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**INVESTIGATING THE PREPARATION AND PERSPECTIVES OF EIGHT HIGH
PERFORMANCE ATHLETES**

by
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Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
of the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

October 5, 1998



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To my husband, John Bales.
Without your love and support, this dissertation would never have been completed.

ABSTRACT

Sport in Canada, and in particular high performance sport at the international and Olympic levels, is a highly competitive and increasingly complex world. The prime focus at this level is on competition, on striving to be the best, or one of the best, in Canada and in the world. It is about measuring oneself against oneself, and against others. At the center of this world lives the athlete, training and competing. Such a life has been researched in the literature from two major perspectives, the physiological and the psychological (Astrand, 1986; Bompa, 1983; Bunker, Rotella & Reilly, 1985; Orlick & Partington, 1988; Orlick, 1990, 1996; Suinn, 1980; Williams, 1986; Wilmore & Costill, 1994).

The extent and quality of an athlete's sport experience, the joy or distress of that experience, is very dependent on all that is inherent in both the physiological and psychological perspectives. The research of Orlick and Partington (1988) and Orlick (1990, 1996) has shown that there are a number of key psychological elements to excelling in Olympic sport. However, the majority of research in the field of sport psychology has been primarily concerned with quite a narrow perspective of an athlete's life – the performing side – at the expense of understanding the whole life of an athlete. And yet, the high performance athlete of the 1990's is very much a '24 hour-a-day' athlete (Rimejorde, 1995). Everything an athlete does, thinks and feels, everyone with whom an athlete interacts, and each issue that must be managed by an athlete, has the potential to impact on their ability and readiness to perform. The world of high performance sport is complex and challenging and so too is the life of the high performance athlete.

The objectives of this research are twofold. The first objective is to complement and extend our knowledge of the psychological mindset that high performance athletes bring to their training and competitive setting that enables them to perform their best. The second objective is focused on achieving a better understanding of the thirty–seven to fifty percent of an athlete's life that is spent outside of physical training and rest/sleep portion of her or his life.

To this end, the research studied the lives, thoughts and emotions of eight high performance athletes who had already won medals at the international and Olympic level and were continuing to train for the next Olympics. A three phase process of interviews was conducted with each of the eight athletes and encompassed training, training camps, national

trials, international competitions and a 1997 World Championships, over a nine-month period, from December, 1996 to August, 1997.

The features of qualitative research adhered to in this study included those of Miles and Huberman (1994) and Stake (1995). The research was both confirmatory, to continue to build on our knowledge of the psychological preparation and mental mindset of athletes, and exploratory, to allow for the less understood parts of an athlete's life to emerge. The study began deductively with the data collection, guided by an initial conceptual framework and a set of questions, and yet simultaneously allowed for emerging patterns and themes, particularly within the Phase II and III interviews.

Data analysis was begun early in the data collection process and was continuous throughout the interview process to enable a progressive focusing of themes. Ten general dimensions were developed that captured the complexity of the lives of the eight athletes. Within the first general dimension, Mental Mindset, a model was developed, in collaboration with the eight athletes. It was intended to encapsulate visually the process involved in being well prepared mentally for a great performance.

The nine other general dimensions that developed over the course of analysis were Beginnings, Personal Description, The Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence, Meaning of Excelling in Sport, Will, Degrees of Balance, Joy's in an Athlete's Life, Relationships, Difficulties and Dilemmas, and an eleventh dimension, a special case of A Girl on Boys' Teams. Three of these dimensions, Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence, Will and Degrees of Balance emerged from the words and thoughts of the athletes over the course of the three phases of interviews. The other six dimensions were introduced by the researcher in the initial framework and the Phase I research questions and were substantiated and further interpreted throughout the successive phases of interviews.

Along with the ten general dimensions, what kept rising to the surface was a sense that each of these athletes, as they were being studied, were 'living with excelling.' There were both commonalities among the athletes and a uniqueness in the way each of the athletes viewed her or his journey in high performance sport and in life outside of sport. This sense of uniqueness included a 'fierce intensity' that five of the athletes brought to their lives in sport; a 'sense of fragility' that one of the athletes brought to his life, particularly in terms of his level of self-confidence; a 'reflective' manner that was the essence of one of the athletes; and a simple,

‘uncomplicated’ manner and view of life that was the essence of the eighth athlete. The commonalities included getting an early start in sport (for most but not all); a strong sense of belief, self-confidence and will, when they were performing well; considerable support from others; joy inside and outside the world of sport; learning to accept the inevitable ups and downs and difficulties; and finally, finding a degree of balance in their life that worked for each of them.

The present study provides a clearer understanding of the complexities and multidimensional nature of an athlete’s life. It also presents a clearer picture of the thirty-seven to fifty percent of the athlete’s life that is spent in going to school or working, in interacting with family, friends and coaches both inside and outside sport, and the time spent reflecting on their pursuit of better performances. These findings will enable coaches and sport psychologists to work more effectively with athletes at the highest levels. For sport psychologists, who are well aware of the potential issues and problems that can hinder a great performance, the findings of this study will allow them to clearly understand all the ‘pieces of the puzzle’ that need to be in place to ensure a best performance, and a joyful life inside and outside of sport.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Researching and writing this dissertation has been a challenging and wonderful experience. I am grateful to the following people who have helped me and who have shared the experience with me.

To the eight wonderful athletes interviewed for this study, who gave so willingly of their time, thank you. You each spoke openly and with great insight and courage about your life both inside and outside high performance sport.

To Dr. Terry Orlick, my advisor, for your brilliance as an educator and as a person, and for the encouragement and unending support you provided throughout this long process. I thank you with all my heart.

To my committee members, Dr. Brad Cousins, Dr. Jean-Paul Dionne, Dr. Wayne Halliwell, and Dr. Pierre Trudel. Thank you for your constructive comments and for your expertise that you shared with me. You have helped immensely in ensuring the quality of this study.

To numerous friends for your help in times of stress. To Shelia Robertson, for your always perfect answers to my endless calls on editorial points. To Mary Millar, for your great skill at 'fixing' computer problems. To Mary Millar and Michael Bales for your help in the construction of the tables and diagrams.

I give you all my heartfelt thanks.

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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

Introduction

Sport in Canada, and in particular high performance sport at the international and Olympic levels, is a highly competitive and increasingly complex world. It is a world not only of athletes and coaches, but also of national sport federations, federal and provincial governments, national and international competitions, national training centres, educational institutions, agents, sponsors, and extensive travel on the part of the athletes and coaches for relocation, training, and competition.

The prime focus of sport at this level is on competition, on striving to be the best, or one of the best, in Canada, and in the world. It is about measuring oneself against oneself and against others. It is about the interplay between athletes and athletes, and between teams. It is about movement, about running swiftly, powering through the water, hurtling down a hill, executing a play, skimming over an ice surface. It is about the desire to create a new move, a new speed with one's body as the instrument. It is about dealing with setbacks. And it is sometimes about going beyond what was thought possible, about setting new limits for oneself and perhaps for one's sport.

The environment of this sporting world is a restricted one. Within each discipline are sport specific techniques to master, high-tech equipment to acquire, tactics and strategies to create and perfect, and unique rules and regulations to heed. Each discipline requires its specific venues to 'play the game'. Games like basketball and volleyball require a gym; ice hockey, speed skating, and figure skating require ice surfaces; canoeing, kayaking, and rowing require water and boats; athletics requires a track and a field; downhill skiing requires snow and a mountain. As well, within each sport in this broader sporting context is a generally unstated but well-understood rule about the age at which one is expected to 'retire' from the sport. A career in the world of sport is not generally lengthy.

At the center of each of these exacting, elite sport worlds lives the athlete, training and preparing for competition. Such a life has been researched in the literature from two

major perspectives, the physiological and the psychological. From the physiological perspective, a great deal has been written on how an athlete might best prepare for competition, such as the texts by Astrand (1986), Bompa (1983), and Wilmore and Costill (1994). Every athlete, at a high performance level, has a well-planned physical training program that incorporates aspects of speed, endurance, strength, flexibility, technique work, and tactics. Such a program is usually planned to encompass an entire year and often now over a four-year cycle in conjunction with the Olympic quadrennial. The athlete might spend anywhere from 2-3 hours to 5-6 hours per day physically training under the supervision of her coach and usually in the company of teammates.

In considering the psychological perspective, many texts and books have been written on both the theoretical and practical psychological aspects of performing in sport, such as Bunker, Rotella and Reilly (1985), Gendlin (1978), Horn (1992), Orlick (1990, 1996), Orlick and Partington (1988), Loehr (1994), Straub and Williams (1984), Suinn (1980), Unesthal (1986), and Williams (1986). More and more athletes have begun to understand the crucial importance of being 'mentally prepared' as well as physically prepared for competition, and many have well-developed 'plans' for both training and competition. However, there is much less known about factors such as the joys in an athlete's life, the exhilaration of excelling and 'getting it just right', or the difficulties, stresses and expectations that also impact on both how athletes go about preparing for a performance, and on living a life.

The extent and quality of an athlete's sport experience, the joy or distress of that experience, is very much dependent on all that is inherent in both these physiological and psychological perspectives. However, Thor Ole Rimejorde, director of sport for the Norwegian Olympic Committee has suggested that the high performance athlete of the 1990's is very much a '24 hour-a-day athlete' (Rimejorde, 1995). Everything an athlete does, everything an athlete thinks and feels, everyone with whom an athlete interacts, and each issue that must be managed on a daily basis by an athlete, has the potential to impact not only his ability and readiness to perform, but also his life outside of the competitive environment. An athlete's sense of his own body, of his emotions and feelings, of his beliefs and values, and of his creative self will all impact his life in and out of sport.

Similarly, issues and relationships are important components of an individual's life. Within the world of sport, athletes are in relationships with coaches, teammates, rivals, agents, sponsors, and national sport federations. In their world 'outside of sport', they have relationships with family, friends, partners, and teachers, as well as facing issues such as having enough money to live, getting an education, or managing a job while training and competing internationally. Inherent within this broader psychological perspective is the sensibilities of both the athlete and the numerous individuals with whom he or she is interacting. So, while the world of high performance sport is a complex and competitive environment, so too is the life of the high-performance athlete.

In attempting to better understand the complexities of such a life, a number of researchers, individuals and organizations within the sporting world have suggested moving beyond what we already know about the physical training and the singular emphasis on performance enhancement skills to a broader perspective of excelling in the world of sport.

Rimejorde (1995) has suggested viewing a high performance athlete's life from the perspective of three components (Table 1). The physical training demands of an elite athlete are certainly great and can take up to three to six hours or twelve to twenty-five percent of their day. Sleep and rest can comprise eight to nine hours or approximately thirty-five percent of the athlete's day. This leaves nine to twelve hours per day for the athlete to spend on such activities as studying, working, and being with friends and family. It is this nine to twelve hours of an athlete's life that needs to be much better researched in order for an athlete to both perform better and eventually become a contributing individual in society.

Table 1

Rimejorde's '24 hour-a-day' Athlete

High Performance Training	Rest / Sleeping	Studying /Working / Social etc
• 3-6 hours per day	• 8-9 hours per day	• 9-12 hours per day
• 12.5-25% of an athlete's day	• 33-37.5% of an athlete's day	• 37.5-50% of an athlete's day

As well, within the field of sport psychology, Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza (1989, 1991) and Vealey (1988) have both suggested the need for a broader perspective of an athlete's experiences. In an assessment of current trends in psychological skills training, Vealey (1988) outlined six needs for future direction within the field. One of those needs involved adopting a more holistic approach to the employment of psychological skills training by sport psychologists. She suggested personal factors, environmental factors, and situational demands were important considerations in terms of understanding and enhancing an athlete's performance: "The holistic approach views athletes as organisms constantly interacting with environmental stimuli and undergoing personal development" (p.327).

Scanlan et al. (1989, 1991), in researching sources of stress and sources of enjoyment of former elite figure skaters, found that the diverse sources of both stress and enjoyment cut across the entire sport environment. Athletes experienced stress and joys both inside competitive sport and outside of their sporting world. For this reason, the authors suggested that a comprehensive understanding of these two constructs required consideration of the totality of the athlete's sport experience.

Within the Canadian amateur sport system, which historically has been primarily concerned with the number of medals that can be won at Olympic Games and world championships, there has recently been the development of guidelines and philosophical statements that illustrate an understanding that good performances in sport and excellence are not just about the physical training component. For example, one of the five core principles of the strategic plan at the National Sport Centre Calgary states, "We believe in the development of the whole person, physically, socially, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. We believe that attention to all these components, over time, will prepare and lead an individual to the best performances in sport and in life" (p. 7).

With the above research and comments in mind regarding the need for developing a broader perspective of a life of excelling in sport, the present research studies the lives of eight high performance athletes. A dialogue with such athletes creates an opportunity, first of all, to discuss how they prepare psychologically for both training and competition. There remains a discussion within the sport psychology literature about how an athlete should go about preparing for the pressure of competition (Rotella & Lerner, 1993). In-depth

interviews with a number of high performance athletes competing in the 1990's will advance the knowledge in this area of psychological preparation.

Second, the in-depth interviews with these athletes ask about aspects of their lives outside of their day-to-day physical training regime which will enable us to begin a broader consideration of what Scanlan et al. (1991) have called the totality of the athlete's sport experience.

The in-depth interviews are guided by an initial conceptual framework (see Figure 1). This initial conceptual framework, with the athlete at the center, incorporated ten major components, including concepts that have been well researched in the literature and those proposed by the researcher as having potential relevance to an athlete's life.

First of all, as mentioned above, an athlete's life has been researched from two major perspectives, the physiological and the psychological. The physiological training component is included in the framework because it is a crucial part of an athlete's life, comprising twelve to twenty-five percent of an athlete's '24 hour-a-day' (Rimejorde, 1995). However, it is beyond the scope of this study to further investigate this aspect.

Second, the psychological aspect is also a critical element of an elite athlete's life and is included in the conceptual framework. It is one of the objectives of the present research to complement and extend what is known in this area of performance enhancement.

Third, the other components of the initial framework are based on research both inside and outside the field of sport psychology, as well as on the knowledge of the researcher and her work with high performance athletes over the last twelve years. For example, the proposed exploration of an athlete's meaning of excelling in sport is guided primarily by the work of Csikzentmihalyi (1990). The proposed exploration of the numerous relationships in an athlete's life are guided by the work of Bloom (1985), Gardner (1993), Howe (1990) and Sosniak (1985). The proposed investigation of joy's inside and outside of sport are guided by the findings of a number of studies (Barbour, 1994; Kreiner-Phillips & Orlick, 1993; Orlick, 1996; Scanlan, Stein & Ravizza, 1989). The beginnings component stems from the work of Bloom (1985) and also research in the area of talent (Csikzentmihalyi, 1993; Ericsson et al., 1993; Gardner, 1993; Howe, 1990). The concepts of difficulties and dilemmas, such as financial issues, and the demands of travel

for both training and competition are issues talked about within the sport community, but are not clearly understood or well researched. Finally, the concept of self description, having each athlete describe herself, is proposed as a way to gain insight into how an athlete at this level in sport sees herself, in her own words.

Thus, the present study, guided by this initial conceptual framework, fills in previously unknown 'pieces of the puzzle' in the life of a high performance athlete. What does it mean to individuals to excel at the highest level in their field of expertise? What have they discovered works in preparing for the immense pressures of international competition? What issues and dilemmas do athletes face as they prepare to compete at the Olympic level, and in their daily life? What exactly does such a life look like and feel like to the athletes? What joys do they experience, both in sport and outside of sport? Answers to these questions and others will begin the process of filling in the gaps in the literature of excelling in sport.

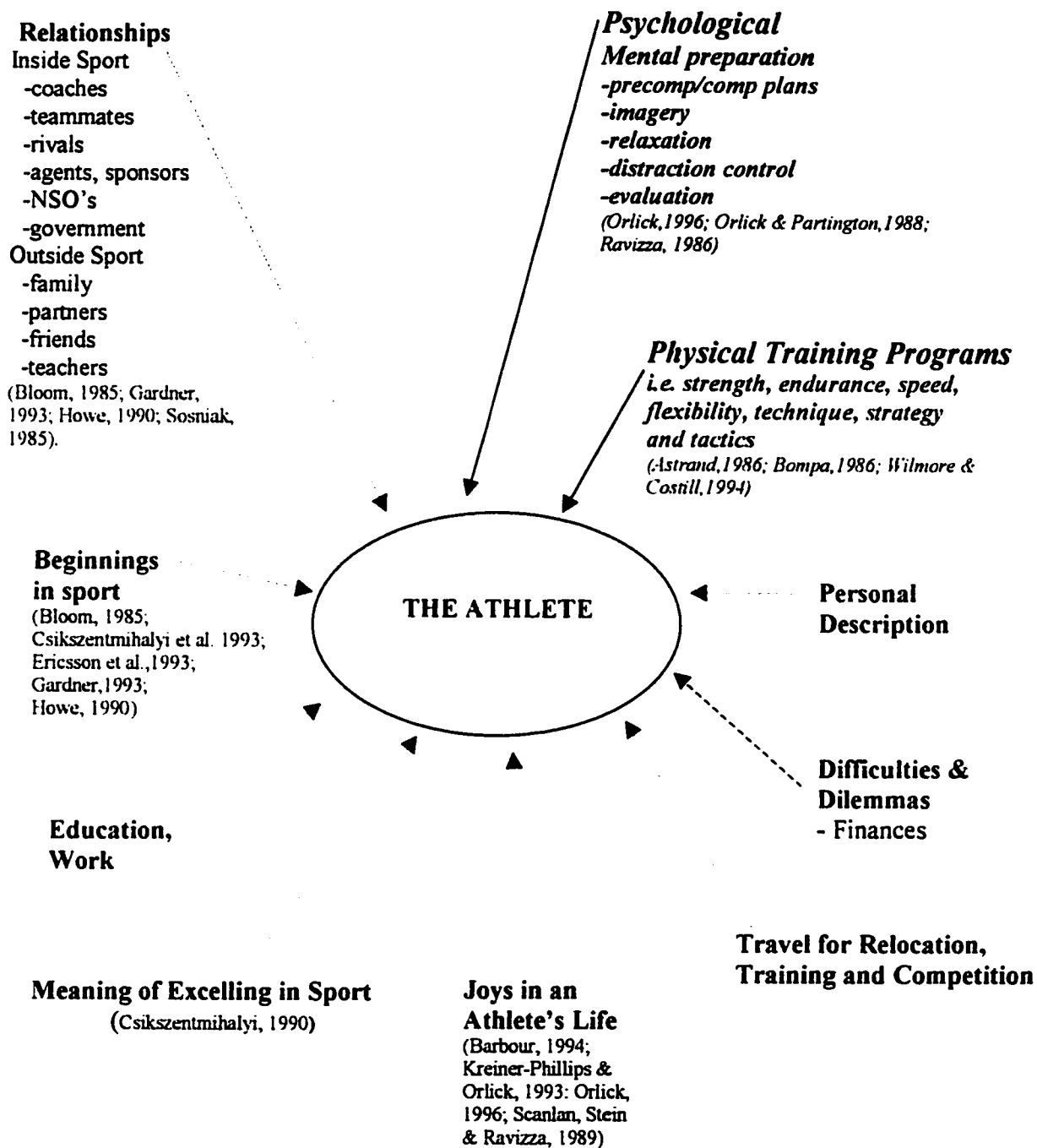


FIGURE I.
INITIAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE LIFE OF A HIGH PERFORMANCE ATHLETE
IN CANADIAN SPORT

Emergence of the Problem

My personal interest and experience in excelling is grounded in elite sport, first as an athlete competing in athletics at the international and Olympic levels and then as a sport psychologist working closely with national level athletes, coaches, national sport organizations, and educational institutions. My work has been both practical and theoretical. Observation over the past ten years and dialogue with colleagues involved in sport in Canada and in other countries has inspired me to question how we view the nature of what is involved in excelling in sport.

In September 1995, I began to keep a journal in response to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) axiom of clearly delineating the 'personal values' of the inquirer, Hunt's (1992) 'inside-out' approach, which is based on the rationale that observation and research must be firmly based on one's implicit theories and beliefs, and Progovff's (1975) concept of journal writing. The journal began with monthly entries on my initial thoughts about the research, and evolved to reflections on the eight athletes as I met with them, thoughts on the interviews as they progressed and notes jotted about the struggles of later analysis of the data. The following are two excerpts of early journal entries, which illustrate some of my thoughts on the phenomenon of high-performance sport and an athlete's life within that world.

What does excelling in sport mean to me? It means a myriad of emotions, like exhilaration, absolute joy, elation, calmness, a sense of control, as well as frustration, confusion, anxiety, disappointment, incredible nervousness, and fear. It also means hard, repetitive work over and over again. Everyday, twice a day, going out to train, to sweat, to hurt. The very physical side of it, the exhaustion, the fatigue, sometimes the boredom, sometimes the feeling of power and invincibility in one's body. The social side of it - the loss of friendships and the gaining of friendships; the difficulty of 'fitting' school or work into the schedule. And the mental

side of it, the "seeing" and "feeling" what the performance will be like before it happens and then the desire to will oneself through to the finish of the workout or race. All of this is working toward the days of competition where all the senses and emotions are heightened. These moments are what are lived for, the moments of putting it all on the line, feeling that pressure and coming through. And sometimes, just sometimes when it all comes together perfectly, it is almost perfection, it "flows", just as Maslow (1954), Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Orlick (1990) have written about.
(Journal entry, September, 1995)

There is a fragility in excelling in sport. There are so many factors that have to be right for it to all come together, creating a great performance. We can never be quite sure when it will happen. Yet, at the same time, there is joy in the process, in the daily work of being an athlete.

Athletes understand the "connectedness" between their body, their mind and their emotions. They understand that after years of training their body, it "knows" what to do. They understand that what they think and how they feel on the day can directly affect their performance. They understand that they want their thoughts, their consciousness on the process, the "how-to" of performing. They understand exactly what feelings work for them in the time leading up to an event or race. And when they truly understand how strong these connections are, and begin to control them, they become free to enjoy the moment.
(Journal entry, November, 1995)

As I read more and more in the fields of philosophy and the current research in the area of leadership, as well as sport psychology, I began to reflect on the complexity of excelling in sport. While it has been noted in the press (Globe & Mail, January 23, 1996) that classical musical editing has become so sophisticated that as many as 100 takes are sometimes used to create a single, note-perfect passage on a recording, competing athletes are accorded no such generosity. Athletes at World Championships, Commonwealth Games, and Olympic Games have only one chance to perform, and it is often live, under the lights and watchful eyes of millions. For that moment to be the one moment when an athlete is able to excel and sometimes go beyond what was anticipated, many factors and relationships must connect and interact in a particularly dynamic way. Wheately (1992) has written about the mystery of these connections and relationships from the perspective of biology, chemistry, physics and leadership. She wrote "...the music comes from something we cannot direct, from a unified whole created among the players - a relational holism that transcends separateness" (p. 44). It is this 'music' that each athlete strives to create within the world of Olympic sport.

Intention Statement

The objectives for this study are twofold. The first objective is to complement and extend the psychological skills literature in one important way. Use of an open-ended question ('Tell me how you prepare yourself psychologically for training and competition') allowed the athletes to express, in their own words, the skills and methods they had learned and utilized in ensuring that they were at their best when it counted the most - at World Championships and Olympic Games.

The second objective is focused on achieving a better understanding of the thirty-seven to fifty percent of an athlete's life that is spent outside of physical training and sleep/rest time. Little is known about what athletes are doing, thinking or feeling during this portion of their life, and little is known about the impact of this portion of the athletes' lives on their training and performing at the international level.

To this end, the lives, thoughts and emotions of eight high performance athletes were explored over a nine-month period from, December, 1996 to August, 1997. This

period of time encompassed training, training camps, national trials, international competitions and a 1997 World Championships. The eight athletes were chosen on the basis of having already won a medal at a World Championship or Olympic Games over the previous three years, or being a world record holder, and were continuing to train for the next major international competition (i.e., the 1998 Winter Olympic Games). A series of three, in-depth interviews were conducted with each of these eight athletes. The three phases of interviews took place during the months of December/ January, a training and initial competition period; the months of February/March, an international and World Championship competition period; and the months of May/June/July/August, an off-season, recuperative time period. The three-phases of interviews made it possible to extensively probe the nature of the athletes' lives in sport to obtain a complete understanding of their personal perspectives.

Academic Relevance

"Exceptional abilities provide one of the most valuable of all mankind's resources" (Howe, 1990: VIII).

The aim is that this research contributes to the fields of both education and sport psychology as it furthers our understanding of elite athletes' lives, not only as performers in the world of sport, but also as individuals who have lives outside of that world, both during their career as a performing athlete and when that career is over.

Much of Maslow's (1954, 1968) work has centered on a psychology of health and 'self-fulfilling' individuals. He has written that "...the study of such self-fulfilling people can teach us much about our mistakes, our shortcomings, the proper direction in which to grow" (p. 5). Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993), in their work with talented teenagers and the factors that affect the continued development of that talent, wrote that "...we can learn much about average development by examining positive extremes" (p. 240). This study aims to illuminate the complexity of a performing athlete's life, in the hope that we may better understand what an athlete feels and thinks as he goes about training, competing and living his life as an elite performer.

A much clearer understanding of the complexities in an athlete's life, and of the thirty-seven to fifty percent of that life that is spent in going to school or working, in interacting with family and friends both inside and outside sport, and in other sport and leisure activities, will enable both educators and sport psychologists to be better prepared to understand and work with individuals who have chosen to excel. For sport psychologists, who are well aware of the potential distractions that can hinder a great performance, the findings of this study will allow them to clearly understand all the 'pieces of the puzzle' that need to be in place for a great performance to take place.

For those who work within education, these findings will, first of all, enable them to understand the potential difficulties inherent in trying to combine an education with a high performance sport career. Second, with Howe's (1990) above quote in mind, that exceptional abilities are one of humankind's most valuable resources, hopefully educators will encourage and help athletes find a way to pursue an education at the same time as they pursue their passion in high performance sport.

CHAPTER 2

A FOCUSED REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature is presented here as it has shaped my philosophy and my beliefs and values in my work with high-performance athletes and national coaches. It is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the sport psychology literature, but rather includes a number of different domains and concepts that are relevant to this study. Included are highlights of a number of studies in the sport psychology field, as well as the potentially relevant concepts of consciousness, flow, creativity, and talent.

Research within Sport Psychology

An extensive and significant study of Canadian athletes who participated in the 1984 winter and summer Olympic Games in Sarajevo and Los Angeles was conducted by Orlick and Partington (1988). The study's objective, to assess the mental readiness of Canada's athletes, involved individual, in-depth interviews with 75 athletes (38 women, 37 men) and a questionnaire survey of 160 additional athletes (57% were men). The authors discovered that a number of common elements of success could be clearly identified, as well as several factors that interfered with optimal performance. They stated that "...a striking result of this study was the consistency of certain success elements for virtually all of our best performers in all sports" (p. 10).

From those findings, Orlick (1992, 1996) went on to propose a model of excellence which consolidated seven basic elements of success. The author believed these seven elements, namely, commitment, belief, full focus, positive images, mental readiness, distraction control, and constructive evaluation to be the most critical for any athlete pursuing high levels of personal excellence.

Orlick (1996) developed the Wheel of Excellence, with belief and commitment at its center. Commitment, the first essential element, is about athletes developing an extremely high level of dedication and discipline to train and compete. It also means that they set clear goals, manage to balance an intense drive to train hard with adequate rest and recovery, and that they grow to understand and respect their individual needs. Rotella and

Lerner (1993) have also proposed that commitment is a crucial characteristic of effective athletes and see it as one of three characteristics of the construct of psychological hardiness.

The second element, belief, is about both the belief an athlete has in herself and the belief that others have in the athlete. Belief is seen as a two-way phenomenon. "It opens the door to higher levels of excellence, and higher levels of excellence open the door to higher levels of belief" (p. 8).

The third element, full focus, is said to be the most important mental skill effecting optimal performance. It refers to an athlete being totally concentrated, totally connected to his performance, 'in the moment.' It is about an athlete trusting in his body to perform.

Positive images, the fourth element, is the skill an athlete needs to develop or create in order to feel positive about herself, to 'see' and 'feel' herself execute a great performance and to prepare herself to perform at the highest level.

The fifth element of the Wheel of Excellence is mental readiness and this refers to a mental or emotional state that an athlete needs to carry into training and performing situations. It is about developing all the mental skills, about learning from mistakes and about an athlete coming to know what works for him/her.

The sixth element, distraction control, refers to an athlete's ability to maintain or regain the best focus when faced with distractions or setbacks. Orlick (1996) wrote that once an athlete has developed a good level of focus, being able to control for distractions became "...the single most important mental factor affecting the consistency of high level performance" (p. 13).

The final element of excellence is constructive evaluation and this refers to an athlete always taking the time to evaluate what he has done well and what he could refine or improve.

Within the time frame of this work by Orlick and Partington (1988), and Orlick (1992,1996), a number of Orlick's graduate students began to investigate the mental qualities of exceptional performers within various sports, as well as outside the world of sport (Barbour, 1994; Kreiner-Philips & Orlick, 1993; McCaffrey & Orlick, 1989; McDonald & Orlick, 1996; Talbot-Honeck, 1994). These studies used Orlick's proposed model of human excellence as a conceptual framework, and in-depth interviewing as a

methodology to explore athlete's and other performer's mental skills and their relationship to performance excellence. In general, all of these studies corroborated a number of the 'elements of excellence' proposed by Orlick (1992, 1996).

McCaffrey and Orlick (1989) explored the mental readiness strategies utilized by top professional golfers. The findings revealed a number of elements common to all the top golfers - high levels of commitment, quality training, daily goal setting, use of mental imagery, a practice plan, pre-tournament and tournament plans, ability to refocus and evaluation.

Kreiner-Philips and Orlick (1993) explored the experiences of 17 successful world champion athletes, representing seven different sports and four different countries, 11 of the athletes being men and six being women. The authors were interested in understanding how these athletes coped with the new demands and increased expectations that came from winning a major competition such as a World Cup, World Championship, or Olympic Games. Within the context of the interview process, these elite athletes mentioned several of the elements of Orlick's model such as full focus, positive images and mental readiness. What appeared to separate the athletes who were able to continue to succeed from those who were not, were some of these very elements. They included having a game plan, staying focused on the task, keeping things in perspective, and maintaining a positive outlook. Interestingly, there is a parallel with a study of Nobel laureates, which found that the impact of winning a Nobel prize was huge and, just as some athletes couldn't cope, some of the scientists' lives were so disrupted that they were never able to match their earlier achievements (Zuckerman, 1977).

In this study by Kreiner-Philips and Orlick (1993), as well as a study of male professional ice hockey players (Barbour, 1994), most athletes mentioned the importance of the enjoyment that they derived from their sport. Enjoyment is now part of the revised model of excellence (Orlick, 1996), and it may well play a large role in this present research as the meaning and essence of an athlete's life is explored.

