
Coaching Life Skills

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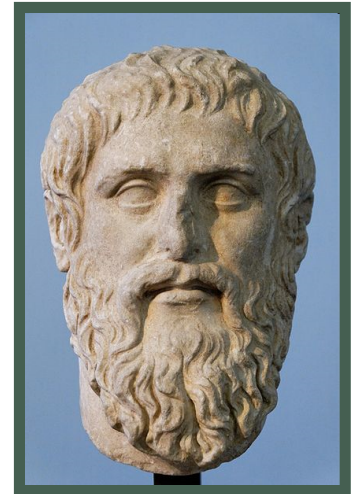
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF
YOUTH SPORTS

Life Skills Development Through Sport Research

- ▶ How do we help develop better people through the sport experience?
 - ▶ How do we use sport to psychologically equip young people for a success and productive life?
-

The Idea of Life Skills Development Through Sport Is Not New!

*“The moral value of exercises
and sports far outweigh the
physical value.” - Plato*



Pierre de Coubertin

- ▶ *“For each individual, sport is a possible source for inner improvement.”*
- ▶ *“Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of a good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.”*



Contemporary Youth Sports: Pop Warner/Little Scholars Football



The mission statement of Pop Warner Little Scholars, a national U.S. youth sport organization that provides football and cheer programs for boys and girls, is to “teach fundamental values, skills and knowledge that children will use throughout their lives.”

The Need to Help Underserved Youth: The Case of the Detroit Police (Youth) Athletic League

- ▶ 40% of Detroit's youth will not graduate from high school.
- ▶ 35% of those youth who do not graduate from high school will be incarcerated by age 35.



KIDS AT THE
CORNER

Wasted Top Sport Talent as a Result of Poor Life Skills



Today's Topic

- ▶ Coaching Life Skills or *How Do We Facilitate Personal Development Through Sport Participation?*
- ▶ Why?
 - ▶ *Feel it is of critical importance today!*



Defining Life Skills

- ▶ *United Nations (2005)*
 - ▶ *Danish, Taylor, Hodge and Heke (2004)*
 - ▶ *Jones (2009)*
 - ▶ *Gould & Carson (2008)*
-

Defining Life Skills

- ▶ *Life Skills*: those mental, emotional, social attributes, characteristics, and behaviors that athletes develop or refine through sports participation and have the potential to transfer for use in other life situations.
 - ▶ *Example Life Skills*: ability to set and achieve goals, confidence, leadership, discipline, emotional control, teamwork, moral reasoning.
-

Today's Focus

- ▶ What Are We Learning About Coaching Life Skills Skills Through Sports Participation?
 - ▶ Examine the Coaching Life Skills Studies We Have Been Conducting at the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports
 - ▶ Derive Implications for Practice
 - ▶ Outline Future Research Directions
-

Life Skills Through Sport: Example Studies

- ▶ Athlete Life Skills Needs Assessment
 - ▶ Coaching Factors Influencing the Development of Athlete Life Skills
 - ▶ Influence of an Intensive Wrestling Camp on Life Skills Development
-

What Life Skills to Develop?



Key Life Skills Needed by Young Athletes

*Gould, Smith, White & Chung (2006)
Coaches Survey*

- ▶ Taking personal responsibility
- ▶ Developing motivation/work ethic
- ▶ Developing better communication and listening skills

*Jones and Lavallee (2009) Athlete
Focus Groups*

- ▶ Personal skills (e.g., self-organization, goal setting, motivation)
- ▶ Social skills (e.g., respect, leadership, communication, family interaction) *

Gen Z Athlete Characteristics

(Gould, Nalepa & Mignano, 2018)

- ▶ Lack of independence
- ▶ Sensitive to negative feedback/take negative feedback personally
- ▶ Short attention spans/easily distracted
- ▶ Lack strong interpersonal skills
- ▶ Struggle with coping with adversity



Life Skills Through Sport: Coaching Factors Influencing the Development of Athlete Life Skills Studies



Coaching Behavior-Life Skills Development Relationship Studies



Developmental Gains Youth Learn in Sport

(Carson & Gould, 2009; 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- ▶ **Purpose:** Examine the relationship between life skills development in youth and the kinds of coaching behaviors they perceive their coaches emit.
- ▶ **Sample:** 200-300 young athletes, ages 13-18.



Developmental Gains Youth Learn in Sport

(Carson & Gould, 2009; 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- ▶ **Method:** Correlational Survey Study
- ▶ **Measures:**
 - ▶ *Youth Experiences Scale [Hansen & Larson, 2005).*
 - ▶ *Coaching Behavior Scale for Sport (e.g., rapport, goal setting) (Cote et al., 1999)*
 - ▶ *Coaching Items based on Gould et al. (2007) qualitative study of hs coaches*

Developmental Gains Youth Learn in Sport

(Carson & Gould, 2009; 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- ▶ Specific coaching behaviors are associated with greater developmental of life skills gains



Developmental Gains Youth Learn in Sport

(Carson & Gould, 2009; 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- ▶ Emotional Regulation
 - ▶ Feedback
 - ▶ Positive Social Norms
 - ▶ Linkages to the Community
-

Specific Coaching Behaviors Reported

(Carson & Gould, 2009, 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- ▶ *Establishing rapport (positive versus negative)*
 - ▶ *Helping athletes work on mental preparation*
 - ▶ *Helping athletes set goals*
 - ▶ *Helping athletes develop competition strategies*
 - ▶ *Motivated athletes to work hard on one's own*
-

Specific Coaching Behaviors Reported

(Carson & Gould, 2009, 2011; Gould et al., 2011)

- ▶ *Creating a mastery oriented coaching climate where the focus was on self improvement versus competitive results*
 - ▶ *Creating a caring and welcoming climate*
 - ▶ *Talked more about how sport related to life*
-

Strategies Outstanding H.S. Coaches Use to Develop Life Skills & Character in Players

Gould, Collins, Lauer & Chung (2006, 2008)

Purpose

To identify the strategies that award winning high school football coaches use to develop life skills and character in their players.



