic ability but I would go and [practice various skills by myself] and I think that really helped me develop a sense of work ethic. If you work hard enough at something you can achieve it.

In her third year at university, the national program for women was starting up for the first time ever. A squad was going to be selected from a national tournament with every province sending a team, "We just went to provincial tryouts and the team was selected. All the teams came to one city and played in a tournament. The national coach watched and selected a group of players from the games." Deb made the squad and stayed on for a three day camp where the squad was going to be cut down even further and the team taken to a tournament in the States:

The camp was a neat experience but also really nervous because you only see the players in your own province so you have no idea what the other players are like. We trained a lot, something I wasn't used to, going twice a day and scrimmages in the evening. He had a meeting with everyone and you found out if you were going to stay or not. There were three of us from the same province and we said okay, all three of us have to make this team. All three of us ended up making it.

Deb's first national team experience was fairly positive. She managed to take advantage of the opportunity she was given to break the starting line up:

I didn't play the first game. I was sitting on the bench. We lost the game and that night one of our players didn't make it back until after curfew and her roommates didn't realize and locked her out. She was trying to get back in by banging on the door and calling her roommate's names. I guess the coach heard so the next day she was taken out of the lineup and I was put in. So I played my first game. We won and I [was top scorer] and I never looked back. I was given that opportunity and I just took it.

So Deb continued to train for the national team while at university and while still playing ringette. Playing two different sports was taking its toll on Deb and she was lucky to still be living at home so she had the support of her family as she rushed from one training session to another:

There was going to be another selection process [for the national team] and there was no guarantee that you were going to be back. First, you had to make your provincial team and then take your chances. It was very busy and a very difficult time because I was so tired from ringette and having to go to training for my other sport and at the same time going to school. I lived at home which was a real bonus because my mom was great. I'd come home and she would have dinner ready for me. I didn't have to cook. I didn't have to clean and so I could just come home, eat and then do my homework or whatever.

After the tournament, Deb once again was selected and this time the national coach named the team and did not carry a squad. Deb's second national team camp experience was a little more challenging than the first one:

It was a weeklong and it was hell. I was just awful. We stayed in dorms and you had a roommate. We trained three times a day. So we'd train in the morning, we'd come back, we'd

eat lunch, try and get a quick sleep in there again, go back for the afternoon session, come back, eat dinner and then go again for the meeting. And we did that for five days. People were falling asleep in the van. You'd come back and have 10 minutes before you had to get ready and you would fall asleep. That's how tired we were. He wanted to squeeze so much in, in so little time. As far as the wear and tear on your body, it was awful.

Deb was very committed to staying with the national team and she was willing to do what was necessary to maintain her status. "I thought, this is a great experience. I get to play at the highest level. I can improve my skills and become a better player. It was something I wanted to work at. I was determined to stick with the team." Deb spent a lot of time doing extra work to develop her skills, "I would go out with my brother and we would work on things. He would set up various drills to improve my skills. I also worked by myself developing various aspects of my game. Any extra practice I could get in, I did. I also had my community team which helped." In addition, she looked into playing professionally in Europe but decided it was not going to benefit her anymore than staying and playing for her community team back home while continuing to work.

Deb's described her early camp experiences similarly. The locations and rooming environments varied from two to a room to "everyone in one room with bunk beds [where] you have no privacy" but the "insane" practice regime remained the same:

We trained two sometimes three times a day, just insane practices where you would work so hard and you'd be so tired and you have to go and work so hard again. Because you were fighting for a position you couldn't take any time off... We had one afternoon off and we had to beg for that. Thirty days with two to three practices a day and no weekends. You just trained.

The "insane training methods" were sometimes used as punishment when the coach was frustrated with the team's performance:

We lost this game and he thought we shouldn't have lost, so the next day he ran us into the ground. When we played a game we usually had the next day off but he made us sprint for an hour and a half. Our physio and assistant coach just watched us run, and he would scream and yell at players and say that's not good enough. Years later we found out people were thinking of ways to get out of the practice so they could stop the torture like okay I'm just going to collapse or fake an injury. Some people were losing control of bodily functions because they just had no energy left. It was awful.

Deb indicated that the situation with the coach actually had the impact of bringing the team closer together, "We all decided that he was such an asshole that if we were going to get through it, it was as a team." Deb described a few situations in which the team used each other to cope with adverse situations. In one circumstance, the team arrived at a camp only to find out that one of their teammates had been killed in a car accident while making her way home before coming to camp:

The coach didn't really address it. He spoke for maybe a minute and then players were left to deal with her death. We were all very young, in our early twenties. We were trying to cope with the whole situation. It was really, really sad. We talked a lot amongst the players. You just help each other through that.

Deb described her national team trips and experiences in vivid detail with many stories from "ants crawling on the eggs" to "thousands of people watching the game" to "being guarded by police with their machine guns" to "a player going into severe dehydration she almost died" to "being asked for autographs." Over the years the team faced numerous adverse conditions on their various trips and a coach who tried to train them like "track athletes." Deb always tried to make the most out of every trip by taking steps to maximize her positive experiences on the trips both within the competition setting and outside it. Through it all she managed to take in many of the sites and to appreciate the culture she

was experiencing, “It was unbelievable to see the poverty... You’d drive by and see these little shacks for houses and five kids around with a mother and father and they were living in this one room shack that we wouldn’t even put our tools in... You came back to Canada from all those trips and you’d realize how much you have here and how many of those material things we don’t really need.”

During this period with the national team, the players were expected to contribute financially to the national program, “We had to pay \$100 for a two day camp. We had to raise \$1,500 each to go to Taiwan. So basically the women were supporting ourselves.” In addition, at this time the athletes were not receiving any kind of financial support from the government or from their national organization. On top of that the trips required players to take time off of work or school. For Deb the time off was not a problem but the financial strain was, “I was substitute teaching, so if I needed time off I just phoned the sub list and said I won’t be available for these weeks. That was easy. It wasn’t easy on my bank account though because no work no pay.” For other players, Deb identified it was more challenging:

They were using their holiday time so they could practice three times a day and once that was used up they were basically taking time off work without pay. Some of these players lost \$20,000 playing for the national team. Money they can’t get back.

The lack of funding going into the women’s program became a real issue for Deb after a trip to Central America:

We had a player almost die due to severe dehydration. We had an incompetent medical staff -- a 72-year old retired gynecologist and a physiotherapist who wasn’t really a physiotherapist but an occupational therapist. We were eating crap for food and players were getting sick and the National organization brass who were there were staying in a great hotel and were eating in this great restaurant every night. They took us to this restaurant once in a while we were there and

allowed us to order anything. So steaks were what most people ordered, meat, protein, which we hadn't had in two weeks. It was frustrating to see how they were being treated in comparison to us, the athletes. Why were they staying in that hotel and if they were there, why weren't we with them? That experience really started to make us bitter.

Things eventually did start to change. There was a little bit more money invested into the program and a new coach was brought on board, "She was really good. Her training methods were a lot better. She actually hired people to design the training programs...She was definitely more a player's coach and made sure players came first and not the staff." It was under this coach that Deb had one of her best experiences at a training camp:

We were all training together in one city for six weeks. It was one of the best times I've ever had with the national team. She allowed us to live in an apartment hotel and gave us money for food. You could go and shop just down the road at the grocery store. She gave us our entire schedule with days off so you could plan to do things on your day off. Everything was spread out, training sessions weren't that demanding but you knew you were going to be there for an hour and a half but then you would have some time to yourself later. The coach also got players compensation. This was the first time players ever had compensation because she realized that players were taking time off and some people were quitting their jobs. It was great. Rooms would get together and have each other over for dinner. There was a real good atmosphere on the team.

The influx of money in the program was to help the team in their bid to qualify for the world competition, which they did, "We qualified and it was the first game that was ever televised on TSN and even though we lost it was exciting." The money in the program allowed the team to tour prior to the world competition, but despite all the preparation:

The experience was not very good because we were expected to do really well and we didn't. We missed qualifying for the Olympics...We came home and everyone was disappointed and our national organization thought we were useless, especially since they had put all this money in.

Deb indicated that the preparation period was not to blame but rather the fact that prior to the preparation period, the team had not done anything for two years after they failed to qualify for the previous world competition, "I don't think at that level you can take two years off of your program and then expect your team to do well." Nevertheless the whole experience left a bitter taste in Deb's mouth and "it took us a long time to get over that."

The next year, the previous national team coach returned and brought in a number of younger players. The first year back the coach was quite positive but eventually the negative coach reemerged:

He cannot communicate very well with his players other than yelling at them. He doesn't know how to motivate players. You hear a lot of negative criticism about the team, about yourself and it's a really tough environment to excel in...You don't know if you are doing anything right and your confidence as a player and as a team starts to go down...He said things to players that I don't think anyone should say to other people, like you need to lose twenty pounds or you will never play for this team again.

The team managed to qualify again for the world competition by winning the qualifying tournament. The athletes were given only a few minutes to appreciate the victory before the coach shed his perspective on the situation:

After the team won the qualifying tournament the first thing he said to us was 'congratulations, take a moment and enjoy it because you deserve it but on the other hand I want to tell you that none of your positions are secure for the world competition. I've got young players coming in

and I want to tell you that it's going to be very difficult for every player to make this team'. Oh thanks coach. I feel like going home and training my butt off. That is the kind of motivator he is.

Deb described herself and her role with the national team:

As a player I was very focused. I wanted to be the best that I could be and I wanted our team to be very successful. I would do all that it took to make sure things were running the right way, that players' needs and concerns were brought forward. I was never a 'rah-rah' kind of leader. I would always watch, listen and then react. Players knew they could trust me and that I would be honest with them. That was me, always willing to listen to what players had to say. I'm still the same. That's just part of my personality.

This is Deb's experience of the six-week training camp.

Deb's Profile. Being a teacher, I had to prepare all my lessons for when I was going to be away.

I had to make sure that everything was left for my substitute teacher so that s/he knew exactly what s/he was doing every day for every lesson. It took a lot of time. Apart from the working, I had to be training and keeping up with the national training program and my community team. On top of that, I was trying to get in some extra training with my brother. You've also got to make sure that your finances are in order so that there's enough money in your account to cover all the things that are going to come out in the time that you're away. I usually take a week off prior to camp. I don't do any weights; I don't do any running. I just sort of relax and get geared up to go to the camp. The only thing I might do is go with my brother and practice a bit.

I was excited. It was going to be my last camp; the last time that I would have to do all the things that we did in camp. I was looking forward to it and just trying to take everything in, get the whole experience, and enjoy it. The first day is usually a nice time because you meet people that you

haven't seen for awhile and you get caught up on what's been going on. You see some new faces and you try to get to know those people. We always start with the fitness test. It doesn't matter how fit you are, you just hate having to do the fitness test. It's something that you dread. It's just not natural to run around a track in our sport. I'll run for miles in a game, but making me run around the track is a very difficult thing, psychologically. We have a standard that we have to attain, and there're expectations for specific positions as well. I try and tell myself that the run is only for a short period of time. You're going to feel awful, but it's only for a small amount of time, and then it will be over. Just try and get it over with as quickly as possible. It's such a relief when it's done. You think about that fitness test for weeks prior to the camp, and it doesn't matter how many you run or how long you've been there, it's always the same.

Training sessions, depending on the day, could be anywhere from really light to very intense. I would drive my car over to the practice facility from the residences where we were staying because that ten minute walk there and ten minute walk back was needless wear and tear on your body. Being older, you have to conserve as much as you can. We also took the ice trunk over, so that's how we justified it. We did fitness on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and our first fitness session was sport specific drills. It was really intense. Those days were very difficult. As the days went on, the coach increased the number that we did or he would change it up a bit. You would be more tired on those days, so you would try and get as much rest as you could. In the afternoon, we would do some sprinting as well. The sprinting was never too demanding, just short sprints. Basically, it was a fitness thing. You didn't really enjoy it too much because it was hard work, but you got through it. In the evening, we would come back, sit down after dinner, and relax a bit. If it was a day where I was tired, I might just go into my room and read. Other days I would go and watch TV with the younger crowd and get introduced to all their shows.

It's intense, and that first week is usually the hardest. The coaching staff is trying to make decisions about who will stay, who will go home, and who will be in the starting line up. I knew that I really had to show the coach that I had recovered from my injury the year before, and that I deserved to get back on the starting line up. I had to show the coach all the things that I could do.

Our coach gave us the weekends off, which was really quite unusual for him. He likes to not give you any time off. I went home. I could just relax and get some home cooked meals. You knew that it was time off and that, on Monday morning, you would be back training so you just tried to relax as much as you could.

The second week was pretty much like the first. We were starting to get a little bit of an idea about who would be playing where, which players were kind of on the bubble, and who would have to fight for their positions. In the second week, people were starting to feel a bit more comfortable around each other. They were still a little bit nervous because the cuts had not been made and you had no idea who would be going on and who would be off. Little problems started popping up with people being hurt, or maybe not having a lot of confidence in themselves.

The cuts were supposed to be at two weeks, but they ended up being closer to three weeks. The way the cutting was done was really unusual. I got back from Montreal and a player told me that the coach had done the cuts. It was shocking because we had not been told of it at all. Basically, he had just walked down the hallway, knocked on the doors, entered the room, and said 'you're going home tomorrow.' It was very unprofessional. I thought it was horrible. It was a really difficult time and there were a lot of emotions, especially for those who were cut and who had been with the team in the past. You want to go and say something to these players, but you fight with what you're going to say and how the situation will be. So it was really ugly. It was the worst part of camp, I would say.

After the cuts, I felt that we were getting a little more focused and figuring out where people were going to be on the team. You started to really focus. Now that the cuts had been done, the focus was more on playing.

After the cuts, we drove from Kingston to Montreal for a two game series against Italy. I was still struggling with trying to get back in the starting lineup. I played the first game, and didn't start for the second game, so I was wondering where I fit into the team. I was probably a little uneasy, not quite knowing what was going to happen.

We went back to Kingston for another week on a pretty good note. We still trained at the same location, so we would have to get in the van and all go together to train. Everything was the same, except for the fact that we were in a hotel. I ended up with the same roommate for the rest of the training camp. A few others did as well, but everyone else changed. I don't know how the coaches did the rooming.

Two more people had to be cut before we went down to Boston. This time, each player met with the coach for individual meetings. At that time, you were told where you stood on the team, where the coach saw you playing, and if he saw you playing at all. I remember people sitting in the hallway waiting for their meeting, and the look of fear on their faces at knowing that they were going in there, and that it might be them who would be cut. Before the meeting, you were always anxious to find out what he had to say. He was not the easiest person to talk to, so it was always quite uncomfortable when you got in there. He told me that he saw me in the starting line up, but that that could change at any time. So there was no guarantee, and it was all based on how I played. So, then I started to think 'okay, just keep doing the things that you're doing, and everything will work out on the team.' After that, we started to get more focused. We only had four games left before we went to the world tournament. Things were starting to get a bit more intense. You felt a little bit more pressure. The time was starting

to wind down. After the cuts were made, I was relieved that the worst of camp was over, the most physical part, and now it would just be about getting ready for the games coming up.

We drove from Kingston down to Boston. Training started the next day. Our training would usually consist of 2-a-day practices until we got to game day, and depending on who we played, we either trained in the morning or just went for a walk.

We played China first. I was feeling pretty good. Things were starting to settle down, and you started to get used to playing with the players again. You have players from all over Canada, and even players from the same province don't necessarily play on the same team. Also, we were playing a new system so that was something new to everyone.

We had two training sessions the next day, after the China game. The next morning we went to the competition venue. It was just a beautiful atmosphere. It was a sold out game, and it was being televised on national TV, so it was pretty exciting. The only problem was that we were playing the Americans, which wasn't very exciting for us because we had only ever beaten them once, and that was, like, fourteen years ago.

When we arrived at the game, about an hour and a half early, there were already tons of people there. Our bus pulled up and I said to the person sitting beside me, who had been playing for a long time as well, "Geez, even I'm getting nervous looking at all these people. Imagine what the younger players are feeling like." This really was the first game that we were playing in front of a large crowd. We knew that, when we went down to the world competition, it would be the same thing. When we came out for our warm up, we got a really good cheer and that kind of pumped us up. There was music blaring. We were excited. We were ready to play.

When you're playing a game that is televised, everything is down to the second and they come in and say you've got two minutes to get ready. You line up at the door and they shuffle you out the

door. You're waiting to come out, both teams are beside each other, and you look at the Americans and it's the same old faces you've played against for years. You know exactly what they do, and who plays where, and who your check is going to be. Then you walk out, it's packed, they're all cheering, but not for you, for the Americans that are standing beside you. You line up beside each other and they play your national anthem first. The neat thing was that there were a lot of Canadian fans down there and, when they started playing the anthem, you could hear people singing in all different parts of the venue. All of a sudden, all of the players were singing because you could hear our national anthem being sung. I don't think that has every happened before, even when we played in Canada. You got tears in your eyes and you got really emotional. You were playing for your country, and there were people from your country that were down watching you play.

We were ahead in scoring early and the Canadian fans just went crazy. We went crazy. It was the first time that we had been ahead of the Americans in a long time. They caught up shortly after, and then we went ahead again, which was even more amazing. Then they caught up again, and then took the lead right at the half. Our coach was really excited and really positive, saying that this was the best that he had ever seen this team play, and that we would have to go out there and do the same in the second half. We'd been in games like this before, where we'd been close to the Americans, but then get blown away. So we were thinking, 'we don't hear what you've got to say right now because we are just concerned about the second half and how it turns out.'

So we went out in the second half and stayed with them for a while and then, I think, that's where their fitness really started to kick in. This was probably their twentieth international match since January and it was our fourth international match. They had been together for six months, we had been together for four weeks. So you knew that, at some point, it was going to kick in somewhere. So we managed to hang on for a while, but we couldn't stay with them physically. We weren't as good as they

were. The game ended close which was a really good result for us. The coaching staff was really happy with that result and we were really happy that we'd actually played with the Americans for a period of time.

After the game, I was exhausted. The Americans were a very skillful team, very fit, and you basically had to just work and work and work the entire game. After the game, we were just exhausted and had nothing left. I was very tired, but also very happy with the way that we had played, and very excited and thinking that things were going really well. We had two exhibition games left, and if we could just keep this up, we were going to go the world competition on a really positive note.

So we drove back to Montreal and then flew to Calgary. By the time we got into our rooms, it was about 10 p.m. Lights out is at 11 p.m.. It was really difficult to go to sleep. After most games, the coach ranks us. He gives us a rating out of ten. For the most part, everyone got a really positive rating. You went up there, saw what your score was, and read the comments, which were quite good because the game had been really good.

The positive stuff was about to change though. In our first game against Australia, we were very tired from our travel day. We hadn't gotten much sleep, we were up quite early to ride the bikes so as to get the lactic acid out, and because we had only had one training session that day, the coach had wanted us to train the morning of the game. We were really tired, and could not understand why we were training prior to the game. He said that it would only be a walk through. Well, it was a walk through for maybe the first half an hour and then it was like 'okay, I want you to go one hundred percent.' If you didn't go one hundred percent, then you get yelled at, so you did. You were tired, you knew you had to play that afternoon, but you were still going one hundred percent in training.

When we got to the game, as a player, you knew everyone was tired. Australia had arrived almost seven or eight hours before us because they had flown straight from Boston. They had probably

gotten lots of time to rest, a good night's sleep, and I doubt that they trained the day of the game. So, in the game against Australia went down in points really early. We managed to get back some of the points by half time. At halftime, the head coach yelled at us. Of course, he was expecting us to play exactly like we did against the US. We went back in for the second half, we didn't do what we were supposed to do, and we ended up losing the game. Our physiotherapist tried to tell the coach that the players were tired, and that they needed rest. He was completely pissed off with us. So he said we could have the next day off. I think our coach really struggled with the amount of time that players needed to recover from games. He had never played at that level. So he didn't know what the intensity was in games. Until you actually play it, you have no idea what toll it takes on your body.

But the next day off turned out not to be a day off. He scheduled a psychological session at one o'clock. So we could sleep in and have a leisurely lunch, but we couldn't go anywhere because we had this one o'clock session with the doctor. He also wanted everyone back for dinner at 6 o'clock. Myself and two other players had planned to go into Calgary that day. All three of us were sponsored by a company, and they had asked for us to come to their warehouse and pick out some equipment for ourselves. We had gone to the coach a few days prior and gotten permission. So we were mad because we had this all planned, and now because of the way we had played, all this stuff was going to be really difficult to do.

We had two training sessions before our next game and they were intense. The coach was still pissed off at us and he had no idea how the players were feeling. It was really ugly because he was yelling at players. Of course, everything was our fault, nothing was the coaching staff's fault. There were certain players who had a more difficult time than others, certain players who get yelled at more often and told to do certain things differently. It was very easy for you to pick them out because you

could hear everything. Players tended to pick up on that and tried to give that player more confidence. It sort of balanced things out.

I was feeling really mad about some of the things that the head coach had done. He just got away with that stuff. There was nothing you could do. You could go and talk to him and we would. The four of us co-captains would all go in there and discuss things like this. Sometimes he would be really receptive to what we said, and other times he didn't want to hear anything. It was basically left to the players to pick up the pieces, to go around and try to encourage people, and to tell them that they were still good players, that they shouldn't feel down about what was going on.

We were focused and ready for the next game against Australia, but at the same time we were still tired and that was always at the back of our heads. The game was going to be on national TV, so we had that added pressure as well. We wanted to play well in front of the Canadian audience. So, we went in there and we did play well. We won the game. It wasn't a great game, but we managed to come out with a victory.