Continuing the research on mental qualities necessary to excel, but moving to the medical field, McDonald and Orlick (1996) interviewed 26 men and 7 women who were active surgeons. The dialogue with these top surgeons again reflected commonalities with the excellence elements, such as an incredible commitment and focus, extensive use of

imagery, and personal and team preparation. As well, a number of comments by the surgeons gave us glimpses into other parts of their lives, the parts that existed outside of the operating rooms and the hospital. One surgeon, in commenting on his commitment to work, said, "...of course it makes your life narrow" (p. 102). A younger cardiac surgeon held a different viewpoint, saying that "...the newer residents believe, whether right or wrong, that lifestyle and family is first and surgery comes second" (p. 103).

Moving to the field of classical music, Talbot-Honeck (1994) interviewed 16 renowned soloists (13 of these pianists, strings and wind players were men, and 3 were women). In inquiring about the mental preparation of these accomplished musicians, the author found that five of Orlick's (1992) elements of excellence were found to be relevant - commitment, focus, refocus, visualization, and evaluation. The musicians also spoke of the hours of practice, the need for spontaneity, creativity and flexibility, and the love and enjoyment that the music brought to them. Several of these factors are also discussed in other studies on excelling both inside and outside sport (Hemery, 1986; Howe, 1990).

Through these studies, primarily focused on the mental qualities of outstanding individuals using Orlick's model of human excellence as a framework, there was an opportunity to gain insight into the lives of a number of exceptional individuals, both inside the sporting world and inside the world of medicine and music. The data were rich with statements of commitment and passion and, on occasion, we were able to catch glimpses of the thoughts and feelings of these outstanding individuals. However, from a methodological perspective, it is not entirely clear how the authors of a number of these studies moved from the initial interviews through the coding process to reach their final conclusions. As Miles and Huberman (1994) have suggested, not being explicit about how the coding process proceeds, is one of the weaknesses of qualitative research.

In a broader overview of numerous sport psychology texts, articles, books and journals, there has been the occasional piece of research that reflected the athlete's viewpoint and touched on aspects of their lives that were not strictly the performing side, such as Gunby (1980), Johnson (1980), Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza (1989, 1991), and Wigger, Anderson, Whitaker and Harmon (1980).

Scanlan et al. (1989, 1991) investigated sources of sport enjoyment and sources of stress for twenty-six elite figure skaters. The issues were studied in depth using primarily

qualitative interview techniques. Inductive content analysis procedures established five major sources of stress and four major sources of enjoyment. The major sources of sport enjoyment were social and life opportunities, perceived competence, social recognition of competence and the act of skating. The major sources of stress that emerged from the data were negative aspects of competition, negative significant-other relationships, demands or costs of skating, personal struggles and traumatic experiences. The results noted that the sources of stress and enjoyment came from both inside the competitive setting and from outside the sporting world. The studies noted that individual differences existed among the athletes and strongly suggested that a comprehensive understanding of these stresses and joys in athletes' lives required a consideration of the totality of their sport experience.

Notwithstanding the above mentioned work of Scanlan et al. (1989, 1991), the majority of papers written and research conducted has been focused on specific aspects of enhancing performance, such as goal setting, motor learning skills, peak performance, relaxation, imagery, feedback, team building, coach-parent relationships, psychological tests, motivation, transition from sport, etc. (Bunker, Rotella & Reilly, 1985; Gallwey, 1976; Horn, 1992; Orlick, 1990; Porter and Foster, 1986; Straub & Williams, 1984; Suinn, 1980; Tutko and Tosi, 1976; Unesthal, 1986; Werthner and Orlick, 1986; Williams, 1986). Indeed, the very titles of the journals such as Contemporary Thought on Performance Enhancement and the new version, Journal of Performance Education, reinforce that image.

On a slightly different note, within one edition of Contemporary Thought on Performance Enhancement two papers addressed the question of how well sport psychologists and the field of sport psychology serve the athlete as a whole person (Briddell, 1993; Segrave, 1993). Segrave (1993) portrayed sport psychologists as manipulative technicians concerned only with performance, and spoke for those who fear what he called a "technocratic ideology" (p. 10). Briddell (1993), in response, wrote that maximizing athletic performance did not necessarily imply that sport psychologists view athletes in one-dimensional terms. He argued that "...the practical application of sport psychology is both humane and functional and always attempts to serve the athlete as a human being who happens to be an athlete" (p. 19). My personal experience and my work would strongly support the latter perspective.

Research is required that takes into consideration an athlete's life from the more holistic-dynamic point of view as proposed by Maslow (1954) and from the perspective of the '24 hour-a-day' athlete (Rimejorde, 1995). Rimejorde, as director of sport for the Norwegian Olympic committee in the 1980's and '90's, proposed that, in order for the Norwegians to be successful as a nation in the Olympic Games, the athlete needed to be developed as a whole person. This development of the whole person involved the mental side, the physical side and the social side.

It is clear that within the field of sport psychology, there is little empirical research that has investigated what Rimejorde (1995) classified as the thirty-seven to fifty percent of an athlete's life spent outside of the physical/mental training and resting/sleeping part of their life. Thus, the present study will move from an initial conceptual framework toward developing a more complete and in-depth conceptual framework of a high performance athlete's life. Such a framework will enable us to more fully understand the factors that may influence, either negatively or positively, an athlete's pursuit of a best performance. It will also help us in understanding the high performance athlete not just as a performer in sport but as a human being.

Relevant Concepts within the Context of an Athlete's Life

Consciousness and Meaning

In reflecting on a more holistic-dynamic viewpoint from which to observe the life of an athlete and to both engage in a dialogue with such athletes and encourage their own 'reflective awareness' (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), the concepts of consciousness and meaning are particularly relevant. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) has written that to have a more complete view of human behavior it is necessary to observe what people do in their normal lives and that such observation needs to take into account the phenomenon of the self, and consciousness. The self is one of the contents of consciousness and consciousness is what we attend to, what we are aware of, what we remember, and "...the sum of what we attend to over time is *our life*" (p. 301). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has also written that "The events that constitute consciousness -

the 'things' we see, feel, think and desire - are information that we can manipulate and use" (p. 26). Greene (1988), in her examination of the relationships of freedom and education, has written that "conscious thinking always involves a risk, a 'venture into the unknown'; and it occurs against a background of funded or sedimented meanings that must themselves be tapped and articulated, so that the mind can continue dealing consciously and solicitously with lived situations" (p. 125). In terms of an athlete's life, we may ask, what is the nature of such a life, what is an athlete aware of as she goes about her daily life as an athlete and as an individual in the community?

Csikszentmihalyi (1990), in pondering the meaning of meaning, has suggested that "...creating meaning involves bringing order to the contents of the mind by integrating one's actions into a unified flow experience" (p. 216). He wrote that there are three senses of the word: individuals who find their lives meaningful usually have a challenging goal; meaning also refers to a sense of purpose and action; and when these first two are acted on then a sense of congruency or harmony is achieved. For an individual with such a sense of purpose and harmony, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggested that flow is experienced in one's life. This concept of flow has many similarities with Maslow's (1968) concept of self actualization, Loehr's (1994) ideal performance state, Unesthal's (1986) ideal performing state, and Orlick's (1990) zen approach.

Flow

"Flow is a subjective state that people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of *losing track of time and of being unaware of fatigue and of everything else but the activity itself*" (Csikszentmihalyi et al. 1993, p. 14). The authors have suggested that such a state is possible when there are clear goals, when there is immediate and unambiguous feedback, and when there is a balance between opportunities and one's ability to act. Certainly these conditions fit sport and athletes very well, although there are examples outside of sport as well (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Tribble, 1996).

Nevertheless, many of the examples of flow or peak performance use sporting examples to illustrate the point, and Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) has reported that artists, athletes and musicians identified their talent with flow at more than double the rate of those individuals in science and math. Within the milieu of sport research, Jackson (1995)

interviewed twenty-eight elite athletes about the factors that influenced their experience of the flow state. Using inductive content analysis of the athletes' responses, the author identified ten factors that would facilitate flow. Some of the more salient factors included physical and mental preparation, confidence, focus, how the performance felt and progressed, and optimal motivation and arousal level.

While Jackson (1995) stated that the majority of athletes felt that the flow state was controllable, she noted that some of the athletes interviewed were not aware of exactly what the term flow meant and six of them felt it was not controllable. Maslow has written that "...we cannot command the peak performance. It happens to us" (p. 87). Certainly, when an athlete has the confidence and belief that they are well prepared to perform, and can allow himself to 'let it be', then flow is possible. But the complexity of this facet of performing and experiencing is not to be taken lightly, as has been emphasized by Rotella and Lerner (1994). As well, as Csikszentmihalyi (1993) has clearly delineated, in order to continue enjoying the activity that results in flow, there must be an ongoing balancing between new challenges and new skills.

Creativity

One of the positive consequences of flow is a sense of creativity. Athletes create with their bodies and their minds (Wills, 1983). Gardner (1993) wrote that "...a single variety of creativity is a myth" (p. 7), and that to even begin to understand creativity a huge number of factors and the interactions of those factors must be taken into consideration. For that reason, Gardner (1993) proposed an interactive perspective with which to better understand how one creates. In the same sense, Wheatley (1992) has suggested that fluctuations are the primary source of creativity and in fact, "...growth is found in disequilibrium, not balance" (p. 20). It is possible to see the incredibly focused desire to excel within sport as a sense of off-balance that can be a place, if well managed, to foster creativity. Leaving aside the issue of illegal drugs, athletes are continually striving for innovative ways to train that will allow them to go faster, jump higher and further, and develop new moves that take their event or sport in a new direction.

Gardner (1993) defined the creative individual as "...a person who regularly solves problems, fashions products, or defines new questions in a domain in a way that is initially

considered novel but that ultimately becomes accepted in a particular cultural setting” (p. 35). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) stated that to only focus on the individual when studying creativity “...is like trying to understand how an apple tree produces fruit by looking only at the tree and ignoring the sun and the soil that support its life” (p. 202). He suggested that rather creativity is the result of the interaction between the three subsystems of a domain, a person and a field. To illustrate his point, he used the example of synchronized swimming - the domain being the four minute required routine with a series of compulsory and voluntary moves, the field being composed of swimmers, coaches, judges and the media, and the individual being the swimmer, who while assimilating the accepted moves, is also able to create original variations and have them recognized by the field.

Talent

Closely related to this notion of creativity is the concept of talent. Gardner (1983) has argued that the dimensions of giftedness or talent include body movement, empathy, visual acuity, just as surely as intelligence quotient, or IQ. Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi (1993) stated that “...any channel through which a mind communicates with the environment could develop into a talent, as long as the culture is willing to recognize and support the given skill” (p. 5).

For many years there has been a widespread belief that certain individuals were inherently talented and that alone accounted for a huge amount of an individual's success in life. In more recent years, the unchallenged acceptance of this factor in explaining exceptional achievement has been greatly weakened (Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Howe, 1990). But it is not necessary for it to be seen as an either/or situation. Heredity certainly plays a role in determining those individuals who will excel in a number of domains, but there are many other factors. Intellect and achievement are far from perfectly correlated (Harris, 1990; Howe, 1990; White, 1990).

Howe (1990) placed much more emphasis on opportunities and experience. He noted that Einstein felt he had no innate ability, but rather attributed his success to his curiosity. The author also cited the historical example of Vivaldi and his orphanage for girls in Venice. Due to the encouragement and teaching of Vivaldi, about one-third of the

girls became exceptional musicians. Innate ability may have been a factor, but most certainly an excellent teacher and an opportunity to experience music were also crucial to the girls' success. Howe (1990) has stated:

Heredity does have effects that can substantially influence the psychological capabilities of individuals, but inherited influences on people's achievements are not direct, not irreversible or immutable, not inevitable and not inescapable (p. 57).

Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) wrote that "...talent is best viewed as a developmental rather than as an all-or-nothing phenomenon" (p. 26). Valuable insight into the ways in which talent is developed has been provided by a group of researchers at the University of Chicago, headed by Benjamin Bloom (1985). Data were collected on individuals in six fields of endeavor: concert pianists, sculptors, Olympic swimmers, tennis players, research mathematicians, and research neurologists. Information about family life and early childhood experiences was obtained directly from interviewing the exceptional individuals, as well as talking to their parents and teachers. The study identified a number of characteristics of these exceptional individuals' early home lives. Virtually all of the families in this study placed a high value on achieving and made their children aware of the importance attached to doing one's best. Often it was the parents who first introduced these individuals to the talent area and parents often provided informal early training. Other research lends considerable support to the importance of these family influences and the crucial importance of the early years (Albert, 1983; Gardner, 1961; Gardner, 1993; Howe, 1990; White, 1990; Zuckerman, 1977).

While the value of parental involvement and interest seems clear, it is important to note how that involvement in their children's success was handled. Sosniak (1985) suggested that, had the young pianists and their parents striven for exceptional success too early and too quickly, they might have been much less successful. She pointed out the value of the parents' and teachers' delight at each of the children's accomplishments, and the steady progress along the way. The focus was on small day-to-day gains, not on what was yet to be achieved.

In considering the work involved in continually developing and maintaining a talent, and in 'performing' with that talent, Ericsson et al. (1993) concluded that the

concept of 'deliberate practice' was the key component to performance at an elite level. The research of Ericsson et al. (1993) did note that the individual, in order to reach a certain level of excellence, required the support of parents, teachers and educational institutions, as well as a high level of motivation, but he considered these factors quite secondary. He stated that he viewed "...elite performance as the product of a decade or more of maximal efforts to improve performance in a domain through an optimal distribution of deliberate practice" (p. 400). There is no doubt that enormous amounts of dedicated time must be spent on an activity or occupation in order to excel at it. Bloom (1982a) wrote that swimmers and pianists practiced as much as five to seven hours daily and Howe (1990), in disputing the myth of effortless creation of eminent individuals, noted that Mozart practiced thousands of hours from a very early age. Gardner (1993), in his examination of seven talented and creative thinkers of the early 1900s, concurred with the 'decade or more'. He stated that "...at least ten years of steady work at a discipline or craft seem required before that metier has been mastered" (p. 32).

Such persistent work at one type of activity over ten years or more would certainly not seem to be the norm for most individuals. But for those who do persist and strive to excel, the literature is full of words like focus, commitment, passion, willingness to work and competitiveness (Bloom, 1985; Gardner, 1961; Howe, 1990; Monsaas, 1986; Orlick, 1992; Partington, 1995; Talbot-Honeck, 1994). So how is such willingness to work encouraged and sustained? The ways in which motivational factors contribute to a talented individual's achievements are certainly not simple or unidirectional (Howe, 1990). Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) has suggested that to keep involved in such difficult tasks one must find rewards within the domain, and that enjoyment of the activity is crucial.

The emphasis in the early years seems to be on steady progress, enjoyment, and a great deal of attention and encouragement by parents and teachers (Bloom, 1982a; Csikszentmihalyi et al. 1993; Ericsson et al. 1993; Sosniak, 1985). At later ages, the rewards change and individuals can be encouraged by progress, by successful performances, by a sense of being special, or by the fact that they become so closely connected to their goal of excellence that it becomes who and what they are.

Finally, one aspect of the concept of talent, and of excelling in some area of one's life that must not go unnoticed is the very real potential for a narrowing of one's perspective and vision and a lack of 'balance' in one's life. Gardner (1961) coined the term 'tyranny of talent', noting that once talent is discovered, it is so highly rewarded that the individual often neglects or does not discover his/her other talents. Roe (1983) felt it was possible to concentrate on intellectual activities without having a sterile life, although her data on eminent scientists did not, in fact, support her belief. Gardner (1993) wrote of the 'Faustian bargain' as he explored the lives of seven creative individuals. He concluded that "....they sacrificed all, especially the possibility of a rounded personal existence" (p. 44). In examining the life of Martha Graham, the preeminent founder of modern dance, Gardner (1993) wrote that the emotional and personal costs of such a life were indeed high and that the 'bargain' she struck "....entailed the sacrifice of happiness and intimacy" (p. 308).

In summary, the results of Orlick (1992, 1996) and Orlick and Partington's (1988) research within the field of sport psychology have clearly shown that there are a number of psychological elements that are key to excelling in Olympic sport. Yet, we have seen that there remains a discussion within the field around exactly how an athlete can best go about developing the ability to effectively respond to the immense pressures of high level competition (Rotella & Lerner, 1993).

As well, the majority of research in sport psychology has been primarily concerned with quite a narrow perspective of an athlete's life – the performing side - at the expense of researching and understanding the whole life of the athlete. Scanlan et al. (1989, 1991) have suggested that we need to develop a broader perspective of the athlete's life to better understand both the factors that affect performance and the very nature of a life of excelling. Rimejorde (1995) has suggested that we need to understand exactly what athletes are doing in their twenty-four hour day in order to help them have success at the highest levels of sport and in their life and future careers outside of sport.

Finally, the research of Csikszentimihalyi (1988, 1990, 1993), Gardner (1993), Howe (1990), Maslow (1968) and Ericsson and Smith (1991) has offered insightful perspectives on the concepts of consciousness and meaning, flow, creativity and talent. These concepts may very well play a part in developing a greater understanding of the lives of individuals who chose to pursue excelling in sport. With the guidance of an initial

conceptual framework, the present study proposes to fill in the gaps in the research by investigating the lives of eight high performance athletes from the broader perspective of their '24 hour-a-day' life (Rimejorde, 1995).

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction

The review of literature on high performance athletes' lives revealed that while much is known about the psychological preparation of athletes in terms of performance enhancement, much less is known about their lives outside of training and competing. In terms of what approach to take to more fully examine such lives, Martens (1987) has suggested, within the field of sport psychology, that research should put more emphasis on experiential knowledge and recommended qualitative methods such as the idiographic approach. Howe (1990) and Hollinger and Fleming (1992) have also strongly suggested the use of more naturalistic methodologies to complement traditional research methods in pursuing the many unanswered questions about the lives of talented women and men. Howe (1990) further advised that, as researchers, we need to shift our gaze away from the achievements per se and begin to detail the lives of such individuals.

With the above in mind, the present study called for a combination of confirmatory and exploratory approaches, guided by an initial conceptual framework that was based on both the already existing knowledge in the field, and on suggestions for other, tentatively important aspects of an athlete's life.

Fundamental to quality research is that the philosophical foundations that underlie the research are congruent with the specific purpose of the research and the methodology chosen. As this investigation focuses on the perspectives and thoughts of high performance athletes as they prepare for training and competition at the international level and live their lives outside of sport, qualitative understanding and interpretation are sought. In the following section, the underlying epistemologies for this study are clearly delineated. The goal, in this chapter, is to document the research process as accurately and clearly as possible. Miles and Huberman (1994) have suggested that failing to do this is one of the outstanding weaknesses of qualitative research.

Epistemological Position

The features of qualitative research adhered to in this study include those of Miles and Huberman (1994) and Stake (1995). Miles and Huberman (1994) see themselves as 'transcendental realists', which means "...we think that social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the objective world." (p. 4). According to Guba and Lincoln's (1994) table of basic beliefs of inquiry paradigms, that would place them somewhere in the postpositivist paradigm. This paradigm fits well with the present research and the guiding conceptual framework, in that we have knowledge in this research domain and "...not to 'lead' with your conceptual strength can be simply self-defeating" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 17).

Yet at the same time, Miles and Huberman (1994) have stated that the lines between epistemologies have blurred, and in the actual practice of empirical research there is much overlap. The present study is both confirmatory, to build on our knowledge of the psychological preparation and mindset of athletes, and exploratory, to allow for the unknown in athletes' lives to emerge. It is for this reason that the study begins deductively with the data collection, analysis and interpretation guided by a conceptual framework and an initial set of questions, and yet simultaneously allows for emerging patterns and themes to come forth.

The work of Stake (1995) is useful here, although his philosophical perspective is more closely aligned to the constructivist paradigm. Just as the present study searches for an understanding of the complexities of a high performance athlete's life and aims to let the athlete's words and thoughts speak for themselves, Stake (1995) wrote that in case study research the interest is in people. "We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality. We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their stories." (p. 1). This study attempts to establish an empathetic understanding, through 'thick description', of the life of eight high performance athletes. To the qualitative researcher "...the understanding of human experience is a matter of chronologies more than of causes and effects" (p. 39). In this study we want to come to understand the uniqueness and peculiarities of each of these athletes, as well as what they share in common. The following

sections will delineate the methods used and the other aspects relevant to the research process.

Focusing the Study

As with any research study, clarifying the intention statement was the first task. Having stated that this study would look at the perspectives and preparation of high performance athletes, it was necessary to decide whom could best contribute to an understanding of an athlete's life.

The Participants

Lincoln and Guba (1985), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (1980) have all written about purposeful or purposive sampling. As the objective of this study is to better understand, from a holistic perspective, the complexities of the life of a high performance athlete in Canadian sport, the eight cases chosen were 'extreme', as delineated by Patton (1980). Each athlete had already attained a high level of success in her or his sport career and was continuing to train and compete at the highest level

With such general criteria in mind, and wanting the athlete/participant to be competing in a World Championship at some point during the interview process (initially proposed as December, 1996 to August, 1997), it was decided to look for athletes who competed in winter sports. This restriction to winter sport athlete/participant ensured a World Championship focus, and also would encompass some discussion of the following season, which for these athletes would include the 1998 Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan.

Once the decision was narrowed to winter sport athletes, it was important to be mindful of Stake's (1995) comments that a first criterion to selecting cases should be to maximize what we can learn, and, if there were limitations due to time and money, we should pick cases that are easy to get to and hospitable to our questions. These thoughts, coupled with the knowledge that it is extremely difficult to access athletes at this elite level, due in part to agents, travel schedules and demands on their time already, it was decided to pursue athletes with whom I had some acquaintance. Given that I had been an

Olympic athlete, and that I now worked in the field as a sport psychologist, I felt there were a number of athletes who would know who I was, and perhaps be more inclined to say yes to the time commitment of three, lengthy interviews spread over a nine-month period.

A second decision that needed to be made was regarding the gender of the athletes. Canadian women athletes do as well as male athletes in high performance amateur sport, and it was therefore decided that the best choice would be to look for both female and male athletes.

Initial contact was made with the athlete/participants by telephone. On that first call, I explained what the objectives of the study were and was very clear about the time commitment regarding the three interviews, indicating that each of the interviews would take somewhere between two to four hours of their time. It was also made clear that they would have an opportunity to both see and comment on the verbatim transcripts and a single-page summary form before the second and third phases of the interviews. On each of those phone calls, as one by one, eight athletes agreed to be part of the study, I felt incredible relief, and great anticipation to get started.

Each of the eight athletes met the following criteria:

- had won a medal in a World Championship or Olympic Games, or held a World Record in their event;
- were continuing to train and compete at an international level
- anticipated competing in a World Championship in 1997.

Specifically, the eight athletes/participants in the study were as follows:

- four women athletes, four men athletes;
- five of the athletes competed in short track speed skating, two of the athletes competed in long track speed skating, and one athlete competed in women's ice hockey;
- ages ranged from 19 years of age to thirty-two years, with a mean age of twenty-five.

The Research Questions

Miles and Huberman (1994) have stated that it is a direct step from the conceptual framework to research questions. (See Appendix A for the outline of the interview questions for Phase I interviews). In looking first at the Initial Conceptual Framework (Figure 1.), and then at the Phase I questions (Appendix A), we can see that the questions are primarily non-causal, and are both general and specific (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These Phase I questions are based on 'etic' issues, brought to the first interview with each of the athletes by myself as researcher and in direct relationship to the aspects sketched out in the framework (Stake, 1995). The 'emic' issues, those issues of the participants/athletes 'on the inside', would begin to emerge in Phase I, and be discussed in further detail in the Phase II and III interviews. Stake (1995) sees this process as the making of a flexible list of questions and progressively redefining the issues and seizing the opportunity to learn the unexpected. "The best research questions evolve during the study" (p. 33).

The questions begin simply by asking each of the athletes to talk about a number of typical days in their life. Such a question is designed to ease them into the interview. At the same time, it gives us a great deal of specific information about how they spend their time at various times of the year, which relates directly to developing a better understanding of what life looks like and feels like to an athlete. Later in the interview, a similar question reappears to ask them what they were doing the day previous to the current interview.

Other simple questions ask about their background and their beginnings in sport. Then the interview questions move to another level with questions asking them about their psychological preparation for training and competing at the international and Olympic level. Probes were used to flesh out the question, regarding one of their best races or games, when they performed well, when they didn't.

Another level of questions then were planned to explore the less known, such as what it means to them to be one of the best in the world, what is important to them, what joys they have in their life, and what difficulties they have faced. And they were asked to talk about the relationships in their lives. In this first phase, the interview process was similar for all eight athletes with all of the questions as outlined in Appendix A being asked. However, the flexibility was there to discuss any 'emic' issues an athlete brought

up. Certainly, this study was designed to be open to the "...patterns of the unanticipated as well as the expected relationships" (Stake, 1995, p. 41). With Phase II and III interviews, the follow-up questions were guided by the contact summary forms suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), and by aspects not previously fully understood or discussed. The contact summary forms consisted of four major aspects of the previous interview. First, the main issues that stood out were summarized. Second, the answers to the main questions were summarized. Third, anything else that stood out from the interview was noted. Fourth, follow-up questions and any necessary clarifications were written down (See Appendix G and H for examples of the contact summary forms).

The Role of the Researcher

Much has been written about the importance of the researcher and her or his role in qualitative research (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Hunt, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Stake, 1995). It is important how one presents oneself to the participants in a qualitative study, what skills the researcher brings to the interview and observation process, and to be explicit about any biases the researcher might hold.

Miles and Huberman (1994) have suggested that the issues of instrument validity and reliability rely largely on the skills of the researcher, and that it is helpful that the researcher have some familiarity with the phenomenon being studied, have good investigative skills, have strong conceptual interests, and take a multidisciplinary approach. As a former elite athlete, and now working within the field, I have a good understanding of this world of high performance athletes and strong skills in interviewing from earlier research (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). While this closeness to the field has its dangers ('going native'), Miles and Huberman (1994) have stated that one has to be knowledgeable in the area to collect good information.

Hunt's (1992) concept of the three R's - Reflexivity, Responsiveness and Reciprocity – also serve as a way to think about the role of the researcher as well as her relationship with the participants in a study. Reflexivity ensures that as researchers we understand and acknowledge our participation in the research and that we reflect back on our implicit theories, and our experiences within the context of the research.

Responsiveness refers to the interaction between researcher and participants, the adaptability and 'flexing' in the moment, and the skill of listening that are key features in all human transactions (Hunt, 1992, p. 116). Reciprocity refers to participation in the study as negotiated, that power is shared and that the interpretations are shared and discussed in a collegial manner. This 'bottom-up' approach is open, flexible, and collegial and ensures that the participants in the study grow and learn as well as the researcher. The proposed series of three interviews with each athlete, and the 'going back' to each of the athletes with both a complete transcript of each of the interviews as well as a one-page summary of each of those interviews (Appendix I) ensured a strong sense of reciprocity between researcher and the eight athletes.

Stake (1995) has written that the researcher has to make numerous choices about her role choices, such as how much to participate personally, and whether to remain neutral or be more critical. The author also sees the researcher as a potential advocate, teacher, evaluator, biographer and interpreter.

In reflecting personally on this literature, I began to see my role as participating in a dialogue with eight very unique, high level athletes. My goal was to give voice to their lives and their experiences, to learn more about each of them and to learn more about excelling at such a level. The athletes in this study knew that I had been an athlete and they knew that I was still involved in sport as a sport psychologist. I brought to these interviews solid skills in interviewing. I saw myself as a researcher, as an interviewer and as an observer of their training. My greatest bias was perhaps that I valued the incredible intensity and commitment these athletes brought to their pursuit of sporting excellence. And I was certainly not totally neutral. I showed empathy and understanding for both the joys and exhilaration they experienced in performing well, and the frustration that they experienced in the face of injuries and difficulties. But I did endeavor to listen well and allow their voices to be heard.

Gaining Entry

Over the course of the three phases of the interviews, I met each of the athletes both at their training venues and in their home environments. Often we shared a coffee or lunch

at their home. The only place that we didn't meet was at a restaurant or café, because earlier research had made it clear that taping interviews in restaurants often resulted in great difficulty in hearing and transcribing the audiotapes.

It was wonderful to have the opportunity to meet each of the athletes in their own environment, both inside and outside of sport. A broader sense of their life in sport was gained by seeing where they trained, by viewing the locker rooms and the ice surfaces and observing their interaction with teammates. And to meet with them at their apartment or their house gave me an opportunity to observe part of their life outside of sport. For example, I met with one athlete, for his first interview, at his newly renovated home, which was decorated with antiques searched out on his days off from training. I saw other apartments shared with teammates and full of sport equipment and other sport paraphernalia. And I met and played with their cats and dogs.

At the beginning of each of the first interviews, we spent ten to fifteen minutes talking in general and becoming better acquainted. The purpose of the study was re-explained (although I had done this in the telephone conversation seeking their initial participation), and how the three phases would unfold. Each athlete was also ensured confidentiality. Clearly stating the intentions of the research guards against one kind of bias, that of the effects of the researcher on the case (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

It was explained that each interview would be taped, transcribed verbatim and both the transcript and a one-page summary would be shown to them prior to both the second interview and the third interview. I pointed out that this was one opportunity for them to comment or clarify what they had said. At the end of the first interview, we also had to discuss when and where the second and third interviews would take place, subject to their travel schedule and availability.

All of the athletes, once settled in for the interview, were extremely open and willing to talk at length about their lives. One of the most gratifying moments in this research came for me early on. One athlete, after seeing me the day after her first interview, exclaimed, "I can't believe how much it helped me to talk about all that yesterday. It really gave me a chance to think about things that I hadn't had a chance to for a while. Thanks. I can't wait to get a copy of the interview and for us to meet again."

The Interviews

“The interview is the main road to multiple realities” (Stake, 1995, p. 64).

The interviews were the opportunity for myself as researcher and for the athletes as participants in this study to enter into a conversation, spread out over a nine-month period, about their perspectives, thoughts and feelings as high performance athletes. The advance plan, to use the words of Stake (1995), was the initial set of research questions already discussed in a previous section in this chapter. (See Appendix A for the outline of the Phase I research questions).

In general, the interviews went as planned. For the Phase I interviews, each of the eight athletes were met in the months of December and January, 1997, which was a training and competitive phase. The duration of this phase of interviews was two to four hours. It was at this point in time that each of the athletes signed the Letter of Consent form (Appendix B).

The Phase II interviews took place in the months of March, April and May, 1997. As this was after a World Championship competition for all of the athletes, a significant portion of this interview focused on their experiences at those World Championships. There was much discussion around performance issues and, in a number of instances, when the results had been particularly great, the emotions and intensity expressed were quite poignant. As well, many of the issues that were begun in Phase I were followed up in this second phase of interviewing. Sometimes, the discussion was initiated by the athlete, who noted something of interest in the first transcript, and often it was something that required elaboration or clarification. The duration of these Phase II interviews was two to three hours.

A similar procedure was followed in Phase III, which took place in the months of June to August of 1997. The athletes, after a break from training, were in summer training. They were relaxed and often more broadly reflective of their life and yet, at the same time, their focus was turning to the 1998 Olympic Games. The duration of these Phase III interviews was again two to three hours.

