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UNDERSTANDING THE HIGH-SCHOOL ATHLETE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETES' ENGAGEMENT

By

Michael J. Crawford

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE HIGH-SCHOOL ATHLETE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETES' ENGAGEMENT

By

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Engagement, as a psychological concept, has been explored in numerous domains, including school and out-of-school time programs, and has been linked to positive developmental and achievement benefits in such domains. However, no research exists exploring engagement as it relates to the context of interscholastic athletics and the athletes who participate. Thus, this research sought to explore engagement through a qualitative investigation of 10 exceptional student-athletes. This study aimed to understand: (1) reasons why high-school athletes engage or do not engage in their interscholastic experiences; (2) what aspects of the environment contribute to high-school athlete engagement; and (3) what coaches can do to enhance engagement in their athletes. Results from in-depth interviews indicated that both environmental and individual factors contribute to engagement. Environmental factors included team and teammates, coaches, activities and drills, and other components of the environment (e.g., family, fan support). Individual factors included personal motivation for participation and personality. Lastly, coaches endeavoring to increase engagement in their athletes are recommended to show that they care about their athletes, understand and get to know their athletes better, and establish relationships with them off the field.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In nearly any teachers' lounge in the United States, it is quite common to hear references to student engagement (e.g., "I had a great class today; my students were really into it") or the lack of it (e.g., "I don't know how much longer I can do this; these students just don't care"). It is no surprise, then, that researchers have been interested in better understanding educational engagement. What was surprising to the author, however, was that sport coaches endure a similar experience to that of teachers. Players frequently pay attention and work hard during practice. At other times, athletes are easily distracted and sluggish. While educational engagement has been studied at length, engagement in athletic activities has received less attention.

At present, minimal research exploring engagement exists in the high-school sport setting. The majority of the literature investigating engagement has looked at engagement by students in the academic domain (e.g., Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Newmann, 1989; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003). Other literature describes engagement by youth in non-academic settings (e.g., Pearce & Larson, 2006; Weiss, Little, & Bouffard, 2005), and researchers in elite sport have attempted to address the concept as well (e.g., Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007; Lonsdale, Hodge, & Raedeke, 2007). This review will consist of the following sections illuminating the literature to date on engagement: (1) engagement and academics; (2) engagement and out-of-school time; and (3) engagement and athletics. Chapter 1 will conclude with the purpose and rationale for this research.

Engagement and Academics

Engagement in the academic setting has been studied extensively in the past. Educational engagement "refers to the psychological investment required to comprehend and master knowledge and skills explicitly taught in school" (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989, p. 177). Newmann (1989) described engagement in academic work as "the student's psychological investment in learning, comprehending, and mastering knowledge or skills" (p. 34). An engaged student, therefore, is someone who devotes energy, attention, and effort to understanding what the teacher is trying to convey through the lesson. Engagement is important, because, by being engaged in the lesson, the student is more likely to reap the benefits of the educational experience (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Such engagement does not occur independently of external factors; several variables can have an impact on whether youth engage or not. Further publications have described factors that affect or contribute to engagement (e.g., Newmann, 1989; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992; Pearce & Larson, 2006). Newmann (1989), in an article exploring student engagement and high-school reform, described five factors as contributing to a student's engagement in school: need for competence, extrinsic rewards, intrinsic interest, social support, and sense of ownership. A student will be more likely to engage in the future when he or she can successfully complete an assignment. Valued extrinsic rewards (e.g., grades; awards) that are acquired as the result of a completed task will propel the student to continue investing. Interest has been found to be a motivational variable related to reengaging material (Hidi & Renninger, 2006); hence, a student who is intrinsically interested is likely to engage. Given that the opinions of others contribute to the extrinsic rewards and intrinsic interests one adopts, positive social support is critical

to engagement. Lastly, owning the work, as compared to doing work prescribed by someone else, contributes to a student's level of engagement (Newmann, 1989).

Expanding on their previous work, Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn (1992) theorized that the sources of student engagement in academic work is the direct result of competence in both school membership and authentic work. In order for a student to fully engage in academics, the student must recognize formal education and the school as legitimate. That is, the school must have a clear purpose, must be fair, must provide personal support, must provide reasonable opportunities for success, and must care for each student as an individual. It is theorized that the student who does not trust the school to provide such elements is unlikely to optimally engage; in fact, she is likely to feel alienated and unmotivated. Not only does the school environment and mission contribute to engagement, but also it is proposed that the academic work undertaken must be authentic. Authentic work is more likely to engage students and is defined as "work that entails extrinsic rewards, meets intrinsic interests, offers students a sense of ownership, is connected to the 'real world' (i.e., the world beyond school), and involves some fun" (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 23). Specifically concerning the importance of fun, enjoying what one produces can be a critical motivator towards continued engagement (Hansen & Larson, 2007).

School engagement has been further described as the overlap of behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement. In a review by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), the authors described the research that has been conducted on behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement as it relates to academics. Behavioral engagement can be defined as following rules, participating in activities,

contributing to classroom discussion, and being involved in learning. Cognitive engagement has been described as being related to preferring hard work, investing (psychologically) in learning, and positively coping with adversity. And emotional engagement has been defined as referring to students' emotional responses, identifying with school, and feeling important. The authors elucidated that several factors can contribute to engagement in a classroom setting. School-level factors (e.g., voluntary choice, student-teacher collaboration, small size), the classroom context (e.g., teacher support, peers, autonomy support), and individual needs (e.g., need for relatedness, need for autonomy, need for competence) may play a part in the amount and degree to which students engage. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) concluded that further research, specifically qualitative research, is needed "to understand the phenomenology of engagement" (p. 86).

The antecedents of engagement have been studied at length in an attempt to better understand the relevance and implications of engagement in academic settings. Researchers used concentration, interest, and enjoyment [concepts from *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997)], to create an engagement score to measure high-school students' levels of engagement during several activities. Using data from the Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development, researchers utilized the Experience Sampling Method (See Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987; Moneta & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) to measure 526 high-school students selected at random. Participants wore electronic pagers and, once signaled, completed a 45-item Experience Sampling Form indicating their locations, their thoughts, and activities in which they were engaged. The researchers found high-school students to have been highly engaged when they felt challenged by and competent

at a task, when they felt in control of the learning environment, and when the instruction was relevant to them. In addition, the high-school students were found to be highly engaged during group work and individual work, and during nonacademic subjects as compared to academic subjects (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003).

Research has been conducted exploring what features compose engagement (i.e., how engagement can be divided into parts) and in what concepts engagement plays a role. For example, utilizing interview data from school-age children, Bartko (2005) described engagement as an interplay of affect, behavior, and cognition. The feelings and reactions one experiences when participating in an activity constitutes the affect domain. Behavior is characterized as participation, involvement, or effort in an activity. And the willingness to exert effort or invest in the activity composes the cognitive aspect. A high level of engagement, therefore, occurs when an individual feels good about and values the activity, participates actively in the activity, and cares about working hard in the activity. However, it is important to note that all three components (i.e., affect, behavior, and cognition) must be considered in conjunction with one another. Because, for instance, an individual who works hard (high cognitive), spends a substantial amount of time at the task (high behavior), and hates the activity (low affect) is unlikely to be engaged (Bartko, 2005). This scenario is common for many high-school students who recognize the importance of earning high marks in school but do not find pleasure in their experiences (Wehlage et al., 1989). Though the aforementioned elements have been found to be related to engagement in academic settings, additional research has investigated engagement in other domains.

Engagement and Out-of-School Time

Out-of-school time (OST) has received increased attention in recent years. Numerous foundations and national organizations have published reports on issues in the field (e.g., Bowles & Brand, 2009; Grossman, Lind, Hayes, McMaken, & Gersick, 2009; Metz, Goldsmith, & Arbreton, 2008); scholars and researchers have explored the antecedents, components, and outcomes of OST programs (e.g., Broadbent & Corney, 2008; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Hansen & Larson, 2007; Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005; Quinn, 2005; Weiss, Little, Bouffard, Deschenes, & Malone, 2008); and the federal government has authorized $1.16 billion for 21st Century Community Learning Centers[1] for 2010 (U.S. Department of Education). As a result, researchers have begun exploring engagement in such programs.

Engagement was included as one component of a conceptual model of participation in OST programs (Weiss, Little, & Bouffard, 2005). Youth participation in OST programs is composed of three parts: enrollment, attendance, and engagement. Enrollment is classified as getting youth through the door and into the program. In order for youth to participate, for example, they must be at the facility or in the building. Attendance is defined as the amount of time youth spend in the program. And engagement, as described by Weiss and colleagues, "is not only motivation to be there; it is also being actively involved in cognitive and social endeavors that promote growth" (2005, p. 24). That is, engagement is more than just wanting to be there, and more than

[1] 21st Century Community Learning Centers were established by the federal government to enrich the achievement of children through programs during non-school hours.

just physically being there; it is intentionally participating in activities that provide avenues for positive development. Participation, then, according to this model, includes being in the door, spending time in the program, and devoting energy to being involved in the program. And "of the three aspects of participation, engagement is the least researched yet perhaps the most critical component of participation" (Weiss et al., 2005, p. 23).

In a qualitative study exploring how youth became engaged in a civic activism program, Pearce and Larson (2006) conducted in-depth interviews with high-school age participants over a 4-month period. Because youth "must not only join [organized youth programs], they must become psychologically engaged" (p. 121) to reap the benefits, the purpose of their study was to understand the process of how youth became engaged and how the setting can contribute. Using a grounded theory approach, analyses revealed that a program containing interesting and relevant activities, leadership opportunities for participants, and responsive and supportive adult leaders were likely to contribute to adolescent engagement (Pearce & Larson, 2006). The researchers also found that the program setting can support engagement through peer support and leader support. When peers were friendly and welcoming, discussed experiences and opinions, and had camaraderie amongst one another, then engagement was likely. And when leaders fostered a welcoming climate, steered attention to program-relevant content, challenged the youth, and provided instrumental support when necessary, then engagement was also common (Pearce & Larson, 2006). Thus, both the contents of the program and the program's setting can contribute to the engagement of participants.