At this point, I think I was a little apprehensive because our defensive system was a risk. We were definitely exploited against Italy, a team that probably shouldn't have had as much offense against us as they did. I knew going into the tournament that, if you were not sound defensively, you were going to struggle. The coach was starting to worry me too because you could see that the pressure was getting to him and he didn't deal with pressure very well. He liked to yell at players, or take his frustration out on certain players, and that was not good for our team atmosphere. People really started to struggle and get tense when they were playing, you didn't want to make mistakes, and people just really didn't want to have the ball. They wanted to get rid of it as quickly as possible. So we would become very frantic in our play. I could see that starting to happen.

When there were problems with the team, it was a really difficult thing. When things weren't going well at practice, or the coach was specifically picking on certain players, it was really difficult to deal with. When the coach was very negative, it really affected the team, so you had to try and go beyond that and bring the team up. I think the way most people dealt with it was by saying that he was a jerk. I mean there was no way around it. The things that he said, and the things that he had done to players -- you had to separate yourself and say 'look, that's the way he is, there's nothing you can do that will change that.' You had to take what he said to you, put it in the back of your head, and then just go on. You couldn't dwell on the way he chose to say things and the words he said. You just had to take it and go with it.

I think that you depend on your teammates a lot to deal with everything. You talk to them about things that come up. Players come and talk to you about things that are going on with them, and you try to help them out. As well, when you go to talk to a player, they try and help you out. There's a lot of team bonding that's done behind closed doors, where people really tell you what's going on and how they're feeling. The older players try to help the younger players through.

For myself, there were probably two or three players on the team that I would share things with that I wouldn't share with other players. Usually, those were the players that had been around for a long time and that knew what I was going through or what other players were going through. Basically, you would just talk a lot. You would spend hours at lunch, dinner, and breakfast talking. Some of it was positive, but a lot of it was negative. The little things that came up, if they weren't dealt with right away, turned into bigger things. As you get older, I think you get a little bit more jaded as to what's gone on. You become a little bit more bitter, even though you try not to show that. You get together with an older player and you start talking and things just start snowballing. Because I had been there for so long, I could see how things were done and it was very easy to start getting negative. But as long as

you keep that between those players it's not going to affect the team. I find that, as a player, you really have to talk about things. You have to get things off your chest and out in the open.

Our assistant coaches were very positive. One, especially, would really encourage players, and he was positive when he went through things at practice, and in the team meetings. The other assistant was a lot quieter, but still a very positive coach. The head coach really liked to keep the coaching staff away from the players. It was like here was the staff, and here were the players. There was a line drawn between the two that was very obvious to everyone. The physiotherapist, who was in contact with the players all the time, heard what we talking about and it would be really difficult for her to draw that line where she was with the coaching staff and with the players. We used her as a sounding board. We would tell her all our problems, and she had a really good relationship with the head coach, so she would go and talk to him a lot about what the players were going through and how they felt. So he was getting feedback from her as well as from the four captains on the team.

When I arrived home life started again. You would go home and get back to reality and know that you had to go grocery shopping yourself, do the dishes yourself, and clean the house yourself. So it was over. At the beginning, I wanted to enjoy this experience and I wasn't going to let anything take away from that. All the problems that we had as a team, I dealt with in whatever way I had to. Then I just moved on, and enjoyed everything. So, when I got home I wasn't bitter. I thought, again, that we had done everything we possibly could have done given the time, and number of games, that we had had together. For the most part, the training camp was a positive experience except for that one little game against Australia. I thought, if this is where my career ends, I've had a good career. I've played over 72 games for Canada. I have no regrets. I trained as hard as I could. I did what I thought I could do to prepare for this, and maybe it wasn't enough, but it was the best that I could do. I thought that all the players had put in as much effort as they could.

I think that some things could have been done differently. I think that there needed to be more communication between the coaching staff and the players, and I think that there needed to be some sort of evaluation of the coaching staff as well. As players, you are evaluated all the time and you are given criticism. You take the criticism, go and work on your game and, hopefully, come back and improve. But there wasn't anything going the other way. We didn't sit down and say, this is what we think is wrong with the training sessions, with how we prepare for games, and with the way things are done. There was really no feedback. I think that's a big thing that needs to be addressed in the future. The coaching staff has to be accountable so that our team can improve and we can go forward.

There was one player, in particular, that the media interviewed quite a bit. She talked a bit about our head coach and some of his methods to the media. Of course, the media just picked it up and flew with it. In some respects, it was really good because I think these things needed to be brought out, and our association wasn't willing to take the time to talk with the players to find out what was good and what was bad. She never did anything to hurt the team. She only wanted to make the team better. The things needed to be said, and they needed to be brought out into the open so that our team could get better for the future whether we were there or not.

When you look at other teams, the best ones in the world are together all the time. They are going to be successful because they put that time into their program. We get six games together before the competition, and yet we are still expected to do well. I look at the whole thing and think 'you know what, it's just not going to happen.' Unless our organization puts money into the women's program and we play every couple of months, and come together as a team, we are not going to be successful. Our world ranking is just going to continually drop. So when I look at that I am bitter because I know that we started off in 1986 beating the United States, and now we can't even come close to them. Our association has put some money into our program, but it's not enough. When you look at what they put

into the men's program, there's a huge discrepancy. The men get together every couple of months and they're flown in from all over the world. They have a two-day camp and then they play a game and then they're all flown back. In the early days, the women's team couldn't even get together for two days before we went off and played, and some of those times we had to pay for ourselves or fundraise so that we could go away. I think the women should get the same as the men. As far as I'm concerned, the women are more successful than the men. Yet our association keeps telling us that the money is with the men's program. I think that, if we promote our women's team the same way the United States has promoted their women's team, there can be just as much money in the women's program as there is in the men's.

I think we have been as successful as we can be, and that is due to the fact that the players go out and they train and they train and they train. You do it because you love the game, and because you want to get better as a player. You know that if you don't do it, your team is not going to get any better or another player is just going to come in and take your position.

I look back and it's a mixed kind of feeling, positive and also negative at the same time. It was really frustrating because we had been very confident, then had one bad result with Australia, and suddenly our confidence went down. It just snowballed. But, I think, if a person is in tune with their team and their players, they will know that that's happening and do something to stop it. Sometimes we're thought of as machines that can just go on and do things, and keep on going, but we're not, we're human. We have emotions and, especially females, tend to be more emotional than males so that's something that I think you have to deal with. That wasn't dealt with at all.

I think I did as much as I could. I followed the training program. I did all my weights, and went out and did the extra technical work. I don't think there was anything more I could have done except played more games, but that's not really in my control. I can play community games, but it's not the

same. I've even gone out and tried to play with men's teams and that resembles the international game more than anything else. But should we be asking our female players to go and get involved with a men's team so that they can get international experience so that they'll be ready to play in an international match? No. We should be playing other countries to get that experience, but the money is not there. That's what they tell us. So when one player spoke out, I supported everything she said. If I had stood up before the world tournament and said our training camp is going to be too short, it's not long enough, why are we staying in dorms at a university and not a hotel, do you think I would have been at the camp? I would have been tagged by our association as a troublemaker, and they would have found a reason not to have me on the team. I say that because I've seen it done in the past. So players are afraid to say anything.

I look back and I think, as time goes on, you forget all the negative things. I did. I just focused on the positive things. To me, it was special because I knew that it probably would be my last camp. I'm not sure what I'm going to do, but I'm most likely leaning towards retirement. So, I just tried to enjoy everything, and I think I did that, so I don't have any bitterness in terms of the camp. But when I look at what happened, how much better we could have done if things were different, and the fact that we didn't get a lot of support from our association, it makes me very bitter.

Maggie

At the time of these interviews Maggie was 23 years old. She had attended two national team camps prior to this camp, neither of which were longer than one month. She was just completing her university degree.

Life History in Sport. Maggie started playing this sport when she was four years old because as she described, "I was a very active child and I needed something active." Her first community coaches

were very supportive and had a significant impact on her career in this sport. She still keeps in contact with them. One of the coaches, in particular, Maggie described in the following way:

[He] gave me so much confidence and believed so much in what I could do...[He] made me believe in myself and made me think I was a good player...He always complimented me, but at the same time helped me too. I respected him so much that I learned so much from him...He had such a passion for [the sport] that he put that on to me as well and made me feel that same sort of passion.

Maggie was identified early as a talented athlete and often played her sport both on community and provincial teams in the age grouping above hers. Her community coach was the one who first encouraged her to tryout for the provincial team. That day still remained very clear in Maggie's mind as does making that first team:

I can still remember the moment he took me aside when I was twelve years old and said to me, Maggie I want you to try out for the provincial team. I can still think about the lighting and everything about that moment. [I was thinking] wow this guy has this much confidence in me that [he thinks] that I can play for our provincial team. It was a big deal...He said I think you can make it and this is your first step towards your goal if you ever want to play for your country...I can remember when I made it [both] me and my best friend. I can still remember doing summersaults and cartwheels and just screaming at the top of our lungs because we were so excited to make that first [provincial] team.

Maggie emphasized the confidence that she experienced while playing for this coach. The supportive environment created by the coach was important to Maggie because as she described, "I've always been the kind of player that's hardest on myself. I never had a lot of confidence in myself." In addition, Maggie highlighted how as a child she was a bit stressed out, worried a lot about everything and was

fairly emotional. Sometimes this led her to follow the crowd because she wanted to fit in and be accepted but for her sport it was different:

I've always been a bit of an emotional kind of kid and person. I think I would let things upset me really easily...more than now. I think I've become more mentally strong as the years have gone on and mentally tough, like [in my sport]. I think when I was younger I might have been a bit of a pushover...I was very impressionable and I think at the time I was quite a follower instead of a leader. But [this sport] was always different for me. It was my own thing and it was my thing that I was really good at.

Maggie was one of the youngest players selected to that first provincial team and despite her younger age on the early teams, she managed to be a starting player throughout her provincial career. Overall, her provincial experiences were very positive. She again was exposed to a supportive coach who she described as "so calm and patient... You wanted to play for him. It makes a huge difference when you have a really good coach that you feel passionate for." In addition to the positive coaching, she experienced and learned from the game, learning she still used today:

I can still remember one game...I think about that game when I think about [what it feels] like to give everything you have...This huge girl kept [bumping me]...I remember coming off when it was over and I just started crying and it wasn't because I was hurt or anything. I was just so emotionally drained. I gave everything I had and I think of that often like when with the national team they say you have to give everything. [After the game] you have to feel emotionally drained and have nothing in you. I bring myself back to that moment when I was twelve years old.

The one negative provincial experience for Maggie arose when she was initially cut from the squad during provincial trials. This experience had a profound impact leaving her feeling confused and devastated at the same time:

It was the first time I had ever been cut. I was just shattered. I couldn't believe it. I had no idea it was coming... You feel like a failure at first. I remember driving home with my dad and crying the whole way and my Dad saying, Maggie it's okay. We will figure this out.

After a series of phone calls, Maggie found herself invited back and actually ended up being captain of the team. It was a difficult choice to return to the team after the initial disappointment but Maggie was determined to prove herself and she wanted to keep playing with her friends on the team:

I didn't want to go back... In the end I realized it was the best thing... I wanted to prove that I should be there... A couple of [girls on my team] went up to him after and said you don't know what you are doing... if you cut Maggie [then] we go. The kind of friends you make through it makes a difference. I mean them saying, Maggie you have to come back, it won't be the same without you... I loved the girls and that's important and you can put up with the coach if you have to.

Maggie found this particular provincial coach difficult, describing him as "not a very nice man." Maggie's experience along with her teammates led to a number of them not returning the following year to the provincial program when they discovered he would be coaching again. Instead they formed their own team where they traveled to various tournaments throughout the summer. Maggie described that experience as "just the best summer... we still practiced twice a week and they were great practices. I was so fit that summer." It was after that summer that Maggie was identified by the junior national program and experienced her first national level training camp:

It was a two-week grueling camp. It was the first experience I've ever had of eating, sleeping and playing my sport. Waking up in the morning, going to breakfast, going to training, coming back, eating lunch, sleeping, going to training, coming back for dinner and sleeping. We were just so tired and then we had to go play. I did really well at the camp. It was a hard camp but I felt really really fit going into it and not knowing what to expect I think that makes a difference. I think when you go in knowing what [the coach] is going to be like and what it's going to be like, it's sometimes a bit harder mentally, but when you don't know, you don't know what to expect...The coach at that time was fine. He didn't really know us too much. He didn't yell and scream and I wasn't afraid to make mistakes.

Maggie also highlighted how she coped with that type of continuous training:

Now I am more of a social person but I remember at that camp, I didn't socialize with anyone. I found that I would either read my book or listen to my music in my room by myself whereas lots of people would be together in the common room. I don't know if that was to keep myself focused or if I was just too shy...I didn't really make too many friends there which is different [for me]...[I called] my parents [a lot]. I'm the kind that calls their parents everyday, at that time anyway. They are quite often more excited than me. [They are] very supportive.

Maggie made that junior team but recalled a particular incident with the National team coach that she felt was a defining moment in their relationship:

I remember sitting in a room...He asked me why I didn't play for the provincial team and I said well there was problems with the coach. Well that wasn't the right thing to say because I can still remember him saying well what if you didn't like me, would you not play for your national team...I think almost from then on it was him being mean to me to see if I could tough it out and to see if I would stay with it.

The next year, Maggie was invited to her first senior national camp. Overall, her first experience at the senior camp was not as positive as she felt less prepared physically, “That was a huge wake up call for me. I had been sent a training program and followed it somewhat, but not taking it seriously as I should have. After the first three days of camp I could hardly walk.” Despite not doing well at the camp, Maggie made the senior team and traveled to two competitions. Her national team experience however was not that positive and her relationship with the coach played a significant role in that:

I've never had a really great experience with the national team and [it is not because of] the players...the girls are great...but in a large part it's due to the coaching staff...I found I was constantly living in fear like am I wearing the right outfit, am I doing the right thing [in practice]? [I was] afraid to do anything really...He's not the type of coach who would ever say you are a good player...He never gave me any confidence. If it wasn't behind closed doors then he would be yelling and swearing at me [in practice or games]...You're fucking stupid and that kind of thing. [He would tell you that] along with what you're supposed to do...Being an emotional person, there's me trying to hold back tears in front of all these older girls that I hardly knew and were so experienced...After one game, in my [individual] meeting, he tore me apart...I came out of there just feeling like oh my god what have I done. I haven't even played a minute, how can he be saying all this stuff to me. The next game he put me in. So there's me [thinking] oh my god I have to play now after he's just told me that I can never play at this level. So I went out and we ended up going into overtime and we lost but I played well. So in my meeting again he said well you surprised me maybe you can play. I remember just coming out of that, running to the stairwell and just bawling. No one had ever made me feel so awful and so unconfident in myself.

Maggie eventually developed coping strategies to deal with the coach and the situation as best she could:

I think at first you feel awful, but then you talk about it with the other girls and realize it's happened to all of them. When you see it happening to other people too and just knowing thinking in my mind, think about what he is saying and not how he is saying it. And I would constantly [repeat] that [to myself]. Think of what he's saying not how he is saying it...If it wasn't for the way our team was. I felt the [older players] took me under their wing and they were always very supportive of me. Not that I was always going crying to them, they would just notice things obviously and say, you've got to ignore it and everyone would talk about the way he was...After the first year, it got to the point where [I said] well I can't be like that anymore. I can't be scared all the time.

That Christmas, Maggie was invited to another junior national camp at the last minute, a camp she was initially told she did not have to attend and was not physically prepared for. The first day there she tore her hamstring badly. It took her a long time to rehabilitate the injury. She attended her second senior national team camp that summer and was released after three weeks:

It was awful....I can't even remember the reasons he gave me. I had been training so much for it and I really wanted to make this team so for me it was such a disappointment. I went home. He said well you never know, you could get called back, so be prepared. So of course, all summer I'm staying fit and being prepared and he ended up calling other people that weren't even at camp.

During her national team involvement, Maggie was also a varsity athlete at a Canadian university in the same sport. Her first year the team won the national championships and many of the athletes on that team are still some of her best friends even though they are quite a bit older than her.

She continues to play with many of them on her community team. She described her friends and the university experience as unique:

They're the type of people that I would do anything for me and I'd do anything for them. They are just very loyal people. It is different when you're at university, I think because you are practicing everyday, you're together all the time, every weekend and you kind of develop a different kind of friendship than other teams because you are so close with everyone all the time. You become like part of a family when you're together that much.

With the national team Maggie said she is known as the nice person "probably because I'm more shy and more apt to just sit back and listen and watch than really get involved in a lot of things going on and there's enough people speaking their mind that I can just sit back." One of the biggest challenges she identified was not worrying as much in general, and more specifically, not worrying about the coach and his negativity:

I've really tried to get past [the coach's negativity] and try not to worry about it as much. Also [the fear of not making the team] has been a really big thing I have to try and not worry about it so much. I stress myself out and I don't sleep or I'm not hungry. I've had to really try and make myself more of a relaxed kind of person and not get so uptight about things because it affects me [when I play].

The following is Maggie's experience of the six-week centralized training camp.

Maggie's Profile. I was in Belgium when I found out I was going to the camp. The summer before, I hadn't made the national team. I had e-mailed the head coach a couple of times with my fitness results that we had to send in every month and a half. That was the only contact that we had had. When I found out I was going, it was my mom who called me saying that I had received a letter, I had mixed feelings. I had had such a bad experience the year before that it would have almost been a relief

not to have been asked back. For me, it felt like I was setting myself up for failure again. It's a hard thing to go through. I had been training hard in Belgium and following the program, but at the same time I didn't know where I stood compared to everyone else because I hadn't been training with them. I wasn't sure that the level I was playing at was as high as it should have been, so I was very nervous about how I was going to compare.

I came back about a week and a half before I had to go to the camp. It was hard because I had to get over jet lag and then, in that week and a half, I wanted to see everyone that I hadn't seen for four months. Plus, I love being at home. I'm a total homebody. So, for me, I was still pretty lonely and it was hard having to go to camp right away.

I went for one practice at the high performance center before going to camp, at least I felt better after that practice because I knew my skills were comparable to everyone else. Still, going into those camps and having two practices a day, or three practices a day, takes a huge toll on your body. I was nervous about that too. But I'm always nervous and I'm always the hardest critic on myself. It's always on my mind that I'm not going to make it. That's just the way I am. That's the way I was thinking, almost so as to not set myself up. I would never assume I was going to make it. I hadn't made it the year before so who was to say that I was going to make it this year.

I tried not to pack too much. I packed lots of books because everyone trades books and stuff. I brought paper to write on and music to listen to. Deb took her car and so we drove there together. It was nice to be with Deb because I would talk to her and she would take me under her wing. She's always been very positive with me and had a lot of confidence in me. When I got cut the year before, she wasn't there so she didn't know. But as soon as she got back, she called me and said, 'I can't believe they did that.' She's always been there for me.

We stayed at the university, in the dorms, and we all had our own rooms. It was nice that you didn't have to sleep in a room with someone else, unlike the camp before where there had been four to a room. Our floor had all the players from my province and then some players from different provinces. Upstairs were players from two other provinces. I wish they had mixed everyone up a little bit because you seemed to hang around your room more. It's easier, I think, to get to know people when there are new people around you.

The first day, we went to dinner at the cafeteria and then had a welcome meeting. It was just like, 'hi, you should be proud to be here, you're representing your country, this is our schedule, have a good sleep.' Everyone was just excited to see everyone again because it had been probably a year for most since they had last seen each other. The coach was going to cut eight people, so he didn't have that many extra people in the camp considering that one or two usually get injured because it's so intense. He posted a lot of things in our physiotherapist's room where we could go by and look at it.

The next day, we always have our fitness testing. In the morning, we would get woken up at about 6:30 a.m. It would be knock, knock on your door and you could hear it start down the hallway from the first to the last door. As soon as the first person was woken up you were woken up. Our equipment manager would knock on your door and say, 'good morning, love.' They would always wake us up half an hour before we had to be at breakfast. Most of us would just set our alarm for five minutes before we had to go, so we would go back to sleep for twenty-five more minutes and then get up and go to breakfast. I'm not much of a breakfast eater. I don't like breakfast foods very much, but you had to force yourself to eat because you needed it. Then you came back to your room, and probably went back to sleep for a little bit if you could so as to get as much sleep as possible. Then we would walk to practice which would take us about ten minutes. I'd walk with people sometimes, or by myself to get focused.

The first day, we did a timed run. That's the only straight running that we had. I totally hated that run more than anything in the whole world, so for me it was just such a relief when it was over. I never do that well in it, so it's not something I really look forward to. As much as I run and run and run, for some reason, that run is just not my thing.

So that was the first session, and then we walked back. Most of us would shower at the university center where we practiced. Then we would walk back, go to lunch, swipe your meal card, eat your lunch, and then rest again. There wasn't enough time because if you had to get taped, or whatever, you would have maybe half an hour to 45 minutes before you would have to go get taped. If you didn't have to get taped, most people would nap or relax and visit. A lot of people would go e-mail at the computer lab. I would e-mail my boyfriend, and sometimes my best friend, but I could use the phone and, for me, it wasn't a big deal because the first couple of weekends we had off, I would get to go home. Most people didn't have laptops and if they did, they needed a phone line, which no one had, except for Vonnette. She rented a phone while she was there. She brought her blender as well, and a hibachi so she could barbecue her salmon.

After our practice in the morning, we'd have to go to the classroom. For the first time, we had a psychologist working with the team. He went through this book. There were a couple of things that we could use, but it felt like he was giving us the same lecture that he did at his university. He didn't give us things that we could actually put to use, so everyone started dreading it. He usually only got half an hour. It was hard though because he didn't know much about our sport and tried to learn it very quickly. Then, all of a sudden, he was an expert and he was trying to be a coach as well. He was a nice enough man, but it just felt like we were in a lecture and it's not what we really needed, but he did give us some useful hints. It was hard for me to take anything in, but one thing I would use, and still use, is this wave thing with my hand. He said that sometimes you had no power over things, so you should just wave

them through. In practice, sometimes, if I had done something bad or screwed up, I would just say 'okay, can't think about it now, just wave it through.' And I would actually see myself doing this, and I found that it did help me.