Rubin & Rubin (1995), from a constructivist paradigm, have written that their approach to qualitative interviewing assumes an ever-changing world and that what we hear depends on when we ask and to whom. Despite the present study's differing philosophical basis, the three phases of interviews allowed for a more holistic view of a high performance athlete's life. The three phases created a unique opportunity for dialogue with these athletes over an extended period of nine months. It was possible to meet with them when they were in serious training, when they were in the midst or just after completion of a World Championship, and when they were well rested and had some time in their lives for life outside of sport. An interview with an athlete at the time of winning a World Championship took on a different tone and focus, than an interview six months later when/if the athlete was injured. This three phase interview process was able to capture those variances.

Memoing

After each of the interviews, I took the time, either in my car or when I arrived at my home base, to make some notes to myself about what I had heard and felt in that interview. "Memoing captures the thoughts of the analyst on the fly" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 75). Ideas or a thought were noted, as well as instances where I might not have fully understood what was said. These memos were handwritten and simply kept in a file folder titled Memos/Ideas. They were not coded but were used for both the next phase of interviews and for aiding in the coding of the data.

As Miles and Huberman (1994) have stated, memos help in moving from empirical data to a more conceptual level of thinking. They encourage a more critical stance as opposed to just being a 'recording machine' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 158). For example, as athletes began to talk about the concept of self-confidence, I began to reflect on what they were saying. Some athletes were so strong and unwavering in their level of confidence and others were seemingly so fragile. I began to reflect on where that confidence came from, what it was related to, and how it might get lost along the way.

As well, Miles and Huberman (1994) have suggested that memos can be written on something that is intensely surprising or puzzling. At least a few times, things just 'jumped

out' during the interview and I could hardly wait to make note of it. These moments were significant in the process of understanding how an athlete thought about his life. One example of these 'ah ha's' was in listening to a vivid description of a World Championship winning performance, and another was the critical reflections an athlete shared from one interview to the next about why he spent so much of his time pursuing an Olympic dream.

Transcriptions

After each interview, the audio tapes were transcribed verbatim with all the statements of both the athlete/participant and the researcher. One of the series of interviews was conducted in both English (the researcher) and French (the athlete), and for that reason, the athlete portion of the tapes were transcribed first in French, by someone other than the researcher, and then translated into English. The transcriptions and one-page summaries, which were developed within the same time frame, were either sent to the athlete or taken to them prior to the next phase of interviewing.

At times I felt the transcribing was an endless task, carrying on over the nine-month time period and for an additional month and a half after the last phase of interviewing. However, it was a valuable time to revisit the interview, to note again the tone and inflections of our voices and to further my understanding of what they were feeling and thinking. Lofland and Lofland (1984) have stated that while transcribing tapes is a chore, it also has enormous virtue. "It *requires* you to study each interview. Listening to the tape piece by piece forces you to consider, piece by piece, whether you have accomplished anything in the interview or not. It stimulates *analysis*" (p. 61).

Observation

As mentioned in the section on Gaining Entry, at least one of each of the interviews took place in the athletes' home environment, and in that way, it was possible to catch a glimpse of each of their lives outside of the sporting world. While this was only a 'glimpse', it did provide another viewpoint. As well, there was an opportunity to directly

observe and take written notes of each of the eight athletes in a training session after either the Phase I or Phase II interviews.

Direct observation provides a 'here and now' experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 273). Through observing a training session of each of the athletes, it was an attempt to see the sport world as the athlete saw it. During these observations I was heedful of Stake's (1995) comments that qualitative researchers are noninterventionists and Bogdan and Biklen's (1982) admonishment to be discreet. I sat quietly in the stands and observed.

As I sit in the stands, I watch the athlete prepare for practice.

At the beginning of practice, he jokes with his teammates as he puts on and adjusts his equipment. It is cold in the arena and there is just the sound of their voices and laughter. He steps onto the ice, still joking with a teammate and begins to warm-up, skating slowly and seemingly effortlessly around the ice surface. He skates with a group of three and then alone. He bends low as he skates and stands up with his hands behind his back during rest. The atmosphere seems relaxed and friendly between athletes. It turns more serious as the coach steps on the ice. All the athletes gather around him as he explains the workout. There is still a bit of laughter and conversation. He (the athlete being observed) appears to be much more focused as he prepares for his first interval. He is all concentration as he and the other athletes skate the three laps. When the interval is complete, he drinks from his water bottle, skates slowly, recovering and talks again to a teammate. With the commencement of each interval, there is a look of total concentration and effort for the duration. But with a little recovery time, there is also renewed banter between this athlete and a number of his teammates. He is alternately serious and focused when working, and relaxed and joking when resting. It is a fascinating interplay for the entire workout period.

Throughout the workout, I was conscious of my presence in the stands but I was not the only person watching and the athlete seemed to take

little notice. (Observation, January 22, 1997)

Each training session was observed from two vantage points. First, I had been an athlete so I could relate to the feeling of closeness with teammates, the anticipation that an athlete feels leading up to a workout, and the feelings of exertion and fatigue with each interval completed. And as a researcher, I was looking for the ordinary and for a way to personally capture the experience so I could understand it and interpret it, and pass along some sense of it to the reader (Stake, 1995). As with memoing, the observations were handwritten and kept in a folder titled Observations. They were not coded but were useful in the coding of the data.

Trustworthiness

As the sole researcher in the present study, it was extremely important to consider the different ways in which to establish trustworthiness and credibility for the findings and interpretations of this research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have written about numerous methods to establish this trustworthiness. One of the ways in which the credibility of the present study was increased was through the ‘prolonged engagement’ with the athletes over the three phases of the interviews. The interviews and the direct observations of training sessions were also a form of methodological triangulation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995).

Member checking, the term used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) or ‘getting feedback from informants’, the term used by Miles and Huberman (1994) was another crucial method utilized for establishing credibility. Throughout the research, the athletes provided feedback all along the way. As has already been mentioned, each of the eight athletes received both her or his verbatim transcripts and one-page summaries at the Phase II and Phase III interview sessions. (See Appendix I for an example of the one-page summary). The opportunity for the athletes to elaborate on anything from the previous interview was very much a basis for shared reflection.

This practice of member checking also created a degree of trust between myself as researcher and the athletes. They did indeed, as promised, get to read and comment on their

interview transcripts. So often, athletes are part of a research project and yet do not get to see or benefit from the results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have written that building trust is a developmental and time-consuming process where the researcher demonstrates to the participants that confidences will not be used against them. In this study, the trust was solidly confirmed at the Phase II interviews and continued through the Phase III interviews, where, at both these points in time, the athletes were encouraged to comment and expand on the thoughts and issues contained in the transcripts and one-page summaries.

Miles and Huberman (1994) have also suggested that the exceptions or 'outliers' can test and strengthen the findings. In fact, in the present study, it has been paramount to preserve those exceptions or contradictory views or events to better understand the peculiarities of each athlete's life. The present research is as much about the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of high performance athletes as it is of their commonalities.

Coding and Data Analysis

During the nine-month data collection phase, from December, 1996 to August, 1997, each of the athletes was interviewed three times and one training session per athlete was observed. The twenty-four interviews were transcribed, memos written and filed, a journal kept, and one-page summary sheets developed for each of the interviews. And, as strongly suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) the coding and early analysis began soon after the first interview was completed.

The primary sources used to guide the data analysis of the study were the work of both Miles and Huberman (1994) and Stake (1995). Stake (1995) has stated that the "...two strategic ways that researchers reach new meanings about cases are through direct interpretation of the individual instance and through aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class" (p. 74). The present study attempts to understand and directly present the athletes' world, including the contradictions and the surprises, and, at the same time, build toward patterns and themes that will illuminate the phenomenon of the life of the high performance athlete.

The analysis of data proceeded as follows:

Step One

The analysis began shortly after the first interview was completed and the tape transcribed. Each sentence of each of the interviews was broken down into incidents, pieces of information, which were then coded. Every bit of information was coded, suspending any judgement, at this point in time, about whether it was relevant or not. More time was required with the data before decisions could be made about what was or wasn't relevant. A separate page was kept of any ideas that came to mind during the coding.

The initial codes were developed directly from the Phase I research questions and the initial conceptual framework (See Appendix C for the Initial Codes). However, as the coding process continued over the course of a number of Phase I interviews, new codes began to emerge progressively, grounded in the comments and issues raised by the athletes (See Appendix D for the List of Emerging Codes and Appendix E for the Operational Definitions of Codes).

Step Two

The purpose of this second step was to separate the statements with meaningful content relative to the experiences of the high performance athlete from those statements that were irrelevant or redundant. (The only code dropped was 'Drugs', which was mentioned in passing by one athlete. This might be a function of not asking a question about drugs in sport, but it is an issue requiring exploration in future research).

Each 'meaningful statement' was composed of a number of the 'incidents' from Step One. These statements were then coded, with the code from step one being reused or a new code devised. During this step, as interviews were completed, transcribed and coded, the list of codes was being regularly revised. This process of revision, according to Miles and Huberman (1994) requires three sources of knowledge to be weighed. First of all, the conceptual structure may be in need of refinement. An openness was required to what was being seen and heard. It was important to not be tied solely to the initial conceptual framework. Secondly, the world of the high performance athlete becomes more meaningful and understandable as time is spent in it. Thirdly, "...the field site emits a continuous stream of leads, mysteries, themes and contradictions that need to be pursued and will

never fit perfectly into a precoded conceptual frame or even a more grounded , emerging coding system” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 62).

At this point in time, after an instructional period reviewing the initial and emerging list of codes and the definitions of the codes, a colleague was asked to code an interview. Miles and Huberman (1994) have suggested that this ‘check-coding’ aids in both definitional clarity and a reliability check. The formula for intercoder reliability, according to Miles and Huberman (1994) involves the number of agreements divided by the total number of agreements plus disagreements. In the present study, there were one hundred and four initial and emerging codes and the external coder, on her first attempt at coding, agreed with ninety-two of the one hundred and four initial codes, resulting in a 79% intercoder reliability ($92/104+12 = 92/116 = 79\%$). In other words, questions arose about twelve of the actual codes as well as concerns about the size of the codable block of data. After some dialogue that was beneficial for both the external coder and the researcher, a second interview was coded by the external coder and intercoder reliability rose to 91%. This means the external coder had agreement with ninety-nine of the one hundred and four codes ($99/104+5 = 99/109 = 91\%$). It is important to note that this reliability check was for early coding of incidents, not for the later, more interpretative level of coding.

Step Three

This step involved the ‘clustering’ of certain meaningful statements. These statements, describing different but related aspects of the athlete’s experience, were gathered together under a word most appropriate to its meaning. Until now, the coding had been rigorous and quite objective. With clustering, it became more intuitive. This could be called pattern coding, which begins to identify an emergent theme or explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, whenever an athlete talked about her will, her drive to compete, her motivation or lack thereof, those all were gathered together. As the researcher, I was beginning to bring my interpretation to the athletes’ experiences and words. And there was a growing awareness of patterns and themes. (See Appendix F for the evolution of this coding process and the emergence of higher order themes).

Step Four

By the time this step was reached, all of the twenty-four interviews had been completed, transcribed and coded. The clusters from Step Three were now organized into ten higher order themes or general dimensions. The seven dimensions of Mental Mindset, Beginnings, Personal Description, Meaning of Excelling in Sport, Joy's in an Athlete's Life, Relationships and Difficulties and Dilemmas had been part of the initial conceptual framework and the Phase I interview questions. The three general dimensions of Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence, Will, and Degrees of Balance, as well as the special case of A Girl on Boy's Teams emerged from the words and thoughts of the athlete/participants during the course of coding the three phases of interviews.

Within each of these ten general dimensions, there were different aspects of that particular topic. For example, the dimension of the Ebb and Flow of Self- Confidence contains different perspectives, both within a particular athlete and between the eight athletes. One athlete went through a period of feeling very self-confident after winning an Olympic medal and yet, at the time of the Phase III interview, was struggling with a knee injury and was not feeling quite as confident. As well, among the eight athletes, there were those who had a consistently high level of self-confidence throughout their sport careers to date, and others whose confidence level fluctuated much more.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the present study was that it was confined to the Olympic winter sports of long track speed skating, short track speed skating and the game of women's ice hockey. The findings may have limited generalizability to other high performance athletes. However, it is hoped that this limitation will be somewhat resolved by the rich, detailed, thick description of the eight cases. While maintaining the uniqueness of each of the cases, the detailed description will help the reader bridge the gap between the lives of the eight athletes detailed in this study to the lives of other high performance athletes in other sports (Stake, 1978, 1995).

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The research objectives for this study of high performance athletes' lives were essentially twofold. The first objective was to complement and extend our knowledge of the psychological skills and the mental mindset that high performance athletes bring to the training and competitive setting that enables them to perform their best. The second objective was focused on achieving a better understanding of the thirty-seven to fifty percent of an elite athlete's life that is spent outside the physical training and rest/sleep portion of his or her life. This second objective will fill in the 'pieces of the puzzle' of excelling in high performance sport.

To achieve these objectives, each of the eight athlete/participants was interviewed three times over a period of nine months from December 1996 to August 1997. The verbatim transcripts formed the data base for each of the athletes. The richness and complexity of data obtained from ten to twelve hours of discussion with each athlete provided numerous opportunities for exploration of each of these athletes' lives, thoughts and emotions.

Against a background of the initial conceptual framework and the research questions, which guided the first phase of this study, the results are discussed and interpreted within the context of the following ten general dimensions: Mental Mindset, Beginnings, Personal Description, The Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence, Meaning of Excelling in Sport, Will, Degrees of Balance, Joys in an Athlete's Life, Relationships, Difficulties and Dilemmas, and the eleventh dimension, a special case of A Girl on Boys' Teams. These findings resulted in the creation of a more extensive Conceptual Framework, which was designed to illuminate the lives of eight high performance athletes in Canadian sport (Figure 2). The intent of this second Conceptual Framework was not to show relationships among the dimensions, but rather to illustrate a more complete picture of these eight, high performance athletes' lives. The framework in Figure 2 includes the three dimensions that emerged from the data, namely Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence, Will and Degrees of Balance, as well as greater detail of the seven other dimensions that were

part of the earlier conceptual framework. At the conclusion of this chapter a summary matrix table is presented that summarizes and highlights the major findings and the tentative relationships among the ten general dimensions (Table 5, p. 143-148).

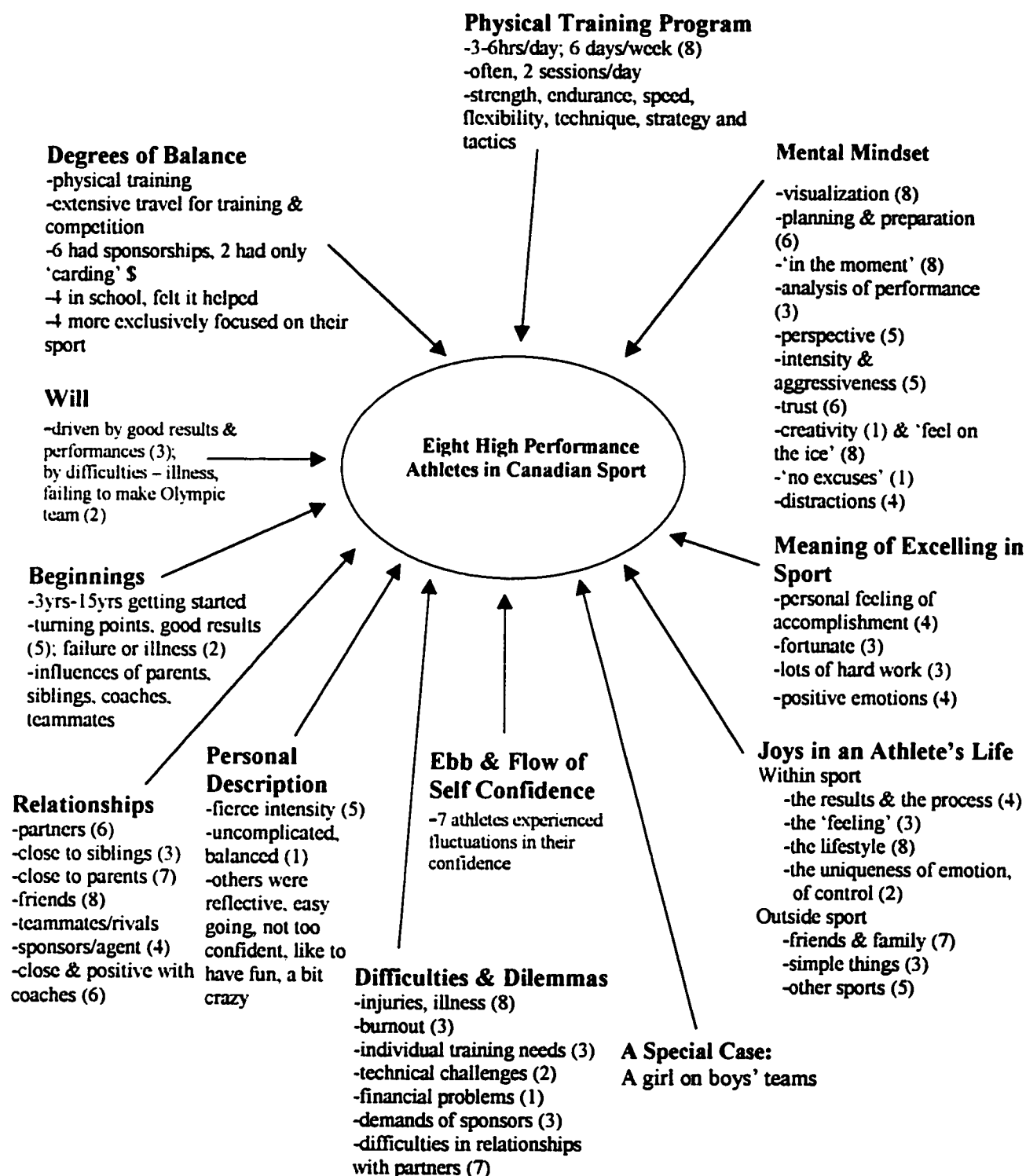


FIGURE 2
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE LIFE OF EIGHT HIGH PERFORMANCE ATHLETES IN CANADIAN SPORT

Mental Mindset

Each of the athletes was asked how they prepared for both training and competition, from a psychological stand point, and what they were thinking and feeling when they were performing at their best.

Visualization

All of the eight athletes spoke of using the skill of visualization to help them prepare for their races or their game. One athlete, who was extremely thorough in his mental preparation, said, "I prepare for the World Championship races far in advance. It's not complicated, I just do visualization." He spoke of sometimes seeing his best previous races, and as it got closer to the World Championships, he would see different possible scenarios, with different competitors. He added, that in terms of visualizing, ... "I have to get it right. If I can't get it right, I won't stop doing visualization until I do. If I have to rewind the race, well, it's going to rewind."

Another athlete, during training on the bike, would focus on one particular competitor from another country and visualize beating him. "I think of 'M' as one of the top guys, and for me to beat him I knew I had to be at the top of my game and I'd have to work hard. I mean, there's just so many good guys in the world...in particular, I just thought of 'M'. I'd go over the race second by second, over and over again, how I would want it to happen." This athlete also said that this helped motivate him in training. The images can be incredibly vivid and as a result quite powerful. He said "...when I'm really into training, when I'm really hammering down the line, and I feel good, that's when I have those kind of visions. It's just something that I want so bad."

In describing her winning race at the World Championships in 1997, one of the athletes said "...just before the start of the race, I thought about being a rocket off the line. As soon as the gun goes, a bomb that explodes. And it went well off the line, I won the start." Such thoughts of 'exploding' are echoed in the earlier work of Rushall (1984) on athletes' visualizations and thoughts during competition.

Another of the athletes said that "...if we did something new, something a little different, I'd go over it and kind of replay it in my mind at night, or as soon as I woke up.

I'd see myself doing it well. In the rest time, I'd put my walkman on and visualize game situations and just try to get those good winning feelings." She also said that she thinks about the gold medal at the Olympics. "I see myself on the ice getting that gold medal round my neck, the feeling of victory."

So visualization can be about winning and seeing oneself beating others. Such images can build an athlete's confidence and sustain an athlete during a hard training session. Visualization is also about powerful, vivid images, and 'seeing' and 'feeling' oneself execute certain moves or race/game strategies. What will become clearer when the 'in-the-moment' focus is discussed, the timing of these different kinds of visualization is critical.

Planning and Preparation

Closely related to the skill of visualization is the planning and preparing for races and game situations. Six of the athletes spoke specifically on how they plan. One of the athletes had a well-defined race plan that he would review and visualize in the week leading up to a race. He was working on making it more than just words, planning a web page on his computer with visual images. Another athlete spoke of the amount and thoroughness of his preparation. "I prepare for races months in advance because you just can't prepare two minutes beforehand." For the coming Olympic year he said... "I just have to be careful to not forget anything." This work was done primarily on their own, with little direct intervention from their coach.

By contrast, four athletes referred to team meetings that helped remind them and make more conscious what they needed to be thinking about during a game or race. In terms of the game situation, the coach led, reminding the athletes of the strategy needed and of their individual roles. Whether this meeting took place the morning of the game or between periods, the athlete then took a few minutes to internalize what was said and visualize execution of the play. For the other three athletes that were involved in racing relays, the coach would bring them together and facilitate the discussion of strategy for the next day. As one of the athletes said, "...for me, it was something of a wake-up call. A lot of things that our guys do, is to take the simple things for granted, and it's good to get back

to the basics and realize what it takes to win, and what you have to do. And when you touch on those, it makes it conscious, even if they're in the back of your head and you know... I think it helps a lot."

One of the reasons this athlete was so receptive to spending time with his teammates, articulating what needed to be done in the next days relay races, was because two years prior he had lost the overall World Championship because he failed to slow down and consciously prepare. Prior to the final race of that competition, he cut his hand. "I was just a bag of toys, running around with my head cut off, trying to get stitched up, trying to get my head into the 3000m. I didn't stop. I don't think I dried off my skates. When I asked him what he would now do differently, he said, "I would have sat down and really talked to myself. And gone for a run and really thought about what I had to do. Really go over the race and when I had to move up." So he learned a tough but valuable lesson from that year that helped him win a World Championship distance in 1997.

These comments on such conscious planning and preparation build on the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1993) on consciousness and attention and on Orlick's (1992) element of mental readiness. Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1993) wrote that the best way to live was by learning to control consciousness, and by being conscious of events and one's feelings, one can begin to *direct* their course. This was the lesson learned by the athlete in the above example. He came to the realization that when things didn't go quite as planned, he needed to step back, take time to reflect on his thoughts and feelings, and only then could he consciously plan for a good race. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) suggested that one must cultivate certain skills in order to control consciousness. These athletes were doing exactly that by consciously learning and practicing certain psychological skills, which then allowed them to control and direct their own performance. This sense of control and direction also influenced both an athlete's will to continue and her or his level of self confidence.

In the moment

All of the athletes were very clear about what was required to perform their best during a race or game. They spoke about the need to be 'in' the race and not anywhere

else, especially not ‘ahead of themselves’, meaning thinking about outcome instead of on the ‘doing’ of the race or game. One athlete said, “...the best thing is to think about what you have to do to race well, like in the 500m, start fast and stay low, skate two crossovers coming out of the last corner when you’re tired and the pressure is on.” Another said, “.... the main thing for us was to focus on our line, playing well. So when we weren’t on the ice, we were off the ice talking about strategy and what to do next shift.”

In his silver medal winning Olympic race, another athlete talked about ‘staying low and thinking power’ on the last corner of the race. He also talked about seeing the video of his Olympic race and said, “I look at my face when I’m on the line and it’s like stone, I mean it’s absolutely clear of any emotion at all except focusing. I can see this face, it’s just totally not seeing anything around. I was all out, going for it. I mean there was no holding back, and if I was going to be disappointed it was because my best was not good enough.” This latter example of intense focus was achieved through this athlete’s orchestration of a number of factors. He had the coaching he needed, he had learned a valuable lesson from a previous Olympic experience, his physical training had been going well, and he had had a number of good international results just prior to the Olympics. All of this enabled him to feel very self confident and have a strong belief that he could win a medal.

One athlete also talked about the focus he brings to the training situation. “I like to concentrate on my technique. You don’t see me talk too much on the ice, I’m always thinking about where to put my weight and which part of the blade I will push. I’m always concentrated in training.”

A number of the athletes also offered examples of when they ‘lost their concentration’ or ‘got ahead of themselves.’ One of the athletes, a three time World Champion and an Olympic medalist, gave the following example. “In the semi-finals, if you’re first, one lap from the finish, you have one lap left and you’re headed to the finals, and in the finals, you have one person to beat to win an Olympic medal. When you get to the last lap, just thinking about that, just that, is enough to break your concentration and make you fall.” This very clearly illustrates both the need to ‘stay in the moment’ and the incredible difficulty in doing so, particularly when an Olympic medal is at stake. But this athlete is very aware of this and he said, “I’m not about to forget it!” This losing

concentration is very much about expectations and thinking about the winning of the race instead of the execution or 'how to' of racing or competing.

One athlete talked about the difficulty of following up a World Cup win with a second good race. He would have an exceptionally good result one day, and the next day fail to finish in the top ten. After much thought, when asked what he thought was going on, he said, "...expectations. The first World Cup race I was feeling very relaxed and confident, just concentrating on skating well. The next day, I wanted to win again and I think I went too hard. You want to start too fast, you want to turn too well, you want too much, you get ahead of yourself."

This discussion of an 'in the moment' focus is very much a conscious act on the part of the athlete. It is similar to Orlick's (1992) element of full focus. While often this 'in the moment' is assumed to be related to the flow experience, it is, first of all, about being focused on the task at hand, or as Cohn (1991) has said "...immersed in the present" (p. 6). It is also clear how easy it is to lose this 'in the moment' focus. As two athletes said, as soon as you 'get ahead' of yourself and start 'expecting' a certain result, a good performance seems lost.

Analysis of performances

Three of the athletes spent a great deal of time reflecting on and analyzing their performances. One of the athletes said that he trains to be first and "...if I don't win, I always ask myself questions on why I didn't win." And then he would spend the time turning it around and visualizing a better strategy that would enable him to win, such as an earlier pass or moving up sooner in the race. Another athlete felt strongly that more time should be spent analyzing one's good performances. "I think many athletes analyze bad races more than they analyze good races. I think they dwell on bad races, trying to figure out why it was bad. I would rather just write off a bad race, well.... often, not always. I think it's hard to not dwell on a bad race, but it's important to figure out why you had an awesome race. If you don't know why you felt great, you're going to be pretty insecure the next time you get on the line because you have no idea why you felt great." The third athlete said, "...it's important to build on the good things that you do, not the races where

maybe you fell or you didn't feel so good." This analysis relates directly to the skill of visualization. As the athlete is reflecting on what she is doing well, the images that form in her head are positive ones. The emphasis on the good performances also helps build feelings of self control and self confidence for the athlete. Ravizza (1986) has stated that developing such a level of awareness is critical for athletes. This critical awareness enables them to gain an understanding of exactly what works for them, as well as recognizing much sooner when something is not working.

Perspective

Five of the eight athletes spoke about the perspective they bring to their sport career. They were all very aware of the immense pressures of the 1998 Olympic year and they all felt they were going to try to 'not let it get too crazy'. Several of them said that although their sport activity is very important in their life, it is not the only thing. One of the athletes talked about a perspective he had developed.

It's a motto or words that I've lived by over the last few years, that you're going to have your bad races, you're going to have your ups and downs. And when they come along there is nothing you can do about it except learn from it and move on and try to better yourself for the next day, the next race, the next competition, whatever it is.

Another athlete said. "I think I put speed skating to the good perspective. I really care. I think about it and work hard, but I don't look for happiness just in speed skating. Winning the World Team Championships was beyond my expectations, and for the moment it's great and I'm proud. But after that life goes on." Perhaps part of the reason that this athlete was able to maintain such a perspective was because he was doing very well at university and had already been part owner of a successful company.

Another athlete who had done a six-week internship as part of her university degree said that the internship had given her a different perspective on life in general, helped her appreciate her life in sport more and had given her confidence for life after her sport career

would be over. Several of the athletes talked about this year of 1997-98 being an exception because they would be very focused on preparing for the Olympics and that would exclude, for a time, much else.

The perspectives that these athletes held about their sport careers certainly influenced other parts of their lives, in particular, whether they chose to have other interests in their lives or rather lead more of a life focused on sport. Several athletes reflected on the pressures of the competitive sport world and understood that Olympic year would require a very singular focus. Others were clear that their happiness didn't come just from sport and felt that it was helpful to have other interests outside of sport.

Intensity and Aggressiveness

Intensity can be discussed here in terms of both an athlete's training and in terms of an actual race or game situation. One athlete spoke about regulating the intensity of his training. He felt that the previous year he had taken every training session and every competition with the same high level of intensity and was quite burnt out by the middle part of the season. "So I just have to control the intensity a little bit. Not only the intensity and the way I skate, but also the way I prepare mentally for practice." He was thinking about more selective peaking for Olympic year and not allowing himself to get upset when a certain practice is not great, but rather being ready for the big races of the year, the Olympic trials and the Olympics. His plan for this year was to ensure that the level of intensity was up for those two important points in his career.

In terms of a race or game situation, the level of intensity is very much related to the 'in the moment' focus that an athlete wants to maintain. In assessing a previous World Championship game, one athlete felt that she had not been well enough prepared for the game. "I think I was just flat. The first three or four shifts set the tone and we just had a bad start and it got off the track." What was the lesson learned? "Better damn well come out and play. It means that I have to get ready 10 minutes earlier, have a better warm-up, a more intense warm-up. I have to step up the intensity a notch from a physical sense and a mental sense. I think it's both."

Three other athletes who used the word intensity also talked about getting their adrenalin and aggression up. One of these athletes planned on working on her aggressiveness, but at the time of the interviews had not actually put it in place. The other athlete said "...on race day, that's part of what I focus on, getting my adrenalin and aggression out. I do it by breathing. I think about the way I breathe. I try to remember to breathe out really aggressively. I tried pushing out all the oxygen out when I trained and I felt good, so I tried it in races." The third said, "...I always try to pump myself up. For me it works if I try to get even more aggressive. I think about being explosive."

This discussion on intensity is about the athletes struggling to find the right balance of intensity in two differing ways. One level of discussion was about intensity in terms of a long training and competitive season and discovering how to 'peak' at the right times. The other level is related to the intensity or 'aggression' required of these athletes because they competed in explosive, sprinting races and the intense game of ice hockey. Again though, it is a conscious task that each athlete is engaged in to find the 'right' mix for himself.

Trust

A necessary element of great performances in sport is finding a balance between the 'in the moment' conscious thinking process and the more instinctual, 'let it happen' flow of the race or game. The athletes in the present study, each of whom had years of experience at the highest level in sport, talked about how to find the right blend of these two aspects. They used the words instinct and trust to describe 'letting' or allowing their bodies and brains to do the job:

Our sport is so hard because we have to come up and down all day. It's so hard.

One race alone is so hard on your brain, but when you do it four or five times per day against guys who are just as good or better than you, it's really hard to do. You know, you have a good race and you come off the ice and then you have to go out and do it again, so sometimes it becomes more instinct.

