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Coaching teamwork: Team sport athletes' and coaches' perceptions of how coaches facilitate teamwork

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Data Availability Statement

The participants of this study did not give consent for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available.

Abstract

To date, research on teamwork in sport has largely focused on defining the construct and examining its relationships to emergent states and outcomes. By comparison, little is known about the antecedents (e.g., leadership) that promote teamwork behaviors in team sports. The purpose of this study was to explore what specifically sport coaches can do to develop teamwork within their teams. Using a critical realist approach, we conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with participants who competed in interdependent team sports (n=8 athletes, n=7 coaches). The data were thematically analyzed whereby three higher-order themes (comprising nine subthemes) were generated. The themes included (1) *Crafting a teamwork recipe*, (2) *Come together, stay together*, and (3) *Maximizing teamwork in action*. Specifically, coaches can facilitate teamwork by: (re)structuring selection practices, carefully considering team compositions, and encouraging role commitment (Theme 1); emphasizing coach-athlete relationships, promoting meaningful connections between teammates, and managing perceptions of favoritism (Theme 2); and crafting team-focused tactics, promoting athlete-led teamwork, and managing healthy internal competition (Theme 3). In summary, coaches appear to play an important role in facilitating teamwork. Specifically, coaches could consider looking beyond individual talent and skill during the team selection process, promoting strong bonds with their players and amongst teammates, and focusing on team-first training and execution tactics. Recommendations for future research and additional implications for those working in the applied field (e.g., coaches, sport psychologists) are also discussed.

Keywords: coaching, group dynamics, leadership, performance, team effectiveness

Lay Summary

This study explored how team sport coaches might facilitate teamwork within their teams. Based on interviews with eight coaches and seven athletes, we identified how coaches utilize the following factors to promote teamwork: team selection, roles, coach-athlete relationships, athlete-to-athlete support, favoritism, tactical systems, athlete leadership, and internal competition.

Implications for Practice

- Coaches can facilitate teamwork when selecting teams and assigning roles by looking beyond individual skill and talent and, instead, focusing on the ideal combinations of players that maximize teamwork. As part of this, coaches can promote a training and competition environment that focuses on collective performance over any one individual performance.
- Creating time and opportunities for the development of coach-athlete and athlete-athlete relationships is an important component of teamwork promotion.
- Coaches could empower athletes with opportunities to lead their team's preparations and reflections (e.g., goal setting, performance evaluations), and encouraging training environments that are competitive without becoming toxic or hostile.

Introduction

1 Within their review of teamwork and team effectiveness in sport, McEwan and
2 Beauchamp (2014) defined teamwork as “a collaborative effort by team members to effectively
3 carry out the independent and interdependent behaviors that are required to maximize a team’s
4 likelihood of achieving its purposes” (p. 5). Teamwork is a central team process within a
5 conceptualization of team effectiveness, which broadly involves the extent to which teams fulfill
6 their objectives (Mathieu et al., 2008; McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014). The most common
7 framework for understanding team effectiveness suggests that it: comprises inputs, mediators,
8 and outcomes; unfolds in episodic cycles (e.g., from game to game); and develops over time
9 (e.g., throughout the team’s season) (Mathieu et al., 2008). *Inputs* include individual-level (e.g.,
10 personality, attitudes), team-level (e.g., team training, leadership), and organizational-level
11 (e.g., funding, organizational stress) antecedents that can facilitate or undermine effective
12 team processes and emergent states (Mathieu et al., 2008; McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014).
13 The *mediators* portion of the inputs-mediators-outcomes (IMO) model is made up of two types
14 of variables: team processes (e.g., teamwork) and emergent states (e.g., team cohesion,
15 collective efficacy; McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014).

16 It is important to recognize the differences between team processes and emergent
17 states as these are sometimes conflated. Specifically, team processes comprise *observable*
18 *behaviors* within a team, while emergent states involve *cognitive, attitudinal, motivational, and*
19 *affective states* that develop over time as a result of individuals’ previous experiences with their
20 team. For example, whereas teamwork comprises behavioral processes—that is, “interactions
21 that take place among team members during the course of goal accomplishment” (Marks et
22 al., 2001)—team cohesion is conceptually distinct insofar as it focuses on attractions to the
23 group which describes “how appealing the group is to them” (Eys & Evans, 2018, p. 178) and
24 group integration which encompasses “the extent of closeness and cooperation within the
25 group as a whole” (p. 178). Attractions to the group and group integration are both related to
26 the social realm (i.e., social cohesion) and tasks related to training and competition (i.e., task
27 cohesion). In distinguishing team processes (i.e., teamwork) from emergent states (e.g.,

28 cohesion), Marks et al. (2001) noted that “this distinction is important, because indices of
29 emergent states are often intermingled with interactional process indicators (e.g.,
30 coordination), which results in serious construct contamination. Emergent states do not
31 represent team interaction or team actions that lead toward outcomes” (p. 358). That said,
32 team processes and emergent states can influence each other reciprocally (e.g., effective
33 communication between team members can result in a surge in team cohesion, which can
34 enhance subsequent team communication; Marks et al., 2001). Together, these mediators
35 translate inputs into *outcomes* which involve the extent to which a team achieves its aims with
36 respect to individual members (e.g., individual skill development) and/or the group at large
37 (e.g., winning competitions). To date, the research on teamwork in sport has focused on its
38 conceptualization and relationships with emergent states and outcomes (e.g., McEwan, 2020).
39 The focus of this study, therefore, is to uncover more insights about how inputs (namely, coach
40 leadership) might impact teamwork and team effectiveness.

41 The four core components of teamwork *preparation, execution, evaluation, and*
42 *adjustments* are referred to as the regulation of team performance (RTP) (McEwan &
43 Beauchamp, 2014). *Preparation* includes identifying the team’s overarching purpose, setting
44 performance goals, and strategizing how the team plans to achieve their goals (Marks et al.,
45 2001; Rousseau et al., 2006). Teamwork *execution* focuses on the task-related observable
46 team behaviors such as the extent to which teammates are in sync with one another (i.e.,
47 coordination), work together as a unit (i.e., cooperation), and exchange information with each
48 other (i.e., communication). *Evaluation* refers to how teams critically assess their performance
49 and progress towards the team’s performance goals via performance and systems monitoring.
50 Finally, *adjustments* are responses to team evaluations such as problem-solving, helping each
51 other improve in training (i.e., backing up behaviors), engaging in verbal feedback between
52 team members, and implementing innovative solutions to improve the team’s performance. In
53 addition to those RTP behaviors, the management of team maintenance (MTM) component of
54 teamwork represents behaviors that occur throughout a team’s tenure including *conflict*
55 *management* and the provision of *psychological support* between team members.

56 Effective teamwork has been shown to predict several emergent states (such as team
57 cohesion, collective efficacy, and team resilience) and outcomes (such as team performance
58 and member satisfaction; Fransen et al., 2020; Lausic et al., 2009; McEwan, 2020). However,
59 research regarding the impact of inputs on teamwork is scant. Previous research on teamwork
60 has shown that collective efficacy and team cohesion mediate the relationship between
61 teamwork behaviors and performance satisfaction (McEwan, 2020); those two emergent states
62 have been linked to coach leadership (Hampson & Jowett, 2014; Kim & Cruz, 2016). Moreover,
63 the frameworks by McEwan and Beauchamp (2014) and Mathieu et al. (2008) suggest that
64 leadership is a particularly prominent team-level input that can facilitate teamwork processes
65 and, in turn, outputs. Research outside of sport has also offered descriptions of various
66 leadership behaviors that may foster team effectiveness, such as providing motivational
67 support, helping teams strategize, and teaching team members relevant skills (Hackman &
68 Wageman, 2005; Peters & Carr, 2013). Indeed, within organizational psychology, Zaccaro et
69 al. (2001) argue that “effective leadership processes represent perhaps the most critical factor
70 in the success of organizational teams” (p. 452). Within the sport domain, effective coach
71 leadership behaviors have been found to promote coach-athlete relationships (Jowett, 2017),
72 group cohesion (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004), collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014), and
73 athlete motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Some initial work within sport suggests that
74 coaches’ and athletes’ provision of identity leadership is linked to teamwork (Fransen et al.,
75 2020); moreover, ineffective coach leadership has been identified (qualitatively) as a potential
76 antecedent to breakdowns in teamwork execution (McEwan & Crawford, 2022).