We had to go through this book everyday and he would teach us something new. There were tons of things that we were supposed to fill out. We were supposed to go to him with the stuff that we had filled out, but I never really did. He just put stuff up on the overhead, like in a lecture, so that wasn't beneficial to me. After we had just practiced for two hours and were hungry and cold, we would end up just sitting there and waiting for it to be over. He was put in a hard position too, only having half an hour with us.

Tuesdays and Thursdays were our fitness days, but we also had an extra technique session. So, those days were cut even more because before the practice in the afternoon, we would have an hour technique session. It wasn't hard work. It was just technique, but still you were there for an hour and then had practice.

The head coach usually tried to keep the practice sessions to between an hour and a half to two hours. I loved their practices. They were intense for an hour and a half. I think you benefit a lot more from that instead of dragging it on. You can keep people's attention too. That's one thing about the camps, I loved all their practices. Our fitness sessions were nice too because it was all sport specific. They were killer, but it was nice that we weren't just running. There was a purpose to our game, like we would have objectives, so it was nice when we were doing fitness, sometimes, for something else to be in there.

In the evening, almost every night, we would go back, shower and then get to go out for dinner to a restaurant as a team. So it was nice not having to eat dorm food. We would have one van and some people would bring their cars. We would go to this Italian place. In the restaurant we would all sit

together but, each night, we sat with new people so it was a good way to get to know everyone.

Afterwards, we would go to Starbucks. Then we would go back for the evening. Sometimes, I would watch TV because, at that point, I hadn't watched my shows in four months. Quite often, I would read and sometimes listen to music. I'm one who likes to sleep. Most people were in bed early because were woken at 6:30am and because we would be tired. We might not have been tired at first because our bodies weren't accustomed to going to bed early, but by the end of the week, for sure everyone was in bed early.

After our afternoon session, we would have our meeting with the head coach. We would go into the classroom nearby and he would go over things. First, it was housekeeping. Then he would go over our schedule for the next day, and then ask if our manager, or equipment manager, needed anything. Then he would go over things, like maybe things we had learned that day or positions. He would just go over something different everyday. We were expected to take notes, but that wore off as the weeks went on. Sometimes there were handouts. Quite often they would show video clips. When we were playing teams, they would always have video clips of other teams.

He was so funny because he would say that we could have weekends off, but that wasn't necessarily the case. One Thursday night he said 'oh, my wife's coming in so we're having a pub night on Friday and everyone should go because it's a good place for us to get together in a casual atmosphere and have a few beers, and then you can have the weekend off.' We went for a little bit and then we all left that night and drove back home. So we had Friday night and Saturday night and then came back Sunday. Two girls who have stayed with me before, came with me. They knew my parents. We just hung out and relaxed and watched movies. As much as it was nice being with everyone, it was nice getting away too. Especially since it would be a long haul if you carried on the whole way. It was really nice to get home and sleep in my own bed, because I hadn't done that very much.

I am my hardest critic. I'm always nervous. This was a really big thing. I always felt like my every move was being watched, whether it was when I was eating or when I was playing. I tried not to put a lot of pressure on myself. I thought 'if I make it, that's great and if I don't, I have my whole summer to enjoy.' I would tell myself that it would be such an experience to make it, but that I was still young. I would have another chance, hopefully, to do it. I talked to myself a lot. I especially liked to think, 'oh, my parents will be so proud if I make it because I know they're always so excited about everything like that.'

Meal times were really the only times you socialized with people, or when walking to and from practice. Everyone got along really well. I had been at camps before where it was like one province would go off and sit by themselves, and then the rest of us would sit at another table, but there wasn't much of that mentality. The only real differences were the Quebec people. At first, there was a girl who was released and she could speak English, but not that well. She would try and communicate, but sometimes it was hard to understand what she was saying. However, most of the Quebec girls have gone to school in the States so their English was fine.

In the second week, it was the same thing again. On the Thursday and the Friday, we played the men's team. The coaches made two teams and one team, you could totally tell, were the starters, or the people that would make it and the other team, we said, were the leftovers. So we, the leftovers, played first and we lost and he just tore into us about how we played. He gave us really bad scores because he does this scoring thing. We never really figured what it was out of. It must have been out of ten, but no one got higher than a seven or an eight. All of us got really bad scores, like four and a half or five. Five or six of the players on the men's team had played on the national team before, so they were skilled. The next night, the starting team played them and they lost by more than us. They never ended up getting scores. They just didn't. It was all very interesting because all of us were like, 'oh, I wonder

what they'll get now because if we received such bad scores, they must be getting bad ones too.' But he never put up scores for them. The funny thing was that when we played, the other group did a shooting competition and he put up their scores from their shooting. Then, the next day we had the shooting contest. We did really well and he never put up our scores for the shooting. We were irritated because we ended up realizing that we had done okay in the game. We hadn't done as badly as he had thought. It was not fair that he could put us down and then, when they did badly, not say anything. It wasn't like we were happy that the starting team had done poorly, we were just happy that maybe we had done well. It just didn't really seem that fair.

We had that next weekend off again. I went to Montreal with Melanie because we were supposed to go to Montreal the following weekend as a team, so she was driving her car home the weekend before. I went home by myself that weekend. I could see some friends. The coach had told everyone that he was going to make the cuts on the Wednesday of the upcoming week. I had said to my friends as I was leaving home, "maybe I'll see you in a couple of days." So, I got back that night and walked down the hall. I started talking to two girls and all of a sudden I said, "Why are you packing?" I noticed one of the girls was packing and she said, "I was released." All the people who had just gotten back were like, "What are you talking about?" She said that the head coach had come, knocked on her door, handed her her passport, and said "sorry, we're releasing you. You're leaving tomorrow at 5 a.m." So that was a huge surprise. Everyone thought it was going to be on the Wednesday. The girl who had just been cut said that there had been one more girl down the hall, but that she didn't know who else had been cut. Everyone was afraid to go to their room. Apparently, the head coach was just knocking on doors and handing out passports. He had collected our passports to check the dates. He hadn't wanted to do it before the weekend because it would have been expensive to get people out, and then he hadn't wanted to do it Wednesday because we were leaving Thursday for the exhibition games. It

was a brutal way to do it. In the past, he would have had personal meetings with everyone and either said that we were staying or we were leaving. At this point, there was one more cut to be made, so I was scared to go to my room, but it ended up being another girl. The year before, she had been my roommate and we had been released at the same time. At the time, I had said that I wasn't going to cry, but she was lying on her bed, hysterical about getting released. Then, she ended up getting called back for the qualifier that year. So, this year she was just absolutely devastated again. It was hard, you felt awful for the person, but at the same time it was such a relief for yourself. I knew that it had been between me and her when the coach had said, in a meeting after the first week, that there were seven players at my position and he was keeping four. He had told me, at that point, that I was at the top of the four as of then but, of course, I never believe anything. I was still totally nervous and things could change. Even the next day, he could have changed his mind. It was just the way he was. I was relieved that I had made it through the first cuts. For me, making it through that was a big accomplishment.

We drove to Montreal and stayed in a hotel. We were playing two games against Italy. There was one person, Vonnette, who I really hoped I wouldn't be put with as a roommate. I didn't know her at all and she just totally scared me. So who do I get on my room list, Vonnette. I thought, 'oh no.' I was so scared. As it turned out, she was just absolutely the nicest person and the best roommate to have. I was so glad that I got her because I really got to know her.

I didn't play in our first game against Italy. For that game, I remember, the coach told me and someone else to warm up. We were just warming up and we wondered when we should go back. We figured that someone would come and get us, but then another girl started warming up. After a while, someone came and got the first girl that I was warming up with. So, the other girl and I were still warming up and thinking that someone would come and get us too. Well no one came and he never put us on. So we just warmed up the whole time. We ended up winning that game. After every game, if

you didn't play at all, or didn't play a whole game, then you did some sprints. The day after the game, he had a meeting and just started freaking out. He said, "if I tell you to warm up, you go down for five minutes and then you come back and say, hey, I'm ready." We had no idea. He had just told us to go warm up. How were we supposed to know? I had never been in that situation before. I thought I would warm up until he would tell me to come back. So, I was mad.

The next game he told me to warm up. So, I warmed up for five minutes, came back, and then he said "no, you're not going on until later." Melanie and I were running together and we were like, 'well, we had better go back after five minutes.' So we watched the clock for five minutes, went back and said, "okay we're ready." He said, "no, go back and warm up." I guess we were supposed to know that this time.

The second game I played though, and I was really happy. I thought I did really well. Everyone said that when Deb and I went on together -- she hadn't started that game either -- we added a spark. Everyone said that they thought I had played really well. When we went to see the coach's scores, I received the lowest score. I knew I didn't deserve it, and everyone was telling me so. I would be the first person to say whether I've played poorly, and I knew I had done well, so for me to get the lowest score was so discouraging. Even one girl that he had pulled off early in the game for playing poorly had received a higher score than me. It was not fair, but again, that was just the way he was, so I had to just wave it through. It was discouraging, but at the same time I knew how he was so I had to just take it and know that I had done better than that.

We then went back to Kingston, but this time we stayed in a hotel, which was nicer. I had Vonnette as a roommate again. She would wake up early, six o'clock, and then be on her computer all day. She traded stocks and, I didn't know exactly what she did on the computer, but she was on it all day. For some reason, I never woke up. She would just get up and be so quiet and I could sleep as

much as I wanted. She was a really nice person, and I learned a lot from her. She was so experienced with everything. From there, we had about a week and a half of just training. We had to play the junior team, who were having a camp alongside of us. The coach had personal meetings with us again. He told me that two more cuts would be made and that this game would be my chance to prove myself. He said that he wanted me to do really well. I was top scorer that game. It was only against the junior team, but it still proved that I could do it.

We had a meeting after that, and it was the first time that I ever spoke back to him. Usually in meetings, I would just agree with everything that he said, but this time I totally didn't. He told me about how he didn't think I was tough enough, which was something he always said to me. I told him that I didn't agree with that. I said that he had put me against Vonnette in drills all the time and that I had held my own against her and that she was probably the strongest woman you would ever see. I told him he couldn't say that to me. I told him that I was tough. That was the first time I had ever talked back to him and he changed his way. He said, "oh well, maybe you're right." When I stuck up for myself, he changed what he said. There were a couple of other things that he had said to me about what I had been doing, and I said that I didn't agree with him and he changed his mind there too. I asked him, "how well do you think I played in the game against the junior team?" He said, "well Maggie, you did fine, but that's junior team." So I said, "but you told me that that was my game to make a difference. So how did you think I did?" He said, "you did well" and then he said, "we've looked back at the tapes of the Italy game and you did some really good things in that game, too." He would never have volunteered that, but he said that to me because I had probed and asked, which I had never been able to do before with him. This time, I thought I wouldn't be the way I usually was. The coach always said to me, "you're a really nice person Maggie, but you have to get meaner when you play." This time I was not going to be that nice person. It was so funny that he could put me down, but when I said something, he

changed his tune. It was really weird to see him like that. I remember coming out of that meeting feeling so good. It was the first time I had ever talked back to him. It was so good for me (laugh). I think that was a really good turning point for me.

In Kingston, he made the final cuts. We had individual meetings this time. One girl ended up with an injury, so she was done, and then there was only one more cut to be made. I had a feeling it was me. I was so nervous, but it ended up being another girl which was funny because she had always been so confident. She was a year younger than me. I felt awful for her, but before I went into my meeting she had gotten released so I knew it wasn't going to be me. My meeting was just basically 'okay, you've made it.'

From there, we took drove from Kingston to Boston. It took so long. We were playing China and the States. The first game we played against China was at this beautiful facility. We ended up losing that game, but we did really well. I didn't play in that game at all. We then had to go play the States, and there was a sellout crowd. We went into that game thinking we're not going to win, but at the same time, let's give them a run for their money. We had lots of Canadian fans down there. We could see Canadian flags everywhere. We were ahead first and then they caught up, and then we took the lead again. Vonnnette was the top point getter. We had them worried. At two points in the game we were ahead, which never happens. On the bench, we were so excited. It was such a neat feeling. We ended up losing, but we actually gave them a run for their money. I went on with about 10 minutes left and it felt like I ran for that whole ten minutes and just defended. It is so hard for a forward to go on in game like that. I was so disappointed with what I had done. I couldn't do anything. So that was my ten minutes, but it was exciting to actually play against the US, against all those people that I idolize. My parents were there watching and my friends. I think it was our fitness that hurt us in the second half. We were not used to playing international games; international fitness is different. The US had played

tons of games that year. It was really good for our team confidence. It just made people feel so much more confident and we really needed that, I think.

We drove back to Montreal that next day and then flew out from Montreal to Calgary for a two game series against Australia. We stayed at a resort-like hotel and trained there. So we just did the same thing, got into the same routine again and practiced. We had two games. We lost the first game. I didn't play in that game at all. The head coach was really mad after that game, too. I remember that we did awful. Everyone was mad. It had a lot to do with the change in humidity and the long travel day. Once we had arrived, we had one day to train and then we played. That US game took everything out of everyone. We were run into the ground and I think that had a lot to do with it. For the next game, we got back up again. We ended up winning the next game, which was televised, so that was good for us. I played the last ten minutes again. I didn't really do that much, but I felt a little bit better after that game than against the US.

I knew that my role on the team would not be a starting one. And I knew that, once we got to the tournament, my chances of getting in would not be that good. I knew that before I went, and you accept your roles on the team. I knew this would be such a good learning experience for me and that I should just take everything in so that, hopefully, in the next four years I would be the one starting. That was the way I looked at it. You never knew with injuries or anything like that, but I anticipated my role so it didn't really bother me that much. I was always so nervous, too, that it was almost nice to be able to be the one watching for the first time around. It was so exciting to watch everyone, and I knew that the people playing were the ones that should be playing. Sometimes, I wished that the coach had given me a little more of a chance. At least I got the chance to know for myself that I could do it in the Italy game. He had always told me before that I couldn't play at the international level, that I was maybe a

community player but not an international player. So, for me, at least for myself, I know now that I can play at the international level.

I think you come away with mixed emotions. For me, anytime I went into camp with all those older players, it was just a huge learning experience in many different ways, both on and off the playing surface. I have always looked up to those players and I still do. Playing-wise, I have learned so much. Before going to camp, I had only had dads as coaches for my sport. I learned so much technically and positionally; things that I'd never known before. I think I brought away so much knowledge from it, from the coaches, from other players, and from watching and listening.

For the training camp, one day would just run into the other. You would just be happy, every day, to have made it through that day. Each day was so similar and it was the same thing over and over. Each day, it was like 'okay, I got through another day, three more days until we have a day off, or three more days until a game.' I would just try to stay positive and have confidence in myself. People kept telling me to stay positive and enjoy the experience.

For me, having confidence and staying positive was just one of the hardest things. Some people were just naturally confident in themselves. For myself, it would take a lot. I would be very hard on myself and, often, I wouldn't have enough confidence in myself. I think I need to build on that more. I just need to learn as much as I can again, and work as hard as I can.

There were tons of positive things, as well as some negative things from the camp. You have to try and remember the positive stuff. I didn't always have the best time. Going through camp is one of the hardest things you can ever go through. I mean, physically and mentally, it is so tough, but in the end we went pretty far. Considering how things turned out in the end, it wasn't always a positive experience. I try to think about my experiences with the perspective of 'wow, I was at the world competition. That's so huge.'

Playing against my idols was such an experience. In the exhibition game against the States, I was sitting there and you could see all those girls that were always in the media and on TV and in the papers and magazines. We were sitting there, playing against them and, afterwards, having lunch with them. It was a huge deal. A lot of those girls had been around for a long time, so I had grown up looking up to them. It was the same with Vonnnette and Breanna. I remember when I was so much younger watching them on TV and going 'wow, I would love to be there one day.' And then to be playing with them was just amazing. Just the friendships I made, what they all taught me. Lots of life lessons.

From different people you take different things. It's so funny all the different things that people on the team have experienced. Just listening to people's stories and what they have been through, or what they have accomplished, makes you learn a lot -- like the lessons of not making it. That feeling of making, or not making, the team is huge. The same goes for getting through things, or overcoming things like your fears. Being around everyone else and knowing that they were going through just as much, and looking at people who were going through so much worse was enlightening. If it wasn't injuries, it was people who had problems in their lives. Like with one girl, her grandmother, her mom, and her brother all died within a week or more. So how could you feel bad for yourself when someone was going through something like that? I have always thought that way. If I was ever feeling tired or sore or anything, I would just think 'well, you could be way worse off right now.' And I think that was one way that I really coped with things. I would think 'well, why am I feeling sorry for myself right now when I could be way worse off.' The support from everyone helped me cope too because everyone was feeling the same way, so most of the time we were all in the same boat. You would cope with each other.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Shared Experiences

The participants in this study varied in age, national team experience, position, starting status and home province. Although each woman's experience at the centralized camp was unique, many similarities in experiences also emerged. The following descriptions of these similarities should not be construed as generalizations regarding all female national level athletes of team sports. The goal is to develop an understanding of the female athletes in this study by providing rich descriptive detail about the group of participants as a whole. The shared experiences have been divided into five categories: the head coach, athlete and other relationships, the environment, emotions, and lessons learned.

The Head Coach

The head coach was identified as a central figure in all the participants' experiences. Three major elements served to define the coach's impact on the participants – communication, personality and use of power.

Communication. The head coach demonstrated several different methods of communication during the camp ranging from verbal communications with the whole group, smaller groups and individuals to written public communications concerning participants' performance at the camp. Six of the eight athletes clearly indicated that they were dissatisfied with how the coach communicated with the team.

The major dissatisfaction appeared to stem from his predominantly negative attitude and feedback toward players. Deb indicated that, “the team needed to have a much more positive approach to how players were dealt with. We needed a coach who could communicate well with the players.” Nathalie's quote stressed this point even further:

Communication is a very important thing. There's nothing wrong with telling the team that they are awful, but I think you also have to say, you're a good player, and I choose you because of this, and this is how I see you improving and this is what you need to improve upon. He doesn't really bring out the best in players. He tends to bring out the best in a select few and rip down others.

The participants described a number of situations where the coach would verbally display his displeasure with athletes. In some cases he would make his displeasure known publicly. According to Maggie, "He just tore into us about how we played." In other instances, the coach would save his negative comments in order to express them during the individual meetings. Nathalie described one such instance when "he brought me into his room to have an absolute go at me. He just tore into me, swear words, blah, blah, blah."

Melanie described how she felt the coach's negative feedback impacted the team, "Everyone seemed to be playing scared. People weren't willing to take risks or try things because if they weren't successful, they received negative feedback...it didn't create a positive atmosphere whatsoever."

Vonnette described the cycle that the negative feedback created with the athletes, "They made more and more mistakes because they were much more nervous about making mistakes."

All the participants highlighted, in some way, the disparity in the distribution of negative feedback by the coach. As Deb described, "Certain players had a more difficult time than others. Certain players were yelled at more often and told to do certain things differently. It was easy to pick them out because you could hear everything." Vonnette pointed out the impact that the differential treatment on individual confidence and on team unity in the following quote:

I thought that he created a lot of insecurities and sometimes, a little bit of animosity among the girls because, and this may sound bad, but the worst player on the team was playing and being

complimented and much better players were being shot down every second. He would build up their confidence a little bit and then within one comment just shoot it down.

Nathalie's quote echoed Vonnette's perspective:

Just the way he communicated, or didn't communicate, to certain players left a lot of disparity between the players. You ended up just fighting for yourself because the person next to you was getting treated very well whereas you were getting a strip torn off of you for no real reason....I could see how some players would end up comparing themselves to others during the camp...You need a unified force, everybody for each other as opposed to everyone for themselves.

Further to the coach's communication with the athletes, five of the participants indicated that the coach refused to listen to their concerns regarding his negativity when it was brought to his attention either individually or through the team captains. Melanie indicated that, "there were four of us who would go to consistent meetings with him, but the reality was that he would hear but he didn't listen. Maybe he did think through the information we gave him but he certainly didn't implement changes to try and improve things." Maria supported Melanie's comment when she indicated that, "The players relayed things that weren't working for us to the coach through the captains, but it seemed like the head coach didn't really care."

Three participants described their individual interactions with the coach in neutral or positive terms. Maria and Wendy received feedback from the coach in individual meetings early in the camp that indicated, directly or indirectly, their place on the team. As Wendy described, "I'd spoken with him and he'd said that if I kept playing the way I was playing that I'd have a spot as a starter. So that really bolstered my confidence and even probably allowed me to play better." Maria described her interactions with the coach as follows: "He has always been pretty nice to me...I didn't get nervous at

all when I talked with him. He seemed to respect me as a player and a person and that helped.” For Rachel, she wanted “to be positive and look at everything in a positive light.” Overall, she felt the coach was better than he had been in past, “The coaches were joking with us and they were more positive than I think they’ve ever been with us. We tried fun things in practice as well as serious stuff and that was new too because we normally didn’t do too much fun stuff.”

For the most part, all three participants were aware of the coach’s negative communication or actions even though they, themselves, may not have been direct recipients of it. Maria found it increasingly difficult to maintain the same type of open interaction with the coach as the competition grew near. Rachel tried to maintain her positive outlook and focus on her own performance despite what was going on around her, and Wendy placed the onus on the athletes in dealing with the coach. Her quote highlights her perspective in relation to one particular athlete:

As a team we should have said to the player, ‘listen you have to do something about this. For the good of the team, whatever personal strife you have with this man or things you hold against him, you’ve got to just get rid of them and deal with it for now’.