Furthermore, other research indicates that program structure and adult involvement can have a sizeable impact on developmental outcomes. Leuven and Tuijnman (1996) wrote that teachers and involved parents were important factors in teaching children how to learn, and that without a proper foundation in learning, individuals may face a sizeable disadvantage with employment. Similarly, in a review conducted by Mahoney, Eccles, and Larson (2004), the structure and delivery of youth activities by adults was likely to have an impact on the type of experiences adolescents have. That is, the most effective organized activities have supportive adult supervision, quality adult-youth relationships, positive interactions with peers, and appropriate, challenging, skill-focused activities. Likewise, in a review of literature exploring the benefits of physical education and sport (PES), Bailey (2006) concluded that "the actions and interactions of teachers and coaches largely determine whether or not children and young people experience these positive effects of PES and whether or not they realize its great potential" (p. 399). However, while literature has described the responsibility of adults with respect to youth development in general, little is known about the roles that adults play in supporting youth engagement. As O'Donoghue, Kirshner, and McLaughlin (2003) illustrated in their review of youth participation in organized activities, more research is needed to understand the conditions that must be present to ignite engagement in youth.

Hansen and Larson (2007), in a study exploring four variables hypothesized to amplify developmental experiences in organized activities (dosage, motivation, lead roles, and adult-youth ratios), included engagement in their study of 1,822 eleventh-grade students. Specifically, the eleventh graders completed the Youth Experiences Survey

(YES), Version 2.0, a measure designed to assess students' positive and negative experiences in organized activities. Then, researchers correlated scores from the YES 2.0 with scores from measures of dosage, motivation, lead roles, and adult-youth ratios. Results indicated that dosage (i.e., the amount of time in an activity), motivation (i.e., why students participate and to what degree), lead roles (i.e., whether they hold a leadership position in an activity), and adult-youth ratios (i.e., the number of adults and youth involved) had an impact on the level of engagement by students in the activities that the programs provide. As previous authors have described (e.g., NRC, 2002; Weiss, Little, & Bouffard, 2005), youth's engagement in the activity plays a crucial role in reaping the benefits that developmental experiences provide (Hansen & Larson, 2007). Although engagement has been explored in academics and OST programs, engagement in athletics has received minimal attention. The following section illuminates what has been published regarding engagement in the athletic domain.

Engagement and Athletics

Despite the fact that engagement in interscholastic athletics has received no attention to date, engagement has been explored in elite athletes. Lonsdale, Hodge, and Raedeke (2007), in their qualitative study of 15 elite New Zealand athletes, explored athletic engagement in elite sport. In their research, "the purpose of this study was to determine whether or not athletes experience engagement and, if so, to identify the core dimensions of these experiences" (p. 464). The Scanlan Collaborative Interview Method (Scanlan, Russell, Wilson, & Scanlan, 2003) was used to begin to understand how engagement may relate to a sport context. The researchers asked the athletes to recall an experience during which they were engaged and to describe their thoughts, feelings, and

emotions at that time. Responses were written on index cards, and the researchers and the participants collaborated to organize the cards into related themes. The dimensions that emerged from all 15 interviews were vigor (i.e., feelings of extreme energy), dedication (i.e., willing to invest substantial time), and confidence (i.e., confidence in abilities). Consequently, they defined "athlete engagement as a persistent, positive, cognitive-affective experience in sport that is characterized by confidence, dedication, and vigor" (p. 464).

In a follow-up study, Lonsdale, Hodge, and Jackson (2007) endeavored to validate the Athlete Engagement Questionnaire (AEQ). The AEQ was designed to measure four components of athlete engagement: confidence (i.e., belief that one can perform well and achieve goals), dedication (i.e., desire to invest time and effort toward achieving one's goals), vigor (i.e., physical, mental, and/or emotional energy), and enthusiasm (i.e., enjoyment and excitement). Enthusiasm was not identified as being a core dimension in the previous study (See Lonsdale, Hodge, & Raedeke, 2007); however, enthusiasm was included in the AEQ because the researchers believed that it could be one of the core dimensions. Two-hundred-one elite athletes from Canada, representing 51 different sports, participated by completing the AEQ and four additional questionnaires. Results indicated that the AEQ is a consistent measure of athlete engagement and that athlete engagement and athlete burnout may be bipolar opposites (Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007). The authors concluded that although engagement was relevant to elite athletes, "it may be useful to study the engagement experiences of athletes at sub-elite levels" (Lonsdale, Hodge, & Raedeke, 2007, p. 467).

Purpose and Rationale

Despite the increasing exploration of engagement by researchers during the past few decades (e.g., Bartko, 2005; Braddock, Hua, & Dawkins, 2007; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Hansen & Larson, 2007; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003; Wehlage et al., 1989), engagement in the domain of athletics has received little attention (e.g., Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007; Lonsdale, Hodge, & Raedeke, 2007). More specifically, research has focused on engagement in academic settings, in nonacademic settings, and in elite athletics and has neglected engagement in interscholastic athletics. Understanding how engagement relates to high-school athletes is not only critical to the advancement of the youth development literature but also to the structuring of environments and facilitation of programs by adults aimed at enhancing the positive developmental outcomes of interscholastic athletics for adolescents. Therefore, the current research aimed to explore engagement in interscholastic athletics.

Research to date has not explored why some high-school athletes engage their sport experiences, while others do not. Research has not identified which aspects of the high-school sport environment influence engagement more so than others. And research has not established strategies and techniques that are usable by coaches to increase the occurrence of engagement by their players. Thus, the specific purposes of this study were as follows:

1. To better understand the reasons for engagement in high-school sport,
2. To identify components of the high-school sport environment that affect engagement, and

3. To identify strategies and techniques that a coach can implement to facilitate engagement in high-school sport.

By investigating engagement in high-school athletics, this study contributes to the bodies of knowledge that exist for both engagement and interscholastic athletics. Researchers have called for research that is both general (i.e., broad in scope) and qualitative in an attempt to better understand engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Other researchers have concluded that qualitative research exploring potential mediating processes (e.g., engagement) of developmental experiences is necessary in order to better grasp the ultimate impact of organized activities for youth (Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). Likewise, Oden (1995), in an article stressing the importance of further research investigating youth programs and activities, emphasized that not enough is known about adolescent development on the whole. In addition, Oden urged researchers to consider multiple methodologies when researching youth programs in order to increase the chances of replicating effective programs and reforming less effective programs. Consequently, a qualitative investigation of interscholastic athletes and engagement was a critical contribution.

Qualitative research has been found to be beneficial for acquiring foundational knowledge on a subject (Oden, 1995) and has been used frequently to study adolescents (e.g., Barron, 2006; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008; Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Larson, Pearce, Sullivan, & Jarrett, 2006). Through qualitative techniques, adolescents have been found to be able to accurately describe their engagement experiences (Pearce & Larson, 2006). Interviews, in particular, have been found to be an effective way to acquire information about engagement (e.g., Bartko, 2005; Lonsdale,

Hodge, & Raedeke, 2007). Lastly, researchers have called for more in-depth qualitative studies to better understand the processes involved in developmental outcomes for youth in organized programs and activities (e.g., Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006; Oden, 1995).

At present, research has shown that engaged and disengaged students differ in several ways (Fredricks et al., 2004; Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbush, 1996). For example, engaged students are less likely to drop out of school than disengaged students (Fredricks et al., 2004). And, as Steinberg and colleagues (1996) have found through their research conducted over 10 years, from 20,000 high-school students surveyed, and hundreds of parents and dozens of teachers interviewed:

> [E]ngaged students attend their classes, try reasonably hard to do well in them, complete the homework they are assigned, and don't cheat. [While] disengaged students cut class regularly, exert little effort in the classroom, take easier classes, fail to do the work that is assigned to them, and break school rules concerning cheating (p. 67).

Thus the present research helps to better understand how engaged and disengaged student-athletes differed in the high-school sport environment.

The results of this study contribute to the development of theory in other related and relevant areas. For example, Larson (2000) included 'concerted engagement in the environment' as one of three critical elements related to initiative development in adolescents. Also, Hidi and Renninger (2006), in their article on interest development, described interest as a motivational variable referring to "the psychological state of engaging or the predisposition to reengage with particular classes of objects, events, or

ideas over time" (p. 112). By further exploring and understanding engagement as it relates to adolescents, the current study has widespread implications for the development of other psychological concepts.

In a more applied vein, high school coaches can directly benefit from the results of this study. Coaches at all levels struggle to ensure that their athletes are fully engaged during practices and games. As the author experienced firsthand, high school coaches, in particular, grapple with conflicting ideas (e.g., winning games or matches; encouraging strong academic performance; instilling life lessons) that add layers of challenge to their job. A better understanding of engagement as it relates to high school athletes would allow coaches to create environments and design programs which will help to ignite in youth the desire to engage their experiences and reap the benefits of their opportunities, a need expressed in the literature (e.g., Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008).

Based on previous research on engagement in academic settings, nonacademic settings, and elite athletics, and on the author's coaching experience, several expectations arise for engagement in interscholastic athletics. First, it is expected that high-school athletes will identify enjoyment as a reason for engagement. Previous research suggests that engagement in academic settings is more likely when activities are enjoyable (e.g., Newmann, 1989; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992), and the author noticed that his athletes appeared to be more engaged when they were having fun. Second, it is expected that high-school athletes will identify relevance as a reason for engagement. The author experienced several encounters with athletes who wanted to know why they were doing a particular activity, or how such an activity mattered to them. In addition, research in OST

activities supports the notion that relevance and real-world applicability matters to adolescent participants (e.g., Pearce & Larson, 2006). And third, it is expected that high-school athletes will emphasize the significance of peers and coaches when thinking about engagement. Literature on engagement in both academic settings (e.g., Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Newmann, 1989) and nonacademic settings (e.g., Mahoney, Eccles, & Larson, 2004; Pearce & Larson, 2006) described the importance of positive peers and coaches for engagement. The author recognized this during practice, as athletes appeared more engaged when peers and coaches were supportive and positive.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of five male and five female high-school student-athletes who were members of the Student Advisory Council (SAC) for the Michigan High School Athletic Association. The SAC was composed of eight females (four juniors and four seniors) and eight males (four juniors and four seniors) who represented a variety of sports (e.g., baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, ice hockey, soccer, track & field, volleyball, and wrestling), both public and private schools, urban, suburban, and rural schools, and both the Upper and Lower Peninsulas of the State of Michigan. Admission into the SAC was highly competitive, as only eight student-athletes were admitted per year. In order for a student-athlete to be a candidate for admission into the SAC, he or she must have been a junior or senior, must have had a cumulative grade point average of no less than 3.0, and must have been recommended in writing by an athletic director, principal, or other administrator. MHSAA staff then selected those students who they felt were most qualified.

