

The Psychology of Ongoing Excellence: An NCAA Coach’s Perspective on Winning Consecutive Multiple National Championships

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Although coaches often talk about the importance of building a championship team, very few studies have addressed the mindset and psychosocial dynamics of teams winning multiple championships in a row. The purpose of this reflective report is to explore from a psychology of coaching perspective, factors perceived to be most paramount in building and sustaining a repeatable championship team culture over time. During the 2007–2010 seasons, a Division One NCAA university volleyball team won four successive national championships in a row. The lead author interviewed the head coach to ascertain his thoughts and reflections on foundational beliefs and coaching philosophy, program development and team norms, group dynamics and synergistic team functioning, and factors that influence the sustainability of excellence from year to year. Results from the structured interview were very enlightening, revealing insights into the importance of recruiting athletes that are the right fit, having a game plan to develop continuity and consistency from year to year, coaching for accountability and self-responsibility, reflections on true leadership and the essence of selfless service, mental skills training and the psychology of coaching, and getting athletes to buy into the program and perform with pride, collective confidence, and resiliency under pressure.

KEYWORDS *championship team building, coaching for accountability, concentration, leadership, psychology of coaching, team mental toughness, team synergy*

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Eighteen years ago, I (the first author) participated in a symposium at the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) Annual Conference entitled “Winning after Winning” and presented a paper that investigated the psychological demands and strategies used by championship Division One National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletes and coaches in their quest to repeat as national champions and stay on top (Yukelson, 1995). Consistent with earlier seminal research by Kreiner-Phillips and Orlick (1993), each coach and athlete interviewed mentioned a strong belief and expectation they would be successful in their quest to repeat as national champions. None of the champions interviewed felt negative pressure to repeat, rather, their focus and mindset was on pursuing a national championship as opposed to having to defend it. Success was attributed to a number of factors including the athlete’s self-belief, their ongoing commitment and daily dedication at practice to improving and working on their season goals, and the implementation and systematic use performance goals to sustain a championship focus over time (Yukelson, 1995). These findings were consistent with a seminal studies investigating psychological characteristics of Olympic athletes (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffitt, 2002; Orlick & Partington, 1988) who found those Olympians that did well at the Olympics were committed to their overall pursuit of excellence, set goals for practice and worked hard to achieve them, had good focusing skills for competition including mental plans for dealing with distractions. Gould et al. (2002) extended these findings and identified other psychological qualities that helped Olympians cope effectively with pressure including dispositional hope, optimism, adaptive perfectionism, coachability, and mental toughness.

Interested in the psychology of ongoing excellence, Kreiner-Phillips and Orlick (1993) interviewed world champion athletes who reached the pinnacle of their sport to see how they coped with perceived expectations, demands, and pressures while striving to repeat as champions. They conducted in-depth interviews with 17 world champions comparing experiences of those athletes who repeated as champions with those that did not. Repeat champions were found to have more belief in their ability to win again, remained positive and worked hard at achieving their goals, and were able to maintain their best performance focus consistently in subsequent competitions. In contrast, those that failed to repeat as champions felt an excessive amount of pressure to have to win, were focused more on outcome as opposed to process goals, got caught up in distractions, and did not have a consistent performance focus from competition to completion.

Winning two successive national championships in any sport is an incredible achievement but winning four consecutive national championships in a row (i.e., four-peat) in collegiate volleyball is unprecedented and something special. That is exactly what the Women’s Volleyball Team at Penn State University accomplished between the years of 2007 and 2010. Interested in learning from a coach’s perspective the psychological dynamics of winning