One particular form of communication as mentioned by most of the participants was the coach’s ratings of the athletes’ performances. Overall, the impact appeared to be fairly negative, more so because of how the tool was used rather than the tool itself. Wendy described the evaluation process as follows:

He was very big on statistics and on how certain statistics would reflect your performance in a game; like some sort of absolute that we could all look at. He would post his views of how you played and then give us a rating. I think it was one to ten and the highest anyone ever got was a seven....With my university team, a lot of stuff was charted, but I don’t think I’d ever been exposed to something that was so harsh.

In some cases, the rating was perceived with confusion like for Maggie, “I thought I had played really well. Well, I went to look at the scores and I received the lowest score. I know I didn’t deserve it and everyone agreed.” In other cases, the rating was a source of embarrassment, as described by Wendy, “I guess people gradually get used to it, but if you know you played poorly and then you have to go up there and read it and know that everyone else read it, it’s hard to look people in the eye immediately after.” Most of the participants seemed to place a definite value on the rating and used it as a guide to indicate how they were performing in the coach’s eyes and ultimately how they felt about their performance. This link is highlighted by Deb’s quote, “The ratings for the game were there and nobody has above 5.5 so you were not feeling good about yourself at that point.”

Vonnette described the impact she felt the player ratings had on the athletes and on the team as a whole:

I think it was really bad for a lot of the girls. I felt a lot of people took this really seriously and, because of that, their confidence was shot, sometimes in a manner of two seconds...A lot of people started to question themselves...The team started to separate a little bit because one player received a better grade or better comments than another player...I think that caused a rift within the team.

Vonnette also had a solution for dealing with the player ratings; she refused to read them:

After the first one or two times of reading that, I just decided that I’m not going to read that thing anymore. Why even bother going there? I think that sometimes it came down to whether he liked a person or not...So, my advice about that little report was just don’t even bother reading it. People got too upset and worried and then you had to listen to people complain and question what they were not doing right. They wouldn’t go to him to talk about it because they didn’t feel comfortable speaking to him.

One particular situation involving the coach's communication tactics stood out for five of the participants. During the first round of cuts the coach went from room to room telling the released individuals that they would be going home tomorrow. Maggie described the experience quite vividly because at that point she felt that there was a distinct possibility that she might be one of those individuals:

I noticed one of the girls was packing and she said, 'I was released. The coach came and knocked on my door and said, sorry we're releasing you'. She then said, 'there is one more girl down the hall who has been released too and I'm not sure who else is supposed to be cut'. No one knew. So everyone was afraid to go to their room because he was apparently just coming and knocking and releasing you. Like, what a way to do it.

Melanie described the impact of the coach's action when one player was not in her room:

He left a note on her door -- there was one of those pads, which you can write on -- and he basically requested that she come and see him. So, by the time she arrived back to the residence, the other players had all obviously heard and her door was the only other door to have a written message on it. She came to the deduction quite quickly that she was indeed the other player that was going to be released. It was a difficult way for a player to find out.

Personality. A number of the participants mentioned elements of the coach's personality and the role it played in how the athletes reacted to him. They suggested that he did not handle stress well and that this inability became more evident as the world competition grew nearer. Melanie described how his stress manifested itself on travel days:

He had personal issues dealing with travel in that he would get extremely stressed when dealing with airports. When we would travel, you were unable to deal with him. Finally, the coaching staff ended up buying him a first class ticket and said, 'go to the lounge and we'll deal with it'.

Four of the athletes described the coach as moody or unpredictable. Both Maria and Melanie used the term moody with Melanie going so far as to indicate that, “his mood swings were just unbelievable.” Nathalie described how he had “a tendency to get extremely angry at times.” Finally, Maggie highlighted his unpredictability; “Even the next day he could change his mind. It was just the way he was.”

The result of the coach’s personality seemed to leave the athletes feeling as if they were unable to approach him and uncomfortable when around him. Maria described the situation as follows, “He was so stressed out about things. You could see that he was really feeling a lot of tension. He was really not very comfortable to be around. You didn’t even want to see him.” Maggie described the feeling in the context of her individual meeting, “He was the kind of man where you would just sit there and be like ‘I just want to get this meeting over with as quickly as I can’.” Deb recalled one particular incident involving the coach and his moodiness and described how his actions led to the team’s apprehension when interacting with him:

One of the younger players went and knocked on his door because she wanted to spend the afternoon with her family and go out for dinner. So she knocked on his door, completely naive as to how he was going to react. We hadn’t seen him but we knew he was mad because he was walking around the hotel not saying anything to anyone. He opened the door and said ‘what?’. She said, ‘I just wondered if we had to be back for dinner?’. He looks at her and said ‘Yes’ and slammed the door in her face. So she told her roommate and it got back to the captains of the team and it was like ‘why does he have to be like that’. Then everyone felt like they had to avoid him because he was in a bad mood. Everyone wanted to stay well away from him because he was a negative force at that moment. So people felt really bad. They were down about the game, they did not feel good about themselves and then they had this thing to deal with as well.

Use of Power. There were several incidences when the participants mentioned the coach's use of power and control over the team. In some instances, such as with Deb, it was an acknowledgement that the only person she could control in any given situation was herself, so that was her focus. She also acknowledged limitations within that focus, "If I had stood up before the world competition and said, 'our training camp is not long enough', do you think I would have been at the camp? I would have been tagged as a troublemaker and they would have found a reason not to have me on the team. I've seen it done in the past."

Melanie also viewed the coach's power as having a silencing effect on the athletes' ability to communicate:

Ultimately, the coach holds in his hands your fate in terms of your position on the team or if you're even on the team for that matter. So players, I think, tend to remain silent as opposed to coming forward and speaking about how they feel about his demeanor or attitude.

Nathalie related the control of the coach to a chess game where athletes are the powerless pieces waiting to be manipulated, "He's got a job to do and I'm just a pawn like the rest of the team."

Both Melanie and Nathalie mentioned that his use of power had a particular effect given that the athletes were female:

I think the reality is female athletes are more sensitive and take a lot more issues to heart...The dynamics are very different and female athletes are a lot more emotional and a lot more acutely aware of how others are feeling and internalize a lot of those feelings. (Melanie)

The players, especially females, tend to hang off of somebody, especially somebody who is in a power position. You were just kind of aware of his moods and emotions and so players were upset and felt badly. (Nathalie)

Vonnnette viewed the disparity in communication among the athletes as a controlling strategy used by the coach:

I told him that I didn't think he should be as hard on a lot of these players. He said, 'well you notice that I only do it to certain players', and I thought to myself that actually he was doing it to the younger players. You would think that the younger players would be the ones you would try to build up because they are young and new, and you are trying to bring them along. He didn't have anything sensible to say about it. I think it was his way of having control.

Melanie also described the differential treatment of players in relation to the status that the coach designated to certain players:

I found that his perception of how important you were to the team affected his treatment of you as a player. I think some players were perhaps treated differently, or given a little more preferential treatment than others and definitely there were players that he attacked and was more verbally aggressive with than others.

Four of the participants also suggested that the coach maintained the power dynamic through actions that served to exacerbate the distance between the athletes and the coaching staff. A few participants described how the coaches did not eat with the athletes, nor interact with them on a personal level. Nathalie described the staff and players as being "two distinct entities... The staff would eat at their table and the players would do their own thing. There wasn't much attempt made at getting to know the players on an individual basis." Several participants made reference to the importance of a coach being able to relate to her or his players on an interpersonal level – an ability that they felt the coach lacked. As Vonnnette described, "I think it's important that the coach have some sort of relationship with the players so instead of just putting the player ratings on the wall, she or he speaks with the players directly and explains that stuff." Deb's quote reiterated Vonnnette's sentiment, "You

still need to keep a line between players relationship-wise, but the players need to feel that if they need anything or if they need to talk or something is wrong, they can come to the coach easily without being scared.”

A few of the participants also identified the coach’s choices and actions as serving to create a hierarchy within the team and divide the athletes. The different treatment of athletes depending on their starting status is one such example. As Maggie described, “They made two teams and you could totally tell that one team was the starters and the people who would make it, and the other team was the leftovers.” Maria had a slightly different view of the division for the game but was still aware that there was a division made based on some level, “They put us into two teams; the first team was made up of the newer players or people who had never really played with the national team, and the second team was made up of the more experienced players.”

Melanie suggested that the coach’s communication, or lack of it, regarding the importance of everyone’s role contributed to the split in the team, “This particular coach didn’t do a very good job of making players feel that no matter what your role...you were an integral part of the team. I think there became a real division between the starters and the non-starters.” Further, she described how the athletes tried to cope with the situation by making up a name for the non-starting group in practices, “For the players who became non-starters...we were divided up...and we would wear these yellow pinnies. So we started joking that we were the mustard community.”

Both Melanie and Vonnelle indicated that they felt the conditioning that the coach required the non-starters to do after games created a division within the team. As Vonnelle described:

I just thought it was embarrassing. First, they hadn’t played very much or even at all, and second, they had to do the fitness after the game in front of all those people in the stands...They could have done it the next day when we were all in practice together. So I felt badly for those

players. We were supposed to be a team. I think that when you do things like that, you separate the team.

Both Nathalie and Vonnnette indicated that there also existed a discrepancy in opportunity for players to try and make the starting line-up. This discrepancy was exacerbated in situations where other players seemed to think that they were equal to if not better in ability than players who were starting. Nathalie witnessed the frustration of players on the bench in this regard:

I think people were a little bitter because there was one player that people could see was not a starter and he kept giving her opportunity after opportunity to start. There were other players that didn't get any opportunity, but you could clearly see that they were stronger players. I think some of the people were growing restless that they were sitting on the bench.

In sum, three main areas defined the shared experience with the head coach for the participants – communication, personality and use of power. Seven out of eight participants highlighted elements of their experience falling into these categories. Only one participant did not directly share in many of the elements of the experience with the head coach; however, she was aware of the coach's actions through observations of, and her conversations with, other athletes.

Athlete and Other Relationships

Other than with the head coach, two main types of relationships emerged as significant for the participants during the camp -- relationships with teammates, and with the staff.

Teammates. Overall, the participants referred to the relationships with their teammates positively. From the first day of the camp through to the various situations that arose over the course of the preparation period, the participants identified other athletes on the team as a major source of enjoyment and support. Wendy's quote highlighted the experience of all eight participants when meeting up with their teammates the first day:

It was really fun seeing people when you first got there. You know part of playing is that camaraderie, the friendships you've forged and seeing lots of people that you haven't seen since the last camp. So it's always fun catching up."

Melanie described the unique dynamic that existed between the athletes on the national team:

It's a unique and special bond that you create with people. Not only are you sharing the same goals and expectations but you're also competing for a starting spot or in some cases what place you're going to be on the bench. In some ways you're the best of friends and in some ways you could consider yourself adversaries. But in the end, when all is said and done, you've just formed some pretty unique bonds and friendships.

Most of the participant's described that, in general, they were closer to one or two particular athletes on the team, but were able to get along with everyone. This process is described in the following quotes:

I tended to get to know a few people really well, especially when we were in the dorms because we were living in our own rooms and you just socialized with people that were close with you. When we were on trips we would have our roommates so you end up socializing with them, but I really enjoyed spending time with everybody. So, it's not the players that make the experience negative. (Nathalie)

You depend on your teammates a lot...For me there's probably two or three players on the team that I would share things with that I wouldn't share with other players. Usually those would be the players who had been around for a long time and knew what you were going through. (Deb)

I would talk with the girls [from my province] more because I knew them so well as well as with Maggie and the coach. The captains were obviously great people to talk to. Breanna was very helpful. She was a very calming person. That's why the captains were there because you

could go and talk to them and feel good about yourself after you'd left. I talked to Deb a lot. Melanie was great to talk to. She had a great ear for listening... You just went to people that you knew understood you're situation better or who maybe knew you better and understand what you needed. (Rachel)

Clearly the biggest element that emerged from the participants' interactions with their teammates was their use of talking with teammates as a coping strategy. Rachel talked with the captains to help her gain confidence. Melanie talked with her roommate and closest friend when struggling with not playing. Maggie talked with teammates to gain a sense of comfort and perspective on her experience, and to remind her that they were dealing with just as much if not more than her. Nathalie talked with a couple of teammates after the coach threatened the team through her.

He brought me into his room to have an absolute go at me....He was extremely upset at the team and he wanted some player to bring his emotions out on....He was really upset because the team had performed so badly....He said if we didn't perform we would not enjoy ourselves for the rest of the world competition....He was basically threatening the whole team through me....I told one or two players, just because I was like, 'you won't believe how he just behaved with me'.

In general, a number of participants mentioned talking with teammates to figure out how to deal with the coach and what actions would be most effective for dealing with him given the situation.

Most of the participants described the importance of playing a supportive role with each other and being there for teammates when they needed to talk. Both Deb and Vonnnette described how the athletes took responsibility, supported each other, and picked up the pieces after the coach was hard on particular athletes. Deb defined the process of support in terms of confidence: "You want to make sure that you kept giving them confidence if they were losing their confidence based on what the coach had

said. The players tended to pick up on that and give that player more encouragement.” Vonnette indicated that she became more aware of the need to support her teammates as the camp progressed, and she took the appropriate action, “I learned how important it was for these players to get the positive feedback when the coach was down on them and that’s one thing I started to do more.”

Staff. There were six members other than the head coach who comprised the staff who worked, and interacted with, the participants: two assistant coaches, the physiotherapist, the team doctor, the sport psychologist and the equipment manager. Four individuals emerged as playing a significant role in the participants’ experiences – the physiotherapist, the sport psychologist, and the two assistant coaches.

The physiotherapist became an important resource for many of the participants. She was the only woman on the staff, and she had close regular contact with the athletes. This regular contact seemed to invite the opportunity to interact with the athletes on a level that was different from that of the coaches. In some cases the participants described her as the link between the players and the coaching staff, relaying information both ways and giving the players her perspective on the dynamics of the coaching staff. The following quotes highlighted this role: “She had a really good relationship with the head coach because she’d worked with him before. She would go and talk to him a lot about what the players were going through and what they felt.” (Deb)

She was the only woman on the staff. She would sit with them and hear all the goings-on. Then she would tell me what was going on like, ‘oh, we just had a big argument’. She was always trying to be supportive of the players and tried to get us things that we needed and that we couldn’t get. She even argued with them. She was very helpful in many ways. (Maria)

I would go upstairs and speak with the physiotherapist...She always had the inside route on what was happening. She lost that as things went on. She filled us in on what was happening.

She wanted to let us know which players had been released so we could have an opportunity to go see them and talk with them. (Melanie)

Deb indicated that the physiotherapist's role as the go-between was challenging at times, "She was in contact with the players all the time, and she heard what we were talking about. It was really difficult for her to draw the line between when she was with the coaching staff and when she was with the players." In Nathalie's case, the communication link between the physiotherapist and the coaches was ineffective, "I found that the lack of communication between the staff members, myself and the physiotherapist hurt me. The physiotherapist and I would agree on one thing, like I was not going to take part in a certain training session. She would apparently talk to a coach and then another coach would send me into the drill."

In other instances the physiotherapist acted as a resource from which the participants could receive support and bounce ideas and thoughts around. Maria described her as "a big friend to me and very supportive." Melanie indicated that, "in our training camp, the physiotherapist became the sounding board. She became the person that people went to talk to with issues and concerns."

The second member of the staff that emerged as a common figure in all the participants' experiences was the sport psychologist. Most of the participants described the sport psychologist as a very nice man who was put in a difficult situation. Overall, the participants were open to, and appreciative of, the concept of having a sport psychologist on board, however in application they indicated that the sport psychology sessions failed to meet their needs on a number of levels.

First, the timing of the session – after the morning practice and right before lunch – was mentioned as being problematic by a number of the participants. Maggie described the experience in this way, "You've just practiced for two hours and are hungry and cold and you just sit there and wait for it to be over. He was put in a hard position." Wendy's quote highlighted the difficulty in staying

focused during the session, “It was hard because we’d go in there right after training and then sit down and have to listen to him. I know a lot of people would doze off in the meetings and it wasn’t because they weren’t interested; it was just fatigue.” Maria took this point a little further indicating that the athletes were protective of their free time, as there was not very much of it, and the sport psychology session was just another event that detracted from that time, “We didn’t have too much time as it was and our time off was to rest or sleep.”

Second, most of the participants mentioned that the content and format of the sessions were not practical enough to meet their needs. The following quotes highlighted the participants’ feelings in this regard:

I was very hopeful because I think it’s an essential thing at a higher level. There were a couple of sessions where I thought, ‘yeah, there’s some quality stuff in there’, but it was very theoretical. I figured, if you were taking a university course, it would be valuable, but we had a very condensed time and the sessions were not really practical enough. I found that a big disappointment. (Nathalie)

It wasn’t like he’d give us things to use in a practical sense. There were a couple of things but you felt like you were in a classroom and he was giving his lecture like he would at his university. It wasn’t about doing mental preparation; he was telling you what mental preparation could do. Well that you know...everyone just started to dread it. (Maggie)

The final issue that most of the participants identified as challenging was the assignments that they were asked to complete and hand back to the sport psychologist. Rachel described her response to the questionnaires, “He was using us almost like test subjects...None of the information that he was getting from us could have been used at the camp. It was all things that he would have had to take home, analyze and record.” Wendy found the questionnaires distracting on a number of levels:

It was really tedious. We'd have these questionnaires to fill out pre-game; one that was two hours before the game and then one immediately before. I just thought it broke up the way I wanted to get ready for things. Then I ended up thinking about things that maybe I wasn't aware of before, but became more cognizant of, because I saw the word and was like, 'I wasn't upset or concerned but now I am'.

Vonnette decided she would not fill out the forms because she saw them as having no direct benefit to her:

He wanted us to fill out these forms, explaining the way we felt in certain situations. We also had to fill out these forms before and after the game. It was something that I didn't care to do, not to be rebellious or anything. I just felt that that was not really going to change or help me. I went to speak with him about it.

As already mentioned, a number of the participants acknowledged the difficulty of the situation for the sport psychologist. Two participants had a few recommendations for a better implementation process:

I think he was put in a very difficult situation, and by that I mean he was thrust into the camp with a large group of players that he really had no prior knowledge of. I think, in a training camp, if sport psychologists are going to become involved, their involvement needs to start well before the camp begins. They need to, in some way, touch base with players and get to know them on an individual level. Only by doing that can they really go into camp and be effective...If players don't trust them, and trust only comes with knowledge and knowing someone and there was no time to develop that in the camp, then players aren't going to utilize that service. (Melanie)

It's not his fault. It's the coaching staff's in my mind or our national organization. They should have realized that sport psychology is a realm that we could use. We could have had a lot done before and then gone and found out what we needed to work on as opposed to going through the concept of broad external focus which no one cared about. So, I think it could have been better if he had been with us longer...No one felt comfortable enough with him because we didn't know him. He was with us for a few weeks and I think it takes a little bit more than that to build a relationship with someone that you want to express your feelings to. (Rachel)

The assistant coaches also played an important role in a number the participants' experiences. Their role appeared to be twofold. First, they acted as a buffer in trying to balance the personality and negative actions of the head coach through supportive and positive comments with the athletes. Here are a few quotes that highlighted that role.

Our assistant coaches were very positive. Alex especially. He would really encourage players and he was positive when he went through things at practice or in team meetings. Chris was a lot quieter but at the same time a very positive coach. He told you things in a good way. (Deb)

I was probably closest with Chris. I get along with him. He is very positive. He can say the same thing as the Head Coach, but say it in a way that is more positive. So he was one of the people to go and just chat with and find out what's happening. Alex the same thing, he was always positive with what we did. (Rachel)

Alex was my university coach...It was nice having him around...It was much easier to talk to him. He was always easy going...Everybody could talk to him....He was always on our side. Sometimes I talked with him about my injuries and what I should do and he would always help me make the decisions. (Maria)

Second, the assistant coaches acted as a support base for the head coach. As Nathalie described it, “They would work towards keeping the head coach balanced and sane.” Nathalie also mentioned that they seemed to have fun together, but when others came into the fold it affected their interactions, “They were more of a close knit group and when the sport psychologist or team doctor came in, it kind of affected their chemistry and they didn’t seem to have as much fun.” Despite their seemingly positive relationship with the head coach, neither of them was seen as wielding any power or influence on the situations that arose or on the head coach and his behaviour.

In sum, during the centralized training camp the participants developed relationships with other athletes on the team, the physiotherapist, the sport psychologist and the assistant coaches. All eight participants mentioned these relationships as noteworthy. With the exception of the sport psychologist, the role of these relationships seemed to be to provide positive support and feedback and to help participants counter their feelings arising from their relationship with the head coach.

Environment

The environment emerged as a major theme related to the participants’ experiences at the camp. Three main elements surfaced as contributing to the environment – structure, critical events and focus.

Structure. For the first three weeks the participants described the setting and structure of the camp as fairly consistent. They were housed in residences, each with their own room. The meals were in the cafeteria and in the evening the team would go out for dinner to a restaurant. The first day of the camp was unique in that it was the day that fitness testing occurred. The team trained Monday to Friday and had the weekends off. There were two training sessions a day for about an hour and half to two hours with an additional shorter session added on Tuesdays and Thursdays. There were daily meetings for the group along with weekly individual meetings with the coach. There were short periods of free

time during the day and for the most part in the evenings. The first round of cuts was made after the second week of training.

All the participants indicated that it was great to have their own room and with it a little more privacy than perhaps they were used to on the team. Deb's quote highlighted most of the participants' perspective on the rooms, "You got a little bit of privacy. You couldn't get too much privacy with a lot of players around but if you had a room by yourself it was nice." The first day with fitness testing was dreaded by most of the participants. More specifically, the timed run was approached by many of the participants with apprehension and fear. Maria described the atmosphere that the fitness testing created, "You could see that everybody was stressed. The next day was the hardest day. It was the fitness testing and no one liked the fitness testing." Maggie identified her complete dislike for the run, "I hated that run more than anything else in the whole world. For me it was such a relief when it was over." Deb suggested that even preparedness did not alter those negative feelings, "It didn't matter how fit you were, you just hated having to do the fitness test."