In general, members of the SAC are exceptional student-athletes. While not all members are superb athletes on the athletic field (i.e., some SAC members are not starters), all members display optimal sportsmanship on the field, excel in the classroom, and represent mature behavior off the field. Members are considered to be leaders of their peers (many are captains on their teams) and are assumed to have a more advanced grasp of adolescent life compared to non-member student-athletes. As a result, members of the SAC were likely to be very capable of comprehending engagement and how engagement

relates to interscholastic athletes and athletics, and the author anticipated that they would be competent at providing in-depth, thorough responses, more so than non-member student-athletes who may not be as cognitively and emotionally developed. Consequently, only members of the SAC were eligible to participate in the study. Of the 16 SAC members eligible to participate in this study, 10 were selected and asked to take part in an interview. The participants were selected in order to achieve a sample that contained equal numbers based on gender (i.e., five females and five males) and school class status (i.e., five juniors and five seniors).

Procedure

The author contacted the parent of a qualified candidate by phone initially. A brief description of the study and an explanation of the candidate's participation were read, and the author addressed any questions about the study. Then, oral consent and permission to speak to the minor were acquired. When the parent granted consent for participation and allowed the author to speak to the candidate, the candidate spoke to the author at that time. The author then read a description of the study, explained the composition of the candidate's participation, addressed any questions, and requested oral assent. When granted assent, the author scheduled an interview with the candidate. After the interview was scheduled, an informational document (See Appendix A) was emailed to the candidate for his or her records. No candidate who was spoken to declined involvement.

Interview Guide

Prior to its use in the study, the semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix B) was pilot tested and confirmed as coherent and appropriate by a recently graduated, former high-school athlete. The interview guide was separated into three parts, to address

the three specific purposes of this research. The first section contained questions addressing Purpose 1 (To better understand the reasons for engagement in high-school sport). The second section was composed of questions addressing Purpose 2 (To identify components of the high-school sport environment that affect engagement). And the third section contained questions addressing Purpose 3 (To identify strategies and techniques that a coach can implement to facilitate engagement in high-school sport). All interviews were audio recorded.

The author asked the participant a series of open-ended questions, allowing the participant to provide a response. If the author needed further clarification, the author was able to ask additional probe questions. One major benefit of open-ended questioning was that the participant was not constrained by the questions; the questions allowed the participant to respond however he or she saw fit. Allowing the participant to respond free of constraints was important for this research, as the author was interested in better understanding engagement as perceived by the high-school athlete. Once the interview was completed, the participant was thanked for his or her time. The interview was then transcribed.

Data Analysis

The interviews ranged in length from 34 minutes to 55 minutes with a mean time of 44 minutes. All 10 interviews were transcribed verbatim which resulted in 192 pages of double-spaced text. Transcripts of all interviews were read multiple times each, to help the author become familiar with and gain a general sense of the data as a whole (Creswell, 2003). Content was analyzed using a hierarchical content analysis approach. The participant's statements were analyzed and separated into meaning units. Meaning

units (i.e., a single, indivisible item containing meaning) were separated from one another within the text and were then grouped with related meaning units into lower-order themes. Then, lower-order themes related to one another in content were grouped together into higher-order themes. For example, meaning units such as "we select practice activities," "players pick their own plays," and "teammates decide how to warm-up" would have been grouped into a lower-order theme titled "Control," which, along with other lower-order themes (e.g., "Fun;" "Relevant;" etc.), would compose a higher-order theme titled "Contributing Factors." This process helped to illuminate why athletes engage, what environmental factors affect engagement, and what strategies coaches can implement to increase engagement in interscholastic athletics based on participants' responses (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Safe-Keeping and Confidentiality

Consistent with the University Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects guidelines, all research materials (e.g., transcripts; audio files) were kept safe in a locked file-cabinet when not in use. By securing the research materials, the author prevented any data-tampering or theft. In addition, to ensure confidentiality, participants' names were not included on the research documents. For example, the transcript and audio file for participant 1 was labeled "Participant 1" and not with the individual's name, so as to protect the identity of the participant.

Trustworthiness

An important criterion for evaluating qualitative research is the use of procedures for establishing trustworthiness of the data collected; two techniques were used in this study. First, a member check was used. Once a transcript was analyzed, the author

composed a bulleted list of the primary themes taken from the interview (See Appendix C for an example of a member check document). Then the author sent the participant the bulleted list from his or her interview and asked that the participant ensure that the themes accurately reflect the participant's feelings and intentions. The participant was able to make any necessary amendments to the bulleted list to ensure its accuracy. By using a member check, the author made certain that transcripts accurately reflected the comments of the student athletes interviewed. Second, a peer debriefer was used to minimize the negative effects of the author's bias. A colleague who is trustworthy, confidential, and familiar with qualitative methods was consulted to discuss and critique data analysis procedures and decisions made. By utilizing a peer debriefer, the author reduced the influence of his bias on results and interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Spall, 1998).

Investigator

The present investigator is a 26 year-old male masters degree student in Kinesiology. A former assistant high-school soccer coach and frequent presenter in the MHSAA Captains Leadership Training Program workshops, he is familiar with high-school athletes and educational athletics. He has been involved in the data analysis sessions for a qualitative study of the leadership experiences for high school athletes (Voelker, Gould, & Crawford, under review) and has also prepared for this study by reading qualitative research methodology books and papers on interviewing (e.g., Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Spall, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

His experience as an assistant coach of a high-school varsity boys soccer team contributed substantially to the present thesis research. While coaching he began to notice

that some of his players were not always paying attention to coaches, working hard in practice, and/or executing behaviors prescribed by coaches. The author was unable to understand how and why some players would not be fully invested in a team that got along well and had an opportunity to find success on the field. He also was interested in understanding what he as a coach could have done to increase the occurrence of engagement for his players. Thus, the present thesis research considered such an experience in its composition.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

The goal of the present research was to better understand engagement as it related to high-school student-athletes. Prior to addressing the primary purposes of this research, participants were asked questions about how they conceived of engagement. Then, the following three purposes were addressed: (1) to better understand the reasons for engagement in high-school sport; (2) to identify components of the high-school sport environment that affect engagement; and (3) to identify strategies and techniques that a coach can implement to facilitate engagement in high-school sport.

Conceptions of Engagement

Prior to addressing the purposes, the author was interested in how the participants understood engagement. What kinds of characteristics or attributes came to mind when participants thought about being engaged or not engaged? Responses to the questions, "What does engagement mean to you?" and "What is it like to be fully engaged?" yielded a number of informative items.

Participants described engagement as encompassing focus (5/10), dedication (4/10), value placed on the sport (4/10), involvement (4/10), giving or doing the most one can (3/10), mental, physical, and emotional components (3/10), enjoyment (2/10), improvement (2/10), success (2/10), and hard work (2/10)[2] (See Table 1). For example, one participant said of focus, "I guess to me, I guess back to my definition of being fully engaged in a sport, it's only the sport that matters. There are no outside influences. And

[2] The first number in brackets following each item is the number of individuals citing that meaning unit out of the 10 participants.

there are no excuses" (Participant 1). Another participant described how value placed on the sport, giving or doing the most one can, and improvement are related to being fully engaged:

> I think it means how active and how much a person puts into what they're doing. They're not just there to, just going through the tasks. They want to be there, they want to improve, they want to do the most that they can (Participant 9).

Participants also included commitment (1/10), physical health (1/10), responsibility (1/10), and pride (1/10) as being important for understanding engagement. According to one participant, involvement, enjoyment, and pride are important aspects of engagement: "I'd say be involved and enjoy what you're doing and having fun doing it, almost like you have pride in what you're doing" (Participant 5). Another participant stressed the significance of hard work and physical health when considering engagement: "Physically, are they physically lifting, are they physically working hard every day, coming to practice, or in games. Are they doing the things to take care of their bodies during the season" (Participant 4). And other participants included commitment ("Engagement is like, I put it, the act of your commitment" [Participant 10]) and success ("the person that's engaged wants it to be, wants the whole team's success, not just individual" [Participant 1]) as important components of engagement.

Table 1

Conceptions of Engagement: What Does Engagement Mean to You?

Theme	Meaning Unit
Focus (5/10)	Being focused on the sport only Being focused Being focused Being mentally present Being focused Being concentrated
Dedication (4/10)	Dedication Being dedicated Being willing to sacrifice Dedication Being dedicated to the team
Value placed on the sport (4/10)	Living and breathing the sport Caring Wanting to be there Making sport the number one priority Placing importance on the sport
Involvement (4/10)	Being an active part of the team Participating Being involved Being involved
Giving or doing the most one can (3/10)	Giving it your best Wanting to do ones best Wanting teammates to do their best Giving all they have Wanting to do the most one can
Mental, physical, and emotional components (3/10)	Being composed of mental, physical, and emotional aspects Being physically and mentally into it Being composed of mental and physical components
Enjoyment (2/10)	Enjoying it

Table 1 (continued)

	Having fun Having fun
Improvement (2/10)	Trying to absorb knowledge from the coach Wanting to improve Having the drive to keep improving
Success (2/10)	Wanting team success Having a sense of accomplishment
Hard work (2/10)	Work hard Physically working hard
Commitment (1/10)	Being committed Commitment
Physical health (1/10)	Lifting weights Taking care of one's body
Responsibility (1/10)	Having and wanting the responsibility Always being conscious of one's responsibility
Pride (1/10)	Being prideful Feeling good about oneself

Responses to the question, "What is it like to be not engaged?" returned relevant items as well (See Table 2). Participants described being not engaged as being characteristic of lower effort (3/10), lack of cohesiveness with teammates (3/10), and placing sport as a lower priority (2/10). One participant described what it is like to exhibit lower effort: "Just kind of goofing around. Um. Not, I mean, obviously not giving my best. It's obvious that I'm not really into it" (Participant 2). Other participants, when

explaining what comes to mind when considering not being engaged, said of lack of cohesiveness with teammates:

> You feel more alienated... you feel like kind of alienated from the team" (Participant 10)
>
> I would say, you come to practice and you're not really there... Like, coming to practice, you don't cheer for your team" (Participant 1).