consecutive multiple national championships on team culture, I interviewed head coach Russ Rose to explore his thoughts and reflections on program development and factors that go into building and sustaining a championship culture of excellence in teams over time. Through 2013, Coach Rose has been the Head Volleyball Coach at Penn State for 35 years. During that time, his coaching record is 1,125 matches won, 177 matches lost; a phenomenal winning percentage of 86% which currently ranks first in NCAA history. During his tenure at Penn State, his volleyball teams have won six NCAA Championships, 16 Big Ten Conference Championships, and during the four-peat, set an NCAA record for team sports by winning 109 consecutive matches in a row. Individually, Coach Rose is a five-time recipient of the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) National Coach of the Year Award, has been named Big Ten Coach of the Year 14 times, and is an inductee in the AVCA Hall of Fame. Based on the aforementioned biographical sketch, Coach Rose is an ideal person to address the research questions of interest in this investigation. Questions in the structured interview centered on his thoughts about his coaching philosophy and coaching expectations, factors influencing program development and sustainability over time, communication and coaching for accountability, and issues revolving around group dynamics, team synergy, collective confidence, and team mental toughness. In the narrative that follows, quotes from the interview will be used to illustrate key points.

COACHING PHILOSOPHY AND BUILDING A CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM

My first set of questions with Coach Rose centered on coaching philosophy and factors he perceives to be important in building high performance championship teams. In general, a coaching philosophy is a set of personal beliefs and principles that guides what a coach is trying to achieve with their athletes (Martens, 2004; Vealey, 2005; Vernacchia, Maguire, & Cook, 1995), and typically consists of two major components; ones coaching objectives (e.g., the goals, vision, operating procedures, and norms that govern one's program) and one's coaching or leadership style (e.g., the interpersonal methods and approach a coach uses while communicating and interacting with athletes). The first thing Coach Rose talked about was the importance of recruiting athletes that are the right fit with his program, noting:

if a coach can attract the type of athlete(s) that can compete and play at a high level consistently, then that program will be on the right path for success. Personally, I do not believe everything revolves around recruiting because there is a lot to be said for player management and managed preparation. But certainly if you want to reach the top tier of competitive

success, you have to attract top players, and perhaps more importantly, get them to play well together as a cohesive team.

Getting talented, sometimes entitled, athletic high school stars committed and dedicated to the team concept is not an easy process. The transition from high school to college can be difficult, particularly when elite young athletes are asked to adjust to new roles while fitting in with a new team. According to Coach Rose, the key is recruiting student-athletes who have the desire and mindset of wanting to be good, as opposed to choosing an institution because the reputation of the program is good, or individually, they have been socialized and reinforced to believe they are the best without having to work at developing their game. I then asked Coach Rose about the expectations he has for college athletes:

Every team I have coached is different but my expectations never change: I expect my players to work hard, play together as a team, and have fun. I cannot control the third component (having fun) but I can certainly control the working hard component and decisions concerning who plays on the court together at any given point in time. Even though pre-season is hard, practices are hard, competition is hard, and I am hard, the reality of the situation is players have to have a great work ethic in order to succeed, and I expect them to bring consistent energy, effort, and spirit every day to practice.

Accountability, attention to detail, and quality practices are important to Coach Rose and a big part of his coaching objectives and coaching philosophy. Adhering to the mantra “today’s preparation leads to tomorrow’s performance,” Coach Rose firmly believes championships are built at practice and implores his athletes to come to practice each day ready, committed, and fully focused. Every practice has a goal and every drill has a specific purpose. If a particular drill in that day’s practice plan is unsuccessful or not acceptable to the standard of efficiency that the coach expects, the drill is repeated until the desired result is achieved:

At practice, I create drills that are both physically and emotionally challenging, drills that require teamwork and collective effort. I want to place my players in demanding competitive situations and see how they respond physically and mentally. As a coach, I assess what I see; how hard they work, how well they respond and the adjustments they make during highly competitive drills, their communication, body language, interactions and reactions to the challenges of strenuous physical activity. Personally, athletes should want to get after it at practice, not because they feel they have to prove something to me, but because they want to!