Most of the participants indicated that they liked the 'nine-to-five' type training structure that the coach implemented. However, they were quick to acknowledge that it was often more similar to a five-to-nine structure. All the participants seemed to appreciate the free time in the evening. Furthermore, the participants saw having the weekends off as beneficial. Nathalie described it "as a good mental break." The participants all highlighted the importance of getting away from the sport for a few days to refresh and refocus.

As for the day-to-day training regime, a number of the participants described the cyclical nature of the training. Rachel's comment highlighted this point for the group, "You would wake up, have breakfast, go train, come back, have lunch, maybe a nap, go back out, train, come back in, have supper and then sometimes have meetings and classroom sessions as well." Each participant received the

routine slightly differently. Vonnette and Maria were not overly fond of the routine. As Maria indicated, “I hate camp; I hate it all. It’s just like play, play, play, no rest. That’s what camp is but I hate it.” Vonnette’s quote highlighted the repetitive nature of the situation and the feelings that emerged from that:

It started to become really repetitive, just the same thing over and over and over. I think people lost excitement and enthusiasm for going to practice...After two weeks of camp it got a little boring. Practicing all the time got old. (Vonnette)

A number of the participants described the routine, training and the first few weeks in a positive light:

I was happy to be there. I loved it. I had a really good time that first couple of weeks, just training and playing well. That was a good feeling. I felt in sync with my body and my thoughts and everything that was going on around me. (Wendy).

I was actually enjoying being in camp. It was a nice change of atmosphere. It was almost back to university in a way. It was nice to be in a really intensive, focused atmosphere. (Melanie).

You get into this routine. It might sound monotonous, but in essence you didn’t really have to think for yourself, you just did it, and that was nice. It was like, ‘this is what we are doing this time’. It was all scheduled for you and you just did it. (Rachel)

A number of participants mentioned that the team selection occurred too late into the camp to allow for the development of a cohesive unit. Nathalie highlighted this point in her quote, “ I think it takes away from coming together as a group when you’re just fighting as an individual to make the team.” Melanie described the coach’s rationale and her perception of it:

He had voiced that he felt it was effective because players didn’t take their positions within the team for granted. He felt that by keeping on the additional players, it would put constant pressure on the other players who were in the camp so that if they didn’t perform, they knew

there was another player ready to step in and take their position. Given the limited time we had together, I think we needed that whole six week period as a team to build as a cohesive unit without having all this underlying questioning like, 'am I going to make the team, am I not going to make the team?'.

Injuries also emerged as an important part of the environment. Most of the participants struggled with some kind of injury during the camp whether it was minor, in that they could play through it, such as for Melanie or Vonnnette, or more major, in that it prevented them from practicing and from competitions, such as for Nathalie and Maria. Having an injury meant that athletes had to attend physiotherapy whether for treatment or to get taped. This process was another element that the athletes had to fit into their already busy schedule, taking away from rest and other free time activities.

The next three weeks of the camp involved traveling, some international games and regular training. At this point, the team stayed in hotels with two players to a room and ate restaurant food. The training regime was altered slightly around games in that the training sessions were reduced to one per day and the team followed a particular routine on game day. The routine consisted of a team walk in the morning, a big meal, team and individual meetings and a small amount of rest time.

Overall, the participants enjoyed the change of environment and focus. As Rachel described, "We got a chance to see new places and even if it was just a hotel, it was a change of scenery because the dorms were getting pretty stale." The shift to hotels and roommates was also viewed favourably. The games, themselves, were seen as opportunities for the team to gauge their skills and progress and to gain some confidence, both individually and collectively. Further, it provided the needed reprieve from the day-to-day training. Wendy described the impact of the games as follows, "It just gave a different focus to the whole thing rather than just training all the time. It gave people new goals and things to shoot for. It breathed new life into everybody."

At this point in the camp, two major structure issues were highlighted by the participants – travel days and rest days. Most of the participants made reference to travel days as long, tiring episodes that, for the most part, drained the team both physically and mentally. The participants illustrated methods that helped them cope with the long days, which generally centered around positive interactions with teammates and relaxing activities. Maria and Wendy were the only two participants who referred to travel days as fun, in that it was a different way for the team to interact. A problem, as identified by the participants, was that the coach viewed travel days as rest days and did not incorporate extra recover time into the training to compensate for these days. As Melanie described:

In his opinion a travel day was a day off...and in the players' opinion a travel day was not a day off. It was a very long taxing day...People would be tired on travel days and would never get a chance to recover from them...It was a constant battle to try and get him to see the balance between rest, regeneration, recovery and training.

During the last three weeks in general, the team struggled to find time off to recover from the intensity of the training and games, from injuries, and from the daily mental challenges arising from the long camp. Deb described the coach's perspective on days off as a struggle, "I think he really struggled with the amount of time players needed off to recover." As Melanie suggested, "When we arrived in camp, we had those initial weekends off, but there was no break leading into the major competition and people were tired....I think people just needed a break mentally....They were burnt out."

All the participants had at least one suggestion for how to improve the structure of the camp. Out of those suggestions, three elements emerged as common target areas for change. First, four participants mentioned that the selections needed to be made earlier in the camp in order to let the group work on developing their team dynamics. Similarly, three participants identified that there needed to be more team building exercises to facilitate the team building process. Second, four

participants suggested that the team required a longer preparation period. This suggestion was either for a longer centralized camp (e.g., two months) or for a number of shorter duration camps over a longer preparation time. Within those suggestions, more time off also emerged as an element that needed to be built in to a longer preparation format. The final suggestion offered by four participants was for better accommodation facilities. Facilities that could provide for a more independent lifestyle such as condominiums or hotels were recommended.

Critical Events. Several critical events occurred over the course of the training camp that contributed to the overall environment and experience of the participants. Those elements were as follows: selections, Vonnelle speaking out, financial compensation struggles, Mishi's family crisis, and games against the United States and Australia.

All the participants highlighted selections as an important component of their experience at the camp. The participants identified two points during the course of the camp where the coach cut individuals from the team. In general, all the participants described selections as a difficult time fraught with a host of emotions and feelings from fear and anxiety to mild apprehension. Deb ventured so far as to describe the selection process as, "the worst part of camp." Nathalie described the reactions of different athletes on the team prior to the event, "Certain players don't affect themselves with it, but a good majority were worried. A good majority of those that were worried shouldn't have been worried, but I think people, overall, were a bit on edge."

For the most part, whether a participant viewed the event as stressful or not seemed to be related to their perception of their place on the team, on the communication they had with the coach, and on their confidence. Rachel indicated one situation that made her think that perhaps she was going to be cut:

Everyone else had been rotated into this drill and we, Maggie and I, weren't. We were thinking at that point that we were going to get cut...As it turned out we were just missed. I guess that happens; you forget to rotate people in.

Wendy was not as stressed about the process for two reasons, "I was confident that I'd had a good three weeks of training. I'd also spoken with the head coach." Around selection time, a number of the participants indicated that the training environment became a little more intense and a little more competitive as athletes pushed to make the cut. Maria also mentioned discussions that went on between the athletes, "We were talking amongst ourselves about who we thought would be staying, who would play what position, and who would be going."

The first round of cuts actually occurred before they were scheduled to happen and that, along with the fact that the coach walked around to athletes' rooms to tell them the news, upset a number of the participants. For the second round of cuts, the coach met individually with each athlete to indicate her status. After the cuts a number of participants described the competing emotions of relief at making the team and regret for those who had not. As Maggie described, "It was hard. You felt awful for the person but at the same time, it was such relief for yourself." At that point a number of the participants described wanting to support their teammates, but feeling unsure as how best to do that. Deb described this uncertainty, "You wanted to go say something to these players but you fought with what you were going to say and how the situation was going to be." Melanie characterized her own past experiences of being cut as heightening her uncertainty about how to best support these athletes, "I think it's really difficult to be surrounded by your teammates....I can't speak for other people, but I certainly remember feeling somewhat embarrassed and feeling very sad about the fact that I hadn't met the mark."

The impact of selections was still felt on the team even after they were over. A few participants described the next day at practice as different, and a little sad, whereas others described feeling more

focused and ready for the next stage. In addition, a few participants indicated some discussions among teammates regarding who was let go and whether or not the selections were appropriate. Rachel suggested that, “A lot of second guessing occurred...so it was tough because there was no way everyone was going to agree that the people who didn’t get cut should have been the only one’s that made the team.”

The second critical incident highlighted by five of the participants was when Vonnette openly expressed her opinion to the media regarding the team’s preparation. During the training camp, Vonnette had expressed her dissatisfaction with respect to the length of the preparation for the women’s program and the late selection process to the media. A few of the participants understood Vonnette’s plea and agreed with her perspective. Deb viewed it as a positive push to the program, “When a player like Vonnette speaks out, I support everything she says. I think it is great that she’s speaking out because she is not speaking out for herself, she is speaking out on behalf of the players.” A few other participants mentioned being aware of the situation but not having the experience or knowledge to get involved. Wendy described how it manifested itself in the camp environment, “It was talked about amongst the players.” Rachel questioned the timing of the comments and its impact on the coaches, “I just wondered how good it was for us to be doubting our coaches or our teammates at that time when we should be rallying around each other.”

Several participants also mentioned their struggle with their National Sport Organization for player compensation. In general, none of the participants referred to their National Sport Organization in a positive manner. The team was forced to hire a lawyer to help them negotiate compensation from the National Organization for the players. Overall, the participants described being pleased with the money. For Deb, the compensation was a long time in coming. For years she had been frustrated with

the lack of accountability within the national organization, their financial support of the women's program, and their secrecy around how and where they spent the money:

I've had people that tried to get information from the national organization on the budget...but they were unable to do so. I would like to see them say here is our budget and this is where the money goes...but they are so secretive about things like that.

The negotiations started prior to the camp but carried on during the camp. Rachel described how the National Organization contributed to the length of the negotiations and how that played out during the camp:

I think it could have been done a lot earlier, but I think the National Organization dragged their heels a little bit. I wish it hadn't been a primary focus during the camp....it was always there... We were still getting e-mails and faxes. It just didn't feel right. It felt like it should have been resolved before the camp.

Financial sacrifices emerged as a reality for many of the participants. A number of them mentioned the financial sacrifices that they have had to make in order to play for their country. For example the athletes who were working full-time either had to quit their jobs or take a leave of absence without pay. For Vonnnette, this led her to question the commitment she was continually making to the national program:

For me right now, whether I'm going to be paid or not is becoming a big thing. I have to pay a mortgage. So now I have to just make a decision. Do I want to eat or do I want to play for Canada? Feeling privileged doesn't put food on the table. You have to choose between being paid and not being paid.

Another critical event mentioned by a number of participant's was the death of Mishi's mother, grandmother and brother-in-law all within a short period of time. Both Maria and Wendy described that

event as having a significant impact on their experience at the camp. As Wendy described, “it was something that I will forever associate with that camp.” Maria and Wendy were good friends with Mishi because they all played together at the same university. They felt deeply for her loss and admired her strength and fortitude during the whole experience. In some ways, they described how it helped them deal with the camp and put things into perspective in their own lives:

I thought Mishi was one of the strongest people that I had ever met. Seeing her and how she handled the situation with such maturity and strength helped me with my injury. It helped me get through the things that were going on in my life. It was insignificant compared to what was in her life. (Maria)

It wasn't hard for us because she was the one going through it, but it still affected some of us. We wanted to be there for her...When something like that happens it sort of trivializes everything else...So I think it put things in perspective. I think it really did mark me. I just realized how strong she was and how proud I was of her. She was going to come back and play after going through that and I was like, 'if that ever happened to me I don't know if I'd be able to do that.' (Wendy)

For Nathalie, Mishi's tragedy served to remind her of what she views as truly important in life. She spoke with the coaches on Mishi's behalf and told them in no uncertain terms that Mishi should be allowed the time off to go see her mother, “You have opportunities throughout your life to play a sport. You don't have an opportunity to be with your mom on her death bed.”

All the athletes were invited to attend the funeral and a number of them went. Wendy described the impact that the decision to attend or not had on the team, “It didn't really tear the team in two but there was a little bit of, ‘why won't she come?’ It was a very touchy subject. I think we got to see sides of people that maybe we wouldn't have seen before just because we were dealing with death.”

The next critical incidences that affected a number of participants' experiences were the games against the United States and Australia. All the participants mentioned, in the game against the United States, the strong performance of the team. At a very critical point in the camp, the experience generally seemed to build confidence in the team and in their ability. The game against Australia, on the other hand, and the coach's negative reaction to their performance, was described by most of the participants as detracting from the team's confidence. Deb's quote describes the varied impact of those two experiences:

The game against the United States was critical in the sense that we saw what our potential could be. I think the game against Australia was critical because we saw what we could be like if we didn't perform well – what kind of results we would get and what would happen in terms of the coaching staff and how they would react.

Focus. All the participants were clearly focused on being prepared for the camp both mentally and physically. Mentally, each of the participants described the various elements of their external world that they had to attend to prior to leaving for the camp. Deb and Melanie had to arrange work schedules; Nathalie took a leave of absence; Rachel quit her job. Maria and Wendy spent time arranging for the completion of their schooling. Maggie returned from overseas where she was playing. Each participant, in some way, attempted to suspend her external world for the duration of the centralized camp. Physically, most of the participants identified the steps they took to prepare for the camp. Rachel moved locations to specifically prepare in a more appropriate environment; Vonnelle trained extensively with a men's team; Melanie trained with a teammate; and Nathalie and Maria worked on rehabilitating their injuries.

While at the camp, the participants only mentioned their external worlds briefly in terms of e-mails, calls or visits with friends and/or family. For the most part the participants identified the camp as

the central element in their lives during that time. Wendy's quote highlighted best the general focus of the group:

When you're with the national team and you're at camp, you are sort of in this bubble where things in the outside world don't matter or you're not affected by them....We get caught up in it so much that our mood changes with our performance.

Maria was the only participant who seemed to struggle with getting into, and maintaining, the right focus while at the camp:

I had to deal with injury after injury... and I had some personal issues that I had to deal with as well....I should have just stopped calling that person and just started focusing on myself and finding ways to be happy and focus on what was important to me.

Remaining focused while at the camp was challenging for a few of the participants. Many issues arose during the camp that served as possible distractions such as the coach's communication, selections, Mishi's tragedy, major competitions, and the players' own performances. Each element had the potential of focusing the participants inappropriately. However, every participant identified strategies for maintaining or regaining focus. As aforementioned, the majority of participants regained their focus by talking with teammates and venting their frustrations. As Deb ascertained, "As a player you really have to talk about things. You've got to get things off your chest." However, various other strategies emerged in response to particular situations.

Participants identified a number of focus strategies for dealing with the head coach. The majority of the participants indicated that the best way to deal with him was to block him out. As Vonnette described, "I learned to just turn off whenever I heard any negativity from him." Rachel described her strategy as follows: "It's just called turning a cheek or looking the other way." It was difficult for the participants to completely block out his negativity as Melanie's quote suggested:

I just focused on what I was doing and the players around me...I think I had a good ability to block it out, but there were certain times when I would hear him and just think to myself, 'unbelievable.' Afterwards, I would discuss it with my own confidants and friends within the team as well as with friends outside the team.

Deb indicated that individuals first have to acknowledge that the communication is not appropriate and then try to focus more on the relevant information in the message:

You had to say he was a jerk. I mean there was no way around it given the things that he had said and the things that he had done to players. You sort of had to separate yourself and say, 'look, that's the way he is, there's nothing you can do that's going to change that.' You had to take what he said to you, put it in the back of your head, and not dwell on the way he chose to say things. You had to take it and go with it.

A number of focus strategies emerged from participants for dealing with their performance and the various distractions at the camp. Again, support from teammates was the most common strategy, however the following strategies were also identified. Rachel wrote daily in her journal about "frustrations or getting cut, or being down on myself." Wendy used visualization, "I started taking time for myself, maybe just a little bit before practice and I just visualized what I wanted to do and how I wanted to play...then when it did go wrong, I was ready for it." Maggie used a strategy suggested by the sport psychologist, "He would say that some things you had no power over so you had to just wave them through...I found that if I had done something bad or screwed up I would just say, 'okay, can't think about it now, just wave it through.'" Both Rachel and Maggie used positive self-talk or affirmations. Rachel described specifically how she used these strategies, "One of my old coaches made me write down ten positive statements about myself. So I brought them with me and read them

when I was feeling down or when I was feeling inadequate.” Wendy described the focusing process overall:

It was something you had to do. You had to say, ‘well I’m not going to let this affect me. I’m going to keep plugging away and practicing as best I can and try to stay on track’. I think at that point if anything was wrong, like if your body was sore or you were sick of the coaches or somebody was getting on your nerves,...you just had to say, ‘okay, mentally I’m going to be really tough’. That’s where it really comes into play. I think I made a pointed effort to say, ‘well I’m going to try and stay focused’.

Given the daily grind of the training camp, participants also identified ways to focus during their spare time over the course of the camp. Vonnette dealt with the monotony by keeping herself busy: “For me it was important to have something I could do such as e-mail or even just have my computer with me. I would usually work in my spare time or maybe sit and chat with my roommate or one of the girls on the team.” Maria listened to music because as she described, “music is a big part of my life.” A few of the participants mentioned reading and trading fiction books. In addition, a number of participants brought specific items with them such as pictures, cards, pendants or computers to either personalize their rooms or add to their general comfort and well-being. As Wendy described:

I brought pictures of my family, my friends back home and my boyfriend...I brought a card from one of my friends wishing me luck. I just tucked all that stuff away in my journal and opened it whenever I was feeling lonely.

In sum, the main elements of the environment at the centralized training camp that were shared by the participants were – structure, critical events and focus. These elements played a role in athletes’ thoughts, feelings and coping strategies. All eight athletes mentioned elements of the environment as playing a role in their experience.

Emotions

The participants highlighted a number of different emotions that arose during and after the camp that played a role in their experience. In general the emotions fell into two categories – positive emotions and negative emotions.

Positive Emotions. Two main positive emotions emerged for the participants over the course of the camp – enjoyment and excitement – with the source of the emotion varying from participant to participant

Enjoyment was highlighted by a number of participants with respect to their feelings about training and the physical elements of the camp. As Melanie described, “I was actually enjoying being in the camp....It was nice to be in a really intensive, focused atmosphere.” Maggie really enjoyed the practices, “I loved their practices....they were good because they were intense and hard.”

A few participants mentioned the enjoyment of playing well and having a good performance in the camp and during the international games. Wendy highlighted her positive performance feelings in the following quote, “I was happy to be there. I had a really good time the first couple of weeks training. I was playing well. I just felt in sync with my body, my thoughts and everything around me.”

Several participants identified spending time with teammates as a major source of enjoyment. Vonnette highlighted this element, “I always like to enjoy myself regardless of how much I am not enjoying myself. I liked catching up with everyone and enjoying each other and our time off together.”

Excitement was also described by the participants as another common feeling arising during the camp. A number of participants mentioned excitement in relation to a next phase or stage of the camp or the upcoming world competition. Maria described looking forward to the upcoming games after the long training regime, “We were starting to get into more games so it was getting exciting.” A number of participants also mentioned feelings of excitement within the context of playing the games. Deb

described the exciting and nervous feeling before the game, “There were just masses of people everywhere....and I said to the person sitting next to me, ‘I’m getting nervous looking at all these people, imagine what the younger players are feeling like’It was really exciting going in.” Other participants mentioned the excitement related to feelings after well-played game where the potential of the team was highlighted. Rachel recalled this feeling in reference to the game against the US, “It was very exciting and motivating for us....There was nothing but positives after that game....I mean the US players came up to us afterwards and said, ‘We can’t believe how much you have improved’. We were really excited.”

Finally, a few participants mentioned the excitement of seeing a teammate achieving something. Rachel mentioned Nathalie’s success in the final Australia game, “Nathalie came in and contributed to the scoring...so that was awesome for her....because she had been injured for so long.” Melanie mentioned the excitement of seeing a younger athlete get the opportunity to play her first international game, “It was just so exciting to see how excited she was and knowing that she was fulfilling what had been a dream for her – to play with the national team. It was just wonderful to watch.”

Negative Emotions. Several negative emotions were described by participants over the course of the camp such as anxiety, embarrassment, disappointment, fatigue, frustration and anger. Again the source for these emotions tended to vary from participant to participant.

A few participants mentioned feelings of apprehension or anxiety just prior to the camp. Maggie described the dread of getting invited to the camp and her subsequent concern as to how she was going to compare with the rest of the athletes. Nathalie mentioned anxiety around her body’s health and whether or not it would be able to withstand the training.

A number of participants mentioned feelings of anxiety surrounding the fitness testing, “Dread” and “hate” were two words that were used frequently to describe feelings in that context. These feelings for many of the participants seemed to stem from the infrequency of the process, the comparison to other athletes and from the question of validity of the fitness test as a measure of preparedness or skill. As Maggie described, “I totally hate that run more than anything in the whole world...As much as I run and run and run, I never do well. It’s not my type of run.” However once the fitness testing was over, the participants indicated that these feelings quickly disappeared and a sense of relief emerged.

A few participants described the anxiety around trying to make the team. For Rachel, the amount of anxiety she experienced seemed to be heightened by her self-doubt, “I’m a pessimistic person...When I see someone doing really well I get down on myself.” Maggie’s confidence seemed to affect her level of anxiety in a similar way, “I’m always nervous and I’m the hardest critic on myself...It was always on my mind whether or not I was going to make the team...I was thinking that way all of the time.” Again these feelings tended to dissipate once the selections were made. However, as Rachel highlighted, “You were always worried about something....’Okay, I’ve made it, now I have to worry about playing’.”