77 Jowett and Chaundy (2004) defined coach leadership as “coaches’ behavioral
78 processes that influence athletes towards performance accomplishments” (p. 303). Kim and
79 Cruz (2016) found a moderate relationship between coach leadership and team cohesion,
80 wherein certain coach behaviors including training behaviors (e.g., athletes’ skill, tactical, and
81 physical performance development) promoted team cohesion, and conversely autocratic
82 behaviors (e.g., authority-based decision-making) discouraged team cohesion. Similarly,
83 Turman (2003) found some coaching behaviors (e.g., positive reinforcement, athlete

84 autonomy, and inspirational motivation) facilitated team cohesion, while other behaviors (e.g.,
85 favoritism, abusive language) undermined it. In addition to team cohesion, research on
86 collective efficacy also connected training behaviors, social support, and positive feedback to
87 collective efficacy promotion, as well as autocratic behaviors to collective efficacy deterrence
88 (Hampson & Jowett, 2014). In summary, there is evidence to suggest that (a) coach leadership
89 is related to emergent states and (b) emergent states are related to teamwork. Based on this
90 collection of research as well as the conceptual underpinnings of teamwork and team
91 effectiveness (cf. McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014), it would seem reasonable to posit a potential
92 link between coach leadership and teamwork in sport.

93 Despite initial insights identifying possible links between inputs and teamwork
94 processes, a notable gap exists in the literature in terms of *how* leaders—and sport coaches
95 more specifically—can facilitate teamwork among their team members (beyond identity
96 leadership enactment). In sport, coaches have significant control over the team environment
97 (e.g., team selection, player role assignments, practice planning) and, as such, understanding
98 how coaches can utilize their position to promote teamwork presents a key starting point in
99 addressing the limited information available on teamwork inputs. In other words, although there
100 is accumulating knowledge on the consequences of effective teamwork, much more work is
101 needed to understand how teamwork might be facilitated by key leadership personnel,
102 including coaches. In summary, this study aims to move beyond describing the mere benefits
103 of effective teamwork. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore what sport coaches
104 can *do* to foster teamwork within their teams.

105 **Method**

106 **Design**

107 A qualitative research design was utilized whereby we sought to understand team sport
108 athletes' and coaches' perspectives on how coaches can influence teamwork by uncovering
109 the lived experiences and perspectives of coaches and athletes through interviews (Smith &
110 Sparkes, 2016). A critical realist paradigm (Archer, 1998) was applied to underpin our chosen
111 research question, design, and analysis. Critical realism attempts to move beyond the

112 perceived limits of both the traditional positivist and interpretivist paradigms to offer a
113 philosophical perspective and acknowledge the relationship between the objective and
114 subjective realities (Ryba et al., 2020) while also recognizing the limits of both the realist and
115 constructivist-interpretivist approaches (Wiltshire, 2018). Critical realism is stratified into three
116 tiers: the empirical (i.e., what can be measured or observed), the actual (i.e., what cannot be
117 directly observed but nevertheless can impact outcomes), and the real (i.e., phenomena that
118 are unobservable and latent but may be catalysed under the right context) (Bhaskar, 1975).
119 Critical realism aims to move beyond describing and measuring the observable world and
120 attempts to uncover *causal explanations* for social phenomena (Archer 1998). This research
121 was conducted from an ontological perspective that posits that participants' experiences of
122 teamwork exists within a pre-existing real-world context while also maintaining that an
123 objective reality is impossible to ascertain. The research is also underpinned by a constructivist
124 epistemology. Constructivism relates to our goal to interpret participants' experiences of how
125 teamwork is facilitated, while also maintaining that this interpretation is not separate from our
126 own personal sport experiences (e.g., as former athletes and coaches) (Ryba et al., 2020).
127 The research questions aimed to uncover how teamwork could be facilitated and how coaches
128 were uniquely positioned to promote teamwork among their teams. A critical realist paradigm
129 was reflected in the methods and analysis of this study which are detailed below in the data
130 collection and data analysis sections.

131 **Participants**

132 After receiving institutional ethical approval, participants (n=15) were recruited using a
133 combination of purposeful and snowball sampling. As this is the first qualitative study (to our
134 knowledge) to explore both athlete and coach perspectives of how coaches foster teamwork
135 behaviors, we chose to keep our sample broad to uncover a breadth of perspectives and
136 experiences. We purposefully targeted individuals who were currently training or competing as
137 part of a competitive sports team as an athlete or coach (for at least 12 months) and were 18
138 years of age or older. 'Competitive' was defined as those who, at minimum, competed at a
139 regional level and competed and trained as a group a minimum of three times per week (i.e.,

140 not recreational, such as in intramurals). We recruited coaches and athletes from a variety of
141 different team sports, competitive levels, nationalities, and included both men's and women's
142 sport (see Tables 1-3). We only sampled from interdependent sports who had competed within
143 12 months of the interview. In addition, we used snowball sampling to encourage participants
144 to pass along the study information to colleagues and teammates. We did not ask coaches to
145 suggest athletes from their teams in order to preserve the athletes' anonymity.

146 As this is one of the first studies to explore *how* teamwork is facilitated in sports teams,
147 we chose to include a heterogenous sample of participants. We wanted to ensure we
148 represented a diversity of experiences across sports, contact levels (e.g., contact sports:
149 rugby, ice hockey and non-contact sports: volleyball, field hockey), genders (e.g., men and
150 women's sports), and nationalities (e.g., Canadian, UK), and therefore maximum variation
151 sampling was employed (Patton, 2014). Maximum variation sampling (or heterogeneity
152 sampling) aims to uncover key themes that transcend the heterogeneity within a sample.

153 *[Insert Table 1 around here]*

154 *[Insert Table 2 around here]*

155 *[Insert Table 3 around here]*

156 We elected for the first author to interview both athletes (n=8) and coaches (n=7) as
157 we believed the two perspectives could offer a diverse description of how coaches perceived
158 their own attempts to facilitate teamwork and how athletes experienced their coaches'
159 teamwork facilitation efforts (or lack thereof). Previous research on coach behavior and athlete
160 perceptions of coach behavior found that coaches perceived their own behavior differently
161 (and typically more positively) than their athletes did (Vargas-Tonsing et al., 2004); as such,
162 both perspectives were deemed important to investigate in this exploratory study. Therefore,
163 guided by Braun and Clarke (2021), the first author conducted 15 interviews and sought to
164 focus our intentions less on achieving data saturation, and instead, leaned into the "messiness"
165 of qualitative inquiry and relied upon our interpretation of the data to generate relevant and
166 descriptive themes that helped answer our research questions.

167 Data Collection

168 After receiving informed consent (approval number 20/21 023) by University of Bath
169 Research Ethics Approval Committee for Health, each participant took part in a semi-
170 structured interview individually via their choice of video-conferencing platforms (e.g., *Zoom*,
171 *Skype*) between March and June 2021. Interviews were audio-recorded using a separate
172 Dictaphone and lasted between 57-130 minutes (Mean \pm SD = 78 \pm 17.4 minutes). Our critical
173 realist paradigm was reflected in the creation of the interview schedule, which was informed
174 by previous research in teamwork (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014) with the main aim to explore
175 *how* athletes and coaches perceived coaches could facilitate (or undermine) teamwork (see
176 Supplementary Materials). The semi-structured interview approach aligned with our critical
177 realist approach by allowing the interviewer to remain open to unforeseen insights from the
178 participants that may not have been anticipated a priori (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The
179 paradigm was reflected in the creation of the interview schedule (see Supplementary
180 Materials) which was designed to acknowledge the participants' lived experiences with
181 teamwork in connection to coach leadership. We also created two separate but complementary
182 interview schedules for the coach and athlete participants. In line with critical realism, the
183 interview schedule was constructed to best extract what processes or behaviors (i.e., causal
184 mechanisms) coaches employed (both directly and indirectly) to drive teamwork behaviors
185 among their athletes and teams (Wiltshire, 2018). An example of a question exploring causal
186 mechanisms was "*Can you please describe a time when you felt you (as a coach) had a*
187 *positive impact on your team's capacity to work well together?*".