The same athlete said "...you have to be prepared mentally, but if you spend too much time, it can be detrimental." These thoughts of not wanting to think too much were

echoed by the U.S. Olympic gymnast Peter Vidmar, in an interview with sport psychologist Ken Ravizza (Ravizza, 1996).

Another athlete said that once she steps on the ice "... I feel like I'm on auto pilot." This connection to one's performance is similar to Orlick's (1992) element of full focus, and related to the element of belief. This trusting of oneself, of letting go of the conscious need for control concurs with Jackson's (1995) theme of release of conscious control as one of the factors that helps athletes get into a flow state. Rotella and Lerner (1993) have also used this word trust to define the letting go of conscious control. (Csikzentmihalyi (1990) has called this the possibility, rather than the actuality, of control. Nevertheless, when an athlete is well prepared for a performance, and knows she is well prepared, she has self confidence and can then trust herself to let it happen.

Creativity and 'Feel on the Ice'

All of the athletes spoke of working on a certain 'feeling' on the ice, which related to the technical and/or creative aspects of their sport. They spoke of the importance of the feeling they wanted to have in their performance or on the ice. Much of this was dependent on their blades, and the 'bend' and 'rocker' of those blades. Or the fiddling with a hockey stick blade, to make a prototype. One athlete said, "...I know the feeling I want to have to skate well."

One athlete spoke extensively about the creative and artistic side of what she did. "Sport, especially speed skating, when it's so technical, requires you to be artistic. And that's where the creativity comes in. I'm pretty creative, feeling the rhythm and the softness, the gracefulness. I feel that skating is something that you have to feel, but once you feel it you have to figure out what it is that you felt." This is an athlete who thinks this analysis of the 'awesome' race is crucial for continued success, and who talked passionately about the technical pieces of her sport. This striving to solve minute technical aspects of the sport and yet, at the same time, maintain some sense of feeling, of the aesthetic, illustrates the creative side of sport. There was a sense of joy for this athlete in searching for this feeling and in maintaining the softness and gracefulness on the ice. Similarly, Scanlan, Stein & Ravizza, (1989), in a study of figure skaters, found that one of

the sources of enjoyment was the creativity, inventiveness, and the very act of skating. There was as well, with the athletes in the present study, sometimes a sense of frustration related to this striving, when they were not able to find that 'feeling.'

'No Excuses'

In describing his Olympic silver medal race, one athlete spoke about the ever-so subtle nuances of a great performance. "Everything went perfectly for me that week, and that's something I think a lot of athletes panic with. When everything is going perfectly, they can't deal with it. So they come up with some excuse, 'well, I was tired today, so if I don't win that's why.' " When asked how he didn't fall into this trap, he replied, "... I refused to do that because I did just that in Albertville (1992 Olympic Games). I gave myself an out in Albertville, saying I was still an underdog, so it was okay that I didn't win a medal. In Lillehammer, I refused to do that. I can be disappointed if I have my best race and people are better than me, but there was no way I was going to give myself an excuse."

On one level, these comments are about this athlete's strong self confidence and powerful belief in his ability to perform despite the immense pressures of an Olympic Games. On this level, the athlete's comments certainly concur with Orlick's (1992) core element of belief. On another level, underlying this sense of self confidence and belief in oneself, are the athlete's thoughts on allowing no excuses for himself and having no fear in putting it all on the line. Cohn (1991), in a study on peak performance in golf, identified the absence of fear as an important psychological quality. Nevertheless, this concept of 'no excuses' brings something subtle yet decidedly new to the literature on the mindset of peak performance in sport. While Rotella and Lerner (1993) have written about athletes learning to not 'psych-out' themselves when they feel nervous, this athlete is talking about learning to not panic (or not get 'psyched out') when, in fact, everything is going very well.

Distractions

Four of the eight athletes in this study faced two distinct distractions that had potential to disrupt their mental mindset for the upcoming Olympic year.

Three of the athletes had experienced a particularly devastating Olympic Games in 1994 in Lillehammer, and it continued to be a concern for each of them at the time of being interviewed. One of the athletes essentially 'lost' a bronze medal. In the Olympic final, he and another skater fell, he got up and finished, which normally would have ensured him the bronze medal. But he was told an incorrect number of laps and as a result was disqualified and the medal was awarded to another skater. Clearly, it was quite a chaotic time for both the athlete and the officials. This athlete's voice was full of emotion when he spoke about it:

It takes a lot out of a person. For me to train, to dedicate 11 years of my life..... it kind of leaves a bad taste in your mouth. It was really disappointing for me. It had a big effect on me emotionally, mentally. Like the ultimate, in many athlete's career, is having a shot at the gold. And I had that and it was just taken away from me.

It took this athlete two years to find his heart again and re-commit to his sport. Fortunately, he went on to win a World Championship race in 1997 and, at the time of his final interview, was feeling very confident for the 1998 Olympics. He is still concerned about the refereeing however. In the 1997 Worlds, he said, "...I was really disappointed by the refereeing. The thing that really bugs me is that it seems a referee will make a call like that with absolutely no hesitation or remorse. It was such a shabby call (against another athlete). It's just disappointing to know that that can happen." But he clearly understands that the refereeing is not something that he can control and he knows what to do. "The best we can do is just go out and race, race the best you can, and try not to let the referees have that option."

Another athlete spoke of his fear of falling in the up-coming 1998 Olympics because he fell twice in the 1994 Olympics. "It's one of my fears, for sure. I'm afraid of wiping out. I'm going to the Olympics this year, and of course I'm going to think about it because in '94, it happened to me twice." But, although he seemed worried about repeating the same mistakes, he also seemed clear, in the third interview, on what he needed to do. "I still think about Lillehammer, of course, but just in one sense, in the sense of knowing what not to repeat. I live in the present now." It appears that he knows what to do to perform

well. The difficulty will always be in doing it under the immense pressure of the Olympic Games.

A third athlete spoke of the enormous pressure and expectations going into the Lillehammer Games. "It was a six months of hearing about the gold medal that I was supposed to win. And it's just because it's the Olympics and you're more nervous than normal." Just as with the previous athlete, she knows now what she needs to work on, but it may not be that easy.

Finally, one other athlete was concerned about the state of refereeing in her sport. She recalled that in the 1996 World Championships there was some poor refereeing. "One ref, you never knew what she was going to call. She called a penalty on the (other team) only after the fans were screaming at her for 5 or 6 seconds and then she puts her arm up and gives us a power play. It was ridiculous. But you can't control those things obviously."

Each of these athletes was very aware of the distractions that they had faced and would probably face again in international competition. Orlick (1996) has stated that being able to control for distractions is one of the most important mental factors affecting consistency of performance. Being clear about what has distracted them in the past was the first step for these athletes in preparing for future performances. They also recognized the powerful emotions caused by these distractions, and understood that some things, such as refereeing, were outside of what they could control.

In summary, the mental mindset of a high performance athlete, as identified by the eight athletes in this study, is supportive of Orlick's (1992) elements of excellence. While the actual terminology used here may not be identical to Orlick's (1992), it is clear from the comments and quotes that, in many instances, the essence is similar. The athletes are well aware that the skill of visualization helps them enormously in their preparation to perform. They know that they need to continue to analyze and consciously think about ways to improve their technical skills. They are aware that, in order to perform their best, particularly in the pressure of an Olympic Games or World Championships, they want to be 'in the moment', focused on the "how-to" of their performance, and not dissuaded by innumerable distractions and a focus on outcome. This 'reflective awareness,' as Csikzentmihalyi (1988) has called it, is a key theme underlying all the components of the mental mindset.

In terms of extending what we know about psychological preparation and advancing the field of sport psychology in general, two sub-sections, creativity/‘feel on the ice’ and ‘no excuses’, open the door to a deeper understanding of some of the more subtle but critical nuances of excelling in high performance sport. The athletes in this study spoke about a certain ‘feeling’ that they were trying to create on the ice. Due to the highly technical nature of the sports in this study, it is no surprise that the need to cultivate a certain feeling of rhythm and softness on the ice is an important aspect of producing a great performance. Bloom (1982b) noted that Olympic swimmers seemed to have a certain ‘feeling’ for the water, although this was seen as more of an innate characteristic rather than something they worked to create. For the athletes in the present study, the ‘feeling’ that they referred to was a feeling that they continually and quite consciously worked on in their quest for better and better performances. To date, research on the phenomenon of creativity has been much more commonplace within the domains of music, art or dance than in sport (Gardner, 1993; Partington, 1995; Talbot-Honeck, 1994).

Only one athlete spoke about the concept of ‘no excuses,’ but it is uniqueness that begs to be explored and understood. As Stake (1995) has said “the more qualitative approach usually means finding good moments to reveal the unique complexity of the case (p. 63). This athlete’s ‘no excuses’ is partly about a strong belief and self confidence in his abilities, partly about having no fear, and partly about being able to *accept* a sense of being fully prepared and letting it happen.

With those thoughts in mind, a representation of the Mental Mindset (Figure 3) was developed in collaboration with the eight athletes in this study. First of all, in reflecting on what each of the athletes had talked about in terms of how they went about preparing psychologically for competition during the Phase I interviews, the researcher developed a tentative model. Second, the model was then presented to each of the athletes in the second phase of the interviews and each of the athletes suggested what would ‘fit’ for them. Third, the researcher then went back, added what each athlete had said, and presented it to them again during the third and final phase of interviews. Each of the athletes felt that the model was a useful way to visualize the whole process of what was required to be well prepared psychologically for Olympic level competition.

This visual illustration of how the eight athletes in the present study go about ensuring a 'best performance' in the competitive situation is meant to emphasize the sense of action required by the athlete to always be 'in the moment.' In general, the larger, upper circle is outcome, the winning, the losing, and all the possible outside influences, distractions, and pressures. These are all aspects of a performance over which athletes have little direct control. The lower circle is the 'in the moment' focus, thinking consciously about a few simple, clear technical aspects of the race or game, including some positive feelings of self confidence. Athletes, with good physical training and solid mental practice, do have control over these aspects.

More specifically, what is 'in' each of the circles is unique to each athlete and dependent on the individual experiences each athlete brings from their life inside and outside sport, as well as the requirements of the sport and event in which they perform. Because the athletes in the present study competed in sprint races and the game of hockey, the notion of raising the level of intensity and aggressiveness is part of the small circle focus. The specific distractions noted in this study, poor refereeing and the 1992 Olympics, are, for these athletes, part of the larger circle

It is in this smaller circle that each athlete must discover for themselves the balance between conscious thought processes focused on a few, clear aspects of the performance, and the more instinctual, trusting of one's well trained body. Partington (1995), in his study of classical musicians, illuminated this delicate balance with a quote on performing from one musician. "I'm not on automatic pilot. I must concentrate on the moment, flowing with it" (p. 150). And finally, the mental training skill is for each athlete to develop the self awareness of when she is in the larger circle so she can bring herself back to the 'in the moment' smaller circle. It is within this smaller circle that great performances are possible.

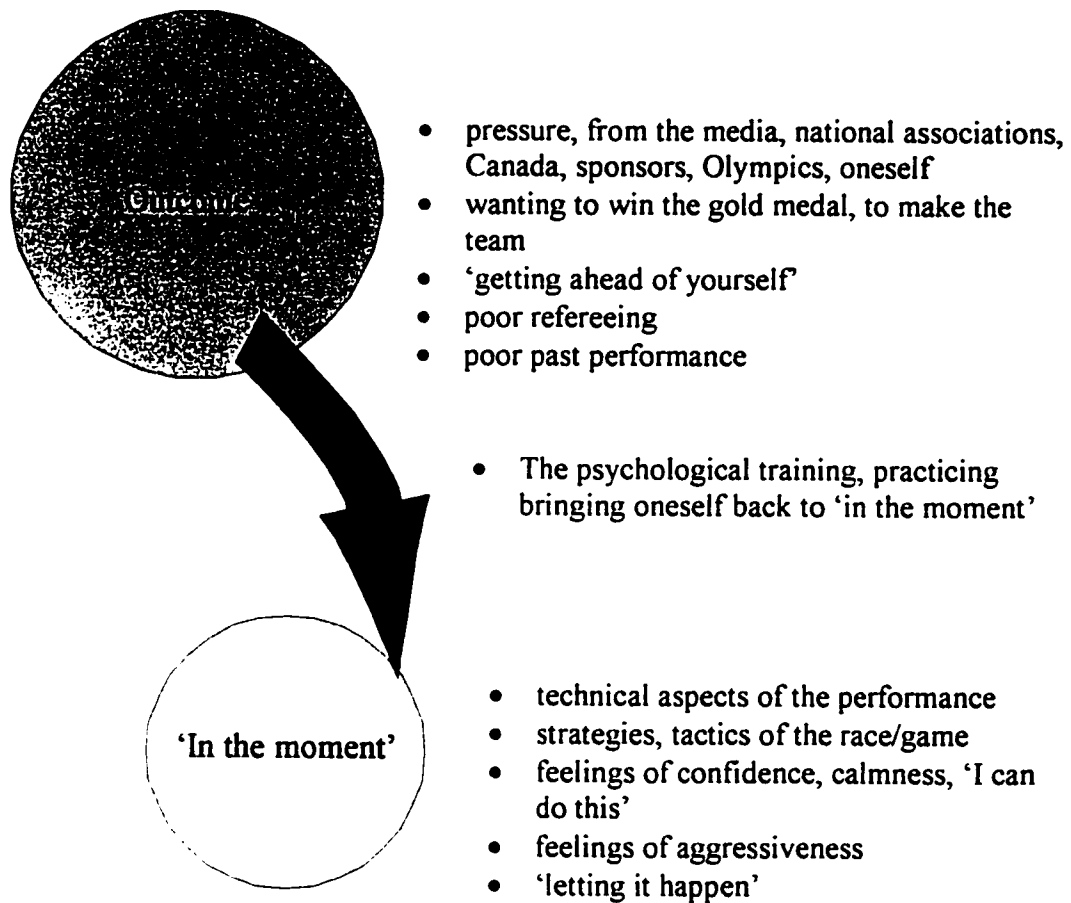


FIGURE 3
THE MENTAL MINDSET

Beginnings

Each of the eight athletes was asked about their beginnings in sport, how and at what age they got started, and what those early experiences were like. They were also asked if anyone had an influence in those early years, and at what point did they realize they could be one of the best in the world. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

The ages at which these athletes got started in sport ranged from three years of age to fifteen. With the exception of one athlete who started sport at thirteen years of age and was on the national team three years later at the age of sixteen, the other athletes took from six to 12 years to make their respective national teams. And for most of them, medals at the international level came several years after that. These timeframes for achieving a high level of excellence in the field of sport concur with the work of both Ericsson et al. (1993) and Gardner (1993). Lets look at each of the athletes to see what stood out in the early years.

Our first athlete began skating at three years old, made the national team at fifteen and was a World Champion and Olympic medalist at eighteen. From his perspective, his life in sport has been straightforward. His parents were involved and coached him when he was very little, and his brother, who was five years older, had started competing and he wanted to do the same. As he talked about those early years he touched on what motivated him to keep going at such a young age.

In the beginning, of course, when you are young and all your buddies go out to play and you go training instead, there has to be something to motivate you to go. I kept on going partly because my brother was at a higher level than I was and I saw what he was doing and I wanted to get to where he was. I always had a certain goal that wasn't necessarily very big for me, at that age. When I was nine or ten, he wasn't at the Olympics either, so

TABLE 2

BEGINNINGS

Athlete	Age When Began Olympic Sport	Age When Made National Team	Turning Point	Influences
A	3 yrs. of age	15 yrs. of age	none mentioned	•Parents •Brother on Olympic Team
B	9 yrs. of age	18 yrs. of age	•Changing disciplines	•Brother
C	12 yrs. of age	18 yrs. of age	•3 rd in World Championships	•Mother •First coach
D	13 yrs. age	16 yrs. of age	•Beating national team member at age 15 •Illness in '95	none mentioned
E	15 yrs. of age	22 yrs. of age	•World University Games, 2 bronze medals	none mentioned
F	10 yrs. of age	18 yrs. of age	•Not making '92 Olympic team	•Sister
G	5 yrs. of age	16 yrs. of age	•Canada Games '91, gold medal	•Parents •Early coaches
H	5 yrs. of age did two sports, at 16 chose his sport	22 yrs. of age	•First World Cup '92	•Parents/Dad •Other National team skaters

I had a goal that was a bit smaller, let's say, than the Olympics.
And I progressed at the same time he did.

This athlete had a very deep inner resolve to train hard and to want to win every time that he went out to compete. Certainly though, his brother's success, his own steady and continuous progression and his parents involvement all helped him develop and pursue his goals, in keeping with earlier research in the area of talent development (Bloom, 1992a; Csikzentmihalyi, 1993; Ericsson et al., 1993; Sosniak, 1985).

A second athlete began, at age nine, participating in the two disciplines of her sport, explaining that in Canada, as a youngster, this was common. Her brother, a year younger, had begun skating and she followed him into the sport. Throughout her career, she has remained close to her brother and during the three phases of interviews, he had become her coach as she trained for her fourth Olympics.

This athlete competed in the 1988 Olympics in one of the disciplines, when it was a demonstration sport (before it gained official Olympic status) and then in the 1992 and 1994 Olympics in the other discipline. She switched not because she loved one over the other, but because of her need to have more control over her performances.

I trained too hard to deal with the unpredictability. There was too much stress involved. For sure I like to have things in my own control, the things that affect me, and for short track I could never be (in control), it was always just up to whatever. I hated that part. I really liked the sport but I hated standing on the line and thinking it's sort of a lottery. So starting in '89, I've done the World Championships.

A third athlete began skating and competing at the age of twelve. She said that she enjoyed being at the rink and at being able to travel around the province initially, and then internationally, although she said she was not really good when she started. "I had no coordination, no talent and was falling all over the place. But I liked it." What changed for her was a third place at a World Championship and then both realizing and wanting to

“...be a World Champion at one point in my life.” This athlete spoke about two key individuals in her life, her mother and her first coach. Her mother was very involved in the early years of her sport career, and her first coach was a very big influence in both her life in sport and outside of sport. He had been extremely supportive, encouraging her and never setting any limits on what she could accomplish.

A fourth athlete began by participating in two different sports and then, at age thirteen, narrowed his choice to his future Olympic sport. At the age of sixteen he made his first national team. Success came quickly to this physically talented athlete, when, at fifteen years of age, he beat some of the more established national team athletes. When he was asked if that was when he thought he could be good, he replied “...oh yeah, I thought I was a shit then. And then I made the national team, so it was good.” While this athlete did not talk about anyone in particular who had influenced him, he did talk about another significant point in his sport career. In 1995, after being a member of two Olympic teams, he suffered an illness that resulted in two mediocre years at the international level. He talked in great detail about the decision he made to take better care of himself and to get more professional in his training, which resulted in a World Championship win in 1997.

Our fifth athlete started his sport career a little later than the other athletes in this study, at fifteen, and seven years later he made the national team, at age twenty-two. He said that while he had always trained hard and enjoyed the sport, he felt, a few years prior to our interviews, that he wasn’t improving anymore and he planned to quit the sport. What changed his mind and his perspective was his racing at the World University Games in 1995. He went to those games planning for it to be his last international competition and came back with two medals.

My mind was made up to just quit skating. But there I did really well. I got two bronze medals. All the guys from China, Korea, Japan, they were all there. And I beat them, most of them.

So I went on to the trials and made the national team. For the previous couple of years I wanted to make the national team really bad, but I kind of said ‘okay, that’s all right, I’m not going to make it.’ But I improved and I made it. So I said, ‘Why not, I’m going to keep skating and training’.

A sixth athlete began her sport career at ten and made the national team eight years later at age eighteen. Her sister, who was four years older, had started skating and she followed her to the sport.

I was following my sister. She was very disciplined and she was very good at every sport she did. She was very good at school. But my family was not very disciplined (laughs). I didn't have a time when I had to go to bed when I was young, and I didn't have an hour to do my homework. I never did homework. And I guess my sister was doing what she had to do, so I guess I kind of followed her. When we moved to Montreal, she took me under her wing and helped me. Sometimes I didn't want to go train and she would say 'oh come on, you've got to go train.'

For this athlete, the realization that she wanted to be good came when she didn't make the 1992 Olympic team.

I was on the national team in '89 and it was kind of easy. And I had the opportunity to go to the Olympics in '92, but I didn't make the team. Until then I didn't realize that skating was important to me. But '92, that was...I was devastated. That was very hard for me. I would never have suspected that. So I realized that it was important to me and that I wanted to be a good skater.

Our seventh athlete had the classic Canadian sport start, playing hockey on the backyard rink at five years of age. The only difference was that this athlete is a woman. Both of her parents had an influence on her pursuing sport, with her dad coaching her until she was ten. Then, when she played on boy's teams, she felt that a couple of her early coaches had had a big influence on her because they taught her great hockey skills and, perhaps more importantly, gave her the opportunity to play and earn her spot. "That's all I ever wanted. I got a chance, I contributed to the team so I got the time I deserved." This

athlete felt that things really started to take off when she was twelve and her provincial team won gold at the Canada Games in 1991.

I was twelve. At that point in time I had never played hockey with girls before. I had always played with the boys and I never really knew that there were opportunities for girls. So after that, I found out that there was a national team and there were all these great things that you could do (laughs). I thought, well, I can pursue this.

Our final athlete began his sport career at five, participating in two different sports. At twelve, he had to choose one sport, which then became the sport he competes in at the Olympic level.

My parents made me choose. With school and hockey and speed skating, it was hard for them and hard for me and hard for school. I would finish school at three-thirty, and would go to hockey practice until five-thirty. Then my mom or dad would drive me straight to the rink to skate at six until seven-thirty and then we would come home. So it was tiring for them, they would be driving me all over the place, and tiring for me too. So I had to choose. And I chose speed skating, because it was fun, we traveled a little bit more, we saw different people. In hockey, we would only really get to know your teammates. But in speed skating you get to know all your competitors as well. You're alone doing your sport. You compete against others that are trying to accomplish the same thing and are trying to beat you, but you can still be friends. I liked it very much, this approach to sport. I still love hockey, but I'm glad I'm not in the NHL right now, or maybe on some farm team (laughs).

This athlete's dad had been a positive influence on him in his early years in both hockey and speed skating. When he chose skating at age sixteen, he was strongly influenced by the tradition of the national team skaters in his province.

The track opened in 1986 and we saw Gaetan win his medals in '84, so that was a big boost for skaters in Quebec. We were ten skaters growing up together and there was a good competition between us and that made us stronger. There was a lot of good national team skaters that came to Ste. Foy to skate, so we could see them skate and we improved a lot more.

For this athlete the realization that he could be good internationally came at his first World Cup race in Japan when he was twenty-two years of age.

It was my first chance to skate against all the other countries and measure your ability. And it was really fun because the in the first race I finished eleventh and the second race I finished seventh, so I was really surprised. I remember I phoned home and they couldn't believe it. I was expecting to go there and maybe finish in the top twenty. That would have been really, really good in my first World Cup. After that it was obvious to me that I had a good chance to be one of the top Canadians and go the 1994 Olympics which were at that time in two years.

In summary, the ages at which the eight athletes in this study began their sport careers ranged from three years of age to fifteen, and the number of years it took these athletes to make their first national team ranged from three years to twelve. As mentioned earlier in this section, with the exception of one of the athletes, these athletes did require a decade or more of serious training before achieving international level success. This finding supports the work of both Ericsson et al. (1993) and Gardner (1993).

However, it would also appear that most of them had significant support from family and friends along the way. Six of the eight athletes spoke extensively about a mother or father, a sister or brother, a wonderful coach and other athletes/teammates who

helped them, pushed them and inspired them. Such a finding lends further support to the research literature already present on the importance of family influences (Bloom, 1985; Bunker, 1985; Howe, 1990; Zuckerman, 1977). The athletes' comments also lend support to the necessity, at a young age, of an emphasis on steady, day to day progression, rather than on exceptional success (Sosniak, 1985). It is important to note here that a number of athletes also talked about the influence of a brother or sister on their early years in sport, and the important encouragement of early coaches and teammates.

Finally, seven of the eight athletes talked about turning points in their sport careers that enabled them to realize that they could be, or they wanted to be, a world class athlete. For five athletes, it was a positive experience, such as choosing to switch disciplines or winning a medal at an important competition, that influenced their level of self confidence and encouraged them to continue training and competing. For the two other athletes, it was a more negative experience (for one, a two-year illness and a couple of mediocre seasons and for the other athlete, failing to make an Olympic team) that pushed them to find the will within themselves to come back and begin again. Those experiences clarified for them the commitment required to achieve international success.

Personal Description

Each of the eight athletes was asked to describe themselves. For some this was easier than for others and there were many laughs as they took some time to reflect on how they saw themselves.

Our first athlete was one of the best in the world in his sport and was still quite young, at twenty-two years of age. He began by describing himself as a bit crazy.

I like having fun. I can be serious when I have to, but there are times when I have to be reminded because I tend to just keep on being crazy and having fun all the time. I'm a guy who likes to go to bed late too (laughs) It's been three years that (my coach) has been trying to get me to go to bed early. Of course there are times when I have a hard time being serious, but in general I can

be serious when it's time. When we get to the World Championships, I won't have any problem being serious and focusing on the race.

This athlete had an incredible desire to win, and, as we saw under the dimension of Mental Mindset, when he didn't do as well as he had hoped, he took the time to analyze his performance in order to be better in the next race or competition.

I don't know. Maybe it's the fact that I've been skating for a long time. I've always competed. I was raised with that. It's just that when I get on the ice I don't like losing. I don't want to be second, I don't want to be third. I want to be first because that's what I train for and that's what I want. I want to win. If you train to be second or third, don't bother training at all. It's not worth it. If I don't win I'm not happy. If I don't win, I ask myself questions on why I didn't win.

There was an intensity about this athlete, not only in his sport career, but also in his life outside of sport.

What's important, in my opinion, is that when you do something, you have to do it right. Don't commit to something if you are just going to do it halfway. That's what I do in sport. I'm committed to that. I'll go one hundred percent and I'll do it to win too. It's like in anything else. If I have a relationship with a girl, I won't go into it halfway. If I'm just going to do it by halves, then I'll end it.

Finally, while this athlete admitted that he might not be too responsible in other parts of his life, he indicated that he took full responsibility for his sport career. He gave an example that dealt with his training needs in general, and with an example of the 1997 World Championships where he 'only' came second overall.

I know that as far as skating is concerned, I can do a lot of things by myself. With the years so many things have happened that I've learned to work things out for myself because I didn't always have

the resources that I have now. I've pretty much learned to manage by myself. Only, when you have a little help on the side, it makes your job easier.

I have to tell myself that if I had trained harder last summer, I would have been in good enough shape to beat them both (competitors at the World Championships). I just lacked the zip. Anyway, I can't stop them from (team skating). It's a bit my fault. You have to find a way to fight against it, and that's to train more and be in better shape.

Our second athlete described herself as organized, self-motivated and quite intense. She illustrated that intensity with an intriguing example from her childhood.

I'm a pretty focused, intense person. I'd say I'm very organized and goal-oriented, and I have a very specific plan that I like to follow. When I was younger I'd describe myself as pretty high-strung, intense and always very competitive.

I think I'm also a very self-motivated person. I don't need someone to come and tell me to do my homework, or get up and go to the rink, or whatever, because I like to do that. I love to go to the rink. I love to work, like I can work hard, in school or whatever I choose to do. I've always been like that. I'm a workaholic. I think I was just born with that. I remember building a tree house when I was younger, about ten, and I couldn't leave until it was done. Like everyone left and I was still hammering nails until two or three in the morning (laughs). I can just remember everyone was so mad at me because it had to be done the right way and perfect, and if they were sitting down and just having fun it wasn't good enough. I remember that vividly.

When I asked her if her brother or sister were as intense, she replied "...they are more laid back. I mean they both work and do the job but it's not a life and death situation that it is for me. So I'm more intense for sure."

A third athlete, many times a World Champion and Olympic medalist, saw herself as honest, very competitive and strong-willed and quite responsible.

I think I'm very honest and blunt. I'm an open book. I say what I think all the time, which is sometimes not so good.

I take a lot of room. I have a big personality that can influence people a bit. I'm strong-willed. Not too many people are indifferent to me, they either like me or don't like me. Well, some must be indifferent, but I get a strong reaction from people. I hate to lose at all times, and I really like to work hard and improve. When I step onto the ice I will give everything I have to be ranked as well as I can. And I'm very responsible with all the stuff I'm supposed to be doing.

She also talked about being someone who likes simple things. "It doesn't take a lot to make me happy, a good coffee, a good wine, good friends. And I like to think that I am a good friend, loyal."

Our fourth athlete, an Olympic silver medalist, saw herself as very focused and intense, and she reflected on how that intensity impacted on her personal life.

I'm very independent, but, I don't know, I've changed a lot.

I'm very intense and very focused for sure and that makes it hard on the rest of your life. You know, Olympic year and pre-Olympic year, I ignored the rest of my life. It's (the intensity) in everything I do, absolutely everything. Anything I choose to do I get incredibly obsessed with it. But I don't think sport made me like that. I think I would have been like that in anything that I would do. For sure, sport gets you to direct your focus. Maybe I would have been more scattered.

Maybe I would have focused on a whole bunch of things and tried to be great at them all. But I don't think so, because I did a whole bunch of sports and ended up really focusing on one and quitting all the others. I think I like to focus on one or two things at a time. And I like to have things in my control. The things that affect me, I like to be in charge of them.

This athlete also saw herself as confident but in a quiet way, not needing or wanting to shout out that she thought she could win a medal at the 1994 Olympics. "(Lots of people) don't think I'm very driven, but it's more internal. I'm not the kind of person who goes around and tells everybody that I think I can win a medal. I don't think, in the summer before the Olympics, that I was going around saying, 'oh, I'm going to win.'"

Our fifth athlete, a World Champion in 1997, was initially hesitant to describe himself. He said he hadn't really thought about it. But he then ventured to say that he saw himself as a combination of easy going and competitive. And he also reflected on how he had matured as an athlete.

I'm pretty easy going. A lot of times I take the view that if it doesn't really matter, it's not worth the concern. So a lot of things within the team, (interpersonal issues) are not worth the stress, the grief. I just don't need it in my life. And I think I apply that attitude in my everyday life. I can let a lot of things go. But when I feel strongly about something, I will voice my opinion.

And I'm competitive. I hate to lose. Even as a kid. I've always been pretty good at most sports. As a kid I would go so far as to say that I would be pretty bad if I didn't win. I think that as I've gotten older I've come to accept defeat a little more graciously. Still, I don't like to lose and I think you need that. I think you need that drive, that will. I don't mind losing to someone who is better, but I don't like it when I beat myself, when I don't

give myself a fair shake.

This athlete also talked about a personal philosophy, in terms of his relationships with others.

I'm usually thoughtful, generous, at times selfish, self-centered. But especially when I travel with the team I always try to think about other people, to make sure everyone else is happy. I apply the same kind of philosophy to my personal life too. I try to think about others, respect others. I really do try to extend the same respect that I expect.