Three participants mentioned embarrassment as a feeling they either experienced directly or suspected others of experiencing. Both Nathalie and Melanie described this feeling in the context of not playing or starting. As Nathalie indicated, “I was a little embarrassed sitting there. I think everybody had had an opportunity to play and then I realized I wasn’t even on the list to play because of my injury.” In addition both Vonnnette and Melanie used the word embarrassing to describe the feelings of athletes who did not start in the games but were then required to do conditioning after the game in front of the crowd.

A number of participants also highlighted feelings of disappointment during the camp. Several participants mentioned the feelings of disappointment surrounding selections. A few participants mentioned being disappointed with individual performances such as Melanie, “I was disappointing that I wasn’t starting and I hadn’t really been provided with an explanation why at that point. So I went into that game and I think my performance reflected how I was feeling. I did not have a good game” Nathalie described her disappointment with the coach’s suggestions surrounding Mishi’s situation, “They were recommending that she stay another day and a half...I found that really disappointing that they were putting our sport ahead [of her well-being].”

A number of participants described feelings of fatigue during the camp. Melanie indicated the physical toll of the day-to-day training regime on the older athletes, “Two-a-day sessions were hard physically on your body. It was definitely the first time that I didn’t recover quite as quickly as I might have five years ago.” Most of the participants mentioned fatigue after the US game followed by the long travel day to Calgary. The feelings of fatigued stayed with the team over the next few days in the training sessions and into the first game against Australia. Deb described this experience of fatigue:

We were very tired from the travel day; we didn’t get to sleep when we were supposed to because of the time change; we were up early the next morning and on the bikes to get the lactic acid out; and we trained that afternoon and the morning of the game. People were really tired.

Several participants mentioned experiencing feelings of frustration or anger during the camp. For both Nathalie and Maria, some of those feelings were related to their injuries. Nathalie was frustrated with the coach’s communication and performance expectations surrounding her injury. The mixed messages she received from him led her to train in ways that prolonged her recover. Maria was frustrated with her injuries and having to watch the team from the bench as she recovered.

Melanie also mentioned her non-starting role as frustrating but for different reasons, “I felt that his decision wasn’t based on my performance; it was based on decisions he made for other reasons...It was very difficult to change that perception.” At the end of the camp, these feelings turned to anger, dejection and blame at the coach, “I felt that no matter how well I trained that his mind was already made up”, and also at herself, “The reality was that I was on the cusp of starting and I had not performed in his mind to the potential that I was able to fall into the starting group.”

Several participants also indicated their frustration and anger with the coach’s reaction to their poor performance in the first Australia game. As Deb indicated:

I was feeling really angry....He was upset at us from the performance...It was really ugly because he was yelling at players...and the way he spoke to that young player, I didn’t think anyone should be spoken to like that.

Most of the participants mentioned their frustration in dealing with the head coach, and his poor communication skills and mood swings. Deb described the struggle to stay positive under these circumstances, “As you get older I think you get a little bit more jaded and bitter even though you try not to show your feelings.” Vonnnette was frustrated with the coach’s use of power, “I felt that he used his authority to keep players in control, not that anyone was out of control...Because they were depending on him to be on the team he felt he could mistreat them or say whatever he wanted to.” For some of the participants their frustration led to feelings of bitterness after the camp with respect to the way they or others were treated. Many of the participants mentioned avoiding talking about, or dealing with, the whole experience as there were too many emotions and bitter feelings involved.

Lessons Learned

Each of the participants highlighted various meanings and lessons that they took away from the experience of the centralized training camp and suggested the impact those elements had on their lives

overall. In addition, each expressed their knowledge and experience through recommendations to younger players who might attend a centralized training camp in the future.

Personal Journeys. Maggie indicated that she learned a lot through her interactions with others such as her teammates:

It was such a huge learning experience...I've always looked up to those players and still do....It was funny how many different things people had gone through on one team and just listening to people's stories and what people had been through or what they'd accomplished, I think you learn a lot from that about how to get through things and overcome your fears.

She also described a turning point during a pivotal interaction with the head coach, "He said something to me that I didn't agree with and this time I stood up for myself....I remember coming out of that meeting and being so happy that I had done that. It was good for me. I think that was a really good turning point for me."

Maria described how the camp contributed to the development of her confidence and belief that she could overcome any obstacles and events when they presented themselves:

I think anytime you go through some sort of personal experience, in the long run, it's going to give you more strength and more confidence to go through other things in life. I learned to deal with my injuries and pushing myself...just the little things that before would have bothered me.

She also expressed her learning in terms of how she would approach certain situations differently in the future, "I had some personal issues....I think they affected me too much and I would have changed about how I dealt with them."

Both Melanie and Vonnnette reflected on the impact of the camp in terms of their continued involvement in the sport. For Melanie the impact of being a non-starter was profound. Whereas she

acknowledged the understanding she gained from playing that role on the team, she also struggled with it and as a result started to question her continued involvement:

I don't think you ever lose your passion for the sport, but I think what happens is your priorities change....The balance starts to change and you need to decide whether or not to continue with the program or with the team....Personally playing was important to me...and I wish I hadn't had to go through not playing but on the other hand I think it gave me a good perspective and a good respect for players I had played with in the past and maybe the situations and difficulties they faced in not playing.

Vonnette reflected on the camp in terms of her whole experience with the national team with respect to the benefits and costs arising from her involvement:

One thing I've been thinking about over these last few months is that I lost a lot of money because I was with the national team this past time. And at this point in my career I am wondering, was it really worth it? I understand you are supposed to feel privileged to represent your country, but do I feel privileged? I think to some extent I feel a little privileged but at the same time it has been more of a headache than anything else....I am kind of weighing my priorities, wondering if it's really worth it to go and play for the team....I've been off two months now and I'm not really missing it. So I am wondering am I really going to be motivated to go back and play for the national team?

Vonnette also mentioned the learning she has gained through her interactions with the national team head coach, "Actually because of the coach I have learned to be my own self and I've learned to be turned off from negative people....I think I've learned that the coach makes a big difference in the team."

Rachel's reflections from the centralized camp experience were extremely positive. She felt that the camp allowed her to feel like she was really part of something. She was aware that her perspective on the team was perhaps somewhat unique, but she did not want to allow the experience of others to taint hers in any way:

It was really positive and I was really excited because I was playing. I know other people had different experiences, but I got the opportunity to play and for me that was good. I really loved the centralization. I thought it was the best thing for us. I only wish we could have more of it. I felt bad for the people that weren't playing....I'd been in that boat myself and struggled....but at the same time I felt good for myself. I felt I was doing what they were asking and that was why I was out there.

Wendy highlighted a few lessons that she took away from the camp in terms of her understanding of herself, "You learn a lot about yourself. You think you know yourself really well and then you're thrown into a situation where you have a lot of time to think....You almost get consumed by it....but I was able to adapt to that and not let it get the best of me." Wendy described a number of strategies that she developed through the camp that helped her deal mentally with the situation and that contributed overall to her development as an athlete:

Before this camp, I would just show up and play...But I started taking time for myself...Before practice I visualized what I wanted to do and how I wanted to play...Then when it came time for the games it didn't feel awkward doing it. It was almost second nature...Then when I did something wrong I was ready for it....So I think I learned over those two months that we had to do that. I use it now and I don't even think about it.

Deb reflected on her camp experience in terms of the specific goal that she had set at the beginning of the camp. There was no uncertainty for her in terms of her future involvement with the

national team. She knew this camp was going to be her last one and she knew that she was retiring at the end. Deb indicated that she took every opportunity to try and enjoy the experience. Despite all the things that went on with the team, she tried to focus on what she could control and take away positive memories. A goal she felt she achieved:

I wanted to enjoy this experience, and I wasn't going to let anything take away from that. All the problems we had with the team, I dealt with them in whatever way I had to and then I just moved on and enjoyed everything. I thought we had done everything that we possibly could, given the time and games we had together prior to the world competition.

Nathalie reflected on her camp experience in terms of the different role that she had to play due to her injury and the unique perspective that emerged for her from that.

I had a unique perspective, more so than any other player because I got to watch players and how they reacted. I got to know their playing personalities, probably more than they know themselves just because of being injured and riding the bike at the side during practice.

Nathalie identified that she learned a few lessons from the role she was forced to play such as the importance of acceptance of the situation and of carrying a role out.

You still need to do your job and if your job is to be captain of the bench then you try and help out in that regard... You can't get angry about it. Sure there were times when it really upset me but you don't tell other players. You keep it to yourself because they've got their own worries and it's just something you have to deal with.

Advice to Younger Players. A number of participants highlighted advice that they would give to younger players attending a centralized training camp for the first time. From that advice, two main elements emerged – confidence and focus.

Confidence was defined by the participants as a central component of success at centralized training camps. Each participant highlighted slightly different elements of confidence and methods for how to achieve it. Nathalie identified the importance of remembering one's talent and focusing on those strengths during training, "Try to go out and do the things that you do well." A number of participants described the importance of being physically prepared. As Maria suggested, "Camp is not easy. Physically, it is very demanding. So if you're not in as good a shape as you should be, then that is just an added stress that you have to deal with." Two participants also highlighted the importance of mental preparation in terms of what to expect. Rachel described this in terms of the style of the camp, "Be prepared for a more militant type camp... You have to be ready for a bit of a change. They watch what you eat. They watch what you do.....It's very structured." Vonnelle recommended working hard, "You just go out and do what you can do, be confident, and work hard. I think when you work hard you become a better player and you just develop confidence." Maggie mentioned the importance of staying positive, "Just try and keep positive and have confidence in yourself."

Maintaining the right focus also emerged for the participants as an important element of success at centralized training camps. Rachel suggested remembering to try and have fun, "It's an experience to be in that camp. If you don't enjoy it then there's no point in being there. I mean take it seriously but remember to have fun." Three participants mentioned focusing on doing technical skills well. Two participants suggested trying to see the opportunities to learn from the experience. Maggie identified the importance of learning from others, "Take what other more experienced and talented players can offer you because everyone's there to help each other." Wendy highlighted the importance of staying focused in the present, "If you have a bad first practice or you're a little bit jittery, that's normal, but don't carry it with you. Get rid of it." She also suggested staying focused in the present by breaking the camp down into smaller more manageable sections, "Break it down in terms of days. If it's a ten day

camp, don't see it as a ten day camp. See it as being the first day, the second day, the third day. Chunk it so it's not too daunting." Finally, Vonnelle suggested learning to deal with distractions effectively, like negative comments from the coach, "I've always said to younger players, whatever negative stuff the head coach says to you, just try and block it out."

In sum, the participants identified numerous lessons learned regarding their centralized training camp experience. Some of these lessons related to personal struggles and triumphs while others related to the process and structure of the camp.

Overall, these eight women shared in their experiences at the centralized training camp along a number of levels. Relationships and interactions with the head coach and with teammates and staff members emerged as the element most common to their experiences. Next, the environment and the participants' constant negotiation with it precipitated various thoughts, emotions, actions and lessons learned.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The goal of this study was to understand the experience of female athletes in a team sport at a centralized training camp. The results provide an in-depth, detailed and intricate picture that lends itself to that understanding. The individual profiles present a rich description of the process and range of experiences of the participants as told through their own voices and grounded in their own personal histories. In turn, the shared experiences from the group provide a clearer understanding of the overall factors and circumstances that played a role for these participants at that particular centralized training camp.

The purpose of this final chapter is to synthesize the profiles of the eight participants and the common themes emerging from their experiences and examine these findings along three dimensions: (a) the contribution of the findings to the understanding of the research questions and to the broader body of literature in the area, (b) the educational implications and future research directions arising from the findings, and (c) the contribution and meaning of this research project to my development as a researcher

Addressing the Research Questions

How do female national athletes of a team sport experience the activity of a centralized training camp? Three specific research questions are now examined with respect to the findings emerging from the profiles, the shared experiences and the current body of literature.

What was the process of the experience for each of these athletes and what strategies did they use to progress through the camp

For six weeks, the participants in this study lived, trained, interacted, performed with, and competed against, each other. They were exposed to the same environment, the same individuals

and the same sequence of events. The profiles served to map the unique journeys of these eight women through their centralized training camp experience with the common themes providing an understanding of the shared experience. A picture began to emerge as to the range of experiences that can occur, the process of the experience, the elements that impact the experience, and the coping strategies used to deal with the experience.

Personal perspectives. Each participant offered a slightly different perspective and voice to her experience that highlighted individual reactions and responses. The participants reconstructed their personal stories of injury, confidence struggles, starter challenges, personal growth accomplishments, and coach communication concerns. The range of athlete experiences has been highlighted in literature by a number of researchers who have identified a range of personal struggles such as self-doubts about talent, injury, lack of finances, and nutritional concerns (Gould, Jackson, et al., 1993; Scanlan et al., 1991, Woodman & Hardy, 2001). For the present study, not only were personal struggles highlighted but so too was the context related to those personal struggles. A view of the participants' thoughts and behaviours and with a way of understanding the meaning of those actions is provided. Moreover, there is an exposure to participants' clarification of their intentions and their expression of the process and time regarding the experience. With the participants in context, it became evident that individual experiences interacted with the social and organizational influences existing within that context.

Social influences. Social influences and relationships were a central component of the experience for the women in this camp. The importance of social interactions has often been diluted in the research on athletes' experiences in sport receiving equal weight with such elements as physical, logistical and psychological concerns. Perhaps this dilution is a product of the assumption that women and men are interchangeable as "knowers," and therefore it is

reasonable to examine their responses as a collective. Certainly, there is evidence to suggest that gender plays a role in perceptions and experiences (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1996) and that female athletes value and utilize social interactions to more of a degree than male athletes (Balague, 1999; Tuffey, 1995; White, 1993).

For example, Tuffey (1995) found that cross-country collegiate coaches perceived the typical characteristics and behaviours of female athletes as different from male athletes. As a group, the coaches identified characteristics and behaviours for female athletes such as being emotional/sensitive, needing more coach feedback, and having a greater desire to please. These perceptions, in turn, were described by the coaches as influencing their approach with female athletes (e.g., approaching female athletes with more sensitivity and caution). Balague (1999) also suggested that female athletes value relationships more than male athletes and that these values should be taken into account by coaches and others who work with female athletes. Possibly social relationships emerged in this study as important because of the all female participant group, or perhaps the importance of the social interactions surfaced because of the overwhelmingly negative social force of the coach.

The head coach emerged as a dominant figure in the process of the experience for the participants. His communication strategies, style and moods left impressions with each of the participants creating a host of emotions and reactions from fear, disappointment, embarrassment, frustration and anger, to confusion. Recently, a study by Gould et al. (1999) identified coaching issues as a distinguishing factor in team success. Negative attitudes toward the coach, poor athlete-coach communication, and a lack of athlete-coach trust were mentioned by members of teams who failed to meet expectations at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. Moreover, coaching issues

also emerged in a study by Woodman and Hardy (2001) that examined organization stress in elite athletes in the United Kingdom. Of particular interest for this study was the mention of the impact of changes and inconsistencies in the coaches' moods that left athletes unsure of how to interact with the coach.

In general, the impact of the coach is well supported in the literature. Several researchers (Brawley, 1990; Brustad & Ritter-Taylor, 1997; Gill, 1986; Yukelson, 1997) have claimed that coaches' behaviours and interactional styles (e.g., communication style, distribution of feedback and rewards, attention to individual athletes) are instrumental in shaping the psychological characteristics of sport involvement for athletes (e.g., self-esteem, motivation and self-perception characteristics). Furthermore, in the studies examining sources of stress, athletes frequently highlighted the coach-athlete interaction as a stressor (Gould et al., 1983; Gould, Jackson, et al., 1993; Scanlan, et al., 1991).

One unique finding arising from this study regarding the interactions with the coach was the use of power during the camp. The profiles and shared experiences in this study lend themselves to a deeper understanding of the process of this power and how the coach's behaviours and actions created a particular climate on the team. Furthermore, through the voice of the athletes, we can see how their perceptions and interpretations impacted them individually and as a team. Finally, there is also evidence to suggest that the coping strategies employed by these athletes were influenced by the climate of power and communication by the coach and by the likelihood of those strategies being successful.

The impact of the use of power in coaching on the experiences of athletes has not been explored extensively in the area of sport psychology (Wann, Metcalf, Brewer & Whiteside, 2000). Instead, research has focused on the impact of leadership styles on elements such as group

cohesion (Gardner, Shields, Bredemeier, & Bostrom, 1996; Weistre & Weiss, 1991), satisfaction (Chelladurai, 1984; 1998; Riener & Chelladurai, 1995) and effectiveness (Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996). Perhaps research in sport psychology has avoided power issues because these issues are viewed as more appropriate for study in the area of sport sociology. However, power and its use and abuse also has been sparsely studied in that area. Perhaps, the limited exploration of power issues in sport rests with a lack of agreement, and in some cases avoidance, as to what constitutes appropriate behaviour by coaches who are developing high performance athletes. Robertson (1994) alludes to this perspective in her article exploring emotional abuse in sport:

Some claim that the coach must enforce high expectations in order to get an athlete to reach full potential. If the enforcement takes the form of yelling or disparaging comments, well, the high-performance athlete has to become tough to succeed. (p. 3)

Regardless of the reason for the paucity of research exploring power issues in sport, if we accept the notion that athletes' meanings of an experience are influenced by context, then we also need to consider the use of power by coaches as a potential element within the sport context. A more comprehensive view of the sporting context will then facilitate an understanding of the differences in experiences and the meaning that is to be made of such experiences. Certainly, several revealing accounts of abusive coaches have been reported over the last several years (Kirby et al., 2000; Robinson, 1998; Ryan, 1995) that lend insight into the importance of this issue and its potential impact on the athlete experience.

Although research in sport psychology has tended to neglect the importance of power, researchers in other areas of social science have examined the phenomenon quite extensively. French and Raven (1959) developed a taxonomy of power, delineating five sources of interpersonal power that hold a frame of reference for understanding the use of power in this

study. The categories as defined are: reward power, control of access to desired rewards; coercive power, control of access to one or more punishments; referent power, control based on liking or respect by group; legitimate power, control based on position within the group, and; expert power, control based on domain specific knowledge, talent or skill. A number of organizational behaviour studies have used French and Raven's taxonomy successfully to predict such elements as organizational control, employee productivity and employee satisfaction (for a review, see Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985). Werthner (1995) applied a modified taxonomy to sport highlighting four categories – positional power, reward power, coercive power and expert power. She suggested that by the sheer nature of their position, coaches are afforded access to these sources of power and the defining impact of their actions lies in how they choose to use that power. Within these parameters, clearly issues of the misuse of positional power, reward power and coercive power could be suggested in this study. Indeed, this study offers a unique glimpse into the impact that one coach's use of power had on the athletes' individual and collective experiences at the camp. Moreover, Dr. David Palframan, a child and family psychiatrist, offered a definition of emotional abuse in Robertson's (1994) article that raises some interesting questions with respect to the participants' experiences in this study: "Emotional abuse suggests a relationship where the person with the most power criticizes, reduces the status of the person being criticized, and finds ways to generally manipulate and hurt that person using emotional issues" (Robertson, p. 3).

Accessing information on the coach-athlete power dynamic is challenging in sport because there is a level of acceptance as to what is considered tolerable within a sporting context. This tolerance of coaches' questionable actions and behaviours with athletes was emphasized particularly in the book, Little Girls in Pretty Boxes by Ryan (1995), that explored the

experiences of young aspiring national level gymnasts and skaters and their families. The stories revealed an acceptance of the coaches' verbal abuse and coercion that was received and interpreted by the athletes, and others around the athlete, as a necessary part of becoming a champion. Moreover, this acceptance whether imposed by the team or the culture of sport also plays a role in athletes discussing these experiences in general. The silence of athletes on certain issues related to coaching makes the findings arising from this study particularly interesting, not only for the contribution to our understanding of the team in sport and adult female national athletes, but also for the fact that the issues were discussed at all.

Kirby et al. (2000) examined Canadian athletes' experiences of sexual harassment and abuse in sport, and they used the term "familism" to describe the way in which sport practices are often drawn along the same lines as the traditional nuclear family. These lines then have an impact on athletes being forthcoming about the issues that arise within the sporting context:

At the national-team level, the training unit is also a patriarchal unit, one in which the head coach is virtually always male, and the role definitions and rituals for each family member (team member) are carefully scripted along sport and gendered lines....Loyalty and self-sacrifice are encouraged. Problems within the family are not discussed outside; thus a context of secrecy about the dynamics of family relations is established. (p. 115)

Kirby described how this silence creates an environment where athletes become vulnerable to abusive behaviours and actions by coaches and are limited in their resources and support if they choose to speak out. They referred to this environment as the "dome of silence" and suggested that it has two main functions:

The first is to separate the public on the outside from the sport world on the inside. The second is to use the pressure created by the rarified atmosphere inside the dome to create a self-sufficient and self-perpetuating sport system which needs only a constant turnover of athletes committed to grasping the brass ring, an Olympic gold medal (p. 119).

Kirby et al. also mentioned the close relatives in the sport family unit such as the assistant coaches, athletic trainers, sport psychologists and sport physicians and the roles they play in adhering to the “family values.” In this study, the staff members around the athletes were obviously aware of the various issues with the head coach and did their part to buffer or lessen the impact. However, they were clearly not there to “rock the boat,” and in essence it could be suggested that their lack of direct support in terms of open confrontation with the coach regarding his communications and actions only served to affirm the coach’s actions as acceptable.

Were the athletes’ experiences with the coach a product of male coach/female athlete dynamic at this camp? Certainly, issues of power and gender cannot be ruled out as a possible element impacting the experience (Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). If they did play a role it was not because of a lack of familiarity with male coaches on the part of the athletes. In this study, there is some access to the participants’ past experiences with male coaches and therefore an understanding of their reactions within the context of their lives is gained. All of these women grew up being coached by male coaches. In fact, all of the women mentioned at least one male coach who had a significantly positive influence in her development as an athlete.