188 The teamwork in sport model (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014) was used to craft the
189 interview guide by framing questions around different aspects of teamwork such as preparation
190 (e.g., *How does your team try to facilitate teamwork pre/post-competition?*). However, relevant
191 to critical realism's stratified ontology (Bhaskar 1975), we sought to also include open-ended
192 questions in order to leave room for novel and unanticipated aspects of teamwork to emerge
193 (e.g., *The next question, might be an abstract one, but I am really curious as to what extent*
194 *you believe you can coach teamwork?*). Collecting data from both coaches and athletes

195 allowed us as researchers to capture how teamwork could be fostered both from the
196 perspective of those who were attempting to promote teamwork (i.e., coaches) and those who
197 were having teamwork promoted to them (i.e., athletes). Critical realism's epistemological
198 assumption posits that our knowledge of social phenomena (e.g., teamwork) is constructed
199 through individual perspectives (Bhaskar 1975; Ryba et al., 2020). Therefore, exploring both
200 athlete and coach interpretations of teamwork was essential to understand further possible
201 causal explanations for coach leadership's impact on teamwork behaviors.

202 To further align with our critical realist approach, the interviewer provided each
203 participant with the same definition of teamwork before the interview started (McEwan &
204 Beauchamp, 2014). The definition provided was purposefully concise to ensure participants
205 could comment on unforeseen aspects of teamwork. To reflect the critical realist paradigm, we
206 incorporated the teamwork model (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014) when drafting the interview
207 schedule. The interview schedules included questions that targeted specific teamwork
208 behaviors, including preparation, execution, evaluation, and adjustments (e.g., "How does your
209 team try to facilitate teamwork pre/post-competition?"). To ensure that our data collection was
210 not purely deductive, we also included more open-ended questions to elicit more inductive
211 discoveries related to teamwork (e.g., "How do you know if an athlete is a good teammate or
212 an athlete who works well with others?").

213 **Data Analysis**

214 The interview data were analyzed thematically using the six stages of reflexive thematic
215 analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2021). One major goal from the outset of the process was to
216 approach each step of the analysis with a qualitative sensibility that was continually reflexive
217 of our individual biases and experiences, such as our positionality as past competitive athletes
218 and coaches (Clarke & Braun, 2021). Interview transcripts were read multiple times to allow
219 for immersion and familiarization with the data. Following the familiarization phase, a
220 preliminary set of codes were created whilst using NVivo 12 software. The data were then
221 coded using a critical realist approach, blending induction and deduction (Wiltshire &
222 Ronkainen, 2021). At this stage, the lead author aimed to generate novel codes that describe

223 participants' experiences with teamwork while also being aware of the established model of
224 teamwork and team effectiveness in sport (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014). The goal of the
225 coding stage was to both describe the data through semantic codes while also offering an
226 interpretation of the data by creating latent codes. As a means of organizing the data, the
227 coach transcripts and athlete transcripts were first coded separately. During the coding phase,
228 the original audio files were often revisited to ensure that the codes made sense in relation to
229 the transcript text as well as the context of the interview.

230 Subsequently, to begin *searching for themes*, similar codes were grouped together. In
231 line with the critical realist paradigm, the lead author continued to blend inductive and
232 deductive interpretations of the participants' experiences with teamwork while considering how
233 their narratives might challenge, complement, and expand upon the already established
234 teamwork in sport model (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021).
235 Preliminary subthemes were created to capture nuanced descriptions of the various coach-
236 influenced teamwork facilitators. Based on these preliminary subthemes, higher-order themes
237 were later generated to describe the overarching commonalities between the various
238 subthemes. To visually organize the initial findings and further assist with theme development,
239 all preliminary subthemes were written onto cue cards and manually organized under potential
240 higher-order themes. At this stage, it became clear that the coach and athlete themes were
241 overlapping and suggested that the same higher-order themes were appropriate for both the
242 athletes' and coaches' descriptions. Themes that were identified permeated across our
243 heterogenous sample and were relevant despite participants representing a range of
244 demographics, contexts, and experiences. There were 17 preliminary subthemes generated
245 from the athlete files, and 20 preliminary subthemes from the coach files.

246 At the *refinement* stage, given that there was consistent overlap between the athlete
247 and coach (sub)themes, the first author decided to amalgamate the coach and athlete data
248 and present the two perspectives side by side in the results section which has been done
249 similarly in previous qualitative studies in sport (Brown et al., 2018). A thematic map was
250 created to visually present the relationships between the tentative (sub)themes and was

251 consistently updated throughout the refinement and naming phase (see Figure 1). The first
252 author then reviewed the preliminary themes and subthemes to verify that they accurately
253 represented (a) the coded data, (b) the dataset as a whole, (c) the research questions, and (d)
254 the existing teamwork literature. Through member reflections and the critical friend process
255 (see 'Rigor' below), modifications to these (sub)themes were made. At this stage, to reflect our
256 critical realist paradigm, the teamwork framework was also used to aid the thematic analysis
257 process. For example, the team effectiveness framework, as presented by McEwan and
258 Beauchamp (2014), primarily focused on the mediators and outputs portion of the IMO model.
259 To date, the antecedents or inputs side of the model remains underexplored. Therefore, we
260 intended to focus our inquiry to the teamwork facilitators or specific coach behaviors that may
261 promote (or deter) teamwork behaviors

262 Thereafter, during the *naming* phase, short descriptions of each (sub)theme were
263 written to define and distinguish the (sub)themes from one another. In line with reflexive
264 thematic analysis and our critical realist paradigm, below in the presentation of the results (i.e.,
265 *write up*) we chose to show the quotes of the participants to give voice to their experiences as
266 team sport members while offering our interpretation of their experiences alongside our
267 conceptual understanding of teamwork in sport (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014).

268 **Rigor**

269 We integrated different means to bolster the rigor of the data collection, analysis, and
270 presentation of the results (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021; Smith & McGannon, 2018). First,
271 participants were asked at the end of their interviews if they would be willing to be contacted
272 later in the research process to offer insights or commentary on preliminary results (i.e.,
273 *member reflections*; Smith & McGannon, 2018). They were informed that this was completely
274 voluntary and was not a requirement of their participation in the study. Participants that
275 expressed an interest were contacted during the analysis phase (approximately 3-5 months
276 after interviews were conducted) and asked if they would still be interested in offering
277 reflections on the preliminary results. In total, two participants (one coach, one athlete) agreed
278 to offer their feedback. Engaging in member reflections was an opportunity to explore potential

279 similarities or differences in the interpretations of the findings with participants (Smith &
280 McGannon, 2018). An example of feedback that was provided by a participant that is reflected
281 in the final presentation of the results relates to the subtheme *team-first tactics*. The coach
282 participant was able to clarify that teamwork is not only facilitated by encouraging teamwork
283 execution between athletes, but by creating offensive and defensive tactical systems that
284 deliberately rely on and maximize teamwork execution (i.e., coordination, communication, and
285 cooperation). Afterwards, when revisiting the transcripts, other examples of *team-first tactics*
286 were more apparent in other participants' testimonies.

287 To further enhance rigor and trustworthiness, the three co-authors served as *critical*
288 *friends* during the design and analysis (Smith & McGannon, 2018). The goal of engaging with
289 critical friends or "the critical dialogue between people" (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 113) was
290 to encourage reflexivity and to explore multiple interpretations of the data beyond the first
291 author's initial analysis. Specifically, the authors of this study collaborated on designing the
292 interview schedule to ensure it was succinct and direct in its attempt to address the research
293 questions, while allowing participants to provide unique and unanticipated perspectives.
294 Critical friends engaged with the data analysis at the refinement, naming, and write up phase
295 as well. For example, some of the initial themes developed in stages 3 and 4 were deemed by
296 co-authors to represent tautological (or purely deductive) understandings of teamwork
297 (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014; e.g., 'evaluation', 'communication'). Therefore, further revision
298 and more nuanced analysis was required to ensure the findings addressed our a priori goal of
299 understanding *how* teamwork could be facilitated by coaches. Hence, the goal of both the
300 member reflections and critical friends was to challenge the lead author's interpretations and
301 biases towards the data and resultant (sub)themes and to encourage reflexivity (Ronkainen &
302 Wiltshire, 2021; Smith & McGannon, 2018).