The sixth athlete, a World Record holder and Olympic medalist, described herself as balanced and uncomplicated, a bit lazy, and perhaps a bit of a loner.

I would have to describe myself as a balanced person. I think I'm not excessive in anything that I do. I'm a happy person and it doesn't take much to please me. I'm easy going. I'm not complicated. I like the company of people but I like to be on my own. What I really like is being alone. I need time and space to be alone. I have to keep my distance. It's the same with my family and with my friends. I'm a little 'sauvage', as we would say in French. That's why, at the end of a trip with the team, everyone gets on my nerves. Because I'm living on my own all week, when I'm at home. And I'm a bit lazy, not in skating, but in school. I guess I'm not involved enough. I always wait until the last minute to do what I have to do.

She also talked about how she learned to take personal responsibility for not making the 1992 Olympic team. "At first I blamed everyone, like it was the girls, it was the coach, and then I realized that it was just me. I didn't do everything that I had to do. And then I realized that even if you don't achieve your goals you learn in the process and that's

good.” And she had since been translating that learning and maturity into making sure she did everything she could to be well prepared for the 1997 World championships and the 1998 Olympic Games.

Our seventh athlete described himself as a calm guy, trying to have as balanced a life as possible. His family was really important to him, and he felt he was a hard worker, putting a lot of energy into both his sport and his school. He talked about being quite reflective, even as a child.

I have always been quite reflective. When I was a kid my mom was worrying about me a bit because I could stand in front of the T.V. for an hour or so when it was off, and I was just thinking. I was ten years old. And I would go with my dad, when he was selling these machines, and I would wait in the car for a couple of hours and that was ok. That’s what I like about driving now (between Montreal and Quebec). You can put everything together in your mind and see where you are going.

This was an athlete who needed to find a reason to be pursuing Olympic excellence, other than just for himself. He found that just too self-centered. After considerable reflection during the timeframe of our three interviews, he felt he was also pursuing his achievements in sport to bring joy to his family and friends, both of whom were extremely important to him.

This athlete also liked to have fun and make people laugh. His hair was often outrageous colors and I asked him why he did it.

It’s a good question. I think a lot of people would like to do it, but they don’t dare. I kind of expected the reaction to be worse than that, at the golf tournament (a sponsorship event). But people accept that I’m just different. I don’t know, I just like to make a fool of myself sometimes, to make people laugh. I like to tell stories to make them laugh.

Our final athlete, a World Champion medalist and World cup medalist, initially said that if his coach was describing him he would probably say that sometimes he lacked confidence. "Sometimes I feel like I don't want to put in the effort and sometimes I don't feel very confident." This comment came in our first interview, right after he had missed making one of the 1997 World Championship teams due to illness. He was feeling pretty down. In the subsequent two interviews, one after he had placed in the top three at the World Single Distances and the other in the summer, when he was in the middle of some good summer training, he described himself as someone who enjoyed being with his teammates and his friends outside sport, and as someone who liked to help others.

I think I'm a happy guy. I like to make jokes. I like to talk to people, to teammates. At a training camp or on a trip, I'm not the kind of guy who wants to isolate himself in his room by himself. I like to see everybody. With others, I try really hard to help others be happy. I like to help, whether it's technically on the ice, or off the ice. I think lots of us doubt ourselves sometimes. You've got to work on being confident. And I choose to go get it, in sport and in everyday life. Just before coming here I got a ticket for turning when I wasn't supposed to - \$135.00. So I got mad for ten minutes, then I'm going to write the damn cheque and then I'm going to forget about it and enjoy the training camp and my holidays.

In summary, the eight athletes had some fun reflecting on this question about how they saw themselves. A few of the athletes were initially reluctant to answer, but in the end, were often quite insightful and candid. They spoke about sometimes being lazy and sometimes not very responsible, sometimes a bit crazy and wanting to have fun, sometimes not confident, occasionally too blunt and often very intense. Their descriptions of themselves relate to the other dimensions of Will, Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence and Degrees of Balance, as well as perspective within the Mental Mindset.

Five of the athletes described themselves as very intense and very competitive. It was an intensity that four of the athletes brought not only to their sport performances but

also to their life outside of sport. This level of intensity and competitiveness has been well documented in the literature on high achieving individuals, whether they are musicians, research mathematicians or athletes (Bloom, 1982b; Mahoney et al., 1987; Orlick & Partington, 1988; Partington, 1995). At the same time, it is important to note that one of the athletes who described himself as very intense also described himself as liking to have fun and as being 'a bit crazy.' Another athlete 'hated to lose' and yet felt he was 'easy going' in other situations in his life.' Equally important, three of the athletes described themselves using words like calm, reflective, balanced and not always confident. These wide-ranging descriptions point clearly to a complexity within each of these athletes, as well as among the eight athletes. These differing self-descriptions remind us of the uniqueness of each of these eight athletes as each pursued a common goal of being one of the best in the world in their sport.

The Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence

In Phase I of the interview process there was no specific question directed to the athletes about self-confidence, but it was an element that emerged in all three phases of the interviews. For all of these athletes, the strength of their self confidence was a powerful force in their successful performances and the level and strength of that confidence was very much related to their training and to their results. Simply put, when they were training well and performing well, their level of confidence was high, and when they were not training or performing well, often due to an injury or illness, their confidence plummeted. To best illustrate the different perspectives that each of these athletes brought to the concept of confidence, let's look at what they each had to say.

Seven of the eight athletes spoke about times in their sport careers when their level of self-confidence was very strong, and of other times when there was quite a bit of doubt, which was reflected in their voices and words as they talked about their training and competing.

One athlete recalled having an incredibly strong sense of belief and confidence in his abilities leading up to the Olympics where he won a silver medal.

(Going into the race) I believed I was *going* to do it, not just that I could do it. I don't even think... I don't know if I thought about the medal all that much. I didn't even bring the podium jacket to the oval. I just did what I did every single day. I rode my bike to the oval. I got on the ice. I warmed up. I went and raced. But I was absolutely certain that I was going to pull off the race of my life that day. That I was going to have absolutely the best race of my life that day.

There were a number of factors that this athlete spoke about that enabled such a strong sense of belief and self-confidence to build. One of those factors was a great result just two weeks prior to the Olympic race. He had won a medal in the World Championship in his Olympic distance. "The fact that I won a medal in that one gave me just unbelievable confidence that I would win a medal at the Olympics, because it was under the same stressful conditions." In addition to this, two individuals who were close to him and who he respected, both believed that he was skating 'awesome' and conveyed that to him in the days leading up to the Olympic race.

Yet this very same athlete, at the time of being interviewed, had had knee surgery and was not nearly so confident, as he had not placed in the top three of a World Cup race during the 1996-97 racing season. It was the first time in five years that he had not won a medal internationally during a competitive season.

It's worrisome sometimes that my knee is not completely better. I mean I sit here and if I tense my muscle my knee hurts and it's not such a big deal that it hurts but if it collapses, which it does when I'm on the ice, it's really hard to control my muscle, it shakes. I have to keep reminding myself that it will come. And I think it will.

This athlete did conclude his third and final interview on a note of confidence by saying that by the end of the season he thought he was back to being competitive, with a few races in the top five, if not in the medals.

Another athlete echoed a similar rise and fall in her confidence, only the timing was different. During the nine-month period of being interviewed for this study, she had won a World Championship race and was feeling extremely confident going into the 1998 Olympics. But for the previous seasons of 1995-96 and 1996-97, she had had two 'not-so-great' years and recalled her lack of confidence.

First, when asked how it felt to win a World Championship she spoke both about the confidence that she took into the Worlds and what the win has given her leading up to Olympic year.

I knew that if given the opportunity that I was capable of having that kind of impact at the Worlds (to win). But because there are so many good skaters in Canada I don't always get that chance. So because opportunities like these don't come around every year for me, I'm glad that I could take advantage and turn in a good performance. You know, it feels good, especially because it's an Olympic distance and it's pre-Olympic year and it's good for my confidence....To win the 500m and to come third overall...it's great for my confidence.

This athlete also spoke about how her confidence changed over the course of the competition.

(The night before the 500m) I felt my 1500m (which she had just raced). So I was kind of thinking, let's do the best we can. You know, if I had won the 1500m or had a good performance, I would have thought 'Ok, well tomorrow is my race.' But you know a bad first day....So it took the first race (of the 500m). I went real smooth and pulled most of the race and beat (a certain rival from another country), so that was a confidence booster. And then next round, the same thing, taking it easy, going smooth and it was a good time. And the semi went good, and I knew I was in the final and I had nothing to lose. I basically felt this is what I have waited for for a long time. So let's make sure I do it up good. I was so excited about it.

When I was putting in my skates I was so happy. I was really looking forward to it. I wouldn't say I felt invincible, but I felt as though if someone was going to win, they were going to have to beat me, they were going to have to come after me.

She points out the slight but important distinction between believing that you can be the best and then actually accomplishing it.

Before I won the 500m, I felt I had the confidence to do it, but I didn't do it yet. That was the difference. The difference between me and the other competitors was that they could do it and did it, and I hadn't done it. But now that I've done it, won, in a high pressure situation, I mean it just totally boosted my confidence, it boosted my energy levels.

On the other hand, in referring to the two years prior to this win, this athlete spoke about having been quite ill for one of those years. The illness and subsequent lack of good racing resulted in raising a lot of questions in her mind about her capabilities, her commitment to training, and a fear of getting sick again.

Like, coming off my sickness, I was a little hesitant too. I didn't know what I was capable of and I really didn't want to fall into the same hole. So I was a little careful. So I was very careful. I think I had lost my hunger. I even noticed the difference over the last two years. Like, in '94, I wanted to make a statement. I wanted people to know that I was one of the fastest in the world. And then my enthusiasm.... I just felt that I wasn't quite as much into it as before. I hadn't had anything to be real positive about. You know, I had good races over those two years, but they were few and far between.

So how did this athlete, who experienced two tough years, manage to comeback and win a World Championship race and finish third overall at the World Championships? When asked this question, this is what she said.

Well, last year sitting in the stands, I was fifth last year, and that was pretty much the bottom of the barrel for me. That was as low as I wanted to go. I felt dejected. And I remember thinking, 'this is not going to happen to me again'. I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure I'm not sitting in these stands feeling this again next year. I trained so much harder this year. Nobody really knows. This year I did train hard. It's no coincidence that I won the 500m.

These comments show a very conscious determination to making some changes, renewing her commitment to training harder and striving to succeed again.

A third athlete had some very good results over the course of the 1996-97 season, winning a number of World Cup races, but then he became ill during the trials and failed to make one of the World teams. Over the course of the three interviews with this athlete it was clear that he had a continuous struggle with keeping his confidence at a strong level. He felt that confidence was something that most athletes had to work hard on. "I think lots of us doubt ourselves, you've got to force yourself to be confident." His confidence came from good training and good national and international results, and from his coach having confidence in him. When he could, he liked to help others in the moments leading up to a race.

When the shape is there, the confidence is there. But I need (my coach) to have confidence in me. I think the confidence goes up and down. I think I need to be reassured all the time and I need a kick in the butt sometimes. My confidence does fluctuate. Maybe it didn't used to be so obvious the last couple of years because I had really good results all the time, it was really constant. But when the results are not there you start going down. And there are a lot more and better skaters. Sometimes

I warm-up with another (teammate) and say ‘ah, you look pretty good.’ I know it helps her. I remember she told me ‘you really boost me up.’ Especially just before the race, the warm-up, the training before, you’re not super confident and when someone comes to you and says you look great it really helps.

Even though it was an illness that prevented this athlete from taking part in one of the World Championship events in 1997, he still experienced a loss in confidence.

Looking back, I think I missed a bit of confidence getting ready to go to the last World Cups. I wasn’t sure what I was going to do over there because it had been a long time since I competed. (he had no competitions for a month and half).

For me, I was not confident at all, but as soon as I got to Europe and skated and felt better, I finished the year on a good note.

When this athlete’s confidence was strong, his thoughts and feelings of ‘just skating’ relates directly back to the ‘in the moment’ mental mindset that has been discussed earlier in this chapter.

I think I had so much confidence. I knew I was skating fast, I knew I was skating well, that I was strong. So I just had so much confidence in myself that I just let myself skate. And I knew that if I skated well, nobody could beat me on that ice. I was really confident. Nothing was going to stop me, so I just let myself skate.

Another athlete was making a comeback after two years off the national team and was not sure of how things would go. She said, “...it took a while to get the confidence that I could be up there with the Koreans and Chinese being so fast and in such good shape. They had improved a lot and I was thinking ‘am I going to be competitive?’ ” She did have a good season and was happy at the time of her first interview with her results, being among the top eight women in the world. This athlete, who had won gold and silver

Olympic medals and been a World Champion three times also spoke about how her sport success had given her a lot of self confidence in other parts of her life.

It (sport) has made me more secure, better at talking in front of groups, better at doing a lot of things that I was not good at.

Because I had a lot of complexes when I was young and now I don't have them anymore. I'm more confident now. Everything is sort of related to the fact that I was a medalist and I got a chance to live those things (the Olympics). I don't know how you say that well in English, but it takes out a lot of the complexes you have as a person when you do so well.

Another athlete echoed this transfer of self-confidence. "You say to yourself, 'I did it in speed skating, I can do it in other places.' "

A fifth athlete hoped (and planned) that her preparation and training would be solid because it was from there that she built her confidence. As well, this athlete felt quite confident in her primary distance, where she held the World Record, but not so confident in the other events she competed in. "I see myself as a good skater in the 500m but I'm not very confident in my 1000m, my 1500m. I'm always in bad situations in a race and that I think I'm not good at it yet." Her plan was to work on aspects of these two distances in order to improve.

One of the athletes in this study who came to international success a little later in life than the other seven, said that "....at first, I kind of had the feeling that I was a little, maybe lucky, to be on the National team. But then I said 'why not? Why not train to make the top five?' And I trained hard and I made it and it was a really good experience to go to the Worlds and win the Team World Championships." Since this time his confidence has risen based on his results. In referring to the previous season he said, "...I had a really good first trials and for me that was a really good confidence builder and it will help me next year because now I know I can do it. I'm happy."

The seventh athlete, who had a great sense of self-confidence, also had had great success in his sport. He had been World Champion three times, twice had finished second overall, had won an Olympic medal in 1994, and held two world records. That is quite a

number of accomplishments for someone who was twenty-two years of age at the time of being interviewed. His confidence stemmed directly from the quality and quantity of his training. He recalled struggling quite a bit with his confidence in 1996 because he hadn't trained much the previous summer and, as a result, went into the 1996-97 season worried about his fitness. He did however learn a valuable lesson, (he didn't like the feeling), and he trained exceptionally hard the summer of 1997. His perspective on competing also cautioned against becoming too confident and thus, too complacent.

You have to find a balance. You still have to have a certain amount of confidence in yourself, you have to believe in yourself, but you can't be over-confident so you don't have tricks played on you. You can't think it's going to be easy to beat everyone because you never know how the others (competitors) will be. Even if you're in better shape than you've ever been, even if you feel like that, you'll get to the competition and there may be some that will be even better. So you can't think that you're going to win no matter what, even if you feel really good.

Interestingly, one of the problems a number of the athletes in this study faced at the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics was this very issue of over-confidence. As one athlete said, "I think we went into the Games thinking we were too good. I think we went in there a little too relaxed, maybe a little too confident, and it took off that competitive edge that we needed. I remember thinking, 'Who's going to beat us?' " These two athletes' comments certainly point to the need to find a balance between being confident that you have the ability to do well and knowing that you still have to get out there and focus fully on doing it. No one is handing out Olympic medals.

Our final athlete, extremely successful in her sport, had a strong and almost unwavering sense of self-confidence. Certainly, one factor in determining this athlete's level of confidence was related to her sport of choice – women's hockey – which has had a short but very successful tradition in Canada, having won all four World Championships to date. She also had great support from her parents. "They gave me the self confidence." This athlete had also surmounted the huge difficulties of playing boy's hockey as a young

girl and was now one of the stronger players on the women's National Hockey Team. She had a great work ethic and what she felt "...is that the gold medal is just hanging out there and it's yours to go get it. It's the challenge that I love. You know, if you want it, you can have it. You just have to go work for it. And I think that's what I love about sports." She added that she gained a lot of confidence from having played a lot of games, so even for this athlete, some degree of her confidence was related to performing well and often.

In summary, it appears that for most of the athletes in this study, their level of confidence was very much related to the quality of both their training and their performances. When they were training and competing well, their confidence level was high and when they were having problems in training, when they weren't racing or playing well, when they were faced with an injury or illness, they had a much tougher time feeling confident. Other research has reported a similar relationship between rigorous preparation, good performances and high levels of self confidence (Burton, 1989; Cohn, 1991; Jones & Hardy, 1990). This conclusion is not surprising given Bandura's (1977) self efficacy theory which stated that performance accomplishments are especially influential because they are based on personal mastery experiences.

Within this dimension, there is also a relationship between an athlete's level of confidence and her ability to be 'in the moment' just prior to and during a performance. Full of self confidence, the athletes said things like 'I just had so much confidence in myself that I just let myself skate' and 'I believed I was going to do it....I don't know if I thought about the medal all that much.' The high level of self confidence allowed them to let go and trust their physical capabilities. They were able to be 'in the moment' and not be worried or stressed by outcome, which, in these cases, was winning an Olympic or World Championship medal.

In addition, there is a relationship between this dimension of self confidence and the dimension of Relationships. Three athletes spoke of individuals who helped them at crucial points in their careers to maintain or regain confidence. For one athlete, it was her parents who, from early on in her life, helped her develop a strong sense of self confidence. For another, it was crucial feedback from his brother (a former skater), in the few days leading up to his Olympic medal winning race, that he was skating 'awesome.' And for the

third athlete, it was also feedback from his coach, but at regular intervals, because this was an athlete who fluctuated a great deal in his level of confidence.

It is this latter comment, of fluctuating levels of self confidence, that leads to what is a surprising finding in this study. Seven of the eight athletes acknowledged experiencing ups and downs in their confidence. We have perhaps, in the field of sport psychology, sometimes misinterpreted comments by athletes. It was Mahoney (1984) who wrote “I have yet to interview a national champion who was not very confident about their ability” (p. 13). This may be an accurate statement if the interview with an athlete is taking place when she is at the top of her game. However, it is clear in the present study, that even athletes who are many times world champions and Olympic medalists have periods in their careers where they feel quite unconfident. When any of these seven athletes were facing an injury or an illness, which resulted in poor training, which then led inevitably to doubts about their fitness, they expressed a lack of self confidence.

Finally, one question remains. How did these athletes, when they were feeling less than confident because of an injury, an illness or poor training, go about regaining a significant level of confidence? Simply stated, they found within themselves the drive or the will to step back, analyze what they might have done differently, and then put their head down and train harder and with greater resolve. As one of the athlete’s said, after being ill for almost two seasons “I trained so much harder this year....It’s no coincidence that I won the 500.” Partington (1995) discovered a similar tactic with the musicians he studied. One musician, when asked how he moved from less confident to more confident said “...be extra rigorous in preparation’ (p. 89).

Meaning of Excelling in Sport

Each of the athletes was asked what it meant to them to be one of the best in the world in their chosen sport. A number of the athletes were seemingly surprised by the question and there were a lot of pauses in the conversations at this point in the interviews. For several of the athletes, the question was repeated in a later interview to give them an opportunity to reflect further. They said it was not something they thought about very

often. For most of them, it was quite a personal feeling of accomplishment, some recognized the temporary nature of success at the international level and some talked about how grateful they were for the opportunity. And one of the athletes said that "...it makes you what you are. You cannot be doing a sport with all the implications, time, people, experience, without that having an effect on your personality."

Another of the athletes felt that she did it for herself, but added that with success came pressure.

I'm not doing it for the recognition. I know I'm among the best in the world, and I know that my limits are pretty high, like in the 500m I can do very well. But it's not like I have to be the world champion to be happy.....But it puts pressure for the Olympics. Well, no, not that much. I think you put the pressure on yourself.. But I've never sat down and said 'well, I'm the world record holder', what does that make me? I don't think about it very often.

Due to circumstances of timing within her sport, one athlete spoke about feeling very fortunate about the opportunities that were afforded her.

It's a big honour, basically, especially in Canada, because to be part of the top twenty in Canada I think is to be part of the top twenty in the world. So it's a huge thrill for me, it's like the dream of a lifetime. It's a great opportunity. I think I feel very lucky because I came into hockey when it was starting to grow. I feel really lucky to get the opportunity to go to the Olympics.

And three athletes spoke about the hard work it took to get to this level. One of them said:

It means a lot to me. I've invested a lot of time into it. A lot of hard work. It means a lot to me to be good at what I do, because I spend a lot of time at it. It's important to me because for the last ten years it's basically been my life. I think athletes at this level,

in this kind of sport, not the highest profile sport, we do it for personal satisfaction. I'm not skating for the money. It's all personal.

Another athlete said:

I don't think about it often. Around the Olympics I for sure thought about it, sometimes. And after the Olympics, you tend to think about it, but it was sort of too awesome to think about or too overwhelming to think 'I won one of those medals that were given out.' But otherwise, it's been so relative. I've been one of the best for ten or eight years now and I don't think about it in those terms so much. But when I think back at how I started and how slowly I progressed and then eventually I was a threat every time I skated...that way it is exciting, to me, because I know how hard I worked for it and it's so satisfying to know that I put in all those hours.

In summary, not all of the athletes had spent time reflecting on what it meant to them to find themselves as one of the best in the world at in their sport. But when they were given some time, they expressed a sense of satisfaction and positive emotion in both working hard and in accomplishing what they set out to do. It is a life that they enjoy.

It is also a life very much focused on well articulated and challenging goals and for the athletes in this study those goals included winning medals in the up-coming 1998 Winter Olympics. It is also a life of physical and mental effort. While Csikszentmihalyi (1992) has written that, in terms of meaning in one's life, this effort matters more than the achievement of the goal, these athletes were fortunate enough to have given the effort and achieved their goals, even though for most, there were setbacks along the way.

Will

There was no specific question directed to the athletes regarding their inner resolve or will to pursue a life of excelling in sport. Rather, similar to the discussions initiated by

the athletes about their feelings of self-confidence, their drive for success emerged within the context of discussing their training, injuries they had faced, and competitions past and present. This will or commitment to succeed is very much related to the athlete's level of self-confidence and, for some, was linked to their most current results in competitions. For the athletes in the present study, both good results, which allowed them to truly *know* they were good, and poor results, which forced them to re-examine their desire to excel, had the potential to enhance their inner resolve or will.

Two athletes spoke about the difficulties of illness and failing to make an Olympic team as factors in helping them get tougher and more focused on the work required in order to succeed. They both talked about not enjoying the feeling of failing to achieve what they set out to. One athlete said:

Yeah, (it was a good lesson). If I had made the team, being sixth, I wouldn't be as good a skater as I am now. Because I would have done just the smallest effort, and just been happy to be on the team. Yep. Like in '94 I was just thinking about '92 (and not making the team) and how it hurt me. And I didn't want to have that feeling anymore. So I was training hard. I wanted a little bit more because I remember in '92 I was devastated.

Throughout her three interviews, a second athlete talked a great deal about the ups and downs of her motivation. She had experienced some great international results early in her career, then a tough two years due to an illness and some poor training, and then a great 1996-97 year culminating in a win at the World Championships. In recalling the two tough years she said that she had felt as if she "...had lost her hunger", that her heart was not in it. She said it was hard when the results were not there, it was hard to get out and train well when there was little to be positive about. It was especially hard because she had "...tasted what it was like to be at the top." But, as mentioned earlier under the section on self-confidence, she didn't like just being on the team and she found within herself the resolve to train hard.

During the summer, I really can't say I trained hard. But then as the season progressed, I don't know, I finally said

‘I’ve got to get my shit together here’ and I put a little more faith in the program and ended up preparing at the right time for the competitions. And a lot of days....you know last year I’d just pack it in, this year I just put my head down and worked really hard. A lot of times when I was in a workout, what would motivate me would be just being in the 500m this year and winning that.....and, I wanted to be on this team.

In this athlete’s final interview, she was speaking as a World Champion. She was full of confidence and resolve to train well and have a great season in 1997-98.

I would say right now, I haven’t been more motivated in my life. Just because, well you know what it’s like when you end the season on a good, good performance. I’m looking forward to training this year. I really am. I’m looking forward to getting into shape and like opening the season as a force. I just want to start on the right note so I stay positive about everything.

A third athlete certainly concurred with results being tied to his resolve to train. He talked about a time in his career when he wasn’t doing well and considered quitting and putting all his energy into school, but he had a couple of good races, it turned around and he got back into it a little more. He was really enjoying himself at the time of being interviewed. But what stood out about this athlete was the time he took to reflect between our interviews. In his third and final interview he said he had taken some time to question why he was spending all his time trying to be one of the best speed skaters in the world. He found that if he could see his pursuit as not so self-centered he was more interested in training and performing well.

I really asked myself this question this summer because for the first part of the summer I wasn’t really into it. I said ‘why am I doing this?’ And I was thinking I was being so egocentric to orient your life on being good at one sport and beating everyone else. And ‘why me?’ and ‘why not me?’

So yeah, I thought about it and now I know why I do it. (Why?) Because it's a big challenge, mentally and physically. And for the achievement and for myself. If I can be really good and make my family and friends live a good moment, then that would be really great too. Because when I think about it too, to give you an example, the two Stanley Cups that the Montreal Canadiens won made me so happy....so I guess if I do good, or the Canadian team is doing good, then a lot of Canadians will be proud of us and it'll be a lot of fun to make some people live a good moment....This way I don't feel like my goals are only self-oriented....Now is my chance to go there (to Nagano) and perform and give to my parents, if I can.

Another athlete felt that each year of his sport career he had been progressing and improving on his best times, and that encouraged him to put in the time and effort each summer and fall in preparation for a new season. He was eager to train, eager to get up in the morning and do the work. This competitive season was to be his last as an elite athlete – he planned on retiring after the 1998 Nagano Olympics to concentrate on his university – and he had made some changes that he felt would help him. He had changed his major at university and he felt that it helped re-focus his energy on school. “I’m working harder in school than I used to in civil engineering, so it’s good, changes are good.” He revived his relationship with his coach, working together on better communication and ensuring that his coach was at all of the training sessions. He was working out with his teammates instead of by himself. And in talking about the technical parts of his training that he was going to be working on, he raised an interesting point about feedback and it’s relationship to his resolve to keep working hard. In referring to both his coach and his new weight training coach he said that they were with him at each training session this year and the immediate feedback really helped his motivation and his confidence.

It’s a small difference, but it’s big in your head. Just feeling that someone is there just for us, for me. So you kind of feel like you want to work hard. And you want that congratulations

after the training. That's what is fun. I mean, sometimes it's fun to just be by yourself on the ice. But when (my coach) is there you try to do the whole program. There is more communication. There is more feedback. You tell him 'this is too hard, or I can't do the next one.' And you talk about it and if it's OK, then you did enough, that's OK for today. So you still have the feeling you did the program. It's a plus in your mind, not a minus. But when you are alone, and you do 90% of the program, it's a minus in your head. You tell yourself 'ah, you're a wimp, you couldn't even finish the program.'

Another athlete also talked about the importance of doing workouts with teammates, as opposed to by oneself. She felt that training with others helped her get up and get out to train and improved the quality of the workout. She also said it was a lot more fun. In her final interview, which took place in June, she was critical and concerned with her training program over the summer months. She said that "...it's been the most boring, non-motivating, terrible training program that I've ever done in one summer. It's not fun on the ice." She felt she needed some variety and some creativity in setting up the program. This was perhaps one of the pieces that contributed to this athlete's burnout that was building throughout the three interviews. But she was also an individual who, by her own admission, worked a lot with negative energy. She had had a tough time as a teenager, and felt that her success in sport helped her get attention and show others who, in earlier years, didn't believe she could be good.

One of the main reasons I wanted to excel was, I think, when I was a teenager, I didn't have an easy teenage-hood. I was not a popular kid. And I'm sure it has had an effect on why I skated so much and why I can't, why I'm never satisfied with myself. Why I always have to be better, faster, win more. I'm sure it started from there.

These latter comments about never being satisfied are not unusual for high performance athletes. As we reflect on the thoughts of all eight of these elite athletes, we can observe their intensity and their inner resolve to work hard in the direction of excelling. But in sport one rarely, if ever, achieves perfection, and, taken to an extreme, such a need can cause problems. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls this “chronic dissatisfaction” and says that it stands in the way of contentment. Certainly a number of athletes, including this one, have talked about the importance of having fun in their training and most high performance athletes need to be reminded of balancing their drive for success with an understanding of the ups and downs of performance. This athlete’s need to always be faster and win more, perhaps contributed to her fatigue and burnout.

Another perspective on this sense of will or inner resolve was offered by an athlete who had won ‘one of those Olympic medals.’ He found himself wondering if he would ever attain the same level of will again.

I don’t know if it will ever be the same anyway because sometimes I’m afraid a little bit that I’m kind of satisfied already with my career and it makes me more and more impressed with (another athlete who won many Olympic medals) because he could do it over and over again. And sometimes I wonder if I’m going to be able to have the same drive that I had there (in Lillehammer). I mean I knew that my best could win a medal and I was bloody going to win one. That’s how I was. It’s hard to imagine that I can be like that....

I think I was never the kind of person that needed to be absolutely the very, very, very best. I was happy with being up there and maybe I have to change that thinking.

I want to be the very top, I want the flag to go up behind me, at the top, and I want to hear the Canadian anthem not somebody else’s anthem.

Finally, two of the athletes who had a very strong sense of confidence in themselves and their abilities, also showed an incredible intensity and a very strong inner

resolve to strive to be the best in their sport. One of them stated quite simply that he tried to always win (and he often did). And when that didn't happen or when training wasn't going well, he spent a great deal of time and energy analyzing why. "I like getting on the ice and trying to do better than the last time. And if I don't do better, I always try to know why. I try to improve every time." He talked about his life in sport, about how and why he pushed himself and what happened on those rare occasions when he lost that drive.

I've always competed. It's always gone relatively well.

Even in the years when I wasn't good, I kept pushing myself to be good anyway. It wasn't because I knew I was good, it's because I wanted to be good. It's not the same. I just continued because I enjoyed it and I wanted to be good and I wanted to train to be good.

You have to push yourself at each competition to be able to win. When you win, you're happy because you pushed yourself. After that you move on to the next competition. You can't stay stuck on what you've done. Sure it's great that I've won three World Championships, but it doesn't change anything. It's in the past and I think now of the World Championships and the Olympics. I have to train for that.

There were times when I was less into it because, I don't know, I was tired of killing myself in the competitions and knocking myself out to win. There were times when I was a bit tired because when you're first, people expect you to win every single time and never finish second or third. Even I was putting pressure on myself. Only at some point you need to rest, you need to relax. It's happened to me a couple of times at competitions that I felt I just couldn't go on. I was like really drained. I needed a break.

Our final athlete in this section was intense and self-motivated in all parts of her life, not just in sport. When she started something she finished it, whether it was homework in grade four (“I remember crying myself sick because I didn’t get my homework done”), or a tough workout as an Olympic athlete. “You don’t give up. Like when we are doing intervals, it doesn’t matter that you can’t finish it, you finish it. If you’re going to pass out, well you pass out and then you get up and you finish it.”