NFL Charities Grant

Strategies Outstanding H.S. Coaches Use to Develop Life Skills & Character in Players

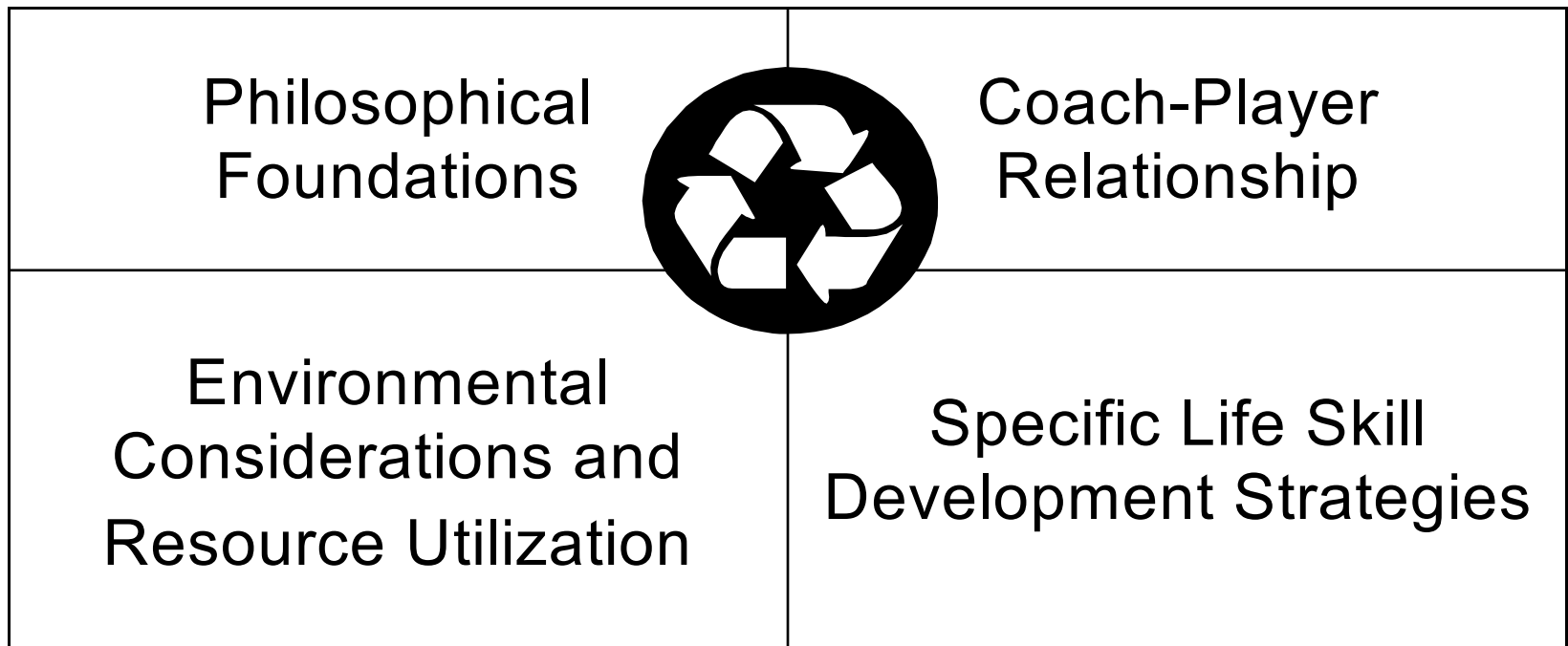
Gould, Collins, Lauer & Chung (2006, 2008)

- ▶ Sample: 10 NFL H. S. Coach of the Year Nominees or Winners
 - ▶ Sample: 10 Former Players of These Coaches
-

Strategies Outstanding H.S. Coaches Use to Develop Life Skills & Character in Players

Gould, Collins, Lauer & Chung (2006, 2008)

Coaching Life Skills Model



Conclusions and Implications

- ▶ For these coaches coaching life skills was very intentional
- ▶ Life skills coaching was not separate from one's general coaching
- ▶ You could win and still develop life skills
- ▶ A model of coaching life skills emerged



Life Skills Through Sport: Influence of an Intensive Wrestling Camp on Life Skills Development

- ▶ Pierce, S., Gould, D., Cowburn, I., & Driska, A. (2016). Understanding the process of psychological development in young athletes attending an intensive wrestling camp. *Qualitative Research in Sport & Exercise*, 8(4), 332-351.
 - ▶ Driska, A. P., Gould, D., Pierce, S., & Cowburn, I. H. J. (2017). Understanding psychological change in adolescent wrestlers participating in an intensive training camp: A mixed method investigation. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 48(3), 303-330.
 - ▶ Gould, D., Pierce, S., Cowburn, I., & Driska, A. (2017). How coaching philosophy drives coaching action: A case study of renowned wrestling coach J Robinson. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 4, 13-37.
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Positive Youth Development Meets Army Ranger Training: A Mixed Method Assessment of an Intensive Wrestling Camp for Adolescents