In terms of his own coaching style, Coach Rose believes in being open, honest, direct, and forthright, always holding players responsible and accountable for their actions. One of Coach Rose's favorite communication tools is something he affectionately refers to as the "One-Minute Drill." At various times during the season, athletes are called into his office for a non-confrontational one-to-one meeting and told, "This is what I think you are doing well; this is what I think you need to work on; and here is where I see you making the best contribution in the next training cycle. Do you have any questions?" The One-Minute Drill provides direct and honest feedback. It clarifies expectations, alleviates uncertainty, and lets the athlete know exactly where they stand. Coach Rose's volleyball players may not like what he has to say but afterward, they know what is expected and what they need to do to improve and get better. I asked Coach Rose what he does to get everyone to buy in. Unequivocally he said:

It is not a negotiation. The first day of practice, each player has to be prepared and ready to get after it from the get go. If not, the train (metaphorically speaking) will be leaving the station without them.

A coach can communicate and clarify expectations, but ultimately, it is the athlete's responsibility to step up and take ownership over the opportunity at hand. In summary, Coach Rose expects his players to come to practice every day committed and focused on improving and getting better. He demands excellence and coaches for accountability; that is one of the main reasons why his teams have been successful for so long. His players may not always like the way he gives constructive criticism or feedback about how they are progressing, but he is always honest, direct, and consistent. Inspiring team members to set challenging goals and empowering them with the skills, vision, and resources needed to accomplish these goals is what transformational leaders in business and successful coaches do in building championship teams (Collins, 2001; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Vealey, 2005). Coaching for accountability and inspiring athletes to take responsibility for their own actions seem to be important building blocks for Coach Rose in sustaining a championship culture over time. But as recent research points out (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013), we still have a long way to go to better understand the multidimensionality of factors that go into creating a successful culture in high performance sport teams.

DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF CONSISTENCY AND SUSTAINABLE EXCELLENCE

Over a four-year period of time, the Penn State Volleyball team won 109 matches in a row and four consecutive national championships. I asked

Coach Rose if there was a secret to the consistency his teams have demonstrated over the years:

Well, I don't know if there is a secret; as a coach and the person in charge, I am evaluated or judged by the performance of the people I work with. With that said, I think the ability of the players to respond to what I want them to do is the barometer I use to gauge success. As I mentioned earlier, if you can attract good players and keep them on task, then it gives you a window of opportunity from which to be successful.

I also think tradition is another factor that comes into play. When kids buy into that tradition, they are going to take pride in what they are doing and work a little bit harder. Personally, I feel the reason we were successful during the consecutive win streak and each of the NCAA tournaments is we were well prepared, made good decisions on the court, played together as a team and executed well under pressure. Going into each match, we believed in our training, we believed in ourselves, we were confident in our abilities, and we were excited to get the job done. Getting back to your question about sustaining excellence over time, our turnaround did not happen overnight; I attribute much of what was accomplished during the win streak to the stability and continuity of things established throughout the 29 years preceding those championships. There was a stretch from 1997–1999 we were close to winning three consecutive national championships but didn't (we lost in the finals twice, won the next year in 1999). Some of the insights and lessons learned from those losses became the impetus for decisions and adjustments I made for the future.

An interesting finding that came from the coaches in the AAASP symposium cited earlier (Yukelson, 1995) about winning after winning was the statement, "We are not defending; rather, we are pursuing a new championship." I asked Coach Rose if that was true about his team's four successive national championship run. He said:

The focus each year has nothing to do with defending a national championship or keeping the consecutive win-streak going. Rather, it has everything to do with pursuing the championship and directing all energy toward accomplishing that goal. I never start the season talking about having to defend or being the favorite to win. Each year, we focus on the process of playing great volleyball and what we need to do throughout the season to improve and get better.

ROLE INTERNALIZATION AND TEAM SYNERGY

Another interesting finding that came out of the interview was Coach Rose's comments about role clarity, role internalization, role acceptance, and team

synergy. According to Coach Rose, everyone on the team has something special and unique to contribute. Team productivity is not only based on the performance of its stars, but the contributions and synergy of all its members (Yukelson, 1997). Some players are not as skilled as others but they are terrific teammates and an important part of the team. At the beginning of preseason, Coach Rose makes it very clear to the team all positions are up for grabs. He notes “just because you are a senior or got a lot of playing time last year does not mean you will be handed the started position. You have to earn it!” Every year roles change and players must be willing to adapt and sacrifice their own self-interests for the betterment of team.