At the beginning of this chapter, under Mental Mindset/visualization, this athlete was quoted as saying that she saw herself with the gold medal hanging around her neck. That vision and the powerful emotions that accompanied that vision are what she used to keep herself training hard.

You know, the thing that I enjoy, that really drives me in sport is the rush of victory....And you know, with the Olympics coming, I want to be the best I can be at the Olympics. So that’s a motivation for me when I go to the weight room. If I’m tired and not doing as many reps as I could, I just think of that. I think, come September when you’re doing your physical evaluations, I want to go in there and know I’ve done everything that I can to be the best.

This was also an athlete who thrived on the pressure and playing in front of big crowds.

I find it really exciting, not stressful. It gets my adrenalin going. I can relax more in front of a big crowd because you know they’re there to cheer for you. All you need to do is work hard and they usually appreciate that. So that probably relaxes me and I play better.

In summary, motivation or will is the key to many activities that we choose to engage in as human beings. Achievement goal theory begins with the basic premise that an individual enters into an achievement context in order to demonstrate competence (Nicholls, 1989). In evaluating whether one is successful in such an achievement context, Nicholls (1989) has suggested that the individual will bring one of two orientations to that evaluation. An ego-oriented athlete will base her success on external criteria, such as

beating others. A task-oriented athlete will base her success more on internal criteria, such as personal improvement. The athletes in the present study employed both orientations. They were driven, at times, by thinking about and visualizing beating other athletes, making the national team, winning an Olympic medal. At other times, they were more inwardly driven, focused on their own progression, improvement, searching for that special 'feeling' on the ice. Duda and White (1992) found a similar, dual orientation with elite skiers. Importantly, the athletes' will, in the present study, is related to a sense of enjoyment they experienced with both these orientations. They certainly enjoyed winning a worlds or Olympic medal, but they also found joy in the process of training, of searching for a better or faster way to move on the ice.

As well, within the literature on motivation and sport activity, there is discussion on the different climates that exist and the effect of those climates on an individual's motivation. A mastery climate is characterized by a focus on personal learning, personal improvement and individualized feedback, while a performance climate is marked by a focus on comparing results and on winning (Roberts, 1993). The athletes in the present study, competing at the world and Olympic level, live in a world that encompasses both climates. However, during the competitive season, they are continually confronted with the pressure of winning. The pressure comes from a number of sources. It certainly comes from within each athlete. After all, each of these eight athletes demonstrated an incredible will, manifested in time, effort and persistence, to become one of the best athletes in the world in her or his sport. As well, the pressure most certainly comes from the outside, from the very competitive and comparative nature of a World Championship or an Olympic Games.

However, key to the present study is that each of these athletes had learned that the perspective they bring to this pressurized, performance climate is what is most important. Rotella & Lerner (1993) have stated that the mental discipline of learning to control one's perceptions and the way one thinks is what 'willpower' truly means. Above all, these athletes had learned what worked for each of them and to trust and to use those lessons. They knew that in a training session, with little pressure, focusing on an opponent or on the winning of a medal was a way to inspire themselves to do the work. But they also knew that such an orientation would hinder them during a competition. Referring back to the

model of the Mental Mindset (Figure 3, p. 60), each of the athletes understood that close to and during the race or game, they needed to be more task oriented and 'in the small circle' or 'in the moment.' In that way, they also created within themselves a kind of personal mastery climate where all that mattered was their own execution of the skills. As the work of Dweck and Leggett (1988) has implied, such a task orientation is more apt to allow the athlete to feel that the competitive situation is within his control, and, importantly, with such a sense of control comes a growing sense of confidence for the athlete.

In terms of relationships with other dimensions, there is a close relationship, in other ways as well, between will and self-confidence. Confidence gained from good results, good training and from personal feedback and attention of coaches contributed to an athlete's will to continue the hard training. Interestingly, just as there was a fluctuation in levels of self-confidence for seven of the eight athletes, so too was there a fluctuation in their will, indicating that will is indeed a dynamic phenomenon.

There is also a relationship between will and the dimension of Difficulties and Dilemmas. In the face of illness or not making a team, two athletes, after a period of despair, followed by reflection, found within themselves the inner resolve to renew their commitment to hard work, better training and excelling.

Finally, in terms of the portion of an athlete's life outside of the competitive sport arena, it is important to note that some of the athletes brought that same degree of will or drive to their life outside of sport and others did not. While some of the athletes described themselves as very intense and competitive in all parts of their life, others described themselves as easy going, calm, reflective, balanced.

Degrees of Balance

An attempt was made to better understand just how much time, both on a day to day basis and on an emotional basis, an athlete at this level spent being an athlete, and if they were willing or able to have much else in their lives. To that end, each athlete was asked if they felt it was possible to be one of the best in the world in their sport and still have other interests. Closely related to this were questions asking them to describe a series

of 'typical days.' Specifically, they were asked to describe what they were doing, who they were with, and what they were thinking and feeling during the competitive season, on a race or game day, during the off-season and on a day off from training. Each athlete was also asked about what they were doing in terms of education and/or work, what their sources of financial support were, and if they played any other sports. A summary of these findings is displayed in Table 3.

First of all, the descriptions of their 'typical days', whether in season, in transition, or in the off-season, revealed that all the athletes trained six days per week, and often twice per day, depending on the time of year. They all traveled extensively, in season, for training and competitions. They all took from a few weeks to a month and a half off at the end of the competitive season before beginning their summer training. This was seen as an important mental as well as physical break. As one of the athlete's said, "... I took a big month off, maybe a little more, but it was more needed mentally than physically. I was ready to start training but, you know the season is pretty long, and it works to take a break in May and June."

On their day off per week, they often did very little. As one athlete said, "... we value our day off, just relaxing, maybe see some friends, watch a movie."

All eight athletes in this study were 'A carded', which meant that they received \$800.00 per month from the federal government. Six of these athletes also had sponsorship contracts with a number of companies, which, for some, would bring their income to over \$50,000 per year.

In terms of pursuing an education, four athletes managed to combine their successful athletic careers with attending university on almost a full-time schedule, while another three athletes chose to do very little in terms of an education. The eighth athlete had already completed an undergraduate degree in 1988, but since that time had devoted most of her time to her sport career. It is important to note here that, for these latter four athletes, the decision to focus quite exclusively on their training and competing was a very conscious choice. It is also important to note that for the 1997-98 season leading up to the 1998 Nagano Olympics, all eight of the athletes were planning on doing very little other than training, travelling and competing. Lets look at each of these athletes to better understand the choices they have made.

TABLE 3

DEGREES OF BALANCE

Athlete	Age	Education Level as of June 1997			Work	Financial \$	Other Sports
		High School	CEGEP	University			
A	22		computer science courses 1996/'97			over \$50,000	Golf Snowboarding
B	30			2 1/2 years, as of '92		over \$50,000	
C	32			BA. in Physical Education completed in '88	•Speaking engagements •Benefit golf tournament	under \$50,000	
D	25	Completed in '96			•Logging camp B.C. one summer	Only 'A' carding, \$10,000	Snowboarding
E	25			3 years, as of '97	Used to be co-owner in company	Only 'A' carding, \$10,000	Cycling, climbing, hiking, tennis, snowboarding
F	24			2 years, as of '97		over \$50,000	
G	19			First year, as of '97	Hockey clinics	under \$50,000	Cross-country skiing, softball, at national level
H	25			2 1/2 years, as of '97 (changed degrees)	Owens a summer hockey camp (2 wks. /summer)	under \$50,000	Hockey

Our first athlete, a three-time World Champion and Olympic medalist, is twenty-two years of age. She sees herself working with computers in the future, and has taken computer science courses at a CEGEP. She also plays a good game of golf and snowboards on days off in the winter, but planned on no snowboarding for the 1997-98 season. For this Olympic year she said she would concentrate on skating only. But she fully understands that skating will not be forever. She has a number of lucrative sponsorships, worth over \$50,000. She lives at home with her parents when she is in Canada.

I have a hard time putting the two together (skating and school).

I'm in it (skating) 100% really. That 100% takes up more than half my day, so I don't have much left to do outside of that. That's why it's a bit hard, because you have to be careful how you take that little part of your life that you have outside. Otherwise, if you stay too caught up in the sport, you'll go a bit crazy. It's a life that's hard to manage. I think that for this year, since it's the Olympics, I'll concentrate more on my skating than on studies, but that's also an important part because I don't think I'll live on skating. I don't feel like finding myself on welfare afterwards, so it's also important to finish school. To finish it properly too, because I don't feel like going on the job market with sixties in all my courses. But next year, I'm going back for sure, but not necessarily full-time, because I'll continue to make sacrifices for skating because even if it's an after the Olympic year, if you want to win the World Championships, you still have to train.

A second athlete, an Olympic medalist, had not been in school since 1992. He had completed two and half years of university, but with 'no real direction.' He was an athlete who spent most of his time thinking about his skating, analyzing it from the technical and the creative side, always trying to figure out that little bit extra that would allow him to go faster. This athlete also has a number of lucrative contracts that bring his income to over \$50,000 per year. It has been a very conscious decision on his part to be very single-

minded in his pursuit of excellence. While he has not been going to school, he has spent considerable time over the last few years renovating a house that he had bought.

I really want to think about skating only. But I'm really lucky, because I know I'm going to get back what I put in. Not everybody gets that. But I can clearly see why school is really important thing for most athletes. It's a risk putting everything into skating. There's not many of us who get to win a medal.

A third athlete, also an Olympic medalist, completed her undergraduate degree in 1988, had begun but not completed a graduate degree, and had spent her time since 1990 being a full-time athlete. She had some sponsorship, totaling under \$50,000. She felt that she needed to have something in her life other than just skating, but she wasn't completely successful in achieving this. A considerable amount of her time outside of training and competing was spent giving speeches about being an elite athlete, representing a national sport association, and running an annual benefit golf tournament for athletes. This work had kept her, in fact, too busy, and at the time of her third interview she was feeling quite burnt-out and was not sleeping well. Two quotes illustrate what this athlete was feeling and thinking.

I think it's necessary to have a little bit of balance. But you do have less in an Olympic year, without choice. But I also think that's why I started to do Italian, and in the fall I want to take a class in something. Like it keeps your mind from just going crazy. If you just do skating, for me anyway, I would go crazy. I think too much about it, and then I get more nervous and more stressed out.

I'm very lousy at saying no, I still haven't learned. It turned out that May and June have been very hectic. A lot of profile for the Olympics, Just tons of stuff. And so I had three weeks that were very tiring and that doesn't help my sleep because every day I always have tons to

do , and I get sick of it. But I've changed my phone system so I can filter the phones a little better and I'm planning on having them call the agent a bit more.

A fourth athlete came back in 1997, after two 'tough years' by his description, and won a World Championship race. He had recently completed a math class at night school, which gave him his high school diploma. He has lived in another province, away from his family, for the last five years. His income consists of Sport Canada 'A' carding money. For this reason, he had worked one summer in British Columbia at a logging camp and his training that summer had been sporadic at best. He was pursuing some sponsorship but at the time of the third interview, he had not been successful.

I hate living in poverty. Like, \$800.00 (a month), it's sufficient and I appreciate it a lot, but it's not enough to cover an athlete's budget, that's for sure. It's not even close. Not even close. Within two weeks of the next cheque I start to hurt real bad for money, and I start to stress. That's not a good way to live.

Despite these difficulties with finances, he was committed to his speed skating career. "My life, basically, revolves around speed skating." At the same time, he also spoke about the need to have other things in his life.

I don't think it's as balanced as I would like. I try. I take a class, I work, I snowboard. They are releases from skating. But there are lots of times when it does consume my life, because I know when skating is not going well, I take it out on the people around me. It affects my relationship with my girlfriend. I don't want it to happen. What I do at the rink I like to keep at the rink and what I do at home I like to just do my own thing at home. But it's not easy. When you put so much time and effort into something it's hard not to take it into your own personal life. I try my best to balance it. I really try to not wrap myself up in the whole skating environment too much.

When I'm at the rink I have a job to do and I do the best I can when I'm training. And I try to have fun too. It's part of the mix too. And I really try to leave (my sport) at the rink.

When asked how he had come to think that having a balance in his life was important, he reflected back over his last few years of competition.

In '94, all I did was speed skate. That's all I thought about. It was like tunnel vision You know, nothing outside, just skating. And I burnt out, and had my two bad years. And then I started exploring and doing other things, and I realized there was, outside of our circle, things going on. Things that you can enjoy. And actually, I think in a sense it helps you because there's an outlet when you have a bad week of training. So, for me, that's something you can only learn by experience. Like I found out the hard way, but for me it's quite important to have something outside. It doesn't have to be a class, it doesn't have to be another sport. Just something. Just something that brings me joy outside of skating. Like snowboarding, like my friends, my girlfriend. Like my dog. Even class. I don't love it but it gets me out, away from skating.

A fifth athlete, while having competed for many years, had only in the last few years reached a level of international success, being part of the team that won the 1997 Team World Championships and several individual medals at 1996 World Cup races. From the age of 16, he had been part owner in a successful company that had sold health machines and had not planned to go to university. He owned his own house. "I thought I didn't have much to learn at university. I was a little cocky. I had earned a lot of money. But I went back to school and I really liked it." At the time of being interviewed, he was in third year commerce in university, had a 90% average and described himself as someone who put a lot of energy into school. As an athlete, his income consisted of Sport Canada 'A' carding.

This athlete was an individual who, partly because of his success in business early in his life, brought a rather unique perspective to his career as a high performance athlete. While training hard for the 1998 Olympics, he was making a very conscious effort to play a little tennis with friends, see his family, who lived in another city, have a social life, take a least one class.

I don't look for happiness just in speed skating. I think a balanced life keeps my mind more pure, well, I'm happier this way. For me, family, school, speed skating, and still having fun with my friends. I think sometimes it can be better to go out with friends than to go train, yeah. That's how I see it. I believe that's what I should do. And having experienced that, when I was putting all my energy into one thing (sport), and I realized that other things were missing, and every time I come back to that. It could just be that I need to see my family more.

He also made an interesting comment on the pressures of high level competition.

I realized that even when I had a bad year, I was still happy in the summer. Sometimes happier, because I didn't feel like I had to perform next year. And so I realize now that it's (sport) not going to make me happy in the long term. When you do good it's a great feeling for a few days , maybe a week, but after a while, you have to do something else. Maybe I'm more conscious of that now.

The sixth athlete holds the World Record in an Olympic distance, has an Olympic silver medal and numerous World Championship medals. As of the spring of 1997, she will have completed her second year of university, going full time in the fall, and taking two courses in the winter when her competition schedule was much heavier. She was planing on taking one course in the fall of 1997. She has a number of sponsorships, totally over \$50,000, and one of her sponsors has guaranteed her a job at the end of her sport career and university degree. In 1992 she said that everything she did was related to

skating and then she didn't make the 1992 Olympic team. From that point on, she felt she needed some space from skating. Since that time she felt that she had very consciously found a way to balance her high performance sport career with other aspects of her life. She also felt that a week break at Christmas helped her come back fresher and more focused and keen for the more serious half of the season.

I think I have a balance because I'm studying. I have a boyfriend outside of skating and I don't talk about skating with him. I don't think my focus is only on skating because you would go crazy. I didn't want to put all my eggs in the same basket. I wanted to keep on with school. And I'm not the kind of athlete who eats a sport, I cannot do that. I'm not that much in love with my sport, and I don't think I would still have been in sport if I would have done that. To still enjoy the sport I think I have to take a distance from it.

The seventh athlete has been a member of two World Championship winning teams, and had completed her first year of university at the time of our third interview. Although in the 1997-98 Olympic year, school would be put on hold to practice and play hockey, she planned to go back to school in the spring and summer of 1998 and complete her second year of university. She had some sponsorship along with her 'A' carding money, and did a number of hockey clinics across Canada in the summer. She cross-country skied with friends on her day off, and in the summer months she played women's softball at the national level and was considering the possibility of competing in the summer 2000 Olympics in that sport. She spoke positively about the sport school concept at the high school level that allowed her to combine her education with her pursuit of high level sport.

Sport is a huge priority, it's of huge importance, but it's not everything. I think you have to have a balance. Like if you just focus exclusively on hockey, hockey, hockey all day long you just burn out, and you

wouldn't be able to be the best. I haven't had too much of a problem (balancing school with hockey). Usually the problem happens when it all builds up at once, and I have four exams in three days and I have three hockey games. So it's just times like that when you want to crawl under a rock. This year (first year university) has been the hardest to balance because I can't go to school when I want to. Like in high school (sport school) we didn't have any classes. It helped, the sport school. I could not go to school for a week and come back and still be ahead, because I had worked ahead before I left, because I knew I was going to be away. So it was perfect, it was the best set-up, it was the greatest thing ever invented, really. Because with university, you actually have classes you have to go to, and exams with specific dates. But I have managed it so far.

Our final athlete had won a medal at the 1996 World Championships, won a number of World Cup races in 1997 and finished fifth in the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics. Along with his Sport Canada 'A' carding money, he had several sponsorships, totaling under \$50,000 at the time of his third interview. He did plan on pursuing other sponsorship in this year leading up to the Olympics. This athlete has been enrolled in university, and had just changed his major from civil engineering to computer programming and planned on completing his degree by December of 1998. Part of the reason he changed his program was because of the time and travel requirements of his sport. "The civil engineering degree is really hard when you go away, and being a winter sport, you're away in the winter. I've done all the summer classes that I can take. So with 'informatique' or computer programming, I can just bring a laptop and work on it."

This athlete owned a hockey school in his own name, that he ran for two weeks every summer with 14 staff and 120-125 youth aged 8 to 15 years of age. He saw it as a way to give back to his community.

It's in my hometown, so I teach the kids of my hometown and I think it's good. You have to feel that you're part of the community.

It's not an expensive school. I wanted that because a lot of parents don't have a lot of money to send their kids to high priced schools. If they like hockey, if they want to have fun and practice hockey and they want to learn how to be better at it. At my school that's how I see it. It's really popular. And it's a nice break for me from training. It's not two weeks of rest but it's a break at the end of the summer training.

He felt that school and his relationship with his girlfriend helped him in his career as an Olympic athlete.

Of course I see myself as a speed skater because I spend so much time on it. Right now it's a big part of my life, but I still want to do other things. I think it helps to have other interests. If you only have speed skating and training isn't going well and you feel down about yourself, you might take a lot more time to get up again. But if you have something else, like school or a relationship, it can help you get through that phase. And if you do well in an exam at school then you are happy and you are happy to go train harder than before. I think everything around you can help you be stronger. Even sometimes if you are not training as hard as someone who is only skating, sometimes you might have the same results., just because of that. Like, you may not spend as many hours as the other guys in the sport, but you get the same results and even greater results. That's why I've always been involved in school and I've had my relationship for so long.

In the above quote, this athlete, as did others, comments on the importance of having other things in one's life to balance his pursuit of excellence. But in order to do so he did have to change his major in university to better accommodate his training and

competition schedule. As well, this is an athlete who traveled to another part of the country for significant portions of the year to train. So that training requirement, combined with his competition schedule, meant that he was away from his home and therefore university for months at a time. He also noted that having other things to think about and do, helped when training wasn't going so well.

In summary, this dimension, Degrees of Balance, encompasses a high performance athlete's life in terms of the day-to day training commitments, education and/or work commitments, financial resources and any other sports played.

Clearly, the pursuit of Olympic excellence requires a huge time commitment on a day-to-day basis. For most of the year, the athletes' physical training fills a great portion of their day, and, coupled with the critical technical analysis and emotional energy that went into both training and competing, leaves little time to accomplish much else. Nevertheless, four of the athletes in this study did manage to combine a university education with their sport career, while the other four athletes consciously chose to focus almost exclusively and directly on their sporting excellence.

These different paths are not about more commitment or less commitment to the pursuit of excellence. It is more about the perspective that each of these eight athletes brought to her or his life both inside and outside sport. The four athletes who combined their commitment to their sport career with a commitment to their education did so because they felt that such a combination would actually help them achieve their sport goals. They felt it was better to have something other than just training and performing to think about. The other four athletes, while expressing an understanding of the importance of balancing their lives, chose a more exclusive path. They either wanted to only think about sport or struggled with developing friendships or interests outside of their pursuit of excelling in sport.

However, for the five months leading up to Olympic selection and the Olympic Games in February of 1998, even the athletes who were committed to school were looking at a change in their life for this period of time. The athlete who played hockey would not be attending university until the spring session of 1998 due to travelling and training requirements of the national team. The other three athletes, at the time of their final

interview talked about perhaps taking one course in the months of September to December, 1997.

Amirault and Orlick (in press) have also investigated this phenomenon of balance in high performance athletes' lives. Interviewing ten elite athletes on their perceptions of balance, the authors found that half of the athletes viewed it as having a vision or goal, while the other half viewed it as respecting other parts of their lives. Similar to findings in the present study, Amirault and Orlick (in press) wrote that the athletes made very conscious decisions on how they led their lives and those athletes who viewed balance as respecting different parts of their lives felt such a perspective actively helped them in achieving good performances.

Gardner (1993) and Roe (1983) have both suggested that success comes at an extremely high cost to one's personal life. While each of the athletes in the present study had to make some very difficult choices about their life outside of sport in order to succeed at being one of the best in their sport, they have not sacrificed everything. At the same time, a number of these athletes learned tough yet valuable lessons along the way.

In looking at the relationship between Degrees of Balance and the dimension of Difficulties and Dilemmas, one athlete spoke of having experienced a season of fatigue and burnout due to too much travel, competition and too narrow a focus on sport. From that experience he learned it was important to have something outside of sport that he enjoyed, something that took his mind off speed skating, at least for a period of time each day. A second athlete was struggling with the same dilemma. However, throughout the three phases of interviews, she was still caught in the middle, experiencing all the signs of burnout, at least in part, due to her almost exclusive focus on her life within sport.

In linking Degrees of Balance to the dimension of Will it is interesting to note that four of the five athletes who described themselves as very intense and focused also chose to follow the more exclusive path to excelling in sport. It is equally important to point out that the fifth athlete who described herself as 'pretty high-strung, intense and always very competitive', chose to be enrolled in university and spend time with friends outside of her sporting world. She felt strongly, as some of the other athletes did, that having such a balance helped her be one of the best athletes in her sport and in the world.

It is possible to also link Degrees of Balance to the dimension of Mental Mindset/perspective. The perspective that the athletes brought to their lives inside and outside of sport influenced the degree of balance they sought out and experienced in their lives. To illustrate, one athlete expressed the following sentiment. “Sport is a huge priority, it’s of huge importance, but it’s not the only thing.” And differently, another athlete said, “I really want to think about skating only.”

Finally, one major concern is raised within this dimension of Degrees of Balance, and that has to do with the ending of an athlete’s sport career. There has been a substantial amount of research conducted on transition from sport and yet there continues to be a considerable debate on the extent and nature of the trauma associated with such transitions (Ogilvie & Howe, 1986; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982; Werthner & Orlick, 1982, 1986).

It is well understood that transition from sport is inevitable. The unfortunate difficulty with an Olympic level sport career is that it is not long term. Most athletes cannot expect to continue performing at this high level past the age of thirty, and for many, it ends much sooner. It is also clear from the research that elite level athletes who immerse themselves exclusively in their sport careers to the exclusion of other activities and interests develop a self-identity that is closely intertwined with their sport life. These athletes often face a much more difficult transition (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Therefore, it is possible that the four athletes in the present study who chose a life much more exclusively focused on sport may face a more difficult transition. To examine more fully such athletes’ lives as they face retirement would substantially enhance our understanding of transition from high level sport.

Joys in an Athlete’s Life

The athletes were asked to talk about the kinds of things that lifted them in life, and that brought them joy. They spoke eagerly and passionately about joys they found both within their sporting world, and in other areas of their lives.

Three athletes, in talking about the joy they found within sport, emphasized the incredible intensity of the feelings that came with setting a world record, or winning an Olympic medal. One athlete described winning the World Championships.

I mean the feeling is just awesome. I threw my gloves, my helmet. So there's four of us that are kind of hugging and everyone else is on top of the goalie. The Americans are in their crease, and everyone is going nuts, my grandpa came down from the stands. He was like the first guy on the ice and everybody was going nuts. It was just amazing. Just a lot of emotion because everyone contributed so much, sacrifices.

Another athlete described the joy in the emotional high of winning a World Championship race.

Skating definitely does bring joy to my life when it's going well, like last weekend (winning the World Championship 500m) and the trials. Those are the times when you think that's why I do what I do. For moments like that. That's why I work as hard as I do. Those moments don't come around very often, but when they do, it makes you feel real good, like everything you've done is worth something.

Four of the athletes talked about the joy they found simply in the process of doing the training, the skating, the performing or executing of skills. It certainly wasn't just about winning. They spoke about loving the feeling of speed, "...the pushing back the limits." One athlete said, "...it's fast and it's a bit crazy and I like going faster and faster. I like skating, that's all." Another athlete reiterated that same comment, declaring emphatically that "...I just love what I'm doing." She continued by saying:

The whole process really is truly what I enjoy. When I have a really great training. The excitement of just doing a great training session. I mean, when I'm on the bike and I can keep my heart rate up over a certain amount for the entire 90 minutes. I get off and I'm just totally thrilled.

Another athlete echoed these comments and added that she enjoyed helping the younger athletes.

You don't have to score, but to have a good shift and get a scoring chance or a good pass...like even to watch some of the young girls that came in and really improved, so you're helping them with their shots. And it's like 'oh my god, this girl is good.' That gives you a big charge.

All of the athletes spoke of enjoying the lifestyle of an elite athlete. They recognized the opportunities that such a life afforded them. They enjoyed the travel that came with each season and the friendships they made both with their teammates from other parts of Canada, and with athletes from other countries and from cultures different from their own. One athlete's comment was representative of many of them when he said, "...I think we are lucky to be able to go all those places. I really appreciate it."

When discussing the joy they experienced in their sport careers, three athletes emphasized what they felt was a uniqueness inherent in the life of high performance sport. One spoke about that uniqueness from a physical standpoint.

It's such a great life. If you can handle the intensity, there's no even emotion involved. I don't think a job ever gets as intense or as relaxed as our seasons do. The summers are stressful physically but as soon as you get too stressed physically it starts to be the winter season and you start to get rested physically and you

get more stressed mentally.

The second athlete spoke about his sense of joyfulness in sport from the perspective of being able to clearly measure oneself, but he also was clear that he felt so fortunate to be able to compete at this level.

Training is fun. I'm lucky to be able to train, to be able to be with the best. That's really fun to feel that you are one of the best skaters in Canada or in the world. I don't think I'm going to find that at school or in business. I'm never going to be able to say that I'm in the top ten students in the world....but you don't have to be number one in the world to have that joy to train.

The third athlete looked at the uniqueness of sport from the standpoint of control.

I love that you can make things happen, that's the part that is probably the most enjoyable. You have the puck and there are nine other people on the ice and you have the ability to manipulate them It's like a power thing (and she laughed). You can make things happen and you can change the outcome of the game very easily. And that's what is so attractive. And then the fact that I just love to play.

Seven of the eight athletes also spoke about joys outside of their sporting life. They talked about spending time with their girlfriends or boyfriends, with their families, with their friends, and playing tennis with a younger brother. They talked about the enjoyment of doing other sports, when they could, like snowboarding, cross-country skiing, softball and golf. One of the athletes spent most of his free time working on his house. He talked about how his dad and girlfriend had been helping him renovate an older house over the previous few years. Another athlete said she took pleasure in simple things. "The very

simple things bring me joy. I have a good meal and that makes me happy. Like, I enjoy a walk in the park. Very small things.”

One athlete spoke about the joy of her friendships, both within her sport life and outside that life.

What gives me joy right now is when I get to see all my friends and family back home. That’s really enjoyable for me. What consumes most of my time right now is hockey and training, so winning the World Championships was a huge lift. And everyday, getting to hang out with some of my teammates, it’s a lot of fun. We just have a really good time. Like I don’t regret getting out of bed. I just really enjoy what I’m doing every day right now.

Another athlete felt that he would always continue to enjoy training and physical activity.

I think I’m going to always have this joy to train, even when I’m 30, 40, 50, whatever. You know, I’m just going to get on my bike and enjoy the nature and train hard, and go ski and go climb. And fix myself different goals. I think I’m going to have as much fun then as I do now.

This discussion of joy echoes some of the eight major components of the phenomenology of enjoyment as suggested by the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990). The athletes were engaged in tasks that they felt they could succeed in, they had good concentration skills, there were obvious goals and immediate feedback and they had a sense of control over their own actions. At the same time, the athletes’ comments often reflected a truly autotelic experience, where the doing of the activity was the reward itself. This sense of joy in the process, in the excitement and fun found in the training is in direct contrast to the theory of deliberate practice developed by Ericsson et al. (1993). These

authors have stated that deliberate practice is effortful and not inherently motivating or joyful. Clearly, the eight athletes in the present study are not in agreement.

In examining possible relationships between Joy and the other general dimensions, there is a link to the athletes' physical training, to the dimension of Mental Mindset/'in the moment' and to the dimension of Relationships. The athletes spoke of the joy they found in their relationships with their partners, with their parents and with friends inside and outside sport. Regarding the athletes' physical training, although it was not one of the ten general dimensions, it was part of the conceptual framework, and, as noted above, the athletes often found joy in the process of training and loved the feeling of being on the ice. And in terms of the relationship of joy to 'in the moment', the athletes expressed great joy in the uniqueness of the intensity of sport and in their ability, at crucial times, to be 'in the moment' bringing it all together for a great performance.

Finally, what truly stood out during these discussions with the athletes on joy in their lives, was the manner in which the athletes expressed their feelings and responded to the question. There was very much an eagerness and a passion in their voices. They wanted to tell me about the intense feelings they experienced when they won or did well. They were keen to talk about the uniqueness of their sport. They spoke about the physical and the emotional feelings they experienced in training, not just in competition. All but one told me that they found joy outside of their sport, sometimes in the simplest things. And they all passionately told me how much they loved what they had chosen to do.

Relationships

The athletes were asked to talk about the relationships in their lives. They discussed relationships with their parents, siblings, partners, friends, teammates, rivals, sponsors, agents and their coaches. Table 4 summarizes these discussions.

Relationships with parents

At the time of being interviewed, one of the eight athletes was living with his parents. The others all lived away from home, with two living alone, two living with their partners, and three living with teammates. Seven of the athletes were close to their parents, often talking about the extensive time and support their parents provided, both at the present time and when they were younger, aspiring athletes. One of the athletes said that he went to his parents often for dinner and "...it's mostly speed skating talk, how I'm doing in my training program, how school is going, because they are pretty proud and want me to do well." Another athlete said that his parents were always ready to listen.

One thing that's great with them is that, after each practice, I always need to talk a bit and when I get home I tell them about the training. I tell them what went well and what didn't. They aren't necessarily there to tell me that I should have done such and such a thing, but just the fact that they listen to me talk about my training, it helps a lot.