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Scientific Background

- ▶ Sport participation and life skill development link established (Larson & Hansen, 2006; Gould & Carson, 2010; 2011)
- ▶ Factors that influence this relationship such as a caring climate and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship have been identified (Gould et al., 2012).
- ▶ However, the **influence of specifically creating challenging sport climates** has not been examined.
- ▶ Few studies have also examined **the process by which psychological development unfolds over time.**

General Purpose

- ▶ Evaluate the Effectiveness of an Intensive Wrestling Camp for Adolescents, Particularly Its Effects on Psychological Development

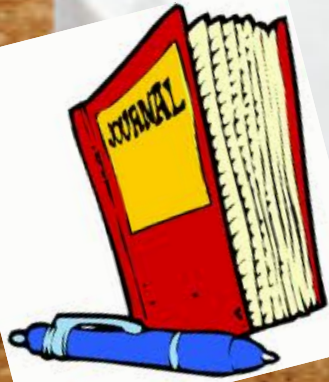


Why This Camp?

- ▶ Focus on the Development of Psychological Skills
 - ▶ Because of It's Duration, Intensity and Intentional
 - *14 Day overnight camp*
 - *Typical schedule*
-

Daily Schedule

6:30am	Wake Up
6:45-7:30am	Weights/Running
7:30-8:30am	Breakfast
9:45-11:45am	Technique Training
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch
2:45-4:45pm	Hard Training
5:00-6:00pm	Dinner
7:00-8:00pm	Mental Attitude
8:00-10:00pm	Weights/Running
11:00pm	Lights Out



Seven Psychological Goals for Camp Participants

1. *Discipline*
2. *Sacrifice*
3. *Dedication*
4. *Hard Work*
5. *Responsibility*
6. *Accountability*
7. *Service*



Psychological Curriculum

- ▶ 6 Mental Attitude Presentations (40-60 Minute)
 - ▶ 13 Mini-Presentations/Reminders (10-40 minutes)
 - ▶ Reflective Journaling
 - ▶ Daily Relaxation/Imagery Sessions
 - ▶ Practice “Positives”, “Neutrals”, and “Negatives”
-

Psychological Curriculum

- ▶ Quote or Thought for the Day
 - ▶ Navy Seal Talk
 - ▶ Physical Challenges Designed to Test the Psychological
 - ▶ Coach/Counselor Feedback, Reinforcement and Discussion
 - ▶ Points system for graduation
 - ▶ *Start with 750 points*
 - ▶ *Lose points for failing to adhere to camp rules*
 - ▶ *Need 525 points to graduate*
-

Specific Purposes

1. Assess the effectiveness of a 14 day intensive wrestling camp in meeting its psychological goals and objectives.
 2. Understand the effects of the camp on the development of psychological skills and attributes on the young athletes.
 3. Examine the long-term effects of the camp on the youth wrestlers.
-

Method Overview

- ▶ Quantitative Surveys (Pre-, Post-, 9 Months)
 - ▶ Individual Wrestler Interviews (Pre-, Post-, 9 Months)
 - ▶ Head Coach/Founder Interviews (7 Hours: Pre-During, Post-Camp)
 - ▶ Post-Program Parent Interviews (9 Months)
-

Method Overview

- ▶ Mini-Interviews During Camp: Athletes and Coaches
 - ▶ Camp Observations: Wrestlers and Coaches
 - ▶ Record Analysis: Point Log, Journals, Etc.
-

Stage 1: Pre-, Post-camp, and Follow-up Quantitative Findings



10 Variables Assessed in the Surveys

From ACSI-28:

- ▶ Goal setting
- ▶ Achievement motivation & confidence
- ▶ Coachability
- ▶ Coping with adversity
- ▶ Concentration
- ▶ Peaking under pressure
- ▶ Freedom from worry

From State Hope Scale:

- ▶ Agency
- ▶ Pathways

From TSCI:

- ▶ Trait sport confidence
-

Participants

216 athletes attended the camp

- ▶ 94 at Time 1
- ▶ 89 at Time 2
- ▶ 70 at Time 3

74% completion rate

- ▶ 24 drop-outs did not differ significantly

Demographics

- ▶ 1 female
- ▶ Grade level = 9.92 (\pm .91)
- ▶ Years experience = 6.02 (\pm 3.28)
- ▶ 8 athletes had previously attended the camp

Results

Significant changes ($p < .01$)

- ▶ Goal Setting
- ▶ Achievement motivation & confidence
- ▶ Concentration
- ▶ Coping with adversity *
- ▶ Peaking under pressure *
- ▶ Freedom from worry
- ▶ Agency
- ▶ Pathways
- ▶ Trait sport confidence *

No significant change

- ▶ Coachability

* Employed Huynh-Feldt correction for non-sphericity

Discussion

Core question: Does the camp effect change in psychological skills and attributes?