In 2008, two of Coach Rose’s most productive players from the previous year’s national championship team went from being in the spotlight the year before to getting limited playing time the following year coming off the bench. One of those individuals was the national freshman of the year three years earlier. Her senior year, she was asked to move from outside hitter to back row specialist for her outstanding ball handling and passing skills at that position. Another player who led the nation in hitting percentage as a middle blocker the previous year was relegated to the bench her senior year, and asked to mentor a younger and more talented aspiring freshman at her position.

Those are the pieces of the puzzle you cannot predict, but allow you to have a championship group! Both those players were resilient athletes; they hurt inside yet sacrificed some of their own personal goals for the betterment of the team. It shows a lot about their character, leadership, and unselfish team attitude. To me, that is what selfless service and championship teams are all about.

Similarly, after winning three consecutive national championships, the 2010 team experienced tremendous turnover in personnel. Nine new freshmen were brought into the mix. Three of the returning seniors were three-time national champions and had never lost a game in college, something Coach Rose commented “is kind of a bizarre thing when you step back and really think about it.” The core players coming back had been through it before, they knew what to expect and how difficult it is to actually win a national championship. Coach asked the veterans to lead by example and demonstrate the championship work ethic younger players could embrace and emulate. His expectations for the younger players were different; he expected them to work hard, be coachable, and bring consistent energy to practice every day. The younger players were not expected to replace the point production of the two graduating All-Americans and the National Player of the Year, but they were expected to fill in and contribute based on their own strengths, skills, and abilities.

The team suffered a few losses at the beginning of the year and the chemistry early on could be characterized as inconsistent at best. Over the course of the season and conference play, the performance and synergy of the team improved, and by the time the NCAA tournament came around, the team was burning on all cylinders, playing with collective confidence and a determined focus every game and every match. The end result was a fourth consecutive national championship.

To Coach Rose, each team is different but the satisfaction derived from getting players to come together and gel over the course of a season is what coaching is all about. This is consistent with the writings by Katzenbach and Smith (1993) about the discipline of teams who state the essence of team is common commitment whereupon teammates that possess complimentary skills, work together with pride and a sense of meaningful purpose to achieve specific performance goals that are important to them. Successful teams are bound together by individual and mutual accountability. When everyone is on the same page pulling together to achieve common team goals and objectives, special things happen.

I then asked Coach Rose what he does to develop leadership from within the team. He emphatically responded “Captains are elected and Leaders Emerge! Just because you are a captain does not mean you are a good leader. In order to lead, you have to have followers.” He went on to say “teams that have good leadership are usually very good; teams that do not are not.”

He noted the season is long and situations come up both on and off the court that require attention and peer mediation. Strong internal leaders often have intangible qualities that others look up to and admire. Effective leaders lead by example and are not afraid to speak up or call an athlete out during stressful or difficult times. It is not a matter of yelling or forcing people to do something. Rather, it involves listening and steering people in the right direction. Coach Rose has had a few athletes who were captains for three years which means “they walked in the door with some special intangibles that were important.” They earned the respect and trust of teammates by being honest, genuine, forthright, and team oriented. As such, how team leaders communicate, keep people on task, and hold each other accountable is essential.

Co-Captain Blair Brown was an instrumental leader and played a significant role on each of those four national championship teams. Immediately after her final game, she was asked at a press conference to talk about the legacy she and her fellow seniors hoped to leave for others. To paraphrase Blair’s response, which was typical of the selfless team culture and dedicated work ethic that permeated each athlete on the team, she said the legacy they wanted to leave had nothing to do with win streaks, national championships, numbers or personal statistics, but rather, tradition and program history. She said any athlete that wears the Penn State uniform must have the dedicated

work ethic and commitment to carry on the tradition and core values that guide the success of our program: working hard every day in practice, going hard and competing with the heart of a champion every point, every game, every match. She summarized by saying “These are the enduring principles that represent the foundation of who we are and the mindset that got us to where we are now” (Penn State Athletics, 2010).