One of the athletes, whose parents were divorced, talked about her mother's years of support and how she had only recently come to understand and appreciate that support.

Looking back, my mom was one of the key factors in my career. She was always around. She loved skating. She got involved, but at the time I thought it was too much. It used to annoy me. But now I'm seeing that if she hadn't been there to drive us to all those competitions or to all those trainings, I wouldn't have been as good, and I might not be skating now. She was very supportive. Sometimes I didn't take it the right way.

TABLE 4
RELATIONSHIPS

Athlete	Parents	Siblings	Partners	Friends	Teammates/Rivals	Sponsors/ Agents	Coaches
A	• lives with parents • mother very supportive	• close to older brother, who was also Olympic athlete	• partner in the sport, from another country	• mostly in sport, some outside sport, but doesn't see them often	• good 'We help each other' • some concerns about the 'little' things	• good • worried about pressure from sponsors	• has 2 coaches, one is national coach, one is for individual training needs
B	• parents divorced • mother very supportive, now deceased	• 2 sisters, not involved in sport	• had partner in sport, ended in '97 • lives alone	• mostly in sport	• close to teammates, 'share so much'	• good, thinks of agent as a friend	• first coach was a very positive influence • now national coach, some concerns
C	• close-knit family • lives with teammate	• 2 sisters, close to young brother	• none, partly due to sport involvement	• many friends • 2 good friends from childhood, outside of sport	• good, but good to have a break in the summer, away from teammates	• none	• great coaches when young • very good relationship with national coach
D	• parents divorced • close to her mother	• close to older sister	• long term partner, outside of sport • lives alone during week	• friends outside of sport	• good, some concerns with teammate, and rival from another country	• good, agent encouraged her to go to school	• good, with national coach

TABLE 4
RELATIONSHIPS (cont'd)

Athlete	Parents	Siblings	Partners	Friends	Teammates/Rivals	Sponsors/ Agents	Coaches
E	• close to parents	• close to brother, who skated on national team, now a national coach	• 8 year partner, 'amazing in her support' • now new partner, a teammate • lives alone	• friends inside and outside sport	• good • bit of rivalry with teammate • concern about a rival from another country	• past agent asked too much of his time, now no agent • no concern with sponsors	• 3 coaches over his career, each good at the time • brother now his coach • need coach who 'brings spirit out'
F	• close to parents	• younger brother and sister both play sports	• none • lives with a teammate	• generally friends from outside sport	• excellent relationships with teammates	• no agent • no concerns with sponsors	• great with early coaches • with national coach, trusting, close
G	• close to parents	• older brother	• long term relationship with partner, outside of sport • lives with partner	• friends outside sport, doesn't see them very often	• good, try to help each other, but not close friends	• no agent, no concerns with sponsors	• good relationship with national coach; had some problems which have been resolved
H	• moved away to train • good relationship with parents although doesn't see them often	• older sister, not in sport	• long term relationship with partner inside sport • lives with partner	• friends outside sport, doesn't see them very often	• cares about how teammates do, but not together all the time	• none	• open, respectful relationship with national coach

I felt the pressure from it, for many years. I realized how hard it was for her when I saw an interview of her in 1994, after I won a silver medal. She was crying and so happy for me. And now, looking back, I really appreciate what she did for me.

Early parental support and encouragement has been found by a number of other researchers to be important for both developing young athletes and other talented, high achieving individuals (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Partington, 1995). The parents in the present study initially provided the opportunity for their young child to begin to participate in sport and, in the early years, often got involved in the organization of the sport itself. As their child grew into an accomplished, Olympic level athlete, these parents may not have been so directly involved, but in almost all cases, they continued to provide support and encouragement to their son or daughter.

Relationships with siblings

In terms of siblings, two of the athletes had brothers who had been on the national team with them. Both athletes drew support from these brothers because they understood firsthand the nature of competing at an elite level. One of the athletes spoke extensively about how her brother had helped her in the days leading up to her 1994 Olympic race.

He showed up two or three days before. And I could feel it in him how excited he was when he watched me skate. He could barely contain himself. He hardly had to say anything. He told me a couple of things I could try and I'd skate some more and he would be just like... he was just so... 'you're ready, you're absolutely as ready as you can be and there is nothing you can change.' And just that excitement, all by itself. By then the training is over, the work is done.

Other athletes talked simply about their sisters or brothers in terms of being able to talk to them and spend time with them outside of the world of sport. During this past summer, one athlete had his eleven year old brother stay in Montreal with him for a week, where they played a lot of tennis and went to La Ronde, an amusement park. Another athlete, whose sister had skated, but not at the national team level, found her able to provide a broader perspective.

She knows me very well, and she knows what to tell me. She's concerned with the whole picture, not just my skating. I talk to her every week. She understands how I feel. But she's away from skating so we can talk about other things too.

Relationships with partners

Six of the eight athletes were in a relationship with a partner during the nine-month period of the interviews. For two of those athletes, their partners were from outside the sport world and both had plans to marry in the next few years. They both said that their partners were very supportive of their sport careers. The first athlete talked about trying to balance the relationship and not have it only focused on her and her training and traveling.

I guess balance is the key word. It's not like everything we do is based on what I have to do. We try not to let the sport influence our relationship too much. When I'm with (him) it's like I'm a normal human being (and she laughs). I would not talk to him about training every night. Sometimes if something very special happened I will tell him but often we talk about other things. Actually, most of the time. And I think he made a pretty big sacrifice. He's the one who has to come to Montreal every weekend, because I can not go because of training. And I'm away a lot. So he does sacrifice.

But when we are together, it's not another sacrifice. I don't always say, 'I have to go to bed at ten' or 'I can't drink some wine.'

The second athlete, who needed to travel away from home not only for competition but also for training, felt that the resulting time away was hard on his partner.

Sometimes it's hard for her. I know it's hard for her when I leave. She likes it when I'm there. She likes us to be together. When there's a problem she likes me to be there. And when I have a problem she wants to be there too. And it's a sacrifice. We've kind of put our life together, our marriage, our kids, on hold. I accept that and she accepts that, but it's hard. She'd like me to finish school and get some money in the bank and buy a house and start life. But we're lucky, we have people who love us and try to help us. The key is to try to realize what we are doing and accept it.

The partner relationships of the other four athletes ranged widely. One of the athletes, at the time of being interviewed was just beginning a relationship with an athlete in the same sport. She had had an eight-year relationship with someone outside the sporting world. It had ended in 1996, but he had been very supportive of her sport career and had brought a valuable, creative perspective to her life as a speed skater.

He was always, without a question, supportive of my skating. He's pretty creative and I think that sport, especially speed skating, when it's so technical, you have to be artistic. And he was so intuitive about how I looked on the ice. He was just great that way. But it's hard to know if I could have done it myself, or if I needed that, because he just brought the love of sport out in me.

And it made me admit that I just love doing what I'm doing. You know, because he couldn't grasp it, how I could just keep training, but I think he understood the love part of it and he made me more aware of that part.

One of the reasons the relationship ended was because of the demands on her after winning an Olympic medal. "I was pulled constantly, and he felt left out. He felt really into the relationship around the Olympics and before. And then after that it turned around."

Her new relationship, with a teammate, was in the early stages, but she did express concern about what to expect, in terms of emotions and preparation, when they both would be competing at similar times on the up-coming Olympic schedule. She was aware of the stress of watching him race and the potential impact on her performance. She felt "...that what I have to do is learn to trust that he's taking care of himself without thinking that I can do something."

Another athlete, in her first interview, also spoke about the ups and downs of having a relationship with a teammate.

The good part is that I have someone who is always shooting for me when I'm racing. He helps me in training. The bad part is that we only talk about skating. Sometimes it goes well for me and not for him. Or it might be the other way around. But that's tough. Another bad part is doing everything at the same time. It's good he goes to school or we'd be together all the time.

By the time of our second interview, this five-year relationship had just ended. The athlete felt it was for the best and said that they were still friends. She did admit to feeling a bit lonely nevertheless.

One athlete, at the time of our first interview, was just beginning a relationship with an athlete in the same sport but from a different country. He said that he was very much in love with her, e-mailing her almost every day. By the time of the second and third

interviews they had seen each other at numerous international competitions and the 1997 World Championships.

The final athlete in a relationship with another athlete felt that they didn't talk about sport that much, and that, in fact, the relationship helped him leave his skating at the oval.

Of the two athletes who were not in relationships, one was still young and simply had no one in her life, at the point in time of our interviews, as a partner. The other athlete had had a number of girlfriends outside of sport, but felt that it wasn't easy because of his commitment to sport. When he moved from his hometown to another city in order to train, he broke up with one girlfriend because she decided she didn't want to move with him. Although the demands of this athlete's sport career created an obstacle to this relationship, he didn't put all the blame on his sport career, but said that perhaps he just hadn't found the 'right' partner.

For me, if I want to be involved completely in a relationship it has to be after skating. (Why?) I have to say because of selfishness, when you train and you want to accomplish something it has to pass before everything. If your friend is first and your training is second, it's so bad, you can't really perform. Like last year, I was going out with 'A' and she said, 'I hope you will have a week to spend with me in August' and I didn't have a week. But that's a choice you have to make. For me, it's even harder because I'm from Quebec and I have to train in Montreal and Calgary. But if it was a real priority I think I could still have a girlfriend. It's just that I didn't find the right one.

Relationships with Friends

In discussing their friends, all eight athletes talked about having friends both inside and outside sport, although three of them said that they didn't see those friends outside sport very often. One athlete said that most of his friends were in skating. He had friends in

his hometown, but didn't see them very often. "It's pretty hard having friends outside of sport because most of the time you are in training or you're leaving for competitions." Another athlete said "...my girlfriend and I, we have a lot of friends outside sport, which is good. But we don't see them often because they work and I have a lot of things to do. And often I'm not there, but we keep in touch."

One of the athletes who did see friends from outside sport on a regular basis, said that she liked having friends outside of her sporting world because it allowed her to think about and talk about things other than speed skating. Another athlete said that some of her friends were into sports, just not her sport of hockey. "A lot of them are skiers, some of the guys are mountain climbers, and some don't play sports at all. Kind of a mish mash of different people." And one athlete felt good friendships were important components of his life and talked about having two good friends from childhood.

I have five or six friends that are really good friends.

One is a guy I met when I was two, my first friend, and one is a guy I went to first grade with. And I see them. I went to Montreal with them last week. And some friends in skating. And I have a couple of good girl friends, but I don't see them as much now, and one of them is getting married next week.

Relationships with Teammates/Rivals

When the discussion moved to relationships with teammates, all of the athletes spoke positively about the ways in which they got along, and yet, at the same time, most of them made some comments about individual rivalries. It's important to point out that, with the exception of the athlete who played hockey, the other seven athletes, even when they were successful in making their respective national teams, still competed against each other at the international level. Lets look at each of the eight athlete's comments.

Beginning with the athlete who played the game of hockey, it was clear that, because of a common goal, the relationships among teammates were very good, although, with most, not necessarily close

With the national team we are so spread out that I don't get to see them often. I don't know most of them outside the hockey world. I do have a pretty close relationship with the players from (my province). But, on the whole, we're really not together except at training camps and Worlds. So it's mostly hockey relationships and they're all good. We all get along great. There is really nobody on the team that anyone dislikes. And when we come together there's an understanding with everyone that we're working toward a common goal which is the gold medal. And it's like a big holiday for everybody to not have to work and to play the game that they love.

In the third and final interview with this athlete, the potential changes that might take place as the team centralized in one location for the six months leading up to the 1998 Olympic Games were discussed. She acknowledged that it would be an adjustment for her because she liked and was accustomed to working out on her own, and training would be much more team oriented. But she saw it in a positive light. "It will be a good change. It'll be a chance to work as a team."

In looking at the comments of the other seven athletes, all whom competed against teammates, one athlete said that the men's team got along well, although this Olympic year would be particularly stressful.

(In the next three or four months) people might be a little more stressed out than usual because everyone will be nervous, everyone wants to make it, but it went well last year. I don't think anyone pissed anyone else

off and we tried to help one another even though we know we're competitors. We did that all year and I think it was good for the team as a whole. Surely there will be days that will be harder, I'll probably be one of those who'll be stressed out too. I just hope that people will be a bit careful to not pass their stress on to others. But we do try to help each other and talk to each other and listen to each other.

At the same time, when asked about possible rivalries with teammates, he responded by talking about small things that his teammates could do or say that might hurt his performances. His comments also make reference to the mindset that he had developed to deal with these possible distractions.

Well, it is stressful in races because I know that (any of three teammates) can beat me. For now, it's going well, but I always have this small fear of being with them in training and in competition because sometimes, even if they don't really mean it, people say things that affect you. Sometimes it can destroy you. I know this because it's happened. But, on the other hand, I can't stop talking to anyone. It's something that I'm aware of and I try to be careful, to not have the others send me little jabs, little things that will lead me to destroying myself mentally.

In terms of these little but significant issues between teammates, another athlete suggested that it was best to "...just do my thing, concentrate on myself." He did find such behavior distressful because, for him, human relations were very important. He didn't like it when someone was mad at him. But, in reiterating what the above athlete had said, he did expect some of it to be inevitable in Olympic year.

Another athlete echoed the above comments about little things that a teammate could say that might cause problems, but felt a particular teammate wouldn't be a problem

for her because she was aware of it and she had "...taken a little distance from her." She did say that her relationships with her teammates, on the whole, were good but she didn't feel they were lasting friendships.

The relationships are good, I think. But I don't think that in five years, or after I finish skating, that I'm going to see them very often. I think a lot of my friends in skating are very different from me and what makes us tight is skating and when that's gone.....

She did raise the issue of a rival from another country and felt that she had to plan her races against her "...because I don't want to be panicking when I have to skate against her." Again, this makes reference to the athlete's necessary mental preparation in order to deal effectively with this 'distraction.'

Another athlete echoed concerns about a particular rival from another country and his need to prepare for everything.

I have to see him as just a stick person, he's just there, he's just another person racing against me. I have to deal with that. I have to be prepared. I have to think of the worst thing he could do to me and not mind.

One athlete referred to the special relationship that she felt developed with teammates because so much emotion was shared.

I know these people so well. You know, you cannot know many people like you know your teammates. You see them on their good days and their bad days, on their biggest thrill and their worst experience. To me, that's something special. And you get to have some real friends because you've shared experiences like winning a gold medal in the Olympics. That is something special and also losing with a team is

something special. It makes you realize a lot of things and how you deal with it. Yes, I think it's quite unique relationships that you get to live.

Another athlete felt he had good relationships with everyone on the team, but this was in part due to the fact that he didn't see them every day. "I see everybody maybe a month or two every year, so when I see them I always get along really well with both the girls and the guys." He also spoke about the impact of the team's performance on his own individual performance.

I care about the team. I would say that I'm very much concerned with how the team does. Obviously, I focus more on what I do, but I'd say to a small degree, I react differently when they do well. I don't think it bothers me to the point where it affects my performance, but I definitely want everyone on my team to do as well as they possibly can. And, if I can help them do that I will.

Our final athlete in this discussion of relationships with teammates, said that his teammates certainly were not his best friends but that they helped each other.

It's too bad that we compete against each other, but that's life. We're not best friends but we try to help each other in our way. We train together, we don't hang out together. But on the ice we help each other, like, we spent ten days in (another country) to work on the skates and we really helped each other.

Relationships with Agents/Sponsors

Relationships with agents and sponsors are relatively new for Olympic athletes. As delineated in the dimension, Degrees of Balance, two athletes had no sponsorship other

than 'carding' money from the federal government, and two other athletes had some sponsorship but had no agent or any responsibility to their sponsors in terms of time commitments. The other four athletes had extensive sponsorship deals and agents that helped them acquire and then manage these sponsors. One athlete had had the same agent for four years and described her as a friend. She trusted her judgement and the company she represented.

A second athlete had had an agent after her 1994 Olympic silver medal race. The agent had wanted to get her as much exposure as possible, but "...I made no money and it drove me crazy." It also contributed to the ending of her eight-year relationship with her partner. This athlete, at the time of being interviewed, was acting as her own agent.

One of the athletes was quite concerned about the amount of work he had to do for various sponsors. His greatest concern was simply that he might miss training or not be well enough rested for training. He did talk to his agent about it, and with the help of both his agent and his coach, they were planning to cut back his commitments to his sponsors.

Another athlete described her relationship with her agent as not particularly close, but the agent did manage to get her a sponsorship with a company that would guarantee her a job at the end of her sport career. And he "...kind of pushed me into nutrition. I wanted to start but not until after I finished skating. But he said I was fortunate to have this opportunity with this company and to have a job after, and I should start now while I was skating." As well, she had quite a unique relationship with her major sponsor. She knew the president, occasionally they would have lunch, and the company put no explicit pressure on her to win a medal at the Olympics.

Relationships with Coaches

The relationship between an athlete and her/his coach is a unique and rather symbiotic one. They spend a great deal of time together. As athletes train six days a week and often twice a day, their coaches are with them for most, if not all, of those sessions. They work together in highly intense and pressure-packed competitive situations and they are often together in social settings as they travel together. They come to know each other well. And they need certain things from each other. The coach needs the athlete in order to

be a coach, and the athletes need their coach to guide their training program, to provide technical and tactical expertise and often to support them emotionally.

All of the athletes in this study had had more than one coach during their high performance sport career. While most of them focused their comments on their relationship with their current coach, a number of them did refer to coaches they had when they were younger. At the time of being interviewed, all eight athletes were primarily coached by national coaches or assistant national coaches. This means that these coaches were responsible for the training and performance of an entire team. As we shall see, this did cause some problems between particular athletes and coaches. Lets look at what each of the athletes had to say.

Six of the athletes had primarily good relationships with their coach. One of the athletes had had three different coaches in her career, including her current coach, and quite unlike most of the other athletes in this study, she did not demand much from her coach. "I would say I can work with anybody, because I don't ask much from the coach. I don't need that close a relationship.

A second athlete was also quite independent and his relationship with his coach was very open and respectful.

It's very open, very candid. For me it's a good thing. He is like a coach and a friend too. I know a lot of people say that he tries to be everybody's friend too much. But one-on-one, it's fine. I try to treat him the way I want him to treat me. I try to be respectful of his program and when I miss training, I make sure he knows why. And I think he is more than willing to extend the same courtesy. And he gives me a lot of freedom and I'm an athlete that needs a lot of freedom. He's good at that. And he's more than willing to listen if I have a problem.

A third athlete felt that all his coaches had been great. He had had a number of coaches at the provincial club level when he was younger and indicated that it had been fun because one of them had always been willing to try new things. At the time of being

interviewed, he said, "...I couldn't ask for a better coach" in referring to his current coach, who was also the national head coach. "I have only good things to say. I agree with her values. If I was to be a coach I would like to be like her."

The fourth athlete, who was overwhelmingly positive about her coaching relationships, spoke about both her current coach and coaches that she had had as a younger athlete. In reviewing her career as a younger athlete, her comments may appear somewhat surprising, although very heartening, because she was speaking of being a young girl, playing hockey on boy's teams. She felt that she had been very lucky.

I've never had a coach I didn't like. There were a couple of coaches who gave me the opportunity to play. And that's all I ever wanted. They didn't care that I was a girl. I got a chance and I contributed to the team so I got the time I deserved. And they also had a great knowledge of the game and I think that has given me a great advantage over a lot of other female hockey players.

At the time of being interviewed, this athlete had three coaches as a member of the national team. Her assessment was that they all worked well together and knew their jobs and roles quite well. She felt closest to the one who had been her coach from the time she was twelve.

I think we relate well to each other because we have very similar personalities and goals. We're both intense, goal-oriented, driven. I've learned a lot from her. And we have a pretty open relationship. I can talk to her and we always tell each other the truth. She trusts me and I trust her. We're both trying to go the same place. But we don't always agree. In fact, we probably disagree quite a bit but we always try to understand.

A fifth athlete talked about his series of coaches at the national level and about what he felt it took, in terms of coaching, to actually win an Olympic medal. He felt that his first national level coach had been perfect at the time because "...I was so needy and he was so motherly." He was then together with his second coach for five years, and while he felt that this coach had helped him a lot, he made an interesting comment on this coach's limitations that came to a head at the 1994 Olympics.

He did a lot of good things. He, for sure, brought me to a world class level. He expected us to be the best. But at the Olympics I was really frustrated with him. We had a big fight the week before. He wasn't paying attention to me at all (he was focusing on other Canadian skaters). I don't know, maybe he thought I could just handle it by myself. And the silver medal and pulling that out of myself, on the day, that was me and my brother. Because you don't win medals because you have a good coach that can tell you how to do the physical and technical things well. You have to have a coach who can bring the spirit out in you. And I think that is the most important thing at the Olympics.

At the time of the second and third interviews with this athlete, his brother had been named a national level coach and would be coaching him as well as other athletes going to the 1998 Olympics. He reported that things were pretty good. He alluded to a few frustrations due to their relationship as brothers. "Sometimes it's frustrating because I feel like he might alter a program for someone else before he would ever do it for me, because I'm his brother. But, I think he is fully capable of doing that again with me (helping him win a medal)."

Our sixth athlete took a slightly different route by working with two coaches at the same time. The situation began because two seasons prior to the interviews she had not trained well in the summer and found herself behind the other national team members in September. She sought a personal coach to help with accelerating her fall training. It

worked well and she was back up physically by December, and ended up second overall at the World Championships in 1997. But second is not good enough for this athlete so she was continuing with two coaches in the present season. She felt strongly that, if she was to be totally prepared from a physical standpoint, she needed to work a lot harder than just the national training program. She had every intention of doing well in Nagano.

It's not necessarily because I don't like the national program training. It's mostly because I didn't train enough last summer and I felt I needed something more. And I'm going to continue training with (the second coach). I'll continue doing the team training, but I'll always have a little extra from (the second coach).

It's not a bad thing because the national coach does the training for the national team, but with (second coach) it personalizes my training. It's not easy for the national coach. He has to do the training for sixteen athletes. It's hard because we don't all have the same needs.

So (second coach) can concentrate just on me, she can do a training specifically for me.

What stood out in this athlete's comments is her need for personalized training. She certainly wanted to train harder and more than just the national program allowed, but she also took confidence from doing things that were developed solely for her. And she was not the only athlete to talk about the need for more individualized training. It is one of the difficulties inherent in having one national coach for an entire national team of sometimes fifteen to twenty athletes. For this athlete, the solution was a second coach. A prime concern with this solution is the danger of over-training, which is a common phenomena in Olympic year. However, this athlete appeared well aware of this potential problem and felt that she was in control of the overall training program.

Another athlete spoke very fondly of her first coach and felt that they had had a very good relationship. (He had been her coach right up to two years prior to these series of interviews). And she felt that his influence went beyond just the physical and technical training.

He has been a very good influence, not only on my skating, but on me as a person. He is someone who made me become a more secure person. I don't know if it's a better person, but he was a key player in who I became. He's someone I respect. I mean we had some arguments but it was a good relationship, yes, and positive. When he started working with me I didn't look like I had any talent and he didn't put up any barriers for me. He never said that's impossible, you'll never do it. He always thought I'd be a good skater even when I was bad. Now, at 30, nobody is going to influence me but at the time when I started skating and I was not good, and I knew nothing about anything, he was the one who didn't put any limits. And I think that's very important.

Her comments point out the powerful, and in this case, positive relationship that can develop between an athlete and her coach. He clearly had a great influence on her in her younger years. And, as she aptly pointed out, he didn't dismiss her as an athlete when she didn't immediately show promise. This athlete and her sport career pattern certainly confirm both the importance of helping athletes develop a belief in themselves (Orlick, 1996), and that hard work or 'deliberate practice' (Ericsson et al. (1993) is a crucial component of success at the elite level of sport.

At the time of being interviewed, this athlete was being coached by the national team coach. In the first two interviews, which took place during the competitive season, their relationship had been going well. She had talked with the coach about her individual training needs for the up-coming Olympic season and the coach agreed that they would work together on it. However, during the third and final interview, near the end of the summer training, this athlete was upset with the coach. She found the training repetitive and boring and saw the coach often coming late to practice. She conceded that perhaps part of the reason that she found it boring was because they were on the ice much sooner than ever before (because of the timing of the Olympics). Nevertheless, she felt there was a lack

of variety in the training. She talked about meeting with her coach about this issue. “I will have a meeting with him on it, because I have a lot of disappointment.”

Our final athlete also had had some problems with his coach, but they were resolved over the course of the three phases of interviews. This athlete had faced an illness in the past season that had resulted in some poor performances and a drop in his confidence. During this period he missed some important competitions that his coach and his teammates had traveled to. Added to this, one of this athlete’s teammates (coached by the same coach) was performing very well and he felt that perhaps his coach was more interested in his teammate’s success. He did however take responsibility for this and successfully worked it out with his coach.

I think it (our relationship) changed a little bit last year. I felt he was more interested in (teammate) to do well, and for me not to do as well. When I think back, maybe I felt that. Maybe that’s why I didn’t go to him as much. And I think he felt that too. It was hard to communicate. And during the season I didn’t see him very often and he seemed pretty far off at the end of the year. He didn’t want to travel anymore and the relationship between me and him was not very good. But then we sat down and put everything on the table. He told me what he thought, I told him what I thought, and he said all the things that I should do to improve and we agreed on everything. And I know he’s there for me and I’ve got to take what he has to give me and not think that he wants (teammate) to do better. I’m sure he doesn’t want that. He wants everybody to achieve their goals. So after that, I think it started the summer training on a good note, I’m really motivated.

Sitting down with his coach and working through these issues was crucial for this athlete because he’s an individual who needs to feel that his coach has confidence in him. “I need him to have confidence in me, that’s when it goes really well. I mostly need to talk to him more, he has so many skills and knowledge.”

In summary, each of the eight athletes in the present study had numerous individuals who strongly supported and helped him or her in the quest for excellence in sport. Certainly, in the early years, the opportunities, support and encouragement came from a mother or father, or from both parents. For three athletes, there was also a close relationship and a great deal of support from a brother or sister, each of whom competed in the same sport, sometimes at an equally high level. Each of these athletes also spoke of important relationships with partners, coaches, and sometimes friends or agents who all played a role in helping them achieve Olympic and world success.

In looking at this dimension of Relationships/partners, friends and its link to the dimension of Degrees of Balance, several athletes felt that cultivating partners and friends outside of sport helped them maintain a healthy perspective on life which, in turn, helped their sport performances. Other athletes, with partners and friends primarily in sport, led a life that was more narrowly focused on their sport world.

There is also a relationship between this dimension and the dimension of Difficulties and Dilemmas. Sometimes those difficulties had to do with partners. For the athletes in the present study with partners outside of sport, those relationships were sometimes strained because of the all the time spent away from home, travelling and competing. For one athlete, the demands of her sponsors after winning an Olympic silver medal, certainly contributed to the ending of a long-term relationship. For the athletes with other athletes/teammates as partners, there were the worries of too narrow a focus in life (“The bad part is that we only talk about skating.”) or the stress of watching your partner compete.

Sometimes the difficulties were with teammates and/or rivals from other countries. A number of athletes spoke of little rivalries with teammates, but they had learned to take responsibility for working through these tensions, and concentrate on themselves. They spoke of trying to help each other when they could, and at other times, to not let the ‘little jabs’ hurt their training or performance.

Finally, there is a link between Relationships/coaches and the dimensions of Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence and Will. Four athletes spoke about the encouragement and support of past and current coaches that specifically helped them develop or renew their level of self confidence and will to continue to train long and hard. These were coaches

who, according to the athletes, had a great deal of skill and knowledge in the sport, believed in the athlete's ability, built a level of trust, and took the time to meet the individual needs of the athlete.

Difficulties and Dilemmas

The athletes were asked if they faced any difficulties or dilemmas in their lives, both inside and outside of sport. While a number of the issues have inevitably been touched on within other general dimensions, we will discuss them here in more detail.

Let's look first at the issue of injuries, illness and burnout. All of the athletes spoke about various injuries or illnesses over the course of their sport careers, but for six of the eight athletes these were rather serious. One athlete, during the timeframe of the interviews, was being treated for a serious neck injury that was becoming chronic. She had had a MRI and been diagnosed with a protruding disk. She talked about how it always hurt. "It always, always hurts. It's a tiring pain but I can endure it. It isn't big enough that I can't endure it." This same athlete, in 1994, had broken her back in a pre-Olympic competition and yet had amazingly gone on to win a medal in the Olympics that same year.

Three athletes had problems with their knees that had interrupted parts of their training. One of the athletes was having no problems with them at the time of being interviewed, but the other two were feeling some frustration because their training was restricted. One athlete had had surgery and felt that it hadn't been entirely successful. She was worried about her knee collapsing on her when she was on the ice. But she did say "...it's getting way better each day. It can hurt as much as it wants as long as it doesn't collapse." The other athlete explained that, due to his knees "...I can only bike. I cannot jog, I cannot do sprints, I cannot do imitations even. I do some weights, but no squats. But on the ice, it's fine."

Three athletes used the term burnout to describe situations that they faced in their sport careers. In two of these cases, the athletes were referring more to mistakes that they

and their coaches made in their physical training requirements rather than to personal issues in their lives.

A number of researchers have examined this issue of burnout in athletes (Cohn, 1990; Gould, 1996; Henschen, 1986). The three athletes in the present study experienced varying degrees of burnout. For one of the athletes it wasn't too serious, and was more a 'staleness' than actual burnout (Henschen, 1986). This athlete spoke about how his keenness to train resulted in training too hard in the off season which then resulted in fatigue and burnout before the end of what is always a long competitive season. However, it was something he learned from, it didn't result in missing a season of training or competing, and he adjusted his training accordingly.

The second athlete, in referring to his 1995-96 season, felt that too hectic a travel schedule, too many races and a program that wasn't tailored to meet his needs contributed to a poor season and a prolonged illness.

I was tired. I was really tired. Just physically worn out. We had that hectic schedule. I went to Japan over Christmas. It was a lot of racing and a lot of travelling. We came back and took a week off, not very long.....Because the program was so general, I wasn't given the attention that I needed. I never got it back (that year). I was just burned out.

Gould (1996) has suggested that two major categories of burnout symptoms exist: 'mental' symptoms, which include staying motivated, lacking motivation/energy, negative feeling/affect, feelings of isolation, concentration problems, and high and low moods; and 'physical' symptoms, which include having injuries, illness or lacking energy. For this second athlete, the majority of the symptoms fit, at least initially, into the 'physical' category. However, as he became more and more fatigued and eventually ill, and his training and results deteriorated, this athlete also began to experience some of the 'mental' symptoms, such as lack of motivation or will. This is the period in his sport career when he said he felt he had 'lost his hunger.'

The third athlete who spoke of being burned out was indeed facing a serious situation as he strove toward making the 1998 Olympic team. Throughout all three phases of interviews he talked about needing to cut back his speaking engagements and his commitments to his sponsors. His father, to whom he had been very close, had passed away quite unexpectedly. He wasn't sleeping well. He was clearly frustrated by his lack of ability to train well, due to a knee injury. He was worried about his competitors, as he continued his comeback to the sport after a two-year 'retirement.' And he had broken up with his girlfriend.