1. Large, significant effects
2. Lasting effects and continued change

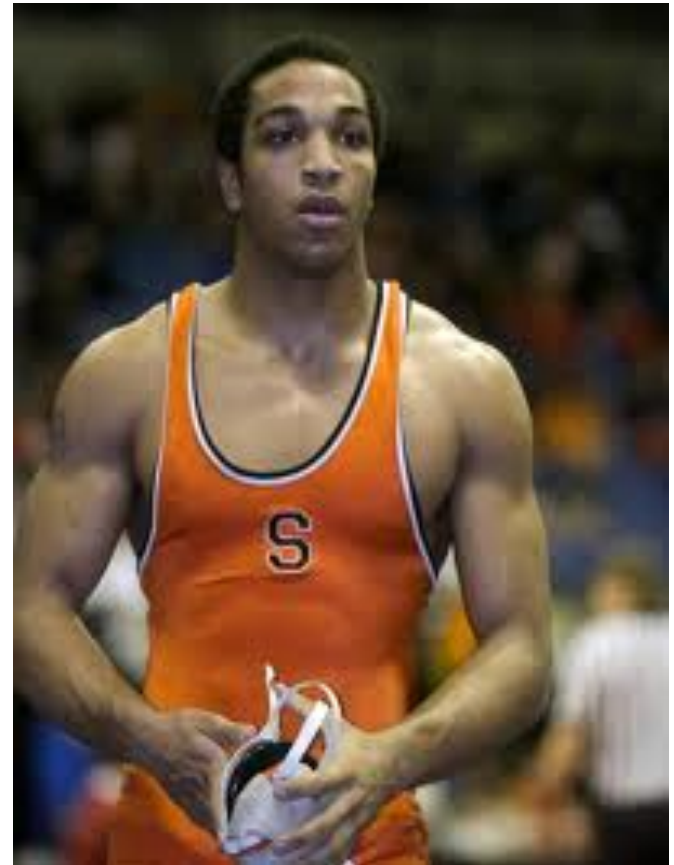


Stage 2: Qualitative Interview Study of the Psychological Development Process



Participants

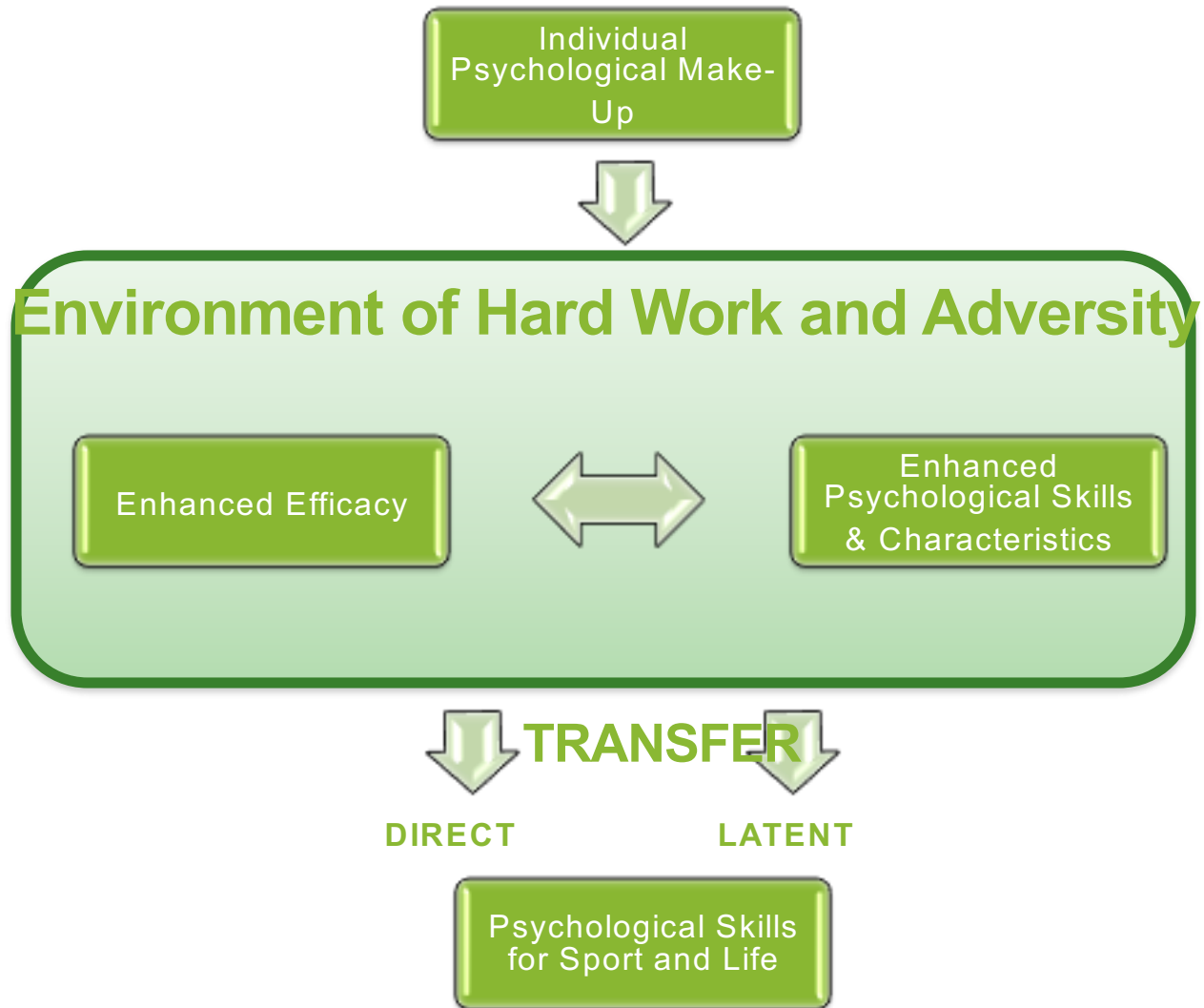
- ▶ One female and seven male wrestlers
 - ▶ 14 - 18 years old
 - ▶ All attending the camp for the first time