Participants also indicated that being there for the social aspect only (1/10), being bored (1/10), not enjoying it (1/10), and being frustrated (1/10) characterized being not engaged. For example, participants identified that being bored ("Probably almost bored with it" [Participant 5]) and being frustrated ("when I'm not fully engaged, I get frustrated 'cause I don't play as well" [Participant 8]) are associated with a lack of engagement.

Table 2

Conceptions of Engagement: What Does Not Being Engaged Mean to You?

Theme	Meaning Unit
Lower effort (3/10)	Not being mentally there Not being physically there Not trying Goofing around Not giving ones best Not being really into it Being unable to put everything into it
Lack of cohesiveness with teammates (3/10)	Not cheering for teammates Thinking only about oneself Being disconnected Being alienated
Placing sport as a lower priority (2/10)	Placing sport as a low priority Having other things take priority
Being there for the social aspect only (1/10)	Being there for the social aspect only
Being bored (1/10)	Being bored
Not enjoying it (1/10)	Not enjoying it
Being frustrated (1/10)	Being frustrated

Reasons for Engagement

Participants were asked why they believed some high school athletes engaged in their sport experience while others did not (See Table 3). The most frequently cited reasons collapsed into a theme labeled sport-related reasons (5/10). For example, one participant identified several components of the sport experience that contributed to engagement:

> But it really depends on I would say the winning aspect of the sport, keeps him going, keeps him fully engaged. And I also think it's the title that maybe one holds... Sometimes, winning and things like playing time, things like production in games, things like coach praise and recognition (Participant 4).

Other reasons for engagement included motivation for participation (4/10), type of person/personality (3/10), feelings towards the sport (3/10), influence by others (3/10), feelings about failure (2/10), and background (2/10). One participant described how the individual motivation for participation separates athletes in terms of engagement:

> The will to win – there's only a handful on every team that really want it. And other people just kind of, they're just kind of there leisurely. Just, you know, to be there, to be part of a team. I just think the difference between that is just wanting it more. Who wants it more? (Participant 3)

The same participant went on to describe how the type of person/personality and feelings about the sport may play a role in engagement:

> I mean there's certain kids that are just real laid back and don't really care. There's some kids, I think it just depends on the person. Some people hate the sport... And then there's other kids who just don't wanna work hard. And those are the kids that are just lazy and you can tell that they don't really care about the sport... (Participant 3).

And another participant provided an example of how an athlete may be influenced by others to engage in high-school athletics: "...they're either in it for the social scene or they're in it just because their parents are making them do it" (Participant 8).

Table 3

Reasons for Engagement: Why Do Some Players Engage While Others Do Not?

Theme	Meaning Unit
Sport-related reasons (5/10)	Want to earn a spot Team success (wins/losses) Title (role on the team) Sport type (team/individual) Coach praise and recognition Playing time Skill level Fear of pain Irrelevant drills Talent level
Motivation for participation (4/10)	How much an athlete 'wants it' Have the drive versus not having the drive Incentives Don't want to be there Have other interests
Type of person/personality (3/10)	Depends on the person Laid back demeanor Personality Naturally competitive
Feelings towards the sport (3/10)	Hate the sport Love what you're doing Care or don't care about the sport Not into the sport
Influence by others (3/10)	Want to fit in with others Do it for social, not athletic aspect Do it for social scene Do it for parents
Feelings about failure (2/10)	Protect themselves from failure Aren't realistic about success/failure Are realistic about success/failure Scared to fail

Table 3 (continued)

Background (2/10)	Because of their upbringing Background

Environmental Components

The second purpose (i.e., to better understand how components of the athletic environment can contribute to engagement) was divided into four domains: (1) team and teammates; (2) coaches; (3) activities and drills; and (4) other components. The following subsections will provide results for each domain investigated.

Team and teammates. According to the participants, the team and teammates positively and negatively affected engagement in high-school sports. Engagement can be positively impacted when the team and teammates interact effectively (5/10), value togetherness (4/10), provide quality leadership (4/10), exude positive affect (3/10), are driven and dedicated (3/10), interact outside of the sport (2/10), work hard (2/10), motivate one another (2/10), and value external factors (1/10) (See Table 4). One participant described how being dedicated is important for improving engagement:

> In a team where everyone's engaged, everybody's dedicated to the system. And even if you're not, you don't really feel like you want to be, you still act like you are, for the benefit of everyone else (Participant 7).

Another participant described how teammates can interact effectively with one another through communication: "talking to them on a level where they're not gonna get looked at. It's the after practice, one-on-one conversations that usually take effect more effectively I'd say, and not yelling at each other" (Participant 6). And another participant

included quality leadership, being driven, positive affect, and working hard as important for engagement:

> Leadership, hard working, intense but can have fun. I think you have to have a good balance between intensity and having fun. Being driven. Wanting to be there, I think. Just wanting to be somewhere, it makes the vibe better, and it makes everyone around you feel more comfortable. I think you have to be happy. I think you have to live and be happy. If you're upset all the time, it throws a lot of things off. And I think you have to be excited and enthusiastic about being on a school team and being with people you like and being with even people you don't like but working it out helps a lot too. I think you just have to be excited about it, and I think you have to be happy about where you are and where your team is, no matter what the score is (Participant 8).

Table 4

Ways That Team and Teammates Positively Impact Student-Athlete Engagement

Theme	Meaning Unit
Interact effectively (5/10)	Believe in one another Are considerate Talk to teammates on a non-threatening level Have trust Are open Sacrifice for one another
Value togetherness (4/10)	Enjoy team road trips Enjoy winning together Strive for goals together Have team engagement Do not have cliques Share a team bond Value togetherness
Provide quality leadership (4/10)	Acknowledge that driven captains are crucial Are great role models Provide good leadership Provide leadership Lead by example
Exude positive affect (3/10)	Have a sense of humor Are fun and they push Are fun Are excited Are enthusiastic
Are driven and dedicated (3/10)	Have love for the sport Are dedicated to the system Want to be there Have a driven team mentality
Interact outside of the sport (2/10)	Interact outside of the sport Care about one another more than on the field Spend time outside of practice

Table 4 (continued)

	Spend time together
Work hard (2/10)	Work hard Are hard working Are intense
Motivate one another (2/10)	Motivate Are motivational
Value external factors (1/10)	Continue tradition of excellence Represent

Conversely, the team and teammates can negatively impact engagement in high-school sports (See Table 5). Engagement can be negatively influenced when the team and teammates behave negatively (4/10), do not value togetherness (3/10), have poor relations (2/10), and have a poor attitude (2/10). For instance, when explaining how having a poor attitude can negatively impact engagement, one participant said, "... sometimes there's one or two people who really just drain the energy or ... sort of distract people or get them off task maybe" (Participant 3). Other participants described how engagement is negatively affected by not valuing togetherness:

> [W]e never came together as a team... there was never a team aspect that was built... It was always the rookies versus the veterans. It wasn't team, even though you made the team as a rookie, you still weren't entitled to the respect of the veterans yet (Participant 4).
>
> There's just some players that don't exactly work well with others. It's part of their nature. Maybe they'll be able to better themselves, but if a player doesn't work well with others, and doesn't have the ability to trust others, one player can

> split up a team. And some people will side with the one player, and things don't work as smoothly if you have people that aren't engaging and aren't working together. And it just makes it a lot more difficult (Participant 9).

And another participant indicated that behaving negatively (i.e., yelling) also negatively influences engagement: "If someone yelled at me, I probably wouldn't [engage] because I don't do good when people yell at me" (Participant 5).

Table 5

Ways That Team and Teammates Negatively Impact Student-Athlete Engagement

Theme	Meaning Unit
Behave negatively (4/10)	Behave harmfully Quarrel over bragging rights Quarrel about starting positions Yell Quarrel with one another
Do not value togetherness (3/10)	Separate into rookies versus veterans Are unable to work well with others Are a divided team
Have poor relations (2/10)	Have harmful relationships Apply negative pressure Do not have trust
Have a poor attitude (2/10)	Are slacking Have a depressed attitude at practice Have a negative attitude

Coaches. Participants indicated that coaches can positively and negatively influence engagement. A coach who positively impacts engagement does so when she or he encourages, drives, and motivates (6/10), displays positive characteristics (5/10), cares about the athletes (5/10), uses effective game- and practice-related strategies (3/10), communicates effectively (3/10), considers the "big picture" (2/10), uses constructive behavior towards the team (2/10), believes in the athletes (2/10), has and sets high expectations (2/10), and has knowledge and experience (2/10) (See Table 6). One participant, when describing the positive effect caring can have on engagement, said, "And he cares about each individual, and you can see that. And he cares about the team

as a whole... I think the coach can really make an impact on a team" (Participant 8). Another participant identified several positive characteristics of coaches who contribute positively to engagement:

> For a positive coach, I think intensity's a good one. I think respect. The coach has to respect the players, and the players have to respect the coach. He should be happy, and I think he should be funny, he or she should be funny. I think they should be into it and realize that, but also realize that it's not the most important thing. It's not the World Cup or anything. So I don't think they should get that intense about things. I think they have to have a balance between friendship and being a coach. Because I think you can have, there's a happy medium there. Then I think they should be welcoming and I think they should be nice. But also being mean when they need to, when we're playing bad or whatever, to tell us to step it up or whatever (Participant 8).