During their championship run, leadership, unity of purpose, role acceptance, and ongoing communication about the efficiency of team functioning was found to be essential. This finding is in alignment with the literature on group dynamics and team productivity where team cohesion, role clarity, team leadership, team resiliency and collective efficacy have been shown to be important constructs associated with team success (Carron & Brawley, 2008; Dunn & Holt, 2004; Kleinert et al., 2012; Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2013; Yukelson, 1997). Along these lines, Morgan et al. (2013) have proposed a model of team resiliency and have identified four characteristics that seem to overlap well with information gleaned from the present study regarding team synergy, team leadership, and collective resiliency under pressure. They include group structure (group norms, roles, and communication), mastery attempts (ongoing learning and working together to improve as a team), social capital (team identity, caring relationships, quality interactions, perceived social support), and collective efficacy (shared expectations and beliefs, successful past mastery attempts, competitive fighting spirit, and sticking together as a team). Recognizing team development is a process that evolves over time and that championship teams need to stick together and adapt to adverse situations that might come up over the course of a long season, then taken together, the importance of shared beliefs, ongoing learning, quality relationships, and strong emotional ties to one another being identified as key components of team resilience, then this line of research proposed by Morgan et al. (2013) may have significant implications for coaches and practitioners alike.

QUICK HITTERS: FURTHER REFLECTIONS FROM COACH ROSE ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COACHING

The last part of the interview is labeled “quick hitters”—questions designed to get short answers and reflective thoughts from Coach Rose on the Psychology of Coaching.

What would be your definition of a successful year?

To me, a successful year would be one in which the players all made strides in reaching their potential. That includes getting players to understand the vision, challenge, preparation, and commitment needed to be successful at this level, the resiliency and toughness required throughout

the season to stay on task, and what each individual needs to do to help the team win. There are going to be times when you are playing as close to your potential as you can, but on that given day, you get beat because the other team is simply better than you. Welcome to sport, I can handle that! On the flip side, I would define failure as my inability to get the players to buy in to what I want them to do because that is what I judge my most important contribution to be. It is getting each player to understand they are part of the team and what specifically they need to do to help the team win.

What role does goal setting play in your team's success?

I value the concept but I don't spend a lot of time on goal setting because our goals are pre-established at a certain level for every team we play. Certainly, goals are important and players need to set goals in order to get better. There are some numerical performance goals and stats we want them to be focused on (e.g., passing efficiency, digging, blocking, hitting and serving percentages, being in the proper position, etc.), things they can quantitatively look at and say, "Yes I am making progress in this area." But as far as team goals, it is hard to judge. From my standpoint, the goal is for each player is to be working hard all the time to get better, and to be committed to being a good teammate, caring about others.

How do you go about mentally/emotionally getting your teams ready to compete?

I think practice is the most significant opportunity I have as a coach to impact team performance. Personally, I think the preparation and attention to detail derived from tough quality practices is what allows an athlete to have that comfort zone and sense of readiness in game situations. How I present material, set up practices and drills, establish the right team culture, and stick to the script all play a significant role in preparing the team and getting them ready to compete. I do believe in visualization and mental training, and the overall value the area of sport psychology offers people; thinking confidently and acting confidently under pressure, visualizing oneself making great plays and performing well in stressful situations, things like that. Of course, there are individual differences in how athletes prepare and utilize mental training but when it is time to compete and the crowd is going nuts, and the adrenaline is pumping, at that particular moment ("Go Time"), an athlete better be ready to compete and get after it.

What does it mean to be mentally tough?