Method

- ▶ Four phases of interviews
 - ▶ Semi-structured interview at the beginning of camp
 - ▶ Unstructured interviews throughout the camp
 - ▶ Semi-structured interview at the conclusion of camp
 - ▶ Semi-structured interview approximately nine months following the camp
 - ▶ Two researchers embedded in the camp
 - ▶ Observations of 8 athletes and camp activities
 - ▶ Detailed field notes
-

Results



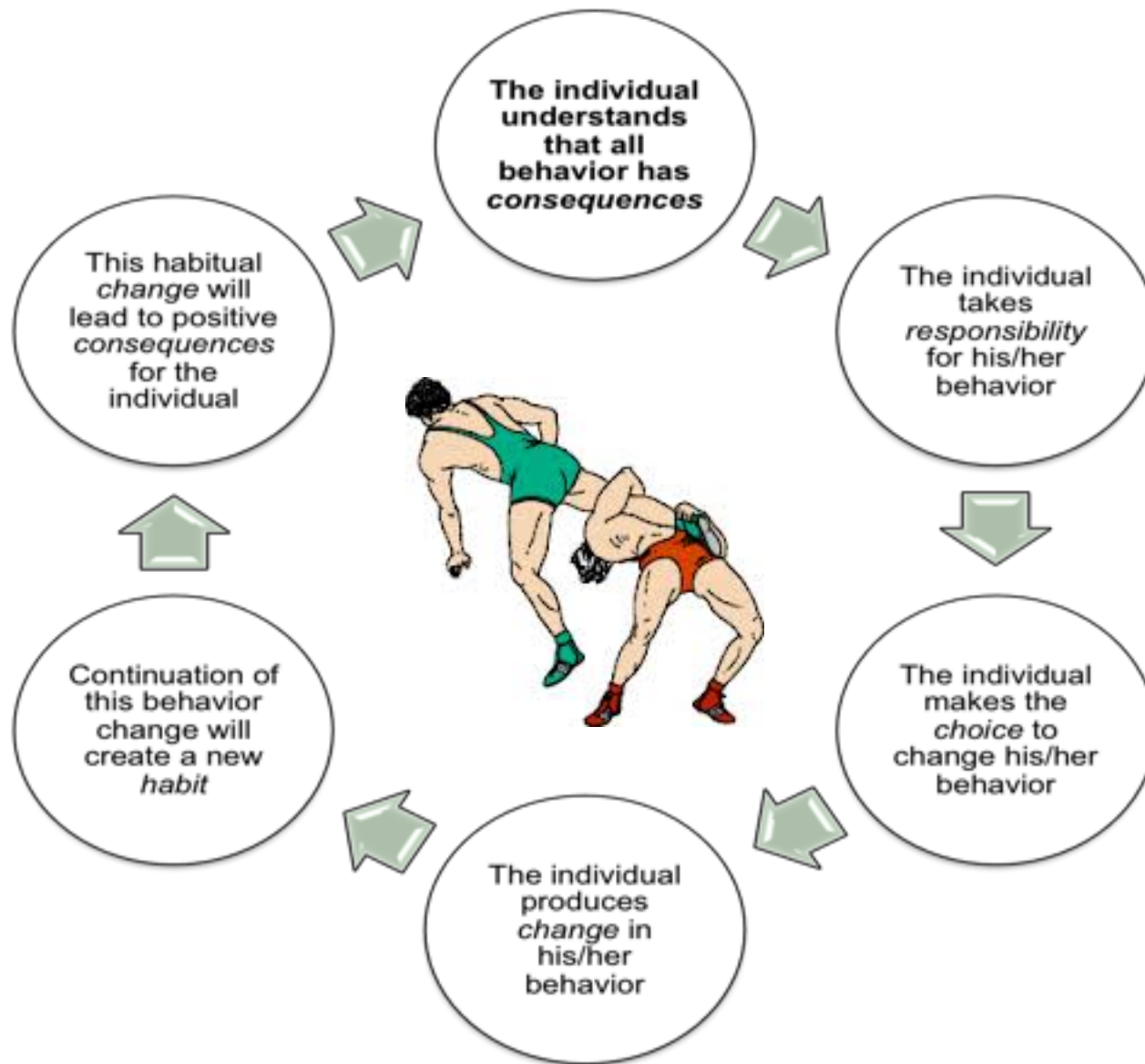
Enhanced Psychological Skills & Characteristics