And another participant described how considering the 'big picture' is important for a coach interested in increasing engagement:

> Our football coach is very experienced in how he draws attention to other aspects of our lives besides football and how he says that this is just a game that most of you will only play for four years. So you gotta learn stuff from this game that you can use later on... He spends a lot of time telling us that even though some of us may think this may be the time of our lives right now, sooner or later you're gonna have to suck it up and realize that this is four years of a long life that you're probably supposed to leave. Might as well learn a few things to help you through it (Participant 6).

Table 6

Ways That A Coach Positively Impacts Student-Athlete Engagement

Theme	Meaning Unit
Encourages, drives, and motivates (6/10)	Guides Encourages players Encourages Is tough with athletes Uses negative reinforcement Is motivational Wants team/individual to improve Drives, pushes players Makes a habit of positive actions
Displays positive characteristics (5/10)	Is dedicated Is flexible Cares, wants it Is patient Is a friend Is a cool coach Has a positive mood Exudes optimal intensity Shows respect Is happy Is funny Is welcoming Is nice Is mean when necessary Is an efficient user of time
Cares about the athletes (5/10)	Lets players know that the coach cares Cares about athletes and pushes athletes Takes time out of day and care about players Cares about players as individuals and athletes Cares about individuals/team Cares about players

Table 6 (continued)

Uses effective game- and practice-related strategies (3/10)	Pairs oppositely motivated players together Lets the players play Makes the sport fun
Communicates effectively (3/10)	Inquires about problems and responds effectively Is able to read people well Is open to players' input
Considers the "big picture" (2/10)	Knows that it is not always about their sport Emphasizes transfer of skills learned in sport to life Is concerned with academics
Uses constructive behavior towards the team (2/10)	Interacts with team outside of the room Gets to know the team Brings team together
Believes in the athletes (2/10)	Believes in players Needs to believe in athletes
Has and sets high expectations (2/10)	Has high expectations Sets high expectations
Has knowledge and experience (2/10)	Has experience Knows what they're talking about

In contrast, participants also explained how coaches can negatively impact engagement (See Table 7). A coach negatively influences engagement when she or he uses destructive behavior towards players (8/10), displays negative characteristics (4/10), displays negative behaviors (3/10), and does not care about the athletes (2/10). For example, one captain explained how using destructive behavior (e.g., playing favorites) can have a negative effect on engagement:

> But, I think another thing is, a lot of coaches play favorites. And that can, I have found that that can ruin one's engagement in sport. Because if a coach plays favorites, you kinda see it as, I'm never gonna get, he's got his favorites picked out, I'm never gonna get on that list. So why even try? (Participant 1)

Another participant provided negative characteristics of coaches (e.g., overly intense, mean all the time) that negatively affect engagement:

> I think some coaches are way too intense, and they just really beat down on a team instead of highlighting the good things of the game, and the bad things of the game. They just highlight the bad things. And that really, I don't know, I think that really brings a team down. And I think being mean. There's a point where you can, there's a time when you can be mean, but I don't think it's all the time (Participant 8).

And other participants described how negative behaviors (e.g., bragging, whining) exercised by coaches have a negative influence on engagement:

> [A] coach that talks up his credentials the first day of practice, I guess. And you know, "I've been coaching for 27 years and blah blah blah this and this" (Participant 2).

> A coach who's a whiner. My freshman/sophomore year coach was a whiner. Constantly telling us, why'd you do that, or why'd you do that? Or just would whine. And we were like, you know what, you're a baby. Why would we want to listen to you? (Participant 4)

Table 7

Ways That A Coach Negatively Impacts Student-Athlete Engagement

Theme	Meaning Unit
Uses destructive behavior towards players (8/10)	Plays favorites Only plays starters Uses negative reinforcement Cuts down players in public Lets people get away with things Highlights only bad things Lets players go through the motions Controls players' ability to improvise
Displays negative characteristics (4/10)	Is high-and-mighty Is self-centered on their sport Is inconsistent Has a negative mood Is overly intense Is mean all the time Is dishonest Is manipulative
Displays negative behaviors (3/10)	Brags Unjustifiably yells Whines Is over/under involved
Does not care about the athletes (2/10)	Does not believe in athletes Isn't interested in players

Activities and drills. In addition to the team, teammates, and coaches, activities and drills also have the capability to positively and negatively affect athlete engagement. An activity or drill can affect engagement in a positive way when it is dynamic (4/10), is relevant (3/10), is short in duration (2/10), contains movement (2/10), targets

improvement (2/10), and is competitive (2/10) (See Table 8). Dynamic activities or drills positively contribute to engagement, as one participant described:

> I think, competitive, game realistic activities. Let's say. And activities that, drills that um, there's a reward in the end... I love drills where I get to move around and pass. Drills where I get to shoot and have potential to score on a goalie in practice. (Participant 4)

Other participants stressed the importance of relevance in activities and drills:

> I think ones that seem, ones that aren't pointless, that don't seem pointless to us... Like drills that are relevant to the sport (Participant 8).
>
> I think, competitive, game realistic activities (Participant 4).

And another participant indicated that activities and drills that contain movement and target improvement are likely to positively affect engagement: "if you're doing something while you're running, like working on a skill or, that would definitely be better than just plain running" (Participant 5).

Table 8

Characteristics of Activities and Drills That Positively Impact Student-Athlete Engagement

Theme	Meaning Unit
Are dynamic (4/10)	Have a reward in the end That you get the ball Are interactive Require thought Are measurable
Are relevant (3/10)	Are realistic Are relevant Are game relevant
Are short in duration (2/10)	Are short Are short
Contain movement (2/10)	Combine running and working on a skill Include movement
Target improvement (2/10)	Combine running and working on a skill Include hard work and improvement
Are competitive (2/10)	Are competitive Are competitive

In comparison, participants described an activity or drill as negatively impacting engagement when it requires minimal mental effort (3/10), is long in duration (2/10), and is repetitive (2/10) (See Table 9). One participant described how an activity that is repetitive ("drilling"), may cause some athletes to not engage, and ultimately, to not improve:

> We drill different moves. That's what we do before… And that is where kids get worse. Not worse. But that's where kids don't improve. Is if they just hit moves leisurely. Just trying to get through practice (Participant 3).

Another participant indicated that activities and drills that require minimal mental effort are not engaging: "I'd say, basic things, people aren't as engaged in" (Participant 1). And participants also acknowledged that activities and drills that are long in duration are less engaging:

> And if they know it's long and tedious they're just gonna be like, "oh my goodness gracious" (Participant 1).
>
> For long distances, it's really hard to keep your focus. If you're not focused before you start running, it's hard to keep it where you're gonna run at a strong pace throughout the whole run (Participant 2).

Table 9

Characteristics of Activities and Drills That Negatively Impact Student-Athlete Engagement

Theme	Meaning Unit
Require minimal mental effort (3/10)	Are basic activities Are just running Are just stretching
Are long in duration (2/10)	Are long Are long
Are repetitive (2/10)	Drilling Are repetitive

Other components. While the team and teammates, coaches, and activities and drills contribute to engagement, other components are likely to influence it as well (See Table 10). For instance, other factors that affect engagement are parents, family, and home (4/10), sport-related factors (3/10), winning and accomplishment (2/10), personal reasons (2/10), fan support (2/10), and school factors (2/10). One participant provided examples of how sport-related factors ("if they're surrounded by their friends in the activity."), winning and accomplishment ("Cuz if you are constantly losing, then that could take away some of the fun of it."), and personal reasons ("And if you aren't really enjoying yourself, it's kinda hard [to put] all your time and energy into it, if it isn't an enjoyable experience.") impact engagement (Participant 10). Other participants indicated that fan, teacher, and community support positively affect engagement:

> I think the excitement of the school. Fan support, I guess you could call it. I think fan support is pretty, that makes you want to, if no one shows up to your games,

obviously you want to do well and play well for yourself. But when you have a big crowd in the stands, that really motivates some people, that really makes them want to do well. And it really makes them want to show up and step up to the plate and play really well. So, fan support is good. And teacher support too. Teachers are really involved at my school. So when they come, we see them in the classroom, you go to their class every day, and when you see them come to one of your sporting events, it's like you're close with that teacher. It's a big deal. And you, I really appreciate if any of my teachers come. I think it's very nice. And then when they comment the day after in your class, if they're like you had a good game or you guys played well yesterday, that really makes you want to do well. So I think fan support is also, that also can make a lot of people motivated (Participant 8).

I think a lot of it might come down to the community and how much the community backs a sport. Because in my community, baseball is not a big sport. And on our team, we are becoming more successful, became more successful through the years that I played. But there just wasn't a very big community backing. So players that played, they knew that there wasn't gonna be people at their games. There wasn't gonna be any excitement about it, so they didn't put as much into it. Whereas in basketball in my town, where we've been to the state championship game, two out of the last four years, and we've been to the final four the last four years. And there's so much community support. And the gym is always packed. You're always gonna have people watching you. And seeing how you've improved. It gives you more motivation to get better, and to put all that

you have into it... I really think that players take note, players really take a lot of pride when they're being noticed by the community for the effort that they've put into it. They're being recognized for all the hard work, all the days of practice. Where it's harder to try to put everything into it when you just know that you're gonna go play a game, you might win, you might lose, but probably nobody's gonna even come up and talk to you about it (Participant 9).

Table 10

Other Components That Influence Student-Athlete Engagement

Theme	Meaning Unit
Parents, family, and home (4/10)	Family upbringing Parents Home environment Demographic variables
Sport-related factors (3/10)	Co-ed nature of a sport Competition for spot on team Friends' participation
Winning and accomplishment (2/10)	Record, team accomplishment Enjoyment of winning in sport Recognition
Personal reasons (2/10)	You, yourself Enjoyment of the sport experience Comfort in the sport environment
Fan support (2/10)	Fan support Community, fan support
School factors (2/10)	School size Teacher support

Recommendations for Coaches

The third purpose of this research was to identify strategies and techniques that a coach could implement to facilitate engagement in high-school athletics. Participants provided a number of suggestions for coaches on how to enhance engagement in their athletes (See Table 11). According to participants, a coach who wants to improve the engagement of her or his athletes should interact effectively with players (7/10), understand the high school context (7/10), and adjust one's behavior accordingly (5/10).