303 **Results**

304 This section presents three higher-order themes that describe various ways in which
305 coaches can facilitate teamwork: (1) Crafting a teamwork recipe; (2) Come together, stay
306 together; and (3) Maximizing teamwork in action. Within the three higher-order themes, nine

307 subthemes (see Figure 1) were created and are outlined below. As reflected in Figure 1, the
308 three higher-order themes and their respective subthemes build upon one another.
309 Specifically, theme 1 'Crafting a teamwork recipe' outlines that player selection, lineup
310 combinations, and role delegation provide the necessary pieces to form a solid foundation of
311 teamwork. This provides a basis for theme 2 'Come together, stay together', which represents
312 that once all the necessary pieces are brought together effectively, it is the forging of
313 relationships between team members that provides the next layer of teamwork facilitation.
314 Finally, theme 3 'Maximizing teamwork in action' demonstrates when suitable people are in
315 place and connections have been formed, coaches are then able to effectively implement
316 teamwork behaviors within their training and competition environments. In the following
317 subsections, both athlete and coach quotes are presented to illustrate similarities, nuances,
318 and differences between the two groups for each (sub)theme.

319 *[Insert Figure 1 around here]*

320 **Crafting A Teamwork Recipe**

321 Teamwork was reported to be facilitated by considering how a coach influenced
322 teamwork through the selection and utilization of their athlete personnel (i.e., the "ingredients"
323 of teamwork). Crafting a teamwork recipe involved collecting the necessary ingredients, finding
324 creative ingredient combinations, and, finally, bringing those various ingredients to life through
325 role assignment and role validation.

326 ***Collecting the Teamwork Ingredients***

327 Coaches were often directly responsible for thoughtfully collecting all the necessary
328 "ingredients" before attempting to put the team's "recipe" together. Participants described how
329 looking beyond skill and talent alone was considered when coaches selected or deselected
330 athletes for their teams each season. Athlete Ollie highlighted how the best teams he played
331 on recruited athletes based on their overall resume (i.e., athletics, academics, and character):

332 [Coaches] can't just see this unreal athlete, this great player, and it doesn't matter
333 that they can't pass classes, or they're not a good teammate and stuff. So [recruiting
334 on talent] just becomes more of an issue than it does like, problem solver.

335 Coaches described how one tangible way they could set a foundation for teamwork
336 was by ensuring they selected athletes who understood what it meant to be a 'team player'.
337 Coaches described team players as those who already demonstrated teamwork behaviors
338 as well as, those who accepted getting less playing time, were invested in their teammates'
339 success, and were willing to change positions or roles to benefit the team. Athletes who did
340 not possess these qualities were often described as 'difficult' or 'selfish' and frequently
341 disrupted teamwork. Coach Fiona, described how despite her attempts to develop teamwork
342 behaviors within one of her 'difficult' athletes, her efforts failed and resulted in the athlete's
343 deselection.

344 I had many conversations with this [difficult athlete] because they came to me and I
345 felt that it was only fair to give her a chance, and we did give her a chance.... One of
346 [her teammates] came to my [hotel] room one night, just ready to kill her. So I had to
347 go that route [and cut her from the team]...She's just not a team player. Yeah, 'you
348 should go play tennis'. That's what I told her.

349 For Fiona, her experience with this 'difficult' athlete served as an example of the negative
350 consequences in selecting an athlete purely for their skill can have on the team's teamwork.

351 ***Creative Ingredient Combinations***

352 Once coaches collected all the teamwork ingredients, finding creative combinations of
353 those ingredients (athletes) to play together on match day was the next teamwork facilitation
354 opportunity. In the following quote, Coach Veronica described how she aimed to look beyond
355 putting the five most talented athletes on the floor, and instead took into account how different
356 *combinations* of athletes facilitated teamwork and, therein, high-quality team performance.
357 Coach Veronica, saw it as her role to test and experiment with various combinations
358 throughout the season to craft the most highly effective teamwork lineup.

359 I understand this now more in the context of a coach than I ever have as a player is
360 systems of people, the individuals on the floor, who work well together. I used to think
361 like 'Agh, why doesn't so and so coach throw this person in with the lineup?' But the
362 fact of the matter is, there *really* are just certain groups that are more, like, that are

363 better suited to playing with each other on the court... and maybe you work your whole
364 season to find that perfect balance of who works really great together.

365 ***Bringing the Ingredients to Life***

366 In addition to collecting ingredients (team selection) and finding creative and impactful
367 ways of putting those ingredients together (creating lineups), it was noted that coaches could
368 bring the ingredients to life by ensuring each ingredient (athlete) knew *why* they were a part of
369 the recipe and knew that they were a *valued* part of the overall dish. In particular, it was
370 reported that coaches that celebrated the perceived “minor” (i.e., less glamorous) roles within
371 the team were able to successfully facilitate teamwork. Athlete Elle described how coaches
372 who made all roles clear to their athletes—no matter how big or small those roles appeared to
373 be—enabled those athletes to execute their roles to their full potential:

374 We were always just working as one because we knew that we needed each other.
375 Like all of us, even like bench players. And that was communicated; everyone knew
376 their role completely.... If you know your role, then you can like really step into it and
377 execute it versus being like, what the hell am I doing here?

378 Added to the importance of defining roles, coaches had the potential to facilitate
379 teamwork by genuinely celebrating each role within their team. Coach Rich felt it was his
380 responsibility to ensure each athlete knew that their role was valued regardless of the
381 supposed status of their assigned role. Further to Rich’s point about celebrating each athlete’s
382 role he makes a point to express each athletes’ impact publicly with the larger group:

383 I think I have a huge impact on how our team is going to do by explaining the roles that
384 everybody is going to be successful at. And that they’re going to be celebrated just as
385 much as the guy that gets all the points, even though everybody celebrates him, and
386 he’s the guy that everybody looks at. That’s not what it is in this [locker] room. It’s the
387 guy that got all of those defensive rebounds and whatever.

388 Come Together, Stay Together

389 Once coaches have selected, combined, and celebrated all the ingredients to their
390 teamwork recipe, participants reported how coaches must then continue to build the foundation
391 of teamwork through the formation and maintenance of relationships between all team
392 members. The theme *Come together, stay together* encapsulates how coaches were reported
393 to foster connection between themselves and their athletes, how they could facilitate
394 relationship building between athletes and their teammates, and how mismanaging
395 perceptions of (or actual) favoritism could undermine those same relationships.

396 Cultivating Coach-Athlete Connection

397 Participants reported that coaches who cultivated meaningful coach-athlete
398 connections were more equipped to improve teamwork and task execution. Coach Ted
399 described how he prioritized investing in the relationships with his athletes by learning about
400 their backgrounds and previous experiences as a means of facilitating teamwork:

401 I really tried to be a coach that has a very involved relationship with my athletes....
402 Understand where they've come from, how they've been developed both as athletes
403 and as people. If you have an understanding of where they've come from, it's allowed
404 me to help them get where we want them to be as a team.

405 Similarly, while athletes appreciated coaches who made an effort to connect with them
406 on a "human" level, they also emphasized the maintenance of healthy boundaries. Coaches
407 were able to best promote teamwork by recognizing when there was a need for closeness
408 versus a need for boundaries with their athletes. Athlete Elle described how her head coach
409 navigated this balance effectively by demonstrating both his investment in the athletes, without
410 comprising his role as the primary leader:

411 I don't love it when coaches are, like, trying to be your friend or, like, trying to get
412 involved super personally. I see respect and, like, interest in your life is nice but he
413 was, like, our coach. We all were able to respect him that way and take him seriously in
414 that sense, because it wasn't like a friend.

415 Building upon Ellie's point above, Athlete Zoe highlighted the importance of the
416 assistant coaches in bridging the gap between athletes and the head coach. Zoe highlighted
417 how a head coach was often tasked with taking on a more distant interpersonal role due to the
418 heightened demands placed upon them (e.g., interacting with media, dealing with program
419 directors, general managers, owners, etc.). Further, head coaches are often tasked with
420 making final decisions regarding playing time, starting line ups, and team changes, and
421 therefore it was necessary to not let their close relationships with athletes cloud their objectivity
422 when making these decisions. Zoe highlighted how the assistant coach's role could be more
423 focused on close relationships with individual athletes:

424 My [two assistant coaches] are the people that, like, will check in on us. We can
425 actually express, like, our full-hearted opinions...[with my assistant coach] I've
426 actually talked to him about my fears and issues and stuff like that. I think they're
427 really important because I feel like they give us all, like, peace of mind and confidence
428 more than [head coach].