1. Work Ethic

2. Personal Empowerment

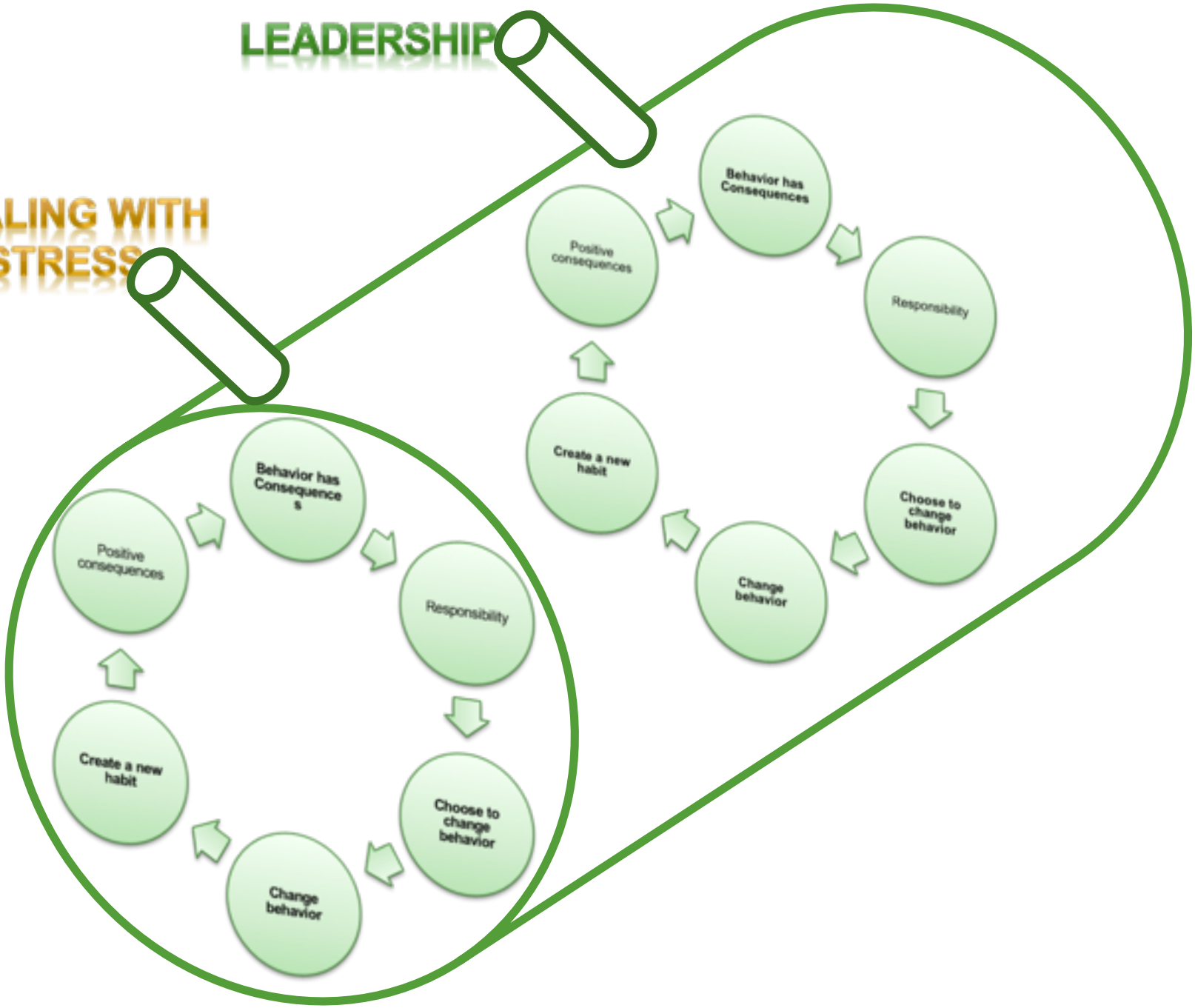
3. Enhanced Awareness

4. Interpersonal Skills



LEADERSHIP

DEALING WITH STRESS



Discussion

- ▶ The camp lessons were taught and reinforced in multiple ways within the stressful environment
 - ▶ Psychological development occurred through both direct teaching and experiential learning
 - ▶ High performance skills for sport and life
 - ▶ Coping/resilience skills for sport and life
 - ▶ The transfer of life skills was identified by all athletes but experienced differently
-

Stage 3: Qualitative Case Studies



Purpose

- ▶ Explain the individual differences in the camp experience, following wrestling season and associated psychological development