Perhaps an equally viable explanation for the experience of athletes at this camp with respect to the coach is that there was a discrepancy between what the athletes valued and perceived to be an effective coaching style and what actually existed. The literature in sport

psychology suggests that athletes are more satisfied when their preferred leadership style is matched by the leadership style exhibited by the coach (Chelladurai, 1984; Chelladurai, 1998; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995). The findings emerging from this study lend support to this idea. However, in acknowledging that athletes' preferences for leadership styles can vary to include autocratic, democratic and participatory styles, we need to be careful not to cloud over issues of power that may impact athletes' experiences and thus inadvertently contribute to the "dome of silence" described by Kirby et al. (2000).

In this study, there is also access to a deeper level of understanding with respect to the athletes' dissatisfaction and its link to their personal values. Noticeably, issues of relatedness emerged as a central value with respect to coach interaction for these athletes. Balague (1999) stressed the importance of understanding athletes' identities and value systems. She suggested, that for female athletes, their relationship with the coach is often a central value impacting their experience. Kirby et al.'s (2000) empirically support this suggestion as their findings indicated that female athletes were more affected if put downs or insults originated from the coach rather than from teammates or other personnel in the sporting context. In general, coaches who are challenged interpersonally may develop problems with their athletes as many athletes have a strong need to be liked by their coach and to develop a meaningful relationship with her or him. However, there is also evidence to suggest that this need may be of particular importance for female athletes.

Social interactions or relatedness issues were a central component of the experiences of the athletes in this study. Athletes clearly highlighted the importance of relationships especially with the respect to other athletes on the team. There was little mention of conflicts or problems amongst team members. This finding is actually in opposition to the sources of stress studies in

sport (Gould, Jackson et al., 1993; Scanlan et al., 1991), social support in sport (Udry, Gould, Bridges, & Tuffey, 1997), and two more recent studies of team performance at the Olympics (Gould et al., 1999) and organizational stress in elite athletes (Woodman & Hardy, 2001). In all of these studies the negative impact of teammates was frequently mentioned. These studies involved both individual and team sports and female and male athletes. However, a study by Spink (1995) with elite female ringette players does lend some insight into this finding. Spink indicated that social factors of cohesion were related to athletes' intentions to continue with the team. He referred to this as an unexpected finding based on the literature with elite athletes that stresses task cohesion factors as more important than social cohesion factors in continued participation at a high level. He also highlighted that this result was in all likelihood a reflection of the all female sample. Certainly, this study lends support to Spink's finding of the importance of social cohesion to elite female athletes.

Spink's (1995) finding uncovers an unsettling assumption within group dynamics in sport, which is that competitiveness and relatedness are diametrically opposed. This assumption is perpetuated by research that continually dilutes the female athlete experience. In this study, almost all the women referred to themselves as very competitive, and yet relationships and social interactions also played a central role in their experience lending support to the notion that they can exist in tandem.

Undoubtedly, there were some issues between teammates that arose during the camp with respect to more playing time, selections, preferential treatment from the coach, and general personality differences. However, the women in this study seemed to downplay these disruptions and take steps to minimize them. In some cases, minimizing the effect was achieved by splitting off into smaller groups within the team to find like-minded teammates and bases of support. In

other cases, it involved an acceptance of personality differences or a realization that the reason for the conflict had a lot to do with the coach. Therefore, blame was directed more at the coach and his actions, choices and camp structure, rather than at any one athlete. Perhaps, in some ways, the coach and his antics brought the group together through a common enemy mentality or an “us and them” identification (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998).

Perhaps the most surprising finding from this study was that the support for teammates existed even in the face of intragroup competition. Indeed, the athletes viewed this type of competition as the coach’s way of trying to create tension and competitive feelings among the group members. Fascinatingly, although the athletes took the necessary steps to secure their place on the team, they did so in a way that aligned with their values of group interactions. Perhaps it is possible to consider the importance placed on social interactions with this group as a “norm” for the team. Carron and Hausenblas (1998) defined group norms as, “the values or standards that govern behaviors of a wide cross section of different individuals who have membership in a group” (p. 174). Team support has emerged as a norm in two studies. Both studies asked athletes to list the norms present in their teams with Prapavessis and Carron (1997) finding 11.4% agreement for support among teammates for elite male cricketers and Munroe, Estabrooks, Dennis and Carron (1999) finding 13% agreement for supportive behaviour during competitions and 6% for supportive behaviour during practices for both female and male athletes involved from high school to the national level teams. The findings for social support are significant but not overwhelming, which may reflect the diversity of the participants selected and the dilution of the female athlete perspective. Also when exploring norms in behaviour it is difficult to discern if the norm is actually developed within the group or a reflection of cultural values.¹

The importance of social interactions for these women was also reflected in their interactions with the staff members. The assistant coaches were valued sources of support for the athletes, and the physiotherapist emerged as an important figure in her role as friend, confidante, and advocate for the athletes. It appeared that not only did the physiotherapist's close contact with the athletes contribute to their dynamic, but so too did her gender with respect to the comfort and level of communication undertaken by the athletes with her. Further, the athletes' interaction with the sport psychologist seemed to reflect issues of relatedness. Although he was acknowledged as a nice man, they had limited opportunities to interact with him and their unfamiliarity with him was cited as an impediment to deeper discussions with him. Furthermore, his approach to the implementation of the mental training program was devoid of social negotiations and the use of paper and pencil testing only served to exacerbate athletes' feelings of distance from him.

It may also be important to consider the level of the participants' comfort and ability to reflect upon their performances and articulate their experiences with a sport psychologist. Given the various constraints already placed on this relationship, delving into various issues may have been viewed as too intimidating an option. Some of the participants had trouble with the third interview in this study that asked them to reflect on the meaning of the experience for them. This difficulty may lend some insight into their level of comfort and ability in dealing with the sport psychologist.

Organizational influences. Organizational influences and structures were also a central component of the experience for the women in this camp. In this study the world of the centralized training camp became accessible and it was explored in a way that is unique to the field of sport psychology. Access was gained into athletes' thoughts, feelings and perceptions

regarding the day-to-day routine and critical events. The importance of routines emerged as a vital element for the athletes particularly during the first three weeks of the camp. The athletes knew the routine – they knew when they would have time off, which days were going to be more challenging physically, and what the critical elements were going to be each day – and they developed their own individual routines to fit that schedule. However, after three weeks, the routine at this camp changed. It became less predictable and in some cases more structured, and as such, an environment less conducive to individual preparation emerged. The athletes' resistance to the schedule increased and their comfort levels seemed to decrease. These feelings also seemed to be exacerbated by feelings of powerlessness regarding their ability to change the situation.

Routines have been highlighted by a number of researchers as a means through which athletes gain a sense of control and familiarity with their surroundings and the elements that contribute to their performance (Orlick, 1986; Orlick, 2000; Williams & Krane, 1998). Pre-competition routines and competition routines are highlighted as essential components of athletes' mental preparation. Interestingly, the centralized camp environment, at least initially, seemed to provide a perfect opportunity for athletes to develop, practice and revise their personal preparation routines. In essence the environment seemed to simulate the intensity of a competition setting and therefore lent itself to the development and implementation of those skills. In their study with Olympic teams, Gould et al. (1999) highlighted residency training programs as a factor contributing to successful Olympic performances by some teams. Teams that were successful were more likely to mention the positive effect of a residency training program and its impact on heightened motivation and intensity at the camp.

A number of critical events also played a role in impacting the experience of athletes during the camp. Selections during the camp helped create and maintain an atmosphere of competitiveness for a large portion of the camp. In some cases intragroup competitiveness can help athletes achieve high levels of performance, however in this case most athletes viewed the selections occurring during the camp as detracting from opportunities for the team to develop as a cohesive unit. Furthermore, the selections themselves created a host of deep feelings, both of a positive and negative nature, as athletes dealt with their own successes and their teammates' failures. The impact of the selections carried on through the camp as issues arose regarding the choices and decisions made. Indeed, late team selection has been identified in the literature as detrimental to team cohesion and performance and to the atmosphere of training (Gould et al., 1999; Orlick & Partington, 1988; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). In this study, we had a window into athletes' thoughts, feelings and perceptions leading up to the selections and the stress and anxiety the selections created, not to mention the pressure it placed on some athletes to play even in the face of injury.

Financial support or lack of it also emerged as a critical event especially with respect to the athletes' struggle with their National Sport Organization for financial compensation. Financial concerns have emerged as sources of stress in a few studies (Scanlan et al., 1991; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). In this study, the participants described financial sacrifice as a part of being a national athlete within the Canadian system. On the coat tails of Canada's poor medal performances at the Sydney Olympics and more recently at 2001 World Track and Field Championships in Edmonton, the lack of financial support offered Canadian high performance athletes has been severely criticized in the media. Indeed, centralized camps have been suggested as a product of current funding restrictions within national programs in Canada (Robertson,

1999). However, athletes make considerable sacrifices financially and otherwise when they centralize with a national program. Ironically, the idea behind centralization is that athletes will be focused primarily on their sport. However, if athletes are concerned about their financial situation during centralized training camps, it may be difficult to maintain the required focus.

A few other critical events such as the personal tragedy experienced by one of the participants' teammates and the media presence also plagued the participants. Both personal tragedies/struggles (Scanlan et al., 1991) and media presence (Gould et al., 1999; Woodman & Hardy, 2001) have been highlighted in the literature as factors impacting team and elite performances.

In general, this study highlighted that the experiences of female athletes at a centralized training camp involved a complex interplay between their individual experiences and the social and organizational forces within the context. Within the social and organizational elements in the camp, a defining feature of the athletes' experiences was their ability to cope with the various elements of those experiences. Indeed, numerous coping strategies emerged, which were specific to the various social and organizational forces attached to the camp.

Coping with the centralized training camp. In dealing with the coach, the athletes highlighted strategies from three of the main categories of coping identified in the literature (Endler & Parker, 1990; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Stanton & Franz, 1999): problem-based (e.g., talking with the coach, talking with other athletes), emotion-based (e.g., seeking support from other athletes, staying positive) and avoidance-based (e.g., avoiding the coach). These types of coping strategies used by athletes with respect to interpersonal interactions have been supported in the literature (Gould, Finch, et al., 1993). An interesting finding from this study, however, was the pattern that emerged for athletes in the coping strategies selected as the camp

progressed. At the beginning of the camp athletes engaged in more problem-focused strategies when dealing with the coach such as meeting with the coach. However, as the camp progressed and the coach became more unpredictable and less receptive to the interpersonal interactions, athletes adopted more emotion-based coping strategies such as venting to teammates. Finally, near the end of the camp, with the competition at hand and the coach exhibiting heightened anxiety levels and moody behaviour patterns, athletes adopted avoidance strategies and maintained their emotion-focused coping patterns. This finding of the situational constraints on coping strategies appears to be unique to this study. Gould, Finch, et al. (1993) tried to link the coping strategies used by athletes with the stressors they experienced. However, there was no indication as to why the athletes chose the strategies they did in that study. This study clearly highlights the importance of considering the context of the situation with respect to strategies selected.

Evaluating the relationship between the person and the environment is a critical element of coping (Lazarus, 1991). This study lends some insight into the athletes' process of coping and the role of their cognitive appraisal in that process. Over the course of the centralized training camp, athletes were evaluating their actions and thoughts with respect to their impact on the environment and their place within that environment: "What do I have at stake in this encounter" and "what can I do?" (Folkman, 1992, p. 34). These primary and secondary appraisals were ongoing and served to influence the coping process. As Lazarus suggested, "Appraisal influences the coping strategy, and coping changes appraisal by virtue of what it does to the person-environment relationship, the deployment of attention, or the appraised meaning of that relationship" (p.113). This study offered a view of the complexity of the process of coping and the impact of the person-environment interaction.

Athletes also emphasized a number of strategies for dealing with the day-to-day training and schedule of events during the camp. Although a few strategies were specific to the structure of the camp, such as keeping busy during spare time, many of the strategies were similar to those outlined to deal with, and prepare for, competition settings. Goal-setting, positive self-talk, visualization and focus and distraction control strategies were all identified as strategies to cope with training and the day-to-day routine. Only a few researchers have addressed mental skills for practice and training situations (Orlick & Partington, 1988; Orlick & Partington, 1998) and yet the environment seems ripe for developing these skills. Crocker and Isaak (1997) recommended developing training sessions and environments that more closely resemble the psychological and physical climate of competition so athletes will employ similar mental strategies to deal with it. It seems that the centralized training camp environment may provide that opportunity naturally.

How did athletes experience the various contexts of their lives during the centralized camp and what strategies did they use to progress through them?

It appeared that the participants recognized that in order to perform at their best during the camp they needed to become completely absorbed in the activity. This seemed to occur on three levels. First, the participants took steps to suspend their other worlds for the duration of the camp. For example, tasks and elements of their lives were attended to and taken care of so as to not enter as distractions during the centralized camp. The necessary sacrifices were made with respect to work, school, friends and family. For some athletes this meant loss of income or job, incomplete courses or missed family functions and events. Although commitment has emerged as a central component of mental excellence (Orlick, 2000; Orlick & Partington, 1988; Williams & Krane, 1998), this finding specifically highlights an understanding of the lives of these participants and the priorities and values that guide their choices.

Second, during the camp, contact with family and friends was kept to a minimum. When the contact did occur it was in the form of e-mails, phone calls and/or visits home (depending on the athletes' hometown). Many of the athletes named other athletes as their biggest source of support during the camp. This finding was intriguing given the obvious importance of relationships and interactions for these participants. However, it does support a recent study by Gould et al. (2001) that identified lessons athletes learned from participating in the Atlanta Olympics. One lesson identified was the need to devise a plan for dealing with family and friends and for educating family and friends on the athletes' needs and requirements during this time. The reason for developing such a plan emerged in a study by Udry et al. (1997) with elite tennis players and skiers. More often than not, these athletes described their interactions with important others as negative. The difference for the present study was that there was little mention of the people in the athletes' outside worlds. Only two athletes mentioned their boyfriends and certainly not in a way to suggest that these people played central roles in the athletes' lives during that time. Indeed, one participant mentioned her boyfriend with respect to the distraction problems it caused her and the role it played in her inability to focus appropriately during the camp. This absence is not to say that these individuals deemed their other world interactions as unimportant, but rather they were not mentioned as elements of the centralized camp experience for these participants. Perhaps this finding was a result of the focused nature of the camp or perhaps the participants viewed their public and private lives as separate elements, unrelated to their centralized camp experience.

The third way that athletes attempted to absorb themselves in the activity of the centralized training camp was by taking steps to achieve and maintain their best focus during the camp such as following a routine, using positive self-talk strategies and engaging in pre-

performance and within performance imagery. These findings support the mental skills highlighted by a number of researchers with respect to excellent performers (Orlick & Partington, 1988; Williams & Krane, 1998). Further, they contextualize the use of these strategies and highlight their importance not only for focus during competition but also for situations such as centralized training camps.

This finding of complete immersion in the centralized training camp and the steps taken by athletes to achieve this end supports the literature on the concept of flow (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Flow is about focus and is defined as total absorption in an activity to the exclusion of all other thoughts and emotions. It has been inextricably linked with positive performance feelings in a number of domains and with peak performance experiences in sport. Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi described steps to creating flow opportunities in sport such as finding a balance between challenge and skills, developing mind body awareness, setting goals, focusing on the present and controlling the controllables. They also highlighted that while flow is important for athletes seeking peak performances it is also rewarding for its own sake. Moreover, there are many opportunities to experience flow. There is certainly evidence to suggest that athletes were actively trying to create an environment where flow could be achieved perhaps not only for positive performances, but also for the sheer enjoyment of the activity. Orlick and Partington (1998) described practice environments as a key time for athletes to practice creating their best focus; a practice to which many elite performers adhere. The steps taken by these athletes to focus supports this contention and is a unique finding lending insight into what the steps to this best focus may be for some athletes.

Complete absorption at the camp or “existing in a bubble” as it was described by one participant, is also revealing with respect to the personal investment that the athletes are making

in the activity and the impact that investment can have on athletes' meaning making. Lazarus (1991) indicated that if an interaction or event holds personal relevance for an individual then it is more likely to trigger strong emotions or feelings of either a positive or negative nature. The investment these women made to the camp lends itself to an understanding of their experiences at the centralized training camp with regards to the potential impact such an event had on them. This impact is best reflected in the range of emotions experienced by the athletes throughout the experience.

How did athletes come to understand and take into account their experiences? What have athletes learned from the experience?

The centralized training camp emerged as an important event in the participants' lives. The meaning arising from the experience was embedded within the content of all three interviews. The participants' experience at the centralized training camp created opportunities for personal growth and risk-taking. It presented them with challenges and mastery experiences of personal success in overcoming those challenges. It also created opportunities to interact and share experiences with others, through which friendships were formed and positive memories of the experience developed. A number of these themes have been reflected in the literature with respect to sources of enjoyment and stress in athletes' lives (Scanlan et al., 1989; Scanlan et al., 1991; Gould, Jackson, et al., 1993). However, in this study insight was offered into a deeper level of understanding with respect to the meanings for these athletes within the context of their lives and their experiences at the camp.

For a few athletes, the centralized training camp also precipitated questions of continued involvement and of the need to continue sacrificing other world experiences. Given the magnitude of the camp and the day-to-day process of the athletes, it seems reasonable that they

would be evaluating their experience against other options and identities. Lazarus (1991) contends that personal meaning is a product of appraisal and that in environments and interactions that are meaningful, individuals will tend to judge how they are doing in those situations and in life overall. He describes it as a process of personal negotiation between our personal agendas (i.e., goals and beliefs) and the environment.

Recently, Gould et al. (2001) suggested that it might be useful to explore the lessons athletes derive from their experiences. In their study they highlighted the lessons of elite athletes competing at the Atlanta Olympic games. Numerous lessons emerged such as the importance of mental preparation and team cohesion for success and the achievement of optimal physical conditioning without overtraining. However, in this study not only were the athletes' lessons considered, but so too were the processes and experiences of the athletes from which these lessons emerged. Perspective was offered into how these lessons developed and why they emerged as important within the context of the athletes' lives.

In summary, the profiles and shared experiences speak to the complexity of the experiences for these athletes and to the powerful social and organizational elements that permeate the context in which they play and compete. Moreover, we are exposed to athletes' process of coping within a complex and ever changing environment. Finally, we are able to hear the richness of the voices and share in the uniqueness of their realities as the experience emerged for them.

Educational Implications and Recommendations

Experiencing the journeys of these eight women through the activity of the centralized training camp has lent itself to a deeper understanding of the issues, structures, processes and policies that pervade their experiences. From this understanding, it is possible to begin to

comprehend the unique journeys within a broader context of future research and potential educational initiatives.

The extent of the meaning of this experience has only just begun to unfold through the voices of the eight women who have described their journeys. There is still uncertainty regarding the range and depth of this meaning. This study describes the perspective of the eight participants from the same national team sport attending the same centralized training camp. The understanding of centralized training camps is limited to the meanings arising from this participant group. As such, there is a need to continue to explore other athletes' experiences from different sports and different teams and also the experiences of others such as coaches and support personnel involved in that environment to begin to understand the full depth and breadth of the experience as a whole. Furthermore, there is a need to explore the impact of environmental constraints such as finances and organizational operations that may create undue stress and strain on those involved. Concomitantly, other methodologies such as ethnographic methods and action research that may lend a different view to the experience of the centralized training camp should begin to be employed.

Armed with a greater understanding of the experience, a dialogue then can begin with athletes, coaches and support personnel involved in centralized training camps regarding steps to enhance the process within the different contexts. Individuals within these environments can examine their own experiences within the context of the stories that have emerged and take personal meaning and learning to challenge or expand their perspectives. Savery and Duffy (1996) contend that we explore our own understanding and scrutinize other's meaning as a means of expanding, accommodating and elaborating our understanding of specific issues.

Subsequent steps would involve sharing knowledge and educating athletes, coaches and support personnel on how to better prepare for the experience of a centralized training camp. There is an assumption that athletes and coaches know how to prepare for training. However, I would suggest that a centralized training camp is a unique environment that imposes unfamiliar circumstances on both athletes and coaches. The experience of athletes at a centralized training camp is a product of the complex interplay between their personal experiences, the social and organizational forces and their coping strategies within the context. Knowledge is power and athletes' need to understand and appreciate this complex interplay and know how to negotiate successfully through the situations as they arise. They also need to know what to expect and therefore coaches need to give athletes as much information about the structure and logistical issues concerning the camp as early as possible. I suggest that not having access to this information will impair athletes' abilities to be able to prepare appropriately, and as a result, only athletes who have experienced the process before or who possess skills that lend themselves to their adaptation within the context will be successful.

A large part of athletes' reactions to this experience will reflect their personal experiences and their ability and confidence in coping with both the personal issues and contextual challenges presented to them. Although a few educational coping intervention programs designed to help athletes deal with acute stressors exist (Anshel, 1990; Johnston & McCabe, 1993; Tammen, 1996), these programs may have limited applicability within the context of centralized training camp. Their focus on acute stressors may be too simplistic for athletes involved in centralized training camps as these athletes will need to know how to cope with both acute stressors associated with the day-to-day training and with the chronic stressors that carry on throughout the camp. More comprehensive intervention programs need to be explored that

consider the unique contextual demands of the centralized training camp and the issues of coping.

A further educational consideration is the issue that social interactions are a central component of the experience of athletes at centralized training camps. The impact of athlete-athlete communications is a relatively unexplored area in sport psychology and yet social support between teammates within the centralized training camp environment has the potential to impact on the athletes' experience overall. In general, a process of communication needs to be set up during the camp that is effective and meaningful for all concerned. The process, once in place, needs to be revisited and re-evaluated during the camp for its effectiveness. Yukelson (1998) highlights several practical coach-athlete communication strategies that can facilitate improved relations such as understanding the person with whom one is communicating, never underestimating the power of positive social influence techniques, and reducing uncertainty by clarifying expectations and roles.