429 ***Fostering Relationships Between Teammates***

430 Not only were coaches reported to foster teamwork via coach-athlete relationships, but
431 also by encouraging the athletes to invest in relationships with their teammates. One tactic that
432 coaches were said to utilize to promote teammate relationships was prioritizing togetherness.
433 Athlete Max highlighted the importance of having time to socialize with teammates outside of
434 training and competition by saying, "doing something as a group or as a team that isn't just
435 riding a bus or being around the rink or related to hockey... having a different experience with
436 that person, it can go a long way." The athlete participants reported that the benefits of athletes
437 investing in social relationships with one another included gaining a better understanding of
438 one another's backgrounds, tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses which then helped them
439 work more effectively together. Similarly, Coach Rich embedded teammate-to-teammate
440 relationship building directly into his practices. The goal of these exercises was to help his
441 athletes connect on a more authentic human level and to learn about one another.

442 Every single practice, you go with a new guy, you don't go with your buddy to shoot
443 two free throws at a time...and you learn two new things about that person that you
444 didn't know before... I want you to find out something that's meaningful to them about
445 their life... find something that makes them more human to you.

446 Participants highlighted the importance of coaches creating teams that acted as a
447 "safety net" for the athletes. Coach Kurt emphasized being perceptive to his athletes' well-
448 being needs and cultivating a team environment that encouraged team members to support
449 one another with shared stressors:

450 I can say, 'I notice you're quite anxious around this area, have you thought that maybe
451 some of the other guys on the team are also anxious?' ... 'You think you're the only
452 person on earth that struggles with depression, struggles with anxiety, struggles with
453 lack of creativity, struggles with time management, well you're not'...Being a part of
454 something larger than one's own self creates an area of safety. It's a safety net.

455 Coach George echoed Kurt's comment when he stated his team had a saying "*take care of*
456 *the ball, take care of each other*" that applied to creating an environment where athletes felt
457 supported both on and off the court.

458 ***Managing (Perceived) Favoritism***

459 Many athlete participants outlined how perception of favoritism caused resentments
460 between athletes and their coaches, as well as resentments between teammates which
461 undermined teamwork. Athlete Elle highlighted how some coaches failed to limit actual or even
462 perceived favoritism and how that created divisions between teammates:

463 He would play most of the time, like, his favorites... even if you were struggling, like,
464 he would keep them on... so then that creates, like, a little division almost... creates
465 talk and it creates people being frustrated and then people not being happy.

466 Interestingly, favoritism was the only theme that overwhelming was identified by the
467 athlete participants and not by the coaches. For the most part athletes described an awareness
468 of who they felt their coaches favored and special treatment was given, whereas only one
469 coach identified favoritism in relation to teamwork. Specifically, Coach Fiona explained how

470 she actively sought to manage her behavior and language so as to minimize perceptions of
471 favoritism within her squad.

472 What I ended up doing was I did not give special treatment to the [certain athletes]
473 ever. What I did though, was I reinforced how important it is that we are team. I really
474 reinforced the team dynamic, we're not individuals. We're not all individuals in the team,
475 we're the team of individuals kind of thing.

476 **Maximizing Teamwork in Action**

477 The final theme *Maximizing teamwork in action* corresponds to how coaches were most
478 effective at facilitating teamwork execution (i.e., teamwork during the competitions/gameplay
479 specifically) when they focused their efforts on crafting team-focused tactical strategies,
480 empowering athlete leadership during gameplay, and maintaining healthy internal competition.

481 ***Team-First Tactics***

482 This subtheme represents participants' descriptions of how coaches tactically designed
483 and implemented offensive and defensive systems that demanded and encouraged teamwork
484 during gameplay. Most participants expressed that an *unselfish* approach, or a *team-first* style
485 of play, was most conducive to effective teamwork execution. Coaches saw their role in
486 facilitating a team-first style of play by teaching tactical systems that relied on several athletes
487 sharing responsibilities. Athlete Ollie emphasized how his coaches encouraged playing
488 unselfishly and playing within a tactical system that encouraged 'sharing the ball'. He said,
489 "when the guys on the team share the ball and it's just, like, find the **great shot** instead of just
490 taking the good shot. Oh yeah, like, I think that's what we were doing well." By being
491 encouraged to find the great shot, Ollie and his teammates were taught to look beyond
492 considering their personal opportunity to score and instead opt to set up the most ideal scoring
493 chance on the floor for a teammate.

494 Unselfish play in team sport was reported by participants as not merely a strategy in
495 fostering social harmony while competing but as a strategic performance-enhancing tactic.
496 Coach Ashley highlighted how a team-first style of play on her team revolved around systems
497 and tactics that were not dependent on one star athlete. She explained how having a more

498 balanced offensive system that shared the responsibility between teammates was most
499 effective in facilitating teamwork. She stated: “the girls were not relying on [our star player] so
500 much... you can try to stop [our star player], but we still have four other players that are good.”
501 This institution of team-first tactics fostered teamwork and, in turn, overall team performance
502 by promoting shared responsibility, relieving an overloaded star player, staying unpredictable
503 to opponents, and enabling all individuals to contribute their unique skills and abilities.

504 ***Empowering Athlete-Led Teamwork***

505 Participants reported that coaches were best able to initiate and maintain effective
506 teamwork during gameplay when they empowered their athletes to lead the charge.
507 Participants highlighted teamwork as being facilitated when coaches relinquished total control
508 and, instead, encouraged athletes to contribute to the team’s goal setting process, make their
509 own adjustments during competition, evaluate their own performance, and even design and
510 execute their own plays during matches. When it came to setting goals, a coach’s role was
511 most impactful when their athletes were given a sense of autonomy over their goals, as
512 opposed to coaches autocratically prescribing team goals. Ollie explained how his role as
513 captain involved preparing his teammates for matches by setting goals and action plans on
514 match days:

515 I [as team captain] was in charge of pre-game and talked to the guys, but I was also in
516 charge of, like, what our game keys were going to be. It wasn't that I was reiterating
517 what the coaches gave to me with [the team], so [the game keys] were different than
518 what our coach’s [keys to the game] usually would be.

519 Coach Kurt highlighted how learning to relinquish control was at first challenging but
520 the more he found himself empowering his athletes to rely less on coach direction from the
521 side-line during gameplay, and instead autonomously engage with one another creatively, the
522 more teamwork improved. One tool Coach Kurt utilized in facilitating athlete-led teamwork
523 was what he called *shared language*, which was created by his rugby athletes:

524 As a coach, we've all got many insecurities and letting go of control is so hard for myself,
525 but also incredibly liberating.... As an example I'll see a really great line run off of a
526 second or third phase. And I'll hear a series of words around it that I've never heard
527 from them. I've never once heard these words. I'm like, "What the hell is that?" [The
528 athletes] understand what one another wants; they have their own shared language.
529 Let's see what you can do with this. I get to sit back, and I get to watch a bunch of
530 creators.

531 ***Breeding Healthy Internal Competition***

532 Participants identified that coaches who were able to breed a healthy internal
533 competition within their squads promoted high-level teamwork. Athlete Max emphasized the
534 importance of internal competition in facilitating better teamwork and, in turn, team
535 performance:

536 We could just be blunt with one another, cut right to the chase, sometimes it was pretty
537 harsh... I think that inner competitiveness to be the best and push each other. On the
538 ice, I think that that's a big thing in attaining your goals, is having that kind of internal
539 competition amongst your teammates, amongst one another, to push each other.

540 However, coaches highlighted the importance of managing internal competition so that
541 it did not breed unhealthy resentments between teammates. Participants pointed out that
542 athletes pushing each other during training specifically was key as it helped players improve;
543 however, come game day it was inevitable that some athletes would be taking a more minor
544 role (i.e., playing limited minutes) but still be expected to support their teammates who may be
545 playing over them. Coach Veronica detailed how she aimed to manage internal competition in
546 a way that bred healthy dynamics and prevented complacency among the athletes:

547 Some of the best teams that I've witnessed, what they've employed that really seemed
548 to work, is having like a clean slate every week. So, if practices start on Monday and
549 the next game is on Friday, it's really all up in the air with who could earn those starting
550 spots by the end of the week.... I think if you start to become predictable as a coach
551 then that's gonna degrade the level of competition in practice over time because... if

552 you keep always coming back to the same people and having those people being your
553 fall-back people, the other members of your team are going to get used to it.