For example, one participant described how to effectively interact with players by saying, "You have to inform your team that when you're on the field, all the other things need to be dropped and just work at what you're doing" (Participant 9). The same participant also indicated that, regarding understanding the high school context, "It's good for a coach to understand that there's a lot that goes on in a teenage, high school sports player's life" (Participant 9). Other participants recommended ways that a coach should adjust his or her behavior:

> If you want your team to be fully engaged, I would make yourself fully engaged (Participant 10).
>
> First off, I would tell them to relax. You're high school coaches (Participant 4).
>
> There's gonna be wins and there's gonna be losses, and if you try to go for that perfect season all the power to you. But don't become a jerk or don't become obsessed with being undefeated for the price of losing players and losing respect (Participant 6).

In addition, participants suggested for a coach to understand the players (4/10), understand the team (3/10), hold individual meetings (3/10), incorporate fun (3/10), incorporate goals (2/10), and hold team meetings (2/10) to improve engagement. For example, one participant indicated that, to enhance engagement, the coach should understand the team: "I would say that you need to read your team... you see that people are getting just tired, burned out, ready for the season to be done, you need to do something fun" (Participant 7). Other participants recommended that, to best understand individuals and the team as a whole, coaches should hold individual and team meetings:

So coaches have to realize that there's different groups of athletes to try to attract and try to understand. To best understand that I'd say is to have team meetings and talk to each player individually and see what makes them tick (Participant 6).

I think that it could be the coach with a different player like separately or the whole team together. Maybe both. Maybe the coach with everyone separately, and afterwards you all get together (Participant 5).

I think that they should, um, I think individual meetings with a player would probably help a lot. I don't know of anyone or anybody that does that. But I think it could help because, I think both the player and the coach need to get onboard with their goals. And the coach needs to sit down and see what the player wants to give. And see if they're gonna be fully engaged. I think the player is gonna be that much more willing to engage when the coach or when the player knows that the coach cares that much about him or her. Like, like, "you're willing to sit down with me and ask me what I want? And you're gonna tell me that you expect this out of me?" (Participant 1)

Table 11

Recommendations for Coaches to Enhance Student-Athlete Engagement

Theme	Meaning Unit
Interact effectively with players (7/10)	Motivate Work one-on-one with struggling players Respect players as equals Earn trust Challenge players Inform players to focus on sport during sport time Be mindful of pushing players Help players learn from mistakes, rather than punish always Should have negative players change their attitude or quit Ensure cohesiveness / don't contribute to incohesiveness
Understand the high school context (7/10)	High school athletes will have good and bad days Players get tired Players want to learn Players want to be cared about as people, not just wins or losses Different types of students play high school sports It's not all about the sport High school is not college Students have rigorous academic lives Relationships are high priority for high school students A lot goes on in high school sports players' lives
Adjust one's behavior accordingly (5/10)	Believe in the players Relax Emphasize importance of practice Don't be a hypocrite

Table 11 (continued)

	Maintain integrity in the face of tough decisions Think about community and team instead of wins and losses Be excited about the sport Fully engage yourself Should determine/convey acceptable image/behavior
Understand the players (4/10)	Establish individual relationships with players Get to know your players Understand players Get to know the players individually Understand player's home environment Understand player's tendencies
Understand the team (3/10)	Allow for more input from players Be on the same page with players Read the team Be aware of team dynamics, address when necessary Make the environment a place where the players want to be Recognize when the team needs a fun practice
Hold individual meetings (3/10)	Hold individual meetings with players Have individual meetings Have individual meetings
Incorporate fun (3/10)	Sports are fun, not all about wins Make it fun Have a sense of humor with players
Incorporate goals (2/10)	Set team goals Set goals Celebrate attaining goals
Hold team meetings (2/10)	Have team meetings Have team meetings

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study was guided by three objectives. First, the study sought to better understand the reasons for engagement in high-school sport. Second, it endeavored to identify components of the high-school sport environment that affect engagement. Third, it aimed to identify strategies and techniques that a coach can implement to facilitate engagement in high-school sport. A qualitative exploration, using a semi-structured interview format achieved these goals. In the following sections, the results are summarized and interpreted.

Conceptions of Engagement

Engagement has been understood in many ways throughout the research literature (e.g., Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007; Newmann, 1989; Wehlage et al., 1989). Participants in this study described engagement both similarly to and differently from those found in previous literature. For example, participants included focus, dedication, involvement, and value in their conceptions of engagement; these are consistent with terms found in prior research. Contrastingly, giving or doing the most one can, improvement, and responsibility were also identified by participants in this study; these have not typically been considered as definitions of engagement as indicated by the research literature.

Results of this study illustrate one of the challenges associated with exploring engagement – namely, that of defining it. In general, people are able to conceive of and "understand" engagement, but they are unable to articulate it. People know what it is to be fully engaged in an activity, but they are challenged to explain exactly how

engagement differs from other similar terms. The manner in which participants in this study conceived of engagement should be considered both cautiously and encouragingly. On one hand, participants described engagement in various ways, not arriving at a consistent and concise definition. On the other hand, however, the conceptions provided by participants in this study were related to and consistent with similar definitions as evidenced by previous research.

Reasons for Engagement

In an effort to better understand why some high-school athletes engaged their sport experience while others did not (Purpose 1), this research illuminated several explanations. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Newmann, 1989; Pearce & Larson, 2006), environmental factors were given as reasons for engagement. According to participants in this study, the number one reason why some athletes engaged while others did not was for sport-related reasons – an environmental factor. For example, aspects of the sport, such as team success, playing time, and praise and recognition from the coach contributed to engagement. Additionally, participants identified the influence of others (e.g., teammates, parents) as a contributing reason as well. These results (i.e., environmental factors as reasons for engagement) are not surprising, given previous research in other domains.

However, other reasons provided for why some high-school athletes engaged while others did not were more individualistic than environmental. For instance, motivation for participation, type of person/personality, and feelings towards the sport were frequently mentioned as reasons for engagement. Participants indicated that engagement is determined by how much the athlete 'wants it' (Motivation for

participation), depends on the person (e.g., laid back; naturally competitive) (Type of person/personality), and depends on whether an athlete loves what he or she is doing (Feelings towards the sport). Clearly, these items are more person-centered, rather than environmental.

Responses to questions about reasons for engagement yielded relevant results. Though participants reported that environmental factors such as the sport and important others contributed to engagement, which is consistent with previous literature (e.g., Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn, 1992), they also identified individual characteristics as vital for engagement. These findings are significant, because they reveal that high-school athletes may not associate engagement solely with external contributions. If high-school athletes believed that their and others' engagement is determined primarily by person-centered, individualistic drives and characteristics, then they may be less likely to respond positively to environmental assistance. High-school athletes who believed that they engaged because they had the drive, whereas others who did not engage did not have the drive, may be less likely to seek out support, because they associated engagement with internal, inherent qualities. Taken together, results of this study suggest that engagement for high-school athletes may be influenced both by the effects of their environment and by person-centered, individual factors.

Environmental Components

The present research endeavored to illuminate how environmental factors contributed to engagement, as perceived by high-school athletes. Results of the inquiry into how environmental components contributed to engagement (Purpose 2) will be summarized and interpreted in the following sections corresponding to the categories

explored: (1) team and teammates; (2) coaches; (3) activities and drills; and (4) other components.

Team and teammates. One aspect of the environment that the author anticipated would have an impact on engagement was team and teammates. Participants reported that team and teammates contributed to engagement both positively and negatively. When teammates interacted positively, worked hard and motivated one another, and were driven and dedicated, engagement was likely to be increased. In contrast, when the team behaved negatively and did not value togetherness, and when the team had poor relations and a poor overall attitude, engagement was likely to be decreased. These results were not surprising, given that previous literature suggested that the environmental context regarding peers was important for engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Research indicated that when peers were supportive and welcoming (Pearce & Larson, 2006) and interacted positively with one another (Mahoney, Eccles, & Larson, 2004), engagement was more likely. Thus, results from this study supported previous findings that peers and peer interactions are important for high-school athlete engagement.

One unexpected result was the inclusion of quality leadership by peers as a positive contributor to high-school athlete engagement. Participants indicated that when teammates led by example, were great role models, and provided good leadership, engagement was more likely. These results suggested that youth leadership may contribute to the experience of high-school athletes more so than previously considered, as participants identified teammate leadership as a critical contributor to high-school athlete engagement. It is noteworthy, however, that such an emphasis on leadership may be due to participants' bias towards the importance of leadership. Because participants

may be captains in sport or leaders in other domains, their acknowledgment of the importance of leadership may be expected. But, although participants in this study may be biased regarding the influence of peer leadership on engagement, understanding how peers serve as leaders in interscholastic athletics is still a noble cause, given the impact of peers, in general, as evidenced in previous research (e.g., Weiss & Weiss, 2007).

Coaches. Another aspect of the high-school sport environment expected to contribute to athlete engagement was the coach. Participants indicated that coaches positively and negatively affect engagement. Coaches can have a positive influence on engagement when they are encouraging, positive, care about and believe in their athletes, and know their sport well. Results of this study also indicated that coaches negatively affect engagement when they used negative and destructive behaviors, when they displayed negative characteristics (e.g., inconsistent, overly intense, dishonest, manipulative), and when they did not care about their athletes.

Two results were particularly interesting to the current study. First, participants noted that a coach caring about one's players is critical for high-school athletes. When the coach cared about his or her players as both individuals and as athletes, participants said, athletes were more likely to engage and benefit from their experience. Oftentimes in sport, coaches may not take the time to get to know and care about their players off the field, and participants in this study indicated that coaches who take time out of their day and let their players know that they care about them were better received than colder, less-caring coaches. These results support the sport psychological work of Jowett (2003) and Petitpas (2002), who emphasize the importance of establishing relationships when working with athletes. Such results also support work done by Gano-Overway and

colleagues (2009) on caring sport contexts that suggests that a coach who establishes a caring climate may be more likely to have athletes who develop prosocial behaviors than a coach whose athletes perceive the climate to be less caring. In more general terms, these results support the significance of positive adult—youth relationships espoused in previous literature (e.g., Hansen & Larson, 2007; Mahoney, Eccles, & Larson, 2004).