A related feature of communication that has educational implications is the importance of understanding and using power effectively. Coaches have access to several sources of power and given the meaningfulness of the centralized training camp to the athletes involved, even small abuses of that power can have long lasting ramifications. Coaches need to develop an understanding of the potential impact of their actions and their use of power and develop strategies that facilitate rather than impair athletes' journeys (Tomlinson & Strachan, 1996). Furthermore, coaches need to set up a support structure from which they can gain feedback and insight into their process of communication during the course of the camp to help them manage their power. Using staff and assistance coaches in this manner and enabling them to discuss such issues as they arise is a possible first step. Furthermore, sport governing bodies or national sport

organizations should consider taking a more active role in providing support, resources and learning opportunities for both athletes and coaches and soliciting feedback in a regular and systematic fashion regarding issues such as coach-athlete interactions. Power, its use by coaches, and its impact on athletes is a relatively unexplored area in sport psychology but its potential impact, especially within a centralized training camp structure, is profound.

Athletes, coaches and support personnel also need to be educated about the impact of organizational context and its potential bearing on the experience of athletes at the centralized camp. Issues such as living arrangements, financial support, structure of training and timing of selections are only beginning to be explored in the literature (Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Studies need to continue to explore the range and depth of organizational forces to facilitate coach planning and athlete preparation.

Education prior to the centralized training camp is an important piece of creating opportunities for athletes to have positive experiences. However, a framework for guiding the implementation of the centralized training camps could also lend itself to positive experiences for athletes if that framework was grounded in the needs of the athletes within the centralized camp context. I suggest that perhaps, national team centralized training camps are organized within an inappropriate framework; a pedagogical framework that views learners as dependent, the environment as structured, and the coach as the sole director in planning and delivery of the training camp and in assessment of athletes' needs. I argue that national athletes of team sports are adults and as such should be guided by an androgogical framework. Therefore, when implementing programs such as centralized training camps, coaches would do well to adhere to the principles of adult education.

Although there is no one definitive list of adult principles in the literature, there is shared understanding regarding what constitutes good practice in adult education. The following concepts are synthesized from such academics as Brookfield (1986), Draper (1992), and Draves (1997) – (a) value adult learners' unique contributions, (b) value adult learners' past experiences and knowledge, (c) make learning meaningful and the environment supportive, and (d) promote dialogue and collaboration. These concepts are explored here as guidelines from which to plan and implement the centralized training camp and facilitate positive experiences for athletes.

First, athletes should play an active role in planning and implementing the centralized training camp. They need to have input into the structure of the camp and the scheduling of events. They also need to be involved in adjustments and decisions that unfold during the course of the camp. By removing the athletes' voice from this process, coaches and other professionals move away from an athlete-centered perspective and advocate for a learning climate of formal authority and powerlessness.

Second, athletes' experiences need to be drawn upon as resources. Athletes who have gone through the process of centralized training camps have perspectives that need to be valued and incorporated into future planning. Furthermore, understanding the range of those experiences acknowledges individual differences within the experience and can only inform best practices overall. Athletes should be provided with opportunities to evaluate the centralized training camp process and the information derived used to inform and improve upon future camps of that nature.

Third, athletes need to be assisted and encouraged in a climate that acknowledges and supports their unique learning styles. Trust and mutual respect between coaches and athletes need to be fostered. The lines of communication need to be open and free-flowing. Conflicts

should be expected and approached in a way that promotes understanding and allows new learning to emerge. Athletes need to see the relevance and applicability of practices, sport science sessions and other events or tasks embedded within the organizational context of the centralized camp.

Fourth, athletes need to have opportunity to collaborate and dialogue with others during the camp. Learning can be fostered through social interactions. Athletes can develop their ideas and understandings related to elements such as coping, critical events and meaning making through group discussions and one-on-one interactions. Through these interactions the distinctions and hierarchies inherent in roles within the context are eased and cooperative and participative environments are allowed to emerge. Overall, a framework based on principles of adult education offers an attractive perspective from which to guide practice in developing and implementing centralized training camps.

Conceivably, one final step could be suggested here related to the ethical responsibility guiding best practices and the centralized training camp. Given that social relationships and interactions have emerged as a central component of the experience for these women at the centralized camp, perhaps we need to consider an ethical code of conduct that values relationships and their potential impact on the experience of individuals involved within that context. Carol Gilligan (1982) highlighted the concept of an ethic of care, which has appeal for the centralized training camp. It is grounded in the social consequences of action and is unique because it begins with an assumption of human connectedness. Kirby et al. (2000) described three distinguishing elements of the concept: (a) contextual sensitivity, considering political, economic and social realities of individuals when making decisions; (b) responsiveness and trust, understanding contextual realities of people's lives and being receptive to how their needs and

abilities play out; and (c) consequences of choice, consideration for how decisions will affect others. Kirby's quote highlights the potential ramifications of adopting such a concept in sport and centralized training camp environments more specifically.

It is about more than good intentions. It is about actively assessing all possible harmful consequences of certain decisions. For example, it raises awareness of how self-esteem, self-confidence and self-respect can be nurtured or alternatively destroyed in relationships of trust such as those between coaches and athletes (p. 146).

Overall, an ethic of care holds value for use within the centralized training camp because it contextualizes the decision making process giving a value and consideration to the full impact of decisions on the lives of the people involved.

The Meaning I Have Taken From My Work

Seidman (1998) suggested that a final stage of the process, consistent with this methodology, is for the researchers to reflect on the meaning of this work for them. I have divided my reflections into five areas: (a) choosing the topic, (b) selecting a methodology, (c) conducting the research, (d) writing the dissertation, and (e) reflecting on the experience.

Choosing the Topic

I was first exposed to centralized training camps during my two- year involvement with a national team as the assistant coach and mental trainer. During this period I experienced three training camps of varying durations (six weeks, two months and six months). At these camps I witnessed a number of elements both within the context of the camps and in the external worlds of the athletes that impacted their state of mind and day-to-day performances. My experience during the six-month camp was particularly revealing. I talked with a number of athletes who were struggling with elements such as the head coach, commitment, distractions, and emotional

and mental exhaustion. In one particular incident, I had to refer an athlete to a clinical psychologist for issues of depression.

In addition to helping athletes deal with their own issues, I was struggling with my own experience at the centralized training camp: I was in the process of breaking up with my partner of three years; I was struggling with my confidence as a coach; I was feeling pressured by the head coach to reveal the specifics of my mental training discussions with athletes; I was struggling to communicate with the head coach; and I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the head coach's use of power. Furthermore, I was struggling to make ends meet financially, being paid only part-time for my full-time coaching job and thus being forced to balance another part-time job in the evenings. After my experience, I withdrew from coaching completely after having coached consistently for 13 years. I was completely burnt out on every level and had lost passion for both the sport and coaching.

As a result of this experience, I became interested in the phenomenon of centralized training camps and, more specifically, in the experiences of the athletes involved. It was also of importance to me to explore women and team sports, partly because that was my experience, and partly because of their lack of representation in the literature in sport psychology. Consequently, I developed my research around understanding the experiences of national female athletes of team sports during centralized training camps. My ultimate goal was to learn from the experiences of others and to gain insight into ways that might better facilitate the process of this experience for the athletes. Perhaps, I was seeking answers to my own questions and looking for ways to understand my experience better; a way to be at peace with its impact and to sort out the changes it precipitated in my life. My experience at that six-month centralized camp was life altering for me and I needed to understand, through the experience of others, the reasons why.

Selecting a Methodology

I still remember exactly where I was when I read the methodology by Seidman (1998). I had been searching for a methodology that would value the participants within the context of their lives and at the same time value their unique individual perspectives. As soon as I read about the interview process and the format for presenting the findings, I knew I had found the methodology I wanted to use. Perhaps the aspect I liked best about the approach was that its goal was to understand the experience of others, not to control or predict that experience. Moreover, the presentation of the results in profiles seemed to do justice to the process of interviewing and the voices of the women that I wanted to represent.

Part of the struggle to find the right methodology had to do with the relationship I envisioned between the participant and myself. It was important to me to have an equal relationship in that dynamic. I did not want to be the center of the research. I did not want to predetermine the meaning for the participant, or explore the experience through my eyes or the eyes of previous research. I wanted to learn from my interactions with the participants and I wanted to create a space for women to talk about this experience in their lives with my role being to support each woman as she made sense of the process and of its meaning to her. The focus of the interviews allowed me to play that role. In addition, crafting profiles allowed me to play co-producer or co-author of the experience, expressing the experience in the participants' own words and reflecting their own consciousnesses.

A further struggle, in searching for the right methodology, had to do with finding a process that presented the participants in context of their lives and their past experiences. I felt that in order to truly understand their behaviour, I would need to hear, not only about the experience itself, but also about their histories in sport leading up to that experience. I was

frustrated by the fact that sport psychology is dominated by the positivist paradigm and the goal to quantify the athletes' experience. Even now, as qualitative research studies are emerging with more frequency, the analysis often follows a post-positivist paradigm, which aims to quantify qualitative research.² I did not want to decontextualize or fragment the experiences of the participants. I wanted them to emerge with the full richness and complexity that they warranted. I think, in this respect, I was significantly influenced by the writings of Kvale (1996), Seidman (1998), Anderson (1990) and Schutz (1967). This quote by Kvale summarizes some issues regarding power and ethics in research with which I struggled.

Does the interviewer own the meanings constructed in and on an interview, interpreting it within his or her selected contexts? Or should the original 'authors' of the interview statements have their say in the interpretation and communication of their stories? This is not only an issue of validity of interpretation, but of ethics and power, of the right and the power to attribute meanings to the statements of others (p. 227).

Certainly, in choosing the methodology, I had some concerns as I was aware that all methodologies have strengths and weaknesses. My biggest concerns were whether or not the participants would be able, and have the comfort to, verbally express themselves, freely addressing their inner feelings and identifying the experiences that precipitated their feelings. I realized that a big part of that process was going to involve my ability to build a rapport with the athletes and to create a space where they felt comfortable enough to reflect on their experience in detail. My added concern had to do with the telephone interviews. There was a point when I realized that it would be next to impossible for me to meet face to face with all the participants, given their locations and the diversity in experiences that I sought. I was concerned that building that same rapport would be difficult on the phone.

Conducting the Research

Conducting the interviews and hearing the personal stories and experiences of the athletes at the camp was an amazing experience for me. I was struck by how open and honest the participants were and how they really struggled to understand themselves and their experiences within the context of the interviews. They took time during the interviews to consider and respond thoughtfully to the questions I asked. There were frequent pauses and “umms” as they contemplated ways to describe the events or their feelings in more detail. Moreover, I was impressed with how they reflected upon their words and experiences between the interviews, often mentioning this reflection during the course of the next interview. I was also surprised with how the telephone interviews did not seem to differ in anyway from the face-to-face interviews with respect to the openness and depth of the dialogue that occurred. In fact in some cases, participants seemed more comfortable talking with me on the phone.

For some athletes, I could tell the third interview was difficult and I felt myself struggle with them in the process. I could tell that reflection and articulation were things that they were not used to doing, especially within the context of sport. I really thought about the limits of the methodology in that regard, as it seemed that the more experienced athletes had much less difficulty with that third interview. However, it also really emphasized for me the cognitive challenge involved in meaning making and its relevance as a learning tool within the context of sport.

I was intrigued with how caught up I became in the lives of the participants. For example after the first two interviews, I occasionally felt like I knew them better than I did. I wrote about this feeling in my journal, based on an experience I had meeting up with my first participant for her third interview:

When Maggie opened the door, I felt like she was an old friend because she had told me so much about her life. I was very casual in my speech and approach to her initially, and I think she was a little taken aback. I quickly adjusted my demeanour as soon as I noticed her awkwardness, and then things returned to the dynamic that we had before. I have to remember my place in their lives and consider how they see me. I know I am going to hear all these amazing stories, but their openness is about their exploration and not about a friend dynamic being created.

I was also struck with how many of their experiences mirrored my own. When the participants talked about their frustration and embarrassment with their coach, I really felt like I understood. The connection with certain experiences also heightened my awareness of the experiences that did not reflect my own. Writing in my journal and being aware of my biases and perspectives really helped me suspend these feelings and explore the experiences of enjoyment and personal growth that occurred for some participants.

It was also challenging and exciting to see how each interview took its own direction. Sometimes it was scary not asking the same questions to each participant, and I felt as though through the process, I was struggling with my own positivist roots in that somehow, I would miss uncovering the true meaning by not treating everyone the same. But it was amazing how the experiences flowed and I found myself wondering how the next participant's reconstruction was going to unfold. I felt myself changing from hearing the experiences of the participants, not only personally but also professionally as a phenomenological researcher. I made a note in my journal after completing the interviews with the fifth participant that highlighted this point.

It is like a kaleidoscope – with each turn the picture changes and reflects that participant's vision and experience. I don't think I have quite looked at experiences that

way before. It's like shedding this skin of some deep seeded belief in one reality. I don't think I realized how deep it ran. I think these little realizations are making me a better phenomenological interviewer. Maybe that is part of the intention of this process. I think the learning for a researcher with this method is limitlessI am excited to see how the next participant will bring the event and her experience to life.

Writing the Dissertation

Perhaps the roller coaster ride of writing this dissertation is best reflected in the e-mail subject headings sent to many of my friends and support personnel over the last year. Here are just a few examples – down and out; on a roll, too big; I see the light; writing and hoping. I know I am not the first Ph.D. student to struggle with the process of writing and I suspect I will not be the last. But the experience of writing has been the biggest and best challenge I have ever faced with respect to my mental skills. All that said, I will not belabour the reflections of my writing process with a meaning that, I suspect, is shared by many and, in the very least, understood by all who have gone through a similar process - one reality that perhaps does exist.

A number of issues did arise while writing this project and, for the most part, they centered around the shared experience section and the discussion chapter and the question, “How do I interpret descriptive results?” My feelings were that the profiles spoke volumes and the interpretation might only serve to fragment and dilute the experiences. However, I came to realize that it is important to frame the results in terms of the learning that emerged for the participants. How they understood and connected their experiences is valuable for a greater understanding of the process and for future research and educational implications that may emerge.

Reflecting on the Experience

For over a year now, I have carried the experiences of eight women at a centralized national team camp around in my head. I feel, in a small way, that I lived that experience and struggled with them to make meaning of it. Certainly, I have explored their experience over and over again and at this point, I suspect I could recount some of the specifics of that experience better than they could. I also realize that their descriptions are thoughts and reflections frozen in time and that their meanings of that same experience have evolved now and come to a new place in their understanding. I would like to think that their interviews paved a small piece of the way to the new meaning. And I would love to know what those new meanings are.

Certainly, a new meaning of my experience at the centralized training camp has evolved for me through this process. Through these women I have revisited my painful experiences of humiliation and powerlessness and come to know them in a new way. Through their struggles and personal triumphs, I have seen the complexity of the experience and understood the power of social and organizational forces within that context. I feel a little lighter through my shared experience and through the ways they have come to know that experience.

Finally, I think from this experience I have had a vision for a way that things can be related to centralized training camps. In sport, athletes spend long hours training and preparing to perform at their best. Embedded within that experience are their day-to-day social interactions. The potential impact of contact with others at centralized training camps cannot be diminished as it opens the doors to change and growth and influence that can be life altering. I think, more than ever, care must be taken to make these experiences positive and meaningful. Moreover, concern for the athletes must extend beyond the boundaries of their eighteenth birthday; concern and support for these individuals has to be ongoing and continue throughout their lives. We are all

vulnerable at points, and we need to be aware of the circumstances that help create and support that vulnerability.

The participants in this study have brought to life the experience and impact of the centralized training camp. I have been inspired by their experiences and by the ways they have come to know those experiences. I know others will take their own personal meaning from the experiences of these eight women, and I know that the diversity of the learning emerging from the readings will give meaning to this research overall.

Chapter 6 - Endnotes

¹ “A cultural value is a social expectation that pertains to how individuals should behave in various situations. Although a cultural value is similar to a team norm, the two are not identical constructs. The former influences behavior at the macro (societal) level, whereas the latter has its effect at the micro (team) level. There is a little doubt however, that a cultural value can exert a strong influence on a team norm....[however] one team might evolve with an exaggerated cultural value, whereas the norm for another team might develop with this value diminished” (Munroe et al. 1999, p. 172).

² I remember being at an AAASP (Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology) conference and hearing one of the leading researchers in the area of sport psychology tout four individuals as the young guns of qualitative research. As I looked at those four men and their studies that I had read, I thought, “This is the future of qualitative research in sport psychology?” I was appalled at the lack of recognition of others who were currently taking risks in using more alternative qualitative methodologies, and I felt that a standard was being set that unfortunately did not fall far from the positivist tree.

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Table 1. Demographic Profiles of Participants

Participant	Age	National Team Experience	Position	Starter	Injured	Home Province	Current Province
Nathalie	28	8 years	Position 1	No	Yes	Province 3	Province 3
Maria	23	4 years	Position 2	Yes	Yes	Province 1	Province 1
Wendy	22	1 year	Position 1	Yes	No	Province 1	USA
Melanie	29	7 years	Position 2	No	No	Province 5	Province 3
Vonnette	32	13 years	Position 3	Yes	No	Province 2	USA
Rachel	27	3 years	Position 3	Yes	No	Province 4	Province 4
Deb	35	13 years	Position 2	Yes	No	Province 3	Province 3
Maggie	23	2 years	Position 3	No	No	Province 3	Province 3

Appendix A

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone number(s): _____

Email address: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Number of years of participation in this sport: _____

Number of years of participation with national program: _____

Number of centralized training camps attended along with duration and location of each camp.

Dates	Location of Camp	Duration of Camp

(Use back of sheet if more space is required)

Appendix B**CONSENT FORM**

Principal Investigator: Laura Gillian Farres, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa,
Canada
Address: 1058 Spar Drive, Coquitlam, B.C., V3H 3G8
Telephone Number: 604 461 2969 (home) or 604 512-3256 (work)

Whenever a research project is undertaken with human participants, the written consent of the participants must be obtained. This does not imply, of course, that the project in question necessarily involves risk. In view of the respect owed the participants, the University of Ottawa has made this type of agreement mandatory.

The purpose of this inquiry is to explore the experience of centralized training camps for female high performance athletes of team sports. The hope is that the information derived from this inquiry will inform coaches, sport psychology consultants and athletes about the complexities of centralized training camps. As a result these individuals will learn how to be better prepared to deal with, and plan appropriately for, this type of situation.

If you agree to participate, your participation will consist of three 90-minute interviews spaced 3 to 7 days apart. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. You will also be asked to verify your transcripts, adding, deleting or clarifying any information as you see fit. In addition, you will be asked to produce any documents arising from the training camp such as journals, training schedules and pictures, which you are comfortable sharing with the researcher.

By signing this consent form you are agreeing to allow the researcher to use direct quotes from the interviews, informal discussions and documents. To ensure anonymity your name will not appear in the research or on any publications arising from the research. Instead, pseudonyms will be used. To ensure confidentiality all data sources will be accessible only by the researcher and all transcripts and documents stored in a secure manner.

As this activity deals with very personal information, it may induce emotional reactions which may, at times, be negative. You are given complete assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences. At any time you are free to withdraw from this project, refuse to participate, and refuse to answer questions without penalty. If you have any questions about this research project that remain unanswered or unclear please contact Laura Gillian Farres at 604 252 5855.

This research has been approved by the Faculty of Education Human Research Ethics Committee (HRECFE). Any further information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Secretariat of the Ethics Committee (562-5800, ext. 4057). You may also contact the thesis advisor directly, Dr. Colla J. Macdonald (613 562 5800 ext. 4110). There are two copies of the consent form, one for you and one for the researcher. Your time and cooperation are greatly appreciated.
Sincerely,

**Dr. C.J. MacDonald
Advisor
University of Ottawa**

**Laura Gillian Farres
Doctoral Candidate
University of Ottawa**

I, _____, am interested in collaborating in this research project and I certify that I understand the nature of this research as described above

Signature

Date

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings once the research is completed please fill in your address below.

Appendix C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview One: Focused Life History of Sport Life Leading Up to Centralized Training Camp

1. Tell me how you came to be involved with the national team and the centralized training camp. I would like to know as much as possible about your sport life leading up to your involvement in the camp.
 - (a) Tell me about the people in your life at that time.
 - (b) How would the significant people in your life describe you at this time?
 - (c) If you were to write an autobiography about your experience leading up to the camp, what would your chapters be?

Interview Two: Details of the Centralized Training Camp Experience

1. Tell me, as much as possible, about the details of your centralized training camp experience.
 - (a) Can you tell me about your experience during the camp?
 - (b) Can you tell me a bit about your life during the camp?
 - (c) If you were to write an autobiography about your experience during the camp, what would your chapters be?
 - (d) What kinds of things would you do during the camp?
 - (e) What were your thoughts, feelings during the camp?
 - (f) Tell me about the people in your life at that time.
 - (g) Could you tell me about a typical day in your life?
 - (h) Could you tell me about the kinds of things you did everyday?

Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning of the Centralized Training Camp Experience

1. Now that you have talked about how you came to be involved as a national athlete at the camp, and what it was like for you during that camp, what does it mean to you?
 - (a) How do you understand that camp in your life now?
 - (b) What have you learned from this experience
 - (c) What would you identify as the most significant aspects of your life during that time?
 - (d) What were the most critical incidents of your experience of the camp?
 - (e) What advice would you give less experienced players attending their first centralized training camp?
 - (f) What recommendations would you make to improve or enhance your centralized training camp experience?