554 To further Veronica's point, Coach Ted highlighted the importance of ensuring athletes
555 know how they can improve their playing time or position within the team. As a coach, Ted felt
556 it was his responsibility to make his athletes aware of the expectations that he had for how
557 they behaved while on the bench. Despite the competition between teammates, Coach Ted
558 expected his athletes to encourage one another during matches.

559 They've got to have a respect for the process. If they've fallen out of favor, it's not
560 forever and these are the things they need to do to fall back into favor.... You gotta tell
561 the guy on the bench "you gotta be a positive upbeat because when you get your
562 moment you want other people to be that way for you." That's what being part of a team
563 is about... this isn't tennis, this isn't an individual sport; it's a team sport and you have
564 to be a good teammate.

565 **Discussion**

566 In this study, we sought to explore what sport coaches can do to develop teamwork
567 within their teams. Through the analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews, three higher-order
568 themes (*Crafting a teamwork recipe; Come together, stay together; and Maximizing teamwork*
569 *in action*) comprising nine subthemes were identified. Utilizing an abductive analysis approach
570 rooted in a critical realist paradigm, participant insights were analyzed whilst considering the
571 existing framework of teamwork and team effectiveness in sport (McEwan & Beauchamp,
572 2014). As highlighted in Figure 1, the themes were interconnected, with each higher-order
573 theme and subsequent subthemes building upon one another. For example, relationship
574 building (i.e., theme 2) was not possible without carefully selecting the ideal composition of
575 players (i.e., theme 1); and those strong relationships and ideal personnel were necessary for
576 high-level task execution (i.e., theme 3) to then flourish.

577 Previous research has identified coach leadership as a predictor of other group
578 dynamic constructs such as task and social cohesion (Fransen et al., 2016). Despite the

579 importance of group cohesion as a central concept for evaluating team sport dynamics (Eys &
580 Evan, 2018), in this study we hope to contribute to the group dynamics literature by focusing
581 on teamwork processes. Although researchers have hinted at leadership as a potential input
582 within the IMO model that fosters teamwork (i.e., mediator) (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014),
583 little detail has been offered about *how* sport coaches might promote (or undermine) teamwork
584 behaviors within their teams. Hence, the study findings contribute to knowledge on teamwork
585 in sport by providing in-depth insights into the potential ways in which coaches (i.e., inputs)
586 can facilitate teamwork behaviors (i.e., mediators). Past research identified some of the
587 subthemes outlined in the results as adaptive coaching behaviours (Hampson & Jowett, 2014;
588 Kim & Cruz, 2016); our study complements and extends that work by connecting those
589 coaching behaviors to the proposed antecedents of teamwork behaviors (e.g., role
590 commitment, coach-athlete relationships, autonomy-supportive coaching practices).

591 Coaches in this study were identified as having a seminal role in facilitating teamwork
592 within their teams, which aligns with previous research regarding the relationship between
593 coach leadership and teamwork (Fransen et al., 2020). It is well established that the
594 relationship between coach leadership and coach-athlete relationships impacts other
595 emergent states such as collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014) and team cohesion
596 (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004). However, less research has investigated the relationship between
597 coach leadership and teamwork. One study that has examined this link showed that *identity*
598 *leadership*—that is, leadership that encourages a strong identification with one’s team as
599 opposed to identification with oneself—was a significant predictor of team functioning,
600 including teamwork execution (Fransen et al., 2020). Previous qualitative research has also
601 identified the role of ineffective coach leadership—including suboptimal communication, self-
602 regulation (e.g., responses to athlete performance), and emotional regulation—as a potential
603 antecedent to teamwork breakdowns during gameplay (McEwan & Crawford, 2022). The
604 findings in the present study, therefore, provide new insights that extend that previous work by
605 highlighting *how* teamwork might be cultivated within sport teams via coach influence. Four
606 novel insights for coach-promoted teamwork are outlined below.

607 The first novel contribution we identified was how coaches prioritized teamwork when
608 selecting athletes, creating lineups, and establishing roles. To date, research on team selection
609 processes has largely focused on how teams can create selection criteria to identify skill and
610 physical fitness; non-technical skills including teamwork are sometimes regarded as secondary
611 criteria markers or not considered altogether (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012; Dadelo et al., 2014).
612 The teamwork focused criteria coaches used to select athletes to join their teams was seen to
613 provide the foundation for effective teamwork. In particular, teamwork was seen to be
614 facilitated by selecting athletes whose individual values and aptitudes aligned with the team's
615 values (e.g., including athletes who are supportive and helpful teammates). In addition,
616 selecting athletes who were prepared and able to play and behave "unselfishly" were evidently
617 more likely to aid a coach's efforts in promoting teamwork. Coaches found selecting players
618 who were more interested in their own personal success, were more often resistant to
619 executing teamwork behaviors despite possessing a high level of skill or talent. Teamwork was
620 deemed easier to facilitate when coaches selected players who demonstrated team-first
621 behaviors such as sacrificing their own playing time, switching to a different position, and
622 helping teammates improve.

623 Although previous research has also highlighted the importance of establishing role
624 clarity and role commitment in sport contexts (Eys et al., 2020), little is known about how role
625 perceptions relate to teamwork behaviors. The findings of this study highlighted a coaches'
626 role in promoting *role commitment*—defined by Eys et al. (2020) as "a dynamic and volitional
627 psychological bond reflected in the dedication to and responsibility for one's role" (p. 91)—and
628 its capacity to inspire exceptional teamwork. Therefore, as a second major contribution of this
629 study, the findings provide initial evidence that coaches could facilitate teamwork by not only
630 explicating what each individual athlete's role entails, but by ensuring that each team member
631 understands how their role fits within the team's goals and purposes (i.e., role clarity).
632 Furthermore, coaches can foster role commitment by publicly celebrating all team members'
633 roles, particularly those that may be considered "lower" in status to the average spectator, as
634 a means of promoting teamwork. Another way in which coaches encouraged teamwork

635 between athletes was by not only valuing all team members' roles verbally, but by crafting
636 tactical systems which relied on all team member roles regardless of how significant they are
637 perceived to be. Doing so can encourage unselfish play and allow teams to implement tactical
638 systems that do not rely on one star player. Such strategies seem not only conducive to social
639 harmony within the team but may also help facilitate better team performance.

640 As a third contribution, our results highlighted the importance of relationship building
641 between coaches and their athletes as well as amongst teammates as a means of ensuring
642 that a strong foundation within the team was set—this could then give way to effective
643 teamwork. The importance of strong coach-athlete relationships has been widely analyzed in
644 sport psychology literature (Hampson & Jowett, 2014; Jowett 2017); however, our findings
645 highlight the connection between coach-athlete relationships and teamwork behaviors. Based
646 on the experiences of participants in our study, quality coach-athlete relationships were vital
647 to facilitating teamwork because it provided opportunities for coaches to learn about their
648 athletes' backgrounds and histories—in doing so, coaches were able to utilize this familiarity
649 when making decisions. For example, knowing athletes' backgrounds might help a coach
650 develop lineups as they hope to compliment one athlete's skills with another's, or if they are
651 looking to build a lineup with a balance of personalities. Striking an appropriate balance
652 between leader and friend as a coach helped promote effective relationships necessary for
653 fostering teamwork.

654 With respect to relationships between teammates, our finding that teambuilding
655 focused on *social* relationships might foster effective teamwork complements previous
656 qualitative (McEwan & Crawford, 2022) and quantitative (McEwan, 2020) research that has
657 identified an association between teamwork and social cohesion. Moreover, coaches were
658 reported to foster relationships amongst athletes by creating an environment underpinned by
659 psychological safety—that is, the extent to which team members feel comfortable expressing
660 thoughts and feelings within a group (Vella et al., 2022). Although the relationship between
661 psychological safety and teamwork in sport has been highlighted in previous work (Fransen et
662 al., 2020), our study extends knowledge on this relationship insofar as it was suggested to

663 impact how athletes communicated with coaches (assistant coaches in particular) as well as
664 how athletes supported one another. Specifically, a psychologically safe team environment
665 may be a foundation upon which practices such as communal coping—that is, managing
666 shared stressors as a collective (Leprince et al., 2018)—could be developed within a team.
667 Although the relationship between teamwork and communal coping has been proposed (see
668 McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014), our findings offer qualitative evidence for this association.
669 Future research (e.g., quantitative analyses) could further examine this potential relationship.