Key Participant Attributes

- ▶ **Readiness**

- ▶ Psychological and physical preparation or readiness to take part in the camp

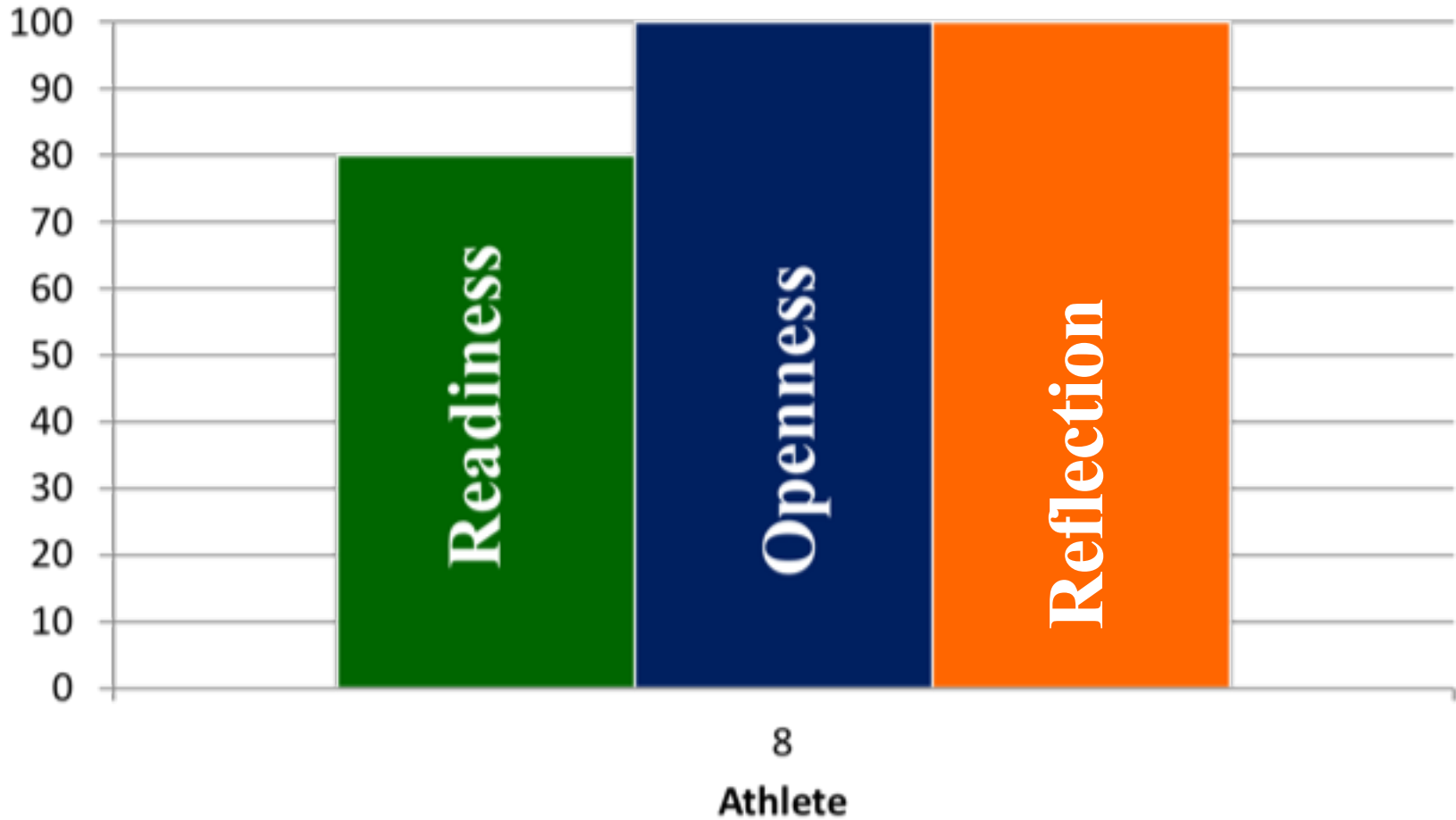
- ▶ **Openness**

- ▶ How open- or closed-minded participants were of camp methods and life-skill lessons

- ▶ **Reflectiveness**

- ▶ The level of reflection that participants had while at camp
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Example Athlete Rating



Conclusions

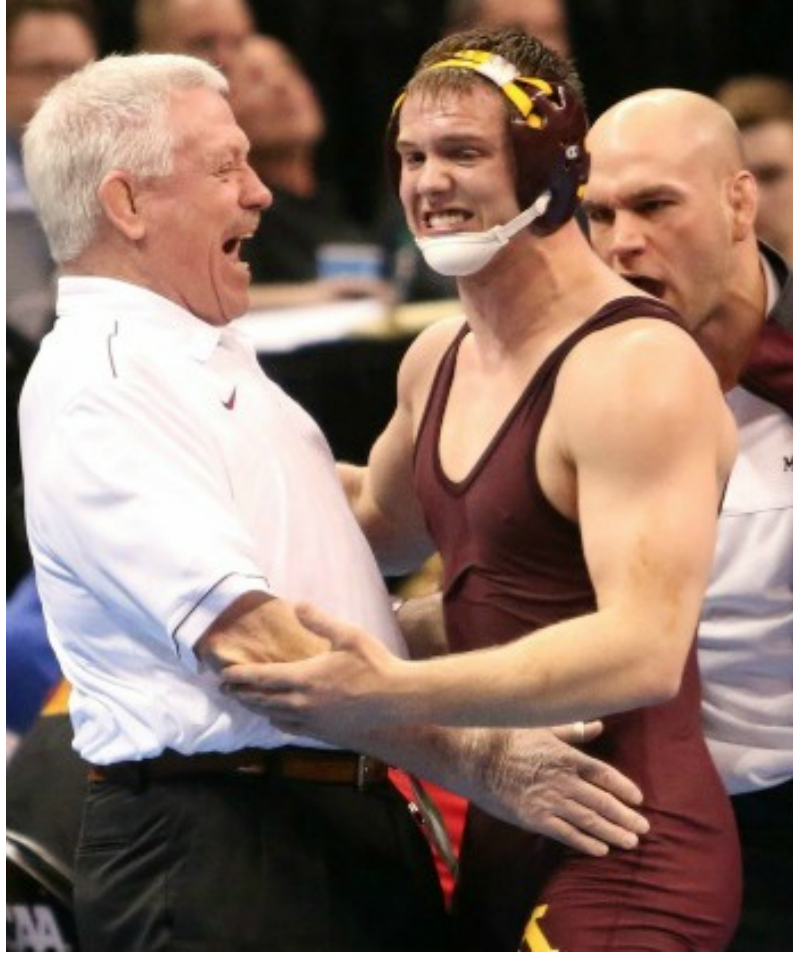
- ▶ All participants got something from camp
- ▶ Readiness, openness and reflection appear to guide outcomes
- ▶ Allows participants to take advantage of camp lessons



Stage 4: Coaching Life Skills Case Study



Coach J Robinson



J Robinson Background

- ▶ 70 year Old Wrestling Coach
 - ▶ Graduate of Oklahoma State University Where He Wrestled Collegiately
 - ▶ US Army Ranger and Jungle Warfare School Graduate (Honors Graduate)
 - ▶ 1972 Olympic team member (4th place finish)
 - ▶ Head Coach, University of Minnesota: 1986-2016
-