A second result that was necessary to note was that of coaches considering the big picture. Participants described coaches who emphasized transfer of skills learned in sport to life, were concerned with academics, and knew that everything did not revolve around their sport as being coaches who positively contributed to high-school athlete engagement. It is noteworthy that participants identified such qualities as being positively related to engagement. It is possible that some readers may assume that in order to positively affect the engagement of players, coaches must approach their sport with a singular vigor that requires players to sustain focus and dedication despite additional interests and responsibilities. Results of the current study suggest the opposite, however; findings from the present research suggest that coaches trying to enhance engagement in their players should be aware of and respect players' non-sport lives and obligations, and understand that high-school athletics is only one of many experiences a high-school student should enjoy.

Activities and drills. An additional aspect of the environment expected to contribute to engagement was that of activities and drills. Results indicated that activities and drills affect engagement both positively and negatively. When activities and drills were dynamic and relevant, contained movement, and were competitive, according to participants, engagement was more likely to occur. Contrastingly, when activities and

drills required minimal mental effort, were long in duration, and were repetitive, engagement was less likely to occur.

Overall, responses from participants regarding activities and drills contributing to engagement were not particularly surprising to the author. Of note, however, is the general nature of those activities and drills described as either positive or negative. Positive drills were more complex (e.g., contained a reward, required thought) and inclusive (e.g., players got the ball), and they allowed for sufficient levels of challenge to exist for athletes; these activities necessitated a higher-order level of commitment, both psychologically and physically, compared to drills that reduced engagement. Activities and drills that negatively affected engagement were basic, long in duration, repetitive, and contained standing; these activities did not allow for players' skills to be challenged. Considering research that has explored the concept of flow (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), it is not surprising that an athlete's level of engagement was positively affected by activities that contained elements of challenge, where higher-level physical and cognitive effort was expected. It is important, then, to consider the qualitative differences between activities and drills observed to engage high-school athletes and those not expected to.

Other components. In addition to team and teammates, coaches, and activities and drills, other components of the environment were expected to contribute to engagement for high-school athletes. Participants identified factors such as family and parents, elements of the sport, personal reasons, and fan and school factors as well. No one component garnered overwhelming mention by participants, however.

Of particular interest to the author was that of fan support. It is not unusual for athletes to be aware of and concerned with how spectators perceive them during an event.

Athletes sometimes modify their behavior, when the crowd cheers and yells; this is not uncommon. However, the author found it noteworthy that participants attributed increased engagement to the support of two unique populations: the community and teachers. When the community was invested in the success and well-being of a team, athletes on that team were more engaged, according to participants. They worked harder and put all they had into their sport when they perceived that the community cared about them. Similarly, when teachers showed that they supported a team, the athletes on that team were more engaged. Participants reported that when teachers showed up at games or asked them how they played the next day at school, athletes appreciated that and that made them want to do better at their sport. Community and teacher support are significant when considering alternative contributors to high-school athlete engagement.

Recommendations for Coaches

The final purpose of this research was to acquire recommendations for coaches for how to increase engagement in their high-school athletes (Purpose 3). Participants provided several recommendations for coaches, including interact effectively with players (e.g., "respect players," "challenge players," "help players learn from mistakes"), adjust one's behavior accordingly (e.g., "relax," "fully engage yourself," "don't be a hypocrite"), and incorporate fun (e.g., "have a sense of humor," "make it fun"). Additionally, participants suggested that coaches incorporate goals, to enhance engagement among their players. Though the aforementioned recommendations are useful, and coaches would be wise to consider them completely, participants made other recommendations that were of particular interest to the author.

First, participants recommended that coaches understand both the high-school context and their players. Participants stated that much goes on in high-school athletes' lives and that the high-school sport environment is not the college sport environment; thus, their lives are not all about their sport. High-school athletes will have good days and bad days and will sometimes get tired throughout the season. Also, athletes want to learn and improve, and they want to be cared about as people, more than just wins and losses. Players come from diverse home situations, and a coach would really benefit from getting to know players individually. By establishing individual relationships with players, learning about their interests and tendencies, a coach is more likely to positively affect engagement.

Second, in order to better understand the high-school context and their players, participants suggested that coaches should hold individual and team meetings. Individual meetings that include discussions beyond the sport context would allow coaches to get to know players on a one-on-one basis, helping the coaches to provide personalized support and challenge when necessary. Similarly, holding team meetings would allow coaches to acquire a more global awareness of the needs and disposition of the team as a whole, allowing for more accurate goal-setting and team-strategizing to occur. Ultimately, both individual and team meetings would allow the coach to acquire a more comprehensive knowledge of his or her players as individuals and collectively as a team. Having such knowledge, a coach would be more likely to be able to effectively enhance the engagement of high-school athletes.

Limitations and Strengths

This research sought to explore and understand engagement in interscholastic athletes. One limitation of this study was that the sample was purposefully selected and non-random. That is, the participants in this research were not randomly selected from a population. This was done for two reasons: convenience and competence. The author of this study was a graduate student with limited means. The participants included in this study were highly-recommended and were convenient to contact. Their selection allowed for the present research to be conducted efficiently and effectively. Additionally, participants in this study were expected to have above-average competencies regarding their knowledge of interscholastic athletes and their capacity to comprehend and analyze novel concepts. Consequently, they were purposefully sampled – a well-established method in qualitative research. It was anticipated that a random sample of the population would not have been able to provide the richness of response – which is necessary for a qualitative exploration into uncharted territory – that the selected participants provided.

Another limitation was that of the concept of engagement itself. Engagement is convoluted and inadequately understood, in general. As evidenced by previous research and the current study, descriptions of engagement are not homogenous. From personal communications with others, the author recognizes that people are typically able to talk about engagement, without coming to definitive conclusions about exactly what engagement is. Although participants provided impressive responses to numerous questions and probes about engagement, their understanding of engagement – a challenging topic about which participants may not have previously pondered – suggests that such responses should be considered with restraint.

Though there are limitations of this research, notable strengths exist. One strength of this study was that it investigated a concept (i.e., engagement), amongst a population (i.e., interscholastic athletes), within a context (i.e., interscholastic athletics), that had heretofore gone unexplored in the research literature. Engagement has been studied in academic settings, OST programs, and elite athletes. Prior to this research, it had never been explored among interscholastic athletes in terms of their engagement in their high-school sport. This research expands the current literature and base of knowledge regarding engagement in interscholastic athletes and provides a foundation for future researchers to explore related concepts and contexts.

A second strength of this research is its qualitative and exploratory nature. Engagement, as a relatively new concept in the research literature, has not been comprehensively understood. Researchers have a much more thorough understanding of and have spent considerably more hours studying concepts such as motivation, self-efficacy, and participation. As a result, quantitative measures have been devised in an effort to measure these terms. Regarding engagement in interscholastic athletes, no such quantitative instruments exist, because research has not been done that identifies the specific aspects of engagement that are measurable and necessary. As a qualitative study, the current research aimed to recognize and illuminate engagement in an effort to better understand how it exists in an interscholastic athlete population and in an interscholastic athletics context.

This study also has as a strength the fact that it can be immediately useful for practitioners in the field. Some research is overly technical and unlikely to be fully comprehensible for non-scientists or non-academic-professionals; other research is

conducted using expensive, rare equipment (e.g., Magnetic Resonance Imaging machine) that is not available to the public in any realistic way; And still, other research is conducted on populations that are not typically or frequently accessed by the average person (e.g., elite athletes, prisoners). The current research explores a population that exists in abundance in this country. Consequently, the results of this study could be used by coaches, parents, and administrators who all have the opportunity to improve the lives of young people through daily interactions.

Future Research Directions

Engagement in interscholastic athletics is a topic that needs further exploration. The results of this study, in conjunction with research in related domains, suggested that environments, established and enriched by adults, can play a substantial role in the experiences youth have. Future research, then, should strive to explore how coaches can modify the environment to enhance engagement. Participants in this study identified several recommendations for coaches to consider if they were interested in improving engagement. Future studies could be designed whereby environments and coaching behaviors are modified and engagement is considered as an outcome. For example, a study examining differences in athlete outcomes when some coaches are required to have one-on-one meetings with their athletes (treatment group) and other coaches are not required to have one-on-one meetings with their athletes (control) may yield interesting findings. Results of such research would support or fail to support the recommendations made by participants in this study.

As mentioned previously, engagement is a challenging concept to define. In an effort to understand engagement from a different perspective, future research that asks

interscholastic coaches how they define engagement would be beneficial. The current study included interscholastic athletes, and the components of engagement provided were as perceived and understood by them. This research is important, as it establishes a basic understanding of how engagement is considered in an interscholastic-athletics context. However, coaches approach the high-school sport context from a different perspective than athletes. Considering engagement from a different vantage point, coaches are likely to include aspects of engagement that athletes may not have considered or recognized as being important. To further establish how the concept of engagement is defined and understood in interscholastic athletics, coaches' perceptions of engagement should be explored.

An additional direction for future research would be to explore relationships between and among engagement and other aspects of psychosocial development. Existing research has investigated countless concepts related to youth development (e.g., initiative, executive function, self-efficacy, etc.) in many domains. To date, however, given the recent emergence of engagement as a psychological concept to be explored, engagement has not been studied as it relates to established psychosocial elements. For example, numerous questions emerge when considering how engagement relates to other concepts: Are youth with task-goal orientations more likely to engage their developmental opportunities? How is engagement related to implicit theories of intelligence? Do youth who engage their developmental opportunities utilize planning strategies more frequently than youth who do not engage? By understanding how engagement relates to established developmental concepts, a more comprehensive knowledge of youth development can be acquired.

Another direction for future research may be to explore engagement from trait-based and state-based perspectives. Do some people always engage in their experiences, no matter the context? Do some people only engage when certain circumstances are present? Are there differences between being acutely engaged and being habitually engaged? The present research does not distinguish between the two connotations, as participants were not asked to nor did they explicitly identify distinctions. Future research on engagement should aim to uncover and delineate potential differences in possible types of engagement.