670 A final contribution of this research involved how coaches could best optimize
671 teamwork by ensuring that they were maximizing their teams' capacity for regulation of team
672 performance (RTP) (e.g., preparation, execution, evaluation, adjustments; McEwan &
673 Beauchamp, 2014). Specifically, both coaches and athletes suggested that teamwork
674 flourished when coaches empowered their athletes to initiate and take ownership of team
675 processes, as opposed to coaches relying to authoritative and controlling tactics. Autonomy-
676 supportive coaching practices have received considerable attention in the sport literature in
677 relation to athlete motivation (Reynders et al., 2019), performance (Mallett, 2005), and well-
678 being (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013). In this study, teamwork was reported to flourish when
679 coaches encouraged athletes to take ownership in promoting their team's functioning by
680 providing feedback to coaches, setting goals, and creating shared language. This
681 complements Fransen et al.'s (2020) findings which emphasized the importance of promoting
682 *shared* leadership as a means of fostering team functioning and also extends that work by
683 highlighting that teamwork flourished when coaches took on a more facilitative (or "overseer")
684 role. Further, coaches were noted to promote teamwork particularly within the training
685 environment by breeding healthy internal competition between athletes. Research on internal
686 competition between teammates has highlighted its connection to various individual- and
687 team-level outcomes including individual and team performance (Harenberg, et al., 2016a) as
688 well as conflict and social cohesion (Harenberg et al., 2016b). Our findings add to that work
689 and further support the notion that there may be potential benefits of healthy internal
690 competition—specifically, it may foster teamwork, by providing opportunities for teammates to

691 engage in intrateam coaching and learn from each other as a result. Although further work is
692 necessary to identify the nuances between teamwork and healthy competition, we reiterate
693 the findings by Harenberg et al. (2016a) who reported that coaches can manage internal
694 competition by providing all athletes with opportunities in training to exhibit their performance
695 to coaches prior to competition selection, communicating player selection, lineup
696 combinations, and playing time decisions directly to athletes, and by providing athletes with
697 feedback on how they can progress their position within the team (Harenberg et al., 2016b).

698 **Limitations, Implications, and Future Research Directions**

699 Although this study makes several novel contributions to the teamwork in sport
700 literature, some limitations should be noted. First, at the time of the interviews, several of the
701 participants had not trained or competed in their sports for several months due to the COVID-
702 19 pandemic. Much of the experiences that the participants shared were recalled
703 retrospectively and may have impacted the participants' capacity to remember details and
704 examples to the questions we posed (cf. Dex, 1995). A second limitation is that this study only
705 made use of one semi-structured interview with each participant. Teamwork has been
706 conceptualized as a dynamic process that evolves over episodic and developmental processes
707 (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014). We recognize that interviewing participants at only one time
708 point merely provides a singular snapshot of teamwork and does not capture the ebbs and flow
709 of a competitive season. As a dynamic process, future research exploring teamwork in sport
710 could utilize multiple interviews as a means of capturing both the episodic and developmental
711 trends in teamwork (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014).

712 Finally, the sample of this study was diverse in terms of gender, sport, and competition
713 levels represented. Having a heterogenous sample was purposeful—namely, given the limited
714 previous literature on the topic, we sought to obtain initial insight into how coaches facilitate
715 teamwork by considering a range of perspectives (rather than delimiting the sample to certain
716 competition levels, sports, or genders). That said, future qualitative research could consider
717 sampling more homogenous samples (e.g., one sport at one level of competition) to uncover
718 how teamwork may operate among participants with similar backgrounds and/or experiences.

719 Future research could also benefit from exploring teamwork facilitation within a single context
720 (i.e., within one particular team)—as opposed to sampling across multiple contexts—as this
721 would also allow researchers to target extreme cases of either highly effective or ineffective
722 teamwork (e.g., specific situations over the course of a season where teamwork flourished and
723 others where it lagged). Finally, future quantitative research could consider whether certain
724 variables (e.g., demographic variables, team size) act as moderators to the relationships
725 between coach leadership and teamwork.

726 Another limitation of the current research included the absence of investigating
727 established coach-athlete dyads. With our current study design, only one perspective within a
728 single coach-athlete dyad was represented (i.e., we did not purposely sample a coach and an
729 athlete from the same team) and, therefore, the interplay between a single coach-athlete
730 relationship was not presented. Exploring coach-athlete dyads could uncover how coach and
731 athlete perceptions of teamwork facilitation may align or differ within the same team. Other
732 research designs could also offer greater insight into how teamwork might be facilitated over
733 time. For example, ethnographic studies have been used to capture trends and patterns of
734 other group dynamics concepts, such as team cohesion and team resilience (Holt & Sparkes,
735 2001; Morgan et al., 2019). Such an approach might, therefore, be useful for studying in-depth
736 the temporal dynamics of enablers and barriers of effective teamwork within a team (e.g., how
737 coaches can develop it over a season, why it might break down at certain points). Utilizing
738 ethnographic or case study designs could showcase alignment and differences between coach
739 and athlete perceptions in terms of how teamwork is best facilitated. In addition, ethnographic
740 designs could simultaneously capture the developmental and episodic trends of teamwork by
741 studying a single team for an entire season.

742 The findings of this study add to the ever-growing research on teamwork in sport and
743 present several implications to the applied field. As this study is the first, to our knowledge, to
744 focus specifically on how team sport coaches can facilitate teamwork, it offers several key
745 insights for sport coaches at various levels of competition (e.g., youth, university, professional)
746 in relation to team selection, relationship building, psychological safety, and autonomy-focused

747 coaching strategies (e.g., collaborative performance evaluations). Previous research in the
748 applied sport psychology field has identified the important role applied practitioners can fill
749 when supporting coaches with the development of their training environment coaches (Kelly et
750 al., 2018). This study, however, is the first to provide practical insights for sport psychology
751 consultants and other applied practitioners who support sport coaches with fostering *teamwork*
752 within their training environments. For example, when considering perceptions of favoritism, a
753 sport psychologist might be able to provide a more objective third-party perspective on how a
754 coach's behaviors may be perceived (i.e., favoritism) despite their best intentions (e.g.,
755 spending extra time on skills with one athlete consistently). Similarly, an applied practitioner
756 might be able to assist a coach with team selection as their initial perspective might be geared
757 less towards sport-specific skills or talents (as a coach's perspective might) and more towards
758 teamwork behaviors and other 'team-player' qualities. In addition, sport psychologists might
759 integrate the key findings of this study (e.g., creating a "shared language" amongst players)
760 into teamwork training sessions that may be beneficial for a team.

761 Longitudinal and/or experimental work is also needed to test the various teamwork
762 facilitation strategies (e.g., team selection strategies, autonomy-focused coaching practices,
763 instituting psychological safety) highlighted in this study, including the extent to which
764 teamwork strategies impact teamwork and emergent states (e.g., team cohesion), as well as
765 salient outcomes (e.g., team performance, member satisfaction). Additionally, reimagining how
766 established teamwork training strategies (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2020) and the identified
767 coach-led teamwork facilitation strategies may be integrated together to bolster teamwork
768 improvement efforts could be explored. In addition, further qualitative inquiry is needed to
769 continue to build our understanding of the complexity and dynamic nature of teamwork in sport.
770 For example, case study (Pineau et al., 2019) and ethnographic inquiry (Passaportis et al.,
771 2022) would provide even greater depth and nuance to how coaches successfully implement
772 and perhaps undermine their attempted teamwork facilitation.

773 **Conclusion**

774 In summary, the present study enhances our understanding of how coaches can
775 promote teamwork within their teams. The findings of this study suggest that coaches could
776 potentially enhance team effectiveness by paying attention to team selection and development
777 practices, prioritizing relationships within the team, and emphasizing teamwork behaviors
778 within team tactics and team execution decision-making. This work provides insights for
779 researchers looking to investigate teamwork further, as well as to those in the applied field
780 (e.g., coaches, sport managers, sport psychologists) on the tangible ways in which they could
781 help their teams function to their peak potential.