I think it is a variable that players are constantly working on. Some people have a certain disposition to be mentally tough, most develop it through competitive experiences. As a coach, I like to think mental toughness is the result of repetition and simulated competitive practices, which in turn fosters better execution and instinctive decision making under pressure. In terms of training for mental toughness, I prefer creating

challenging competitive situations at practice and collectively see how the team responds. The art of coaching is determining what that level of challenge is and preparing the team for potential adverse situations ahead of time.

Why do the girls seem to perform so well under pressure?

Everything comes back to athletes developing good practice habits and doing things assigned of them correctly. If they know what they are supposed to do and are confident in their abilities, that's what's going to hold up under pressure! To get to the Final Four, you have to be committed and really good. To win the national championship, you have to be tough, resilient, and able to adapt. There are so many intangible things you can't always prepare for in practice. For instance, when we played at Nebraska for the national championship, we knew the environment was going to be extremely hostile, we knew the crowd was going to be huge, but we didn't know the decibel levels would be so loud our players on the floor couldn't communicate. We had to make adjustments. The first two games we played very well and won. In the third and fourth games, Nebraska made adjustments and simply outplayed us. Going into the fifth and final game, we didn't panic; we just had to refocus and play our game. Had we not had good maturity, composure, and on-court player interaction, we would have had a far greater challenge winning the fifth game and corresponding national championship title.

What was the most satisfying thing about your team's 109 match winning streak?

I think from my standpoint, the most satisfying thing is we found a lot of different ways to be resilient and win. The players learned over four successive years what they were capable of achieving against top competition, as well as how to handle stress, challenges, and responsibilities successfully. Those things are wonderful transferrable skills that will carry over into their lives later on.

Summary: Quick Hitters

In going over Coach Rose's responses to rapid fire questions about mental training and the psychology of coaching, a few key points seem to stand out. His definition of success as a coach is linked to his coaching philosophy; his goal for each athlete is to work hard and be committed to getting better every day. If players fail to buy into this philosophy, he looks at that as a personal failure. From a mental training perspective, although he believes in the concept of goal setting and mental imagery, and finds value in the role of a sport psychologist working with his team, he believes confidence comes in knowing you are prepared, and as a coach, feels practice is the most important time in getting his team mentally and tactically prepared for competition. By simulating tough competitive situations during practice,

he feels his athletes will be more confident and better prepared to apply composure skills to competitive contexts which in turn will lead to better concentration and instinctive decision making under pressure. The reflections on coaching philosophy fit nicely with ideas put forth by Vernacchia et al. (1995) on the coach being someone special in the lives of their athletes. Similarly, his comments about collective confidence and team mental toughness are consistent with ideas proposed by Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) and Morgan et al. (2013) on developing psychological resilience and positive coping skills while competing under pressure, both from an individual and team perspective.

DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSIONS

Over the years, Coach Rose and the Penn State Volleyball Team have won six national championships including four national championships in a row between 2007 and 2010. Russ is a no-nonsense coach who demands excellence and has earned the respect of his players, peers, and the national volleyball community. Coach Rose is not afraid to tell it like it is; he is always honest, direct, and to the point with his feedback and constructive criticism, sometimes brutally honest. The athletes know his communication style is one of “tough love,” and that information conveyed at any given time should not be taken personally; it is intended to help each player get better. From his point of view, that is how he communicates and it is up to them to adjust accordingly.

Based on my conversation with Coach Rose, many factors influence the development of a championship team culture and its sustainability over the years. It starts with recruiting talented athletes that are the right fit with his system and coaching style; dedicated team players with a great work ethic and an internalized motivation to succeed. They need to be passionate about their pursuit of excellence and committed to the core values and operating procedures that govern the team. From a team perspective, there needs to be strong effective leadership from within, role understanding and synergistic team functioning, individual and collective accountability, and positive team energy. From coach’s perspective, athletes must take ownership over their actions and responsibility for the decisions and choices they make.