Previous literature has provided definitions and conceptions of engagement (e.g., Bartko, 2005; Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007; Wehlage et al., 1989; Weiss, Little, & Bouffard, 2005), and which and how aspects of the environment influence engagement (e.g., Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Pearce & Larson, 2006). The current research advanced the theoretical understanding of engagement by shedding light on the fact that the individual is important too, as participants identified person-centered reasons for engagement. A more comprehensive exploration into the characteristics, tendencies, philosophies, and desires of the individual is needed. The current research merely scratched the surface of the underlying, personal attributes that inspire engagement.

So what is engagement, and how is it relevant in interscholastic athletics? Though engagement remains nebulous, the present study exposed new areas of understanding and interest. Coaches can have a substantial positive impact on their athletes' engagement, especially when coaches take the time to care about and build relationships with their players. Individual athletes experience the environment differently, bringing with them unique skills, personalities, and needs, which contribute to their engagement or lack

thereof. And engagement, as a psychological concept, may be the temporal result of particular environmental features, the regular manifestation of past experiences and internalizations, or some combination of both. Additional research, then, needs to hone in on exactly what engagement is and is not, in an effort to universalize its definition and usage.

Future research on engagement should aim to establish an agreed-upon understanding of exactly what engagement is and is composed of. Past research has included several definitions and conceptualizations of engagement. Wehlage and colleagues (1989) and Newmann (1989) have described it as a psychological investment by students to learn, comprehend, and master knowledge and skills taught in school. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) and Bartko (2005) have included a behavioral component, a psychological (i.e., cognitive) component, and an emotional (i.e., affective) component in their conceptions of engagement. In elite athletics, researchers have described engagement as being composed of vigor, dedication, confidence, and enthusiasm (Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007; Lonsdale, Hodge, & Raedeke, 2007). And the present research identified components of engagement such as focus, dedication, and involvement (aspects similar to those identified in past research), as well as unique components such as improvement, responsibility, and pride. Thus, a thorough understanding of exactly what engagement is remains nonexistent.

Furthermore, research exploring what engagement is not would contribute to the overall understanding of engagement as well. Weiss and colleagues (2005) claim that engagement "is not only motivation to be there; it is also being actively involved" (p. 24) in an activity. How does engagement differ from motivation? If one considers a

commonly used definition of motivation, that motivation is the direction and intensity of effort (Sage, 1977), then are the concepts of engagement and motivation different from one another? Or are they merely just a different way to say the same thing?

Ultimately, researchers interested in developing a comprehensive, universal understanding of engagement would be wise to begin to formulate a model for engagement. Answering questions such as, "What is it?", "What does it look like?", and "How is it experienced?" can begin to address engagement's definition. Questions such as, "What features of the environment need to be present, in order for engagement to occur?", "Are certain individuals more predisposed to engagement than others?", and "What can activity facilitators do to increase engagement?" can begin to address engagement's antecedents. And questions such as, "What happens when youth engage?", "What developmental outcomes are related to engagement?", and "What performance outcomes are related to engagement?" can begin to address engagement's consequences. By creating such a model, scholars will be better able to use engagement in their research and will be better able to disseminate a coherent, useful message to practitioners in the field. Future research in engagement promises to yield an abundance of benefits to academics and professionals alike.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Understanding the High-school Athlete:
A Qualitative Study of Interscholastic Athletes' Engagement
Informational Document

The purpose of my thesis research is to better understand engagement as it relates to high-school athletes. Engagement refers to the psychological, behavioral, and emotional investment of time, energy, and effort in a given activity while reaping the benefits of the activity.

The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes, will be conducted over the phone, and will be audio recorded. The participant's involvement will be completely voluntary. If, at any time during the research, the participant does not feel comfortable, then she or he may discontinue participation without penalty or consequences. That is, the participant may refuse to participate at any time.

All information provided during the interviews will be kept completely confidential. The only individuals who will have access to the information will be my advisor at MSU, Dr. Daniel Gould, and me.

We are not aware of any physical or psychological risks of the study that would affect the participants or their parents. With respect to benefits, although there may not be any immediate benefits of the study for the participants, future high-school athletes may reap the benefits provided by the results of this study. Results of this study may be used by coaches, teachers, and parents to create environments and programs which promote engagement and development.

The research and this informational document have been approved by the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations. If you have any concerns or questions about this research study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or if you believe you have been harmed because of the research, please contact me (Michael Crawford, 211 IM Circle, MSU, East Lansing, MI, 48824; crawf189@msu.edu; (248) 789-1451)) or my supervising advisor (Dr. Daniel Gould, 210 IM Circle, MSU, East Lansing, MI, 48824; drgould@msu.edu; (517) 432-0175. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program by phone at (517) 355-2180, by fax at (517) 432-4503, by email at irb@msu.edu, or by US Mail at 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI, 48824.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix B

Understanding the High-School Athlete:
A Qualitative Study of Interscholastic Athletes' Engagement
Interview Guide

[Introduction]

I am interested in engagement in high-school sports, and you have been selected as a high-school athlete who may be able to describe engagement from an inside perspective, given that you are or currently have played high-school sports. I became interested in this topic when I coached varsity soccer this past year. Some of the guys on my team were not into it as much as they could've been. We had a good team and a good group of guys, so I couldn't figure out why some of the guys wouldn't be all in; they weren't fully engaged. I could not understand, so I wanted to do some research to better understand what was going on. And here we are.

So what do I mean when I say engagement in high-school sports? Engagement, in this study, refers to the psychological, behavioral, and emotional investment of time, energy, and effort in high-school sports activities with the goal of reaping the benefits of the experience. So basically, do you care, are you into it, are you working hard, are you paying attention, are you doing what the coach asks, are you trying to learn and improve, trying to better yourself as an athlete and/or as a person? We know a little bit about engagement in high-school sport, but we'd like to know more. And that is why we'd like to hear what you have to say. Does that make sense? Do you have any questions? So the following questions are going to be about your high-school sport experience, about your opinions about engagement and other athletes, about the high-school sport environment, and about high-school sport coaches. Does that sound okay? Just to remind you, at any point in time, if you feel uncomfortable or want a response to be stricken from the record,

please let me know immediately. You can discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Are you ready to begin?

[Conceptions of Engagement]

1. What does engagement mean to you?
    a. What's it like to be fully engaged?
    b. What's it like to not be so engaged?

[Purpose 1: To better understand the impetus for engagement in high-school sport]

2. Let's talk about your high-school sport experience. Why do you play high-school sports?
3. Some players say that they play high-school sports to learn sport-skills as well as life skills, like leadership and responsibility. What reasons would you give for why you play high-school sports?
4. Some players also mention that they really engage their sport experience in order to get the most out of it that they can. Do you approach sport like that?
    a. (If yes), why do you engage your high-school sport?
    b. (If no), why do you think they engage their high-school sports?
5. Others players don't seem to care. Why do you think that some players engage their sport while others do not?
6. How are players who engage different from players who don't?
7. Do you think players who engage their sport are better off during and after their sport experience than players who don't?
    c. Why do you think that that's the case?
8. What else is there about the player who engages that I need to know?

d. What is that player like?

[Purpose 2: To identify components of the high-school sport environment that affect engagement]

9. We got into a bit about why some players engage and how they differ from other players who don't engage, but we also know that the environment can play a role too. How does the overall team environment affect a player's engagement?
    e. Think about how a team affects player engagement; what are some characteristics of such a team?
10. We also know that the coach is an important piece of the puzzle. When thinking about coaches, how can they have an impact on engagement?
    f. What characteristics of coaches who impact engagement come to mind?
11. Peers, teammates, are obviously involved as well. How can teammates impact engagement?
    g. What are some characteristics of teammates who impact engagement?
12. Also, sometimes, just the nature of the activity or drill can influence engagement. What types of activities are likely to engage players?
    h. What features do these activities or drills have that make them good for engagement?
13. We covered the overall team environment, the coach, teammates, and the activity; what else may play a role in engagement?

[Purpose 3: To identify strategies and techniques that a coach can implement to facilitate engagement in high-school sport]

14. We talked a bit about the characteristics of coaches who have an impact on player engagement. What are some important things coaches need to know about high-school student-athletes, or in general, to help the coaches to help the players to engage their high-school sport experience?
15. So if you could talk to a group of coaches, what advice would you give to coaches to help them help their athletes to engage?

Appendix C

Understanding the High-School Athlete:
A Qualitative Study of Interscholastic Athletes' Engagement
Example – Member Check Document

Participant X: Gender, Grade

- Participant plays sports because she enjoys being active, to stay in shape, and to practice life skills.
- Engagement means that the athlete is:
    - Involved
    - Enjoying what s/he is doing
    - Having fun
    - Prideful
    - Feels good about self
    - Not bored
- Some players engage, while others do not, for many reasons:
    - Skill level
    - Personality
    - Want to fit in with others
- Players who engage in sport are better off during and after their experience because:
    - Learned life skills
    - Stayed in shape
- The coach can affect engagement:
    - Positive:
        - Caring about and pushing athletes
        - Making sport fun
    - Negative:
        - Being inconsistent
        - Not believing in athletes
- Peers, teammates, and the team can affect engagement:
    - Positive:
        - Being fun and pushing teammates
        - Working hard
        - Being motivational
        - Being considerate
    - Negative:
        - Yelling
- The activity can affect engagement:
    - Positive:
        - Interactive
        - Running and working on a skill
    - Negative:
        - Running by itself
- Parents, both positively and negatively, can affect engagement as well.

- Helpful for coaches to improve athlete engagement:
    - To know:
        - Players want to be cared about as people, not just wins or losses
        - Sports are fun, not all about wins
    - To do:
        - Get to know your players
        - Allow your players to provide more input
        - Have team and individual meetings
        - Be on the same page with players
- Both environmental and individual factors affect engagement, but the environment may play a larger role.
- One strategy for adults who want to promote the benefits of sports could be to have current players talk to potential players.
- Not all players benefit from sports; differences exist.
- Other:
    - A student-led group is more likely to have an impact than adults when emphasizing the benefits of sports.
    - Participant mentioned that it is possible for some players to not know that they are not trying as hard as they could be. That is, some players may not be able to recognize that they are failing to engage.

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