J Robinson Background

- ▶ Three Time NCAA Championship Winning Team Coach
 - ▶ 5 Time National Coach of the Year
 - ▶ 4 Time Assistant Olympic Team Coach
 - ▶ Head Coach, Pan American Team
 - ▶ Founder and Director, J Robinson Intensive Wrestling Camps
-

Results

- ▶ **Clearly defined and articulated coaching philosophy**
 - ▶ Assumptions about society and human nature
 - ▶ Assumptions about self and purpose
 - ▶ Guiding principles about teaching and learning
 - ▶ Core psychological skills to develop in young athletes
-

Assumptions about Society and Human Nature

- ▶ Young people are not challenged enough
 - ▶ There is a lack of societal standards
 - ▶ Society creates weak youth by trying to make everyone feel positive all the time
 - ▶ Fundamental lessons are not taught
-

Results: Assumptions About Society and Human Nature

e.g., *“The worse thing we do for kids is not enforcing our standards. Today, in high school, if you take a test three times and fail they still graduate you – makes no sense. We have a whole society of weak people because we don’t want standards.”*



Results: Guiding Principles about Teaching and Learning

- ▶ Key to teaching young people was realizing that everyone wants to feel special (*“you don’t want them to be better than anybody but you want them to be different or special”*).
 - ▶ *“Some will not be interested or ready to learn. So I focus my attention on the youth who want to learn.”*
-

Results: Guiding Principles about Teaching and Learning

- ▶ Athletes learn by doing as (*“actions speak louder than words.... the Army found that resilience lectures do not work.”*)
 - ▶ *“They (kids) don’t learn anything when it’s easy.... some stress is essential.”*
 - ▶ *“There is always a better way to do something and as a coach you must constantly search for it.”*
-

Results

- ▶ Highly intentional in terms of teaching mental skills
 - ▶ Has a well-developed system for implementing his coaching philosophy and objectives
 - ▶ The vast majority of his coaching behaviors were linked to his philosophy
-

Intensive Wrestling Camp Discussion, Practical Implications and Future Directions



Discussion: *Key Conclusions*

- ▶ The camp was found to be very effective at enhancing the psychological development of the participants
 - ▶ Some changes occurred pre- to post-camp, some were more latent, while others increased across time.
 - ▶ None of the changes reverted back to pre-camp levels
 - ▶ Qualitative data triangulated these findings while also demonstrating how the camp uniquely influenced individual wrestlers
-

Discussion: *Key Conclusions*

- ▶ Important information was also obtained on understanding **the process of how** the camp influenced the psychological development of the wrestlers.
 - ▶ Looking across all data sources a model was developed to explain how the camp worked to develop the participants psychological skills and attributes.
-

Discussion: *Links to Previous Research*

- ▶ Findings support the conclusion of Larson and Brown (2007) that young people learn to deal with emotions from “hot” emotional episodes and drawing from the culture around them.
 - ▶ Findings support the contentions of Collins and Mac Namara (2012) and Fletcher and Sakar (2013) in that stressful encounters and learning how to cope with those encounters are critical to psychological growth.
-

Discussion: *Future Research Directions*

- ▶ In many ways the findings support the approach that is often taken in Army Ranger “special forces” type training where physically challenging tasks and environments are used to mentally train soldiers.
 - ▶ We need to do more to study when, under what conditions and within whom such approaches might work as wide individual differences were found in this study.
-

Note of Caution

- ▶ It takes a special coach with good emotional and contextual intelligence to use this approach.
 - ▶ This is not an approach that should be disseminated widely without knowing the coaches who will employ it.
-

Conclusions and Implications: What Do All These Studies Tell US

▶ **Coaches as Key Amplifiers of Life Skills Development**

- 1. Coaching Rapport and Caring*
 - 2. Motivational Orientation*
 - 3. Emphasis Placed on Intentional Teaching of Life Skills*
 - 4. Integrating Life Skills Teaching Within Ones General Coaching*
 - 5. Preliminary Models of Coaching Life Skills Are Appearing*
-

Conclusions and Implications

- ▶ The Importance of the Intentional Teaching of Life Skills in Sport – *Life Skills Are Taught Not Caught!*
 - ▶ Coach Selection and Philosophy: Getting the Right People on the Bus or Truthfully Advertising What We Do—Coaching Education May Not Change Some People
 - ▶ The Importance of Teaching and Facilitating Transfer
-

Summary: Where To From Here?



Future Directions

- ▶ Identify “Under What Conditions”, “How” and “Why” Athletes Learn Life Skills
 - Theory Development Badly Needed
- ▶ Determining If Coaches can be Taught to Teach Life Skills and Factors Which Influence Doing So



Future Directions

► Identify the Limits of Competitive Sport as a Life Skills Teaching Vehicle

1. Is Sport Too Adult Dominated to Teach Life Skills

2. Does the Nature of the Sport Influence the Types of Life Skills Taught

- Wrestling especially good at teaching hard work
- Golf especially good at teach patience
- Tennis especially good at teaching independence



Future Directions

▶ **What Role Does Winning Play in the Teaching of Life Skills**

- 1. Motivational Orientation Superiority of Task Goal Findings*
- 2. NFL Study Finding: Coaches Won 77% of Games*
- 3. Martens (1978) Dual Role of Winning Hypothesis*
- 4. Flett et. al (under review) University Coach Study*



Questions