Individually and collectively, the players bought into the traditions, culture, and core values that governed the program and were willing to sacrifice self-interests for the betterment of the team. Throughout the four-peat, they adapted to various personnel changes, worked through adversity, held each other accountable, and found different ways to win. They had strong internal leadership and demonstrated a sense of resilient determination throughout. This finding is consistent with other studies in the literature depicting positive qualities of successful high performance teams (Cruckshank &

Collins, 2012; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Morgan et al., 2013; Yukelson, 1997).

Consistency is a good performance indicator of sustainability and the Penn State Volleyball Team has been consistent over many years. Coach Rose attributes this to his athlete's dedication, commitment, attention to detail, and focus. Similar to earlier studies investigating winning after winning and the psychology of ongoing excellence (Kreiner-Phillips & Orlick, 1993; Yukelson, 1995), the Penn State Volleyball Team did not feel pressure to repeat during their championship run but rather their focus was more on their day to day preparation and their commitment to the process of pursuing another championship. Comparable with other studies that looked at psychological characteristics of Olympic champions, they had strong belief and expectations, were optimistic and focused, adapted well under pressure, and were resilient and mentally tough (Gould et al., 2002; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Orlick and Partington, 1988).

Interestingly, information derived from this investigation is consistent with what Daniel Coyle brings out in his book *The Talent Code* (Coyle, 2009) that identifies three key components in developing talent: motivation, quality practice, and effective coaching. To paraphrase Coach Rose, if you are going to build a championship culture, it starts with commitment and work ethic; athletes coming to practice with the intent on getting better, teammates holding each other accountable, pushing each other each day to get better. Coach Rose succinctly summarizes "in order to be good, you have to train like a champion."

Personally, I have known Coach Rose for over 25 years. Although he can be tough and demanding, he is a master motivator and skilled tactician come tournament time, with an uncanny ability to keep his team relaxed and focused when it matters the most. His coaching staff is exceptional at breaking down scouting reports and getting the team ready, but it is his demeanor and on-court presence during playoffs that transmit poise, calmness, and positive energy to the team under pressure. His teams are outstanding "road warriors" and genuinely seem to embrace the challenge of NCAA Tournament play.

In my opinion, what Penn State had during their championship run that others teams did not was talent, belief, role internalization, collective confidence and focus knowing how to close games out, collective toughness and resiliency to stick together and stay on task. Coach Rose concludes "the reason this article is being written is because as a program and team, we did something unique and special; we won four national championships in a row. That is unprecedented and unique in our sport, the first time that has ever happened."

In terms of implications for future research, we must continue investigating the role psychosocial influences play on building and sustaining championship teams. Possible areas of inquiry may include investigating

how personal/team factors (e.g., individual motivation, collective shared beliefs, individual and team coping skills) interact with situational factors (e.g., sport type, level of competition, coach and teammate influences, time of season competing) to impact collective confidence and team resiliency. For instance, what impact does a coach's leadership style have on sustaining a championship culture over time? Although Coach Rose cares a lot about his players and their overall development as people, I would characterize his interpersonal approach as being a no-nonsense authoritarian type who knows exactly what he wants from his players and won't compromise his expectations. Would a more collaborative, transformational style of leadership involving athletes in decisions that impact them directly yield the same results? Similarly, could there be differences between individual sports and team sports in the way championship athletes perceive and attribute reasons for being successful over long periods of time and how they acquire the resiliency and focusing skills to manage the adversity that comes up during the course of a long season (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Would a three-time male high school state champion in wrestling respond differently to questions asked in the present study compared with a two-time successive collegiate national champion in women's swimming or basketball? There are other coaches (and athletes) in the country that have won multiple national championships; it would be interesting to interview some of them to get their perspectives and input on factors they perceive as being important in repeating as champions and sustaining a culture of excellence over time. As mentioned earlier, there are multitudes of factors to consider, and the work of Cruickshank and Collins (2012) is a step in the right direction in developing a solid theoretical framework from which to study sustainable elite sport cultures in teams.

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