782

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Table 1*Participant Characteristics and Demographic Information (n= 15)*

Participant	Role	Sport	Competitive level
Ashley	Assistant Coach	Women's volleyball	University
Fiona	Head Coach	Women's curling	Professional
George	Head Coach	Women's volleyball	University
Kurt	Head Coach	Men's rugby	University
Rich	Head Coach	Men's basketball	Youth
Ted	Head Coach	Men's ice hockey	Professional
Veronica	Assistant Coach	Women's basketball	Youth
Becki	Athlete	Women's field hockey	University
Elle	Athlete	Women's volleyball	University
Hannah	Athlete	Women's curling	Professional
Jack	Athlete	Men's ice hockey	Professional
Max	Athlete	Men's ice hockey	Professional
Ollie	Athlete	Men's basketball	University
Tara	Athlete	Women's rugby	Professional
Zoe	Athlete	Women's volleyball	University

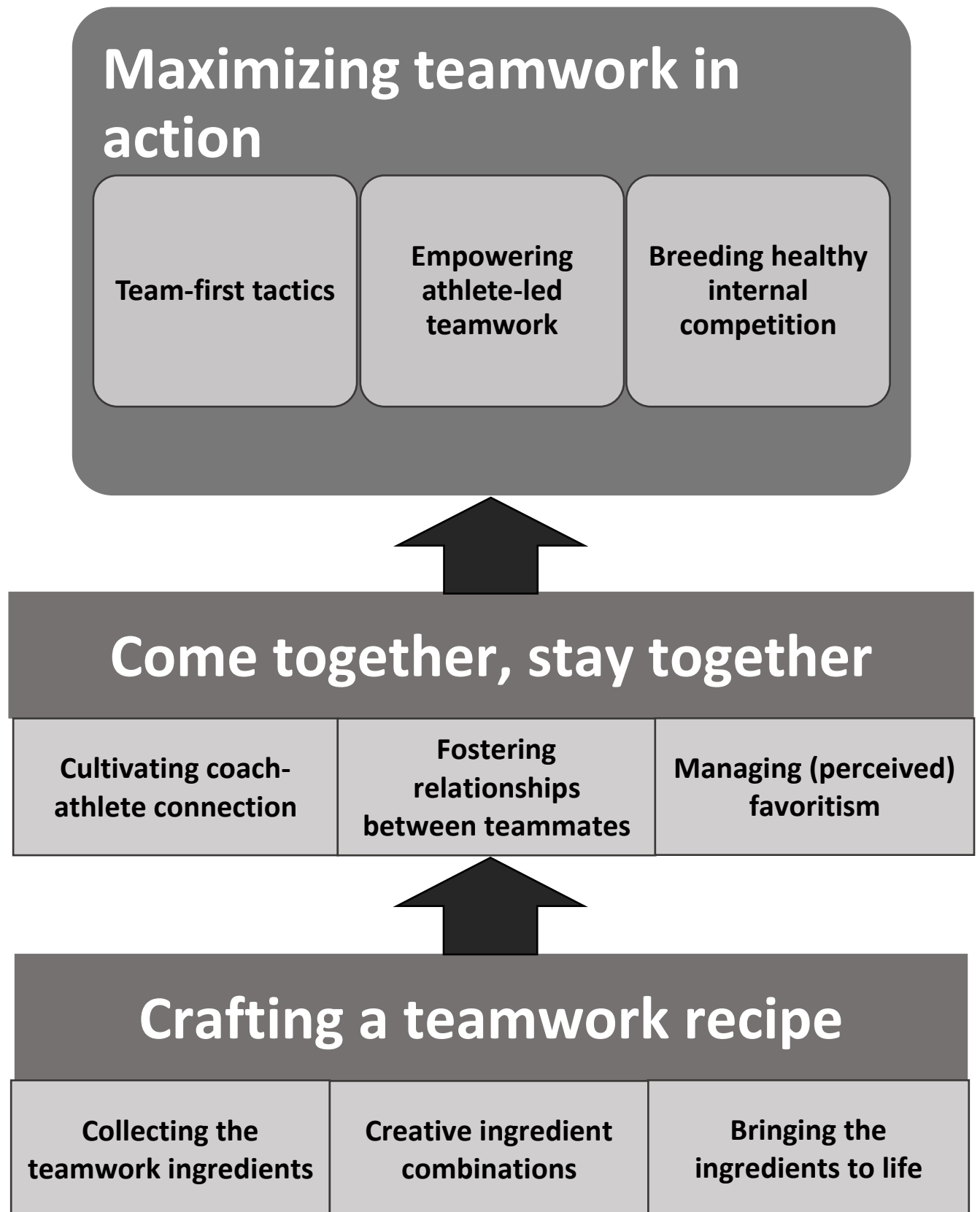
Table 2*Participant Demographic Information (n= 15)*

Participant	Age (in years)	Months with current team
Ashley	37	36
Fiona	60	16
George	59	276
Kurt	39	96
Rich	60	234
Ted	60	24
Veronica	27	24
Becki	21	36
Elle	22	36
Hannah	30	16
Jack	33	72
Max	36	192
Ollie	23	48
Tara	30	72
Zoe	22	36

Table 3*Participant Demographic Information Continued (n=8 athletes, n=7 coaches)*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Athlete age	27.1	6.5	21-36
Athlete time with current team	8.4	7.9	1.3-2.3
Coach age	48.9	14.1	27-60
Coach time with current team	7.35	5.2	1.3-1.6

Figure 1
Teamwork Facilitators Map



Supplementary Materials: Interview Schedules

Introduction

[Interviewer introduction, reminder of participant's right to withdraw and confidentiality, and general overview of discussion.]

To ensure we are on the same page I am now going to provide you with a definition of teamwork. Teamwork is a dynamic process involving a collaborative effort by team members to effectively carry out the independent and interdependent behaviours that are required to maximize a team's likelihood of achieving its purposes. Teamwork focuses on observable behaviours of team members and is simply *what teams "do"*.

Athlete Interview Schedule:

Q	Interview Question
1.	Firstly, could you tell me a little about how the team you are currently playing? (Overview of the team's dynamics.)
2.	Can you describe a time you felt your current team was working together exceptionally well?
3.	How did you know you were working well with your teammates? What sorts of behaviors did you observe from your teammates and what was the feeling on the ice/court/field? How long did this period of exceptional teamwork last?
4.	Can you recall what preceded OR what was happening within your team right before this time when your team was working so well together?
5.	What techniques did your team utilize to maintain/extend this period of exceptional teamwork?
6.	What sort of outcome/consequences unfolded on account of your team working well together?
7.	To contrast my previous question, could you tell me about a time when your current team was not working well together?
8.	Can you recall what precipitated this particular lapse of teamwork on your team?
9.	What sort of outcome/consequences unfolded on account of your team struggling to work together?
10.	What strategies did your team use to address the lapse?
11.	What was the feeling within the group when you were in this phase of low-quality teamwork?
12.	How does your team try to facilitate teamwork pre/post-competition?
13.	To what extent do you believe both individual athletes or teams can learn teamwork or be coached to work together?

14.	What do you look for in a “good teammate”? What observable behaviors would you point out?
15.	Can you please describe a time when your coach had a positive impact on your team’s capacity to work well together?
16.	Can you please describe a time when your coach had a negative impact on your team’s capacity to work well together?
17.	How might the role the of an assistant coaches, video coaches, S&C coaches, differ from the role of head coach with respect to inspiring high-level teamwork?

Coach Interview Schedule:

Q	Interview Question
1.	Firstly, could you tell me a little about how the team you are currently coaching?
2.	Can you describe a time you felt your current team was working together exceptionally well?
3.	How did you know you were working well? What sorts of behaviors did you observe from your athletes and other team members (i.e., other coaches)? How long did this period of exceptional teamwork last?
4.	Can you recall what preceded OR what was happening within your team right before this time when your team was working so well together?
5.	What techniques did your team utilize to maintain/extend this period of exceptional teamwork?
6.	What sort of outcome/consequences unfolded on account of your team working well together?
7.	To contrast my previous question, could you tell me about a time when your current team was not working well together?
8.	Can you recall what precipitated this particular lapse of teamwork on your team?
9.	What sort of outcome/consequences unfolded on account of your team struggling to work together?
10.	What strategies did your team use to address the lapse?
11.	What was the feeling within the group when you were in this phase of low-quality teamwork?
12.	How does your team try to facilitate teamwork pre/post-competition?
13.	The next question, might be an abstract one, but I am really curious as to what extent you believe you can coach teamwork?
14.	How do you know if an athlete is a good teammate or an athlete who works well with others? What observable behaviors would you point out?

15.	Can you please describe a time when you felt you (as a coach) had a positive impact on your team's capacity to work well together?
16.	Can you please describe a time when you had a negative or unhelpful impact on your team's capacity to work well together?