I just think the fact that I am so tired and can't sleep for some reason that I don't know. I get emotional and a little irrational. And I'm just hyper and I feel I'm anxious. I think it's being nervous for the Olympics. I don't think it's the relationship with (girlfriend). I don't know what it is besides that I'm too busy. The past three weeks I was too busy, and that didn't help.

By the end of the third interview with this athlete, he was seeing a medical doctor for help with his sleeping problems and, out of necessity, had cut back on his training. Many of the difficulties faced by this athlete correspond closely to the themes of burnout cited by Gould (1996). This athlete was clearly experiencing physical concerns, in the form of a nagging injury, and not feeling satisfied with his training or his performances. He was experiencing logistical concerns, with increasing demands being placed on his time from his sponsors, and psychological concerns, in the form of his own high expectations to continue to be one of the best in the world. After all, this is the same athlete who said, "I'm never satisfied with myself. I always have to be better, faster, win more."

Interestingly, what these athletes raise, along with a problem of burnout, is the issue of individual training needs, need for input into their training and a need for a degree of variety and fun in that training. Two of these athletes came to realize that, as a direct result of mistakes in their training, they needed to listen better to their own bodies and develop, along with their coaches, a training program that worked better for them as individuals. Subsequently, they adjusted their training to meet both their individual needs and the

requirements of a long and intensive competitive season. As one of them said, "...I know what I'm capable of. It's just a matter of timing and putting it all together." They were careful to not let the off-season training get too intense, and they made sure that they took some rest days both after hard training weeks and after a competitive stretch of competing and travelling. It was very much a matter of timing so that they were ready to be at their best at World Championships and Olympic Games.

For the third athlete, a long-term national team member and multiple Olympic medalist, it was a need to have input into his training, and an increased variety in the training that would help him stay keen and motivated. For this athlete, the training had become drudgery. "It's not fun on the ice." This lack of enjoyment in training was a factor in this athlete's feeling of despair. As noted by Henschen (1986), enjoyment in training is one way to prevent staleness and burnout. Yet, for this athlete, it was most certainly only one factor in many that were contributing to his serious case of burnout.

Another issue the athletes spoke about was technical challenges they faced in their sport. Sometimes they spoke about them as difficulties and sometimes they spoke about them as challenges, but always, they became animated when the conversation turned to these technical aspects of their sport.

Two of the athletes were faced with adapting, in pre-Olympic year, to a newly designed skate, called a 'clap' skate. For them it was a bit worrisome not knowing exactly how it would go in terms of their technique.

This is our first year on them. A few really good skaters started on them at the end of last year. For the sprinters, we were still doubting, because we need to start fast, we have bigger legs, we're stronger. And with the mechanism not being stuck.... But this summer we all wanted to try the clap skates because it goes faster with them. What (used to slow us down) was the toe digging into the ice. Now the toe doesn't go into the ice, the whole blade stays on the ice. So there's more glide, you don't slow down. But it's difficult (to get used to), it's not the same.

However, both athletes, by the end of their third interviews, said that their speed and their starts were improving and they were feeling confident. As one of them concluded, "I'm sure I won't have any problems."

For the other athletes, there was no new technology to deal with, just a constant focus on equipment, working on the 'bend' and 'rocker' of their blades and the fit and feel of their boots. Certainly part of their race preparation was getting the right 'feel' of the blade on the ice. They all spoke about the time and energy that they put into their blades. One of the athletes said "... I came to a point where I wasn't improving. But it was my skates. They weren't the skates for me. But finally I changed one boot.... (and it went better)." Another said that she spends about a half an hour on her blades every day, more if they are new boots and blades. For some athletes, the strain of getting the right 'feeling' went on right up to competition day, for others, they were clear that regardless of how the blades felt on race day, they were going to skate well. This was very much a part of their mental mindset.

For the athlete who played hockey, the technical aspect focused on her stick rather than on her skates. At the time of her second interview, she was spending time over the kitchen stove making a prototype for her sponsor to replicate.

I'm trying to make a blade to send in and get a pattern made.

I'm just making my own blade so that I can have my own for next year, so I was on the stove fiddling around with it. I'm bending it and curving it to where I want it. It works out if I make it right. The last one I made and sent to them, I ended up not liking. So I'm making it right this time.

Other difficulties that four of athletes raised had to do with sponsors and finances. Three of the athletes were concerned about the demands placed on them by their sponsors and how those demands took time away from their training and rest time. As mentioned above, one of these athletes was on the verge of a burnout and certainly a contributing factor was the demands of his sponsors. For the other two athletes, while they were concerned, they both had supportive agents who understood the needs of an Olympic level

athlete. Interestingly, the fourth athlete's concern was just the opposite. Although he was a World Champion, he had no sponsorship other than government support and he said, "... paying bills, that's the big difficulty in my life."

Finally, relationships with partners, discussed in detail in the general dimension of Relationships, were sometimes seen as a difficulty or dilemma for most of these eight athletes, at one time or another in their lives. One of the athletes had a relationship with an athlete in the same sport but from another country. Because of the demands of training and the requirements of each of their respective national teams, the dilemma faced by this athlete was being able to spend time with his partner. Some athletes chose not to have a serious relationship, partly because of their commitment to their sport. Two of the athletes had relationships with teammates, and at least for one of these athletes, as has already been mentioned, she was concerned about them both competing on the same day in Nagano at the 1998 Olympics.

For those athletes with partners outside of sport it was also difficult. As one of them said, "...it's the situation that is hard. It doesn't make it very easy. For me, going away is nothing. For her (his girlfriend), it's different. She's mad because I'm not there. But she doesn't love me any less."

In summary, most of the eight athletes in this study faced a number of difficulties or dilemmas throughout their lives inside and outside sport. Some of these difficulties were on-going at the time of the three interviews and some had been resolved. There were injuries and illnesses, some as serious as a broken back, in the past, or a potentially, career-ending burnout in the present. There were poor performances caused by a lack of individualized training that had, at the time of these interviews, been effectively resolved for two of three athletes. There were technical difficulties or challenges that they all faced in their pursuit of more and more speed and greater success. There were the pressures of finances for one athlete and the pressures and demands of sponsors for others. And there was the dilemma of how to combine a high performance career in sport with a relationship, whether that relationship was with a fellow teammate or someone from outside of the sporting world.

To encapsulate the results of the present study, a summary matrix table has been developed (Table 5). This table illustrates and, at the same time, attempts to clarify and

summarize the complexity of each of the eight athletes' lives, both inside her or his sport career and her or his life outside of that sport career. In the first column, the ten general dimensions are listed.

In the second column, the components of each of the general dimensions are described. In looking within the general dimension of Personal Description, it becomes clear that the eight athletes cannot be easily summarized or categorized. There is diversity among the eight athletes. While five of the athletes described themselves as very intense and competitive, the other three athletes described themselves as balanced, easy going, reflective. There is also diversity within an individual athlete. One of the athletes that described himself as very intense and focused, also said that he was a bit crazy at times, and liked to have fun. Another athlete said he was competitive and hated to lose, and yet, he also saw himself as pretty easy going outside of sport. This complexity within an individual athlete is similar to the multidimensionality found within talented teenagers in other fields Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993). These findings also support a review of the research on personality in sport which indicated that no distinguishable 'athletic personality' has been shown to exist (Vealey, 1992).

In the third column, relationships among the general dimensions are delineated. Given the complex personal nature of each of the eight athletes in the present study, it is not surprising that the relationships among the dimensions are also quite complex. In fact, as Stake (1995) has so eloquently stated, it is these 'multiple realities' that we seek to delineate and to understand. This matrix table allows an overall view of the eight athletes' lives and the relationships among the dimensions without losing sight of the particulars of each case.

TABLE 5
SUMMARY MATRIX OF GENERAL DIMENSIONS,
HIGHLIGHTS, AND RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE DIMENSIONS

GENERAL DIMENSION	HIGHLIGHTS	RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DIMENSIONS
MENTAL MINDSET	-visualization - 8 athletes -‘getting it right’, images of winning, images of technical and tactical aspects of race or game -planning and preparation - 6 athletes -planning for months in advance, race plans, team meetings, ‘making it conscious’ -‘in the moment’ - 8 athletes -conscious thinking on ‘doing’ of race or game, technical, tactical aspects -1 athlete spoke of ‘no emotion’ - totally in the race, when winning an Olympic medal -analysis of performance - 3 athletes -building on the good performances, analysing the ‘not so good’ races -perspective - 5 athletes -awareness of the pressures, ‘don’t look for happiness just in speed skating’, importance of having interests outside of sport -intensity and aggressiveness - 5 athletes -struggling to find the ‘right’ balance of intensity in training, and in competition -aggressiveness/adrenaline in terms of getting ready for explosive sprinting/game of hockey -trust - 6 athletes -importance of finding the crucial balance between ‘in the moment’ cognitive thinking and ‘letting it happen’/letting go of conscious control -creativity (1 athlete) and ‘feel on the ice’ - (8 athletes) -‘feeling’ of skating well technically; and, for 1 athlete, the creativity of finding the softness, the gracefulness -‘no excuses’ - 1 athlete -acceptance of being ready to ‘have my best race’ -distractions - 4 athletes -poor past Olympic results, poor refereeing	planning and preparation to Relationships - athletes planning and working with coaches and team-mates, in team meetings. planning and preparation to Will and Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence - a sense of solid preparation gave the athletes a direction and focus and built their confidence perspective to Degrees of Balance - differing perspectives influenced whether athletes felt it was important to have other interests in their lives, both for performance reasons and for personal reasons, or chose to concentrate, to a large extent, on their sport life. ‘no excuses’ and trust to Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence - athletes, when they are strongly confident, were better able to accept their readiness and be ‘in the moment’ visualization to Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence – visualizing a good performance built up an athlete’s self confidence creativity and ‘feel on the ice’ to Joy – there was a joy in being on the ice and training
BEGINNINGS	- athletes began in sport from 3 years of age to 15 years of age - the athletes took from 6 to 12 years of training to make the national team; one exception - 1 athlete made his national team after 3 years of training and competing	Beginnings to Relationships - athletes were encouraged and helped a great deal by supportive family members, and sometimes team-mates and early coaches.

GENERAL DIMENSION	HIGHLIGHTS	RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DIMENSIONS
	- 6 athletes were influenced strongly and positively by mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, team-mates and first coaches - turning points - for 5 athletes, changing disciplines, good results at Canada Games, University Games, a World Cup, a first World Championship; for 1 athlete it was missing out on making an Olympic team and for 1 athlete it was an illness.	turning points to Will - 2 athletes found the will within themselves to come back from the 'devastation' of not making an Olympic team and a difficult, two-year illness, to become serious about training and go on to making Olympic teams and becoming Olympic medalists. turning points to Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence - good results, steady progression in training and competing built the athletes' confidence to continue with their sport career.
PERSONAL DESCRIPTION	-several athletes talked of liking to have fun, of being 'a bit crazy' -5 athletes were self-described as very focused, very intense, self-motivated, competitive individuals, in and outside of sport - but it 'makes it hard on the rest of your life' - 1 athlete described herself as 'balanced', and along with the above, several of the athletes added descriptions that included easy-going, thoughtful of others, calm and reflective, not always confident.	Personal Description to Mental Mindset/perspective - how the athletes saw themselves (intense, easy-going) influenced the perspective that they brought to both their life of excelling in sport, and to their life outside sport. Personal Description to Will - being very focused and very intense (and not just within sport - one athlete's example of building a tree house as a youngster and 'still hammering nails at 2 or 3 in the morning') linked to the inner will and drive to be the best in the world . Personal Description to Degrees of Balance - as in the relationship to perspective, how each athlete saw themselves related to the path they chose to pursue in a life of excelling.
EBB AND FLOW OF SELF CONFIDENCE	- 7 athletes experienced fluctuations, during their sport career and life, in their level of self confidence - nevertheless, an athlete's level of self confidence was high when winning Olympic medals or setting world records - 'knew I was capable', and before winning Olympic silver, 'believed I was going to do it' - regaining confidence was accomplished by narrowing one's focus to training better or	Confidence to Physical Training (not one of the 10 General Dimensions, but part of Conceptual Framework)- when training (and competing) were going well, athletes felt a strong sense of confidence in their abilities. Confidence to Mental Mindset/

GENERAL DIMENSION	HIGHLIGHTS	RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DIMENSIONS
	harder - 2 athletes felt the self confidence gained through sport helped them in other parts of their life - 1 athlete spoke of the importance of not becoming over-confident – ‘You can’t think it’s going to be easy to beat everyone because you never know how the others will be’.	‘in the moment’ - when the confidence was there, the athletes were more able to be ‘in the moment’ and capture the crucial ‘feeling’ necessary to a great performance. Confidence to Relationships - athletes gained needed confidence through specific time spent and encouragement from their coaches, or, in one case, brother/coach. Confidence to Difficulties and Dilemmas- athletes facing injuries or illness, which resulted in less effective training and often poor results, felt their level of confidence deteriorate. Confidence to Will - several athletes, while facing difficulties, found within themselves the desire and will to get back to training better/harder.
MEANING OF EXCELLING IN SPORT	- 4 athletes said that it was not something they often thought about - 1 athlete said ‘it makes you what you are’ - 1 athlete felt it was ‘...a big honour’, ‘...a huge thrill’, an opportunity, felt lucky - 3 athletes spoke about the hard work – ‘it means a lot to be good at what I do because I spend a lot of time at it’ - 4 athletes spoke of a feeling of personal accomplishment - 2 athletes spoke of the temporary nature of success at the international level - 1 athlete, an Olympic silver medallist, felt ‘...it was sort of too awesome to think about’.	Meaning to Joy - regardless of the path taken to a life of excelling, all the athletes found joy within their lives in sport. Meaning to Will – the role that sport played in their lives, drove each of these eight athletes to continue to strive to excel
WILL	- 2 athletes spoke about difficulties - illness and failing to make an Olympic team,-that they chose to view as an impetus to get more organized in their life and start training better. They didn’t enjoy the feeling of failing. It wasn’t easy, one athlete ‘...had lost her hunger’, but, ‘...this year I just put my head down and worked really hard’. - from a positive perspective, 3 athletes indicated that good training, steady	Will to Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence - these two dimensions are closely related. Confidence gained from various sources - good training, good results and positive feedback from coaches and sometimes team-mates contributed to a continued or renewed will to train and compete.

GENERAL DIMENSION	HIGHLIGHTS	RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DIMENSIONS
	improvement and good results were also an impetus to increased resolve to train harder - 1 athlete, having already won an Olympic medal, wondered whether he would be able to find that same drive again - 2 athletes spoke of always trying to win, and one said '...the thing that I enjoy, that really drives me in sport is the rush of victory'	Will to Difficulties and Dilemmas - illness, not making a team, resulted in initial despair, then reflection and finally a renewed will or resolve from within the athlete to become more focused on training; - 1 athlete's burnout was related to her drive to excel - '...I'm never satisfied with myself... I always have to be better, faster, win more' Will to Joy - several athletes spoke of the enjoyment in training and in the feeling of steady, successful progression as an encouragement to find that drive to train well, to get up in the morning and do the work required. Will to Relationships - feedback and encouragement from coaches and working out with team-mates both served to contribute to the will to continue on.
DEGREES OF BALANCE	- all the athletes trained 3-6 hours/day, 6 days/week, often 2 sessions/day. - all faced extensive travel for training and competition - all took 1-2 months off/year - all were 'A carded' athletes - 6 athletes had sponsorships, 3 with over \$50,000, 3 with under \$50,000 - 2 athletes had only the approximately \$10,000/year of 'A carding' money - all 8 athletes understood the importance of having other interests, but chose different paths and 4 athletes found it harder than others to have outside interests. 'You have to be careful how you take that little part of your life that you have outside.' 'It's a life that's hard to manage.' - 4 athletes made a conscious effort to go university and have friends outside of sport and felt that it helped their performances in sport. '...in a sense it helps you because there's an outlet when you have a bad week of training.' 'I don't think my focus is only on skating because you would go crazy.'	Degrees of Balance to Will - 4 athletes with an intensity and strong will to win also chose to lead a life that was very focused on their sport career. Yet, another athlete, who described herself as a very focused and intense person felt it helped her sport performance to have other interests and she was enrolled in first year university. Degrees of Balance to Difficulties and Dilemmas - 1 athlete felt he had just burned out and become physically ill from thinking too much about his sport, and so he had learned to look for ways to find joy and fun outside of skating. Another athlete was facing a burnout partly because she had little in her life except training, competing and speaking engagements that

GENERAL DIMENSION	HIGHLIGHTS	RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DIMENSIONS
	-4 athletes chose a path that was more exclusively focused on their sport. 'I'm in it (skating) 100% really.' 'I really want to think about skating only.'	were related to herself as an Olympic athlete. Degrees of Balance to Mental Mindset/perspective - several athletes spoke of finding interests outside of sport and not looking for happiness just in sport. 'Sport is a huge priority, it's of huge importance, but it's not everything.'
JOY IN AN ATHLETE'S LIFE	-within sport - 3 athletes spoke of the intensity of feeling that comes with winning an Olympic medal or setting a world record. 'For moments like that. That's why I work as hard as I do.' - 1 athlete enjoyed the sense of being in control, being able to make things happen - 4 athletes spoke of the joy in the process of training, of becoming more and more skilled, and of loving the feeling of speed. 'The whole process really is truly what I enjoy.' - 2 athletes enjoyed helping other athletes - all the athletes enjoyed the opportunity to travel, and the friendships that developed with teammates and with athletes from other countries. 'I just love what I am doing.' -outside of sport - 7 athletes said that spending time with friends, family, partners brought them joy, as well as renovating a house, playing tennis, golf, softball, snowboarding, and simple things like a walk in the park.	Joy to Relationships - the athletes spoke about the joy that they found in their relationships with their partners, with their parents, and with their friends inside and outside of sport. Joy to Physical Training (again, not one of the ten dimensions, but part of the Conceptual Framework) - the athletes found joy in the process of training and loved the feeling of being on the ice. 'I'm going to always have this joy to train.' Joy to Mental Mindset/'in the moment' - the athletes loved what they saw as the uniqueness of the intensity of emotion experienced in this sport life, when they were able to be 'in the moment' and it all came together for a great performance.
RELATIONSHIPS	-parents - 7 athletes were close to their parents -siblings - 2 athletes had brothers on the national team -partners -6 athletes had partners, 2 athletes did not - 2 athletes were in relationships with individuals from outside sport and it was not always easy. 'Sometimes it's hard for her.' 'I think he made a pretty big sacrifice.' -2 athletes were without partners and 1 of those athletes felt it was partly because of the demands of his sport. -3 athletes had partners that were teammates, and 1 athlete's partner was in the same sport but from another country	Relationships/partners, friends to Degrees of Balance - several athletes felt that partners and friends outside sport helped them maintain a healthy perspective that also helped their sport performances. Others, with partners and friends primarily in sport led a life that was much more focused on their sport career. Relationships to Difficulties and Dilemmas - 3 athletes, in the discussion of their coaches, spoke of a need for more

GENERAL DIMENSION	HIGHLIGHTS	RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DIMENSIONS
	-friends - the athletes talked of friends inside and outside sport, but 3 said that they didn't see friends outside of sport very often. One athlete said that she liked having friends outside sport because it allowed her to think about and talk about things other than sport. - teammates/rivals – all the athletes had positive comments about their teammates, but for 7 of the athletes "it's too bad we compete against each other." 2 athletes spoke of particular rivalries with individuals from other countries - agents/sponsors – 4 athletes had agents and sponsorships, 2 athletes had sponsorships, 2 athletes had no sponsorship -coaches - 6 athletes felt that they had a good relationship with their coaches -1 athlete spoke of the need for a coach that can "...bring out the spirit in you" in order to rise to the highest level in sport -1 athlete had two coaches at the same time, one being a personal coach to provide some extra, individualised training-1 athlete had a great first coach who encouraged her to stay in the sport	individualised training. -2 athletes with partners outside of sport, spoke of the difficulties related to being separated due to the travel and competition requirements. For the athletes with partners inside sport, the difficulty was a concern related to being too narrow and of only talking about sport. 1 athlete chose not to have a serious relationship, partly because of his commitment to his sport. -3 athletes expressed some difficulty with team-mates – the 'little jabs' and 2 athletes spoke about difficulties with rivals from other countries Relationships/coaches to Self Confidence and Will - 2 athletes spoke about the encouragement and support of past and current coaches that helped develop or renew their level of self confidence and their will to continue to train hard.
DIFFICULTIES AND DILEMMAS	-all 8 athletes spoke of injuries and/or illness that they had faced; for 6 of those athletes the injuries or illnesses had been serious -3 athletes spoke of instances of burnout - 2 through over-training, peaking at the wrong time, too much travel, need for a more individual training program; 1 because of numerous personal and situational factors – death of a parent, break-up with partner, too many speaking engagements -2 athletes faced technical challenges in their sport with the introduction of a new kind of skate -1 athlete faced financial problems, with his 'A carding' money as his only source of income. '...paying bills, that's the big difficulty in my life.' -3 athletes voiced concerns about the demands placed on them by their sponsors -7 athletes faced difficulties with partners; sometimes the difficulty was related to being too close, when both individuals were in the same sport; or it was related to being away from each other when the partners were from outside sport or from another country.	Difficulties and Dilemmas to Relationships - difficulties were related to relationships in the athletes lives, sometimes with sponsors, with partners, or as a result of a parent's death. Difficulties and Dilemmas to Physical Training (again, not a dimension, but part of the Conceptual Framework) - difficulties arose because of over-training or mistiming of the peak and lack of a training program designed to meet the needs of that particular athlete.

A Special Case: A Girl on Boys' Teams

One of the eight athletes in this study had played boy's hockey until the age of twelve. From the ages of twelve to fourteen she played on girls' teams, and then at fifteen she switched back to boy's Bantam Triple A, as well as beginning to play with the women's National Team. At sixteen she tried out for boy's Midget Triple A but got cut. We talked about what it was like as a young girl to play with the boys.

One of the things is that if you are going to play on a boy's team you have to be thick-skinned. Probably until I was about twelve there really wasn't any problem. I was so young then that if there was I never noticed. But then there is that sex factor as you get older. You have to get changed by yourself. At nine and ten I changed in the same locker room. It was never a big deal. But somewhere around twelve, it was like, ok, I better change in a different place. And if there was a place, I've changed in it. I've changed in the boiler room, the rest room, the storage room. Probably one of the worst things was that I was good enough to play with the boys. That's what caused all the problems. Generally, I was one of the top players on the teams that I played for. For boys, that's the age when you get drafted. In small towns everybody dreams about the NHL. So parents started to get jealous that I was taking their son's spot. And the comments started to come and I started to notice them a bit. Comments like, 'a girl doesn't belong on the ice,' and 'go back to ringette' and 'you puck hog.' It happened quite a bit and it was the same parents that were always doing it. I laugh sometimes because I don't know why I continued. Sometimes it was so frustrating that I'd be crying and I'd be working myself up so much that I'd be making myself sick. I look back on it and it's so funny, but

it wasn't funny then. There were always tears. I cried all the time. I mean I cried when we lost because I hated losing (laughs). I was always crying over something. But I never cried at the direct comments. Those never really bothered me. I cried because it was frustrating to not be treated like the other boys. I didn't do anything wrong. I was just a kid. But then you started to get into contact and they would take cheap shots, so then it was starting to hurt, physically (laughs). But it didn't bother me enough to quit.

When I asked her why she kept on, she replied that "...I like to play the game. I love it. I just had an over-riding passion for the game." She also added that her mom and dad were always there supporting her, and that "...there were a lot more people supporting me than were against me."

A number of researchers have begun to examine this phenomenon of young girls and women playing the game of ice hockey, both on women's teams and on boys' and mens' teams (Boyd, Trudel & Donahue, 1997; Theberge, 1995a, 1995b; Williams, 1995). In the present study, the athlete's comments of just loving the game of hockey are consistent with one of the factors of continued participation for young women ice hockey players (Boyd et al. 1997). Interestingly, unlike the participants in the study by Boyd et al. (1997), who cited fathers and brothers as influential in their early involvement, the athlete in the present study said that both her parents had been very involved in her sport career. Her mother had been very supportive and was quite involved in the provincial organization of the sport.

As well, the factor cited by Boyd et al. (1997) of not being satisfied with ringette, figure skating or boy's hockey as a reason for moving to women's hockey, does not hold true for the athlete in the present study. In fact, she wasn't satisfied with women's hockey. This hugely talented athlete, feeling frustrated by the skill level of women's ice hockey, felt she needed to play with a boy's team, as long as she could, in order to improve her skills. Whether girls and young women should be allowed to play on boy's teams or whether they should play on girls' team in order to strengthen the game for girls continues to be an on-going debate within women's sport (Edwards & Robertson, 1995; Williams,

1995). Nevertheless, for this very talented athlete, early on in her career, it was the best way to improve her skills. At the same time, as women's hockey continues to develop and grow as a sport, this athlete enjoys playing on the Women's National Hockey team and was looking forward excitedly to being part of the first ever women's Olympic hockey tournament.

CHAPTER 5

OVERVIEW AND INTEGRATION

The research objectives for this study of high performance athletes' lives were twofold. The first objective was to advance our knowledge of the mental mindset that high performance athletes bring to the training and competitive setting that allows them to perform their best. The second objective was focused on achieving a better understanding of the whole life of an athlete competing at the Olympic level.

The life of a high performance athlete has been previously well researched from two major perspectives, the physiological and the psychological. From a physiological perspective, a great deal has been researched on how an athlete might best prepare for competition (Astrand, 1986; Bompa, 1983; Wilmore & Costill, 1994). From the psychological perspective, most texts and books focus on both the theoretical and the practical psychological aspects of performing in sport (Bunker, Rotella & Reilly, 1985; Orlick & Partington, 1988; Orlick, 1990, 1996; Loehr, 1994; Suinn, 1980; Unesthal, 1986; Williams, 1986).

Given the above well researched aspects of the performance literature, and recognizing the suggestions and perspectives of Rimejorde (1995), Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza (1989, 1991) and Vealey (1988), that highlighted significant gaps in the literature on high performance sport, it was clear that a broader knowledge base of the complexities surrounding the lives of those excelling in sport needed to be developed. To this end, it seemed appropriate to examine in depth the life of eight high performance athletes.

A series of three interviews, spread out over a nine-month period of time, were conducted with eight athletes who had already reached the highest levels in their sport and were continuing to compete at an international level. The verbatim transcripts and a one-page summary were given back to each athlete before the second and third phases of the interviews. This enabled each athlete to edit and/or elaborate on what they had said. This three-phase process, which resulted in a 'prolonged engagement' with the athletes, and this 'member checking', establishes a strong degree of credibility for the study and built a sense of trust between the researcher and the participant/ athletes.

The twenty-four interviews were coded, guided by the work of Miles and Huberman (1994) and Stake (1995). (See Appendix C for a list of initial codes and Appendix F for the evolution of the coding process). The coded data were then clustered, and those clusters were organized into ten general dimensions: Mental Mindset, Beginnings, Personal Description, The Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence, Meaning of Excelling in Sport, Will, Degrees of Balance, Joys in an Athlete's Life, Relationships, Difficulties and Dilemmas, and the special case of A Girl on Boys' Teams. The dimensions of Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence, Will, Degrees of Balance and A girl on Boy's Teams emerged from the data, while the other dimensions were part of the initial conceptual framework and set of Phase I questions.

The results have been presented and analyzed in detail in Chapter Four. The intent in this final chapter is to move beyond the 'thick description' and 'particular perceptions' of each of the eight athletes to put back together the findings in a more meaningful way (Stake, 1995). We will begin first with the findings that complemented and extended our knowledge in terms of the psychological mindset of high performance athletes. Second, in terms of what has been learned of the life of the '24 hour-a-day' athlete, the focus will be on both the commonalities and the uniqueness of these athletes' lives. As well, implications for further research and suggestions for those working in the sport system will be addressed.

Overview of the Mental Mindset of a High Performance Athlete

There is much in the present study that corroborates Orlick's (1996) seven critical components of personal excellence. Each of the eight athletes was asked in an open-ended question to describe what she or he did to be psychologically prepared for a performance. This question allowed each of the athletes to freely express, in her or his own words, the skills used to be well prepared psychologically for training and for the pressures of competition. In analyzing and interpreting the results of this question, the general dimension became Mental Mindset, with ten subsections or categories within the dimension.

The two categories of the Mental Mindset that all the athletes spoke about were the skill of visualization, and the 'in the moment' focus. These relate directly to Orlick's (1996) elements of positive imagery and full focus. The athletes were clear that they worked very hard on the skill of visualizing their performances, whether it was 'seeing' themselves beat a particular competitor, or going over and over various strategies 'until they got it right.' Often the process was a conscious, thinking one, but sometimes it was more the development of a feeling. For example, a number of the athletes talked about developing an image and a feeling of explosiveness or aggressiveness.

The 'in the moment' discussion provided insight into both what the athletes thought about and felt when they were totally concentrated on the task, and when and how they lost that focus which almost always resulted in a poor performance. To elaborate further on Orlick's (1996) element of full focus, the athletes in this study either specifically 'thought' about small technical or strategic aspects of their performance, or they trusted their bodies to physically perform the task and 'let it happen.' This latter aspect was developed into its own category called 'trust' as it became clear that there was a balance that needed to be found by each of the athletes between the more cognitive aspect of 'in the moment' and the more trusting or instinctual aspect. The balancing of these two aspects was individual for each athlete and for each performance.

Inevitably, the athletes lost their 'in the moment' focus when they shifted their thoughts to results and expectations. This corresponds directly to Orlick's (1996) element of distraction control. Clearly, while the eight athletes had a great deal of experience at dealing with the pressures and expectations of high level competition and at successfully staying 'in the moment', they still succumbed, at times, to losing that 'in the moment' focus.

The third category, that six of the eight athletes reflected on, was planning and preparation. It corresponds most closely to Orlick's (1996) element of mental readiness. This was conscious work on the part of the athletes to prepare race plans, game or relay strategies, and learn from previous mistakes. Sometimes, the athlete did the planning and preparation on his own, and sometimes it was in collaboration with his coach.

The other seven categories developed under this section of Mental Mindset, were not common to all eight athletes, but rather illustrated unique and often powerful ways in

which individual athletes had learned to prepare themselves psychologically for their best performances. For example, one athlete spoke of ‘no excuses’, and talked about not giving himself ‘an out’ at his second Olympics. “I can be disappointed if I have my best race and people are better than me, but there was no way I was going to give myself an excuse.” It was a poignant example of having learned a tough lesson, and unlike many athletes, having a second chance at the Olympic level to act on that learning. It was also an example of having no fear of putting it all on the line and being open to discovering whether one is good enough to be the best or the second best in the world. It is not often that, in life in general, we are called on to perform and be judged in such a manner, and yet, this is what high performance athletes face every time they go out to perform. And they are always required to be ready to produce at a pre-ordained time, under the lights and, at the Olympic level, in front of the world. It is, without a doubt, an extremely high-pressure world. This lesson learned and shared by this athlete in our interviews took years of performances, years of personal reflection and growing self-awareness, and years of developing a strong belief in his abilities.

Figure 3, the Mental Mindset (p. 60), was developed in collaboration with the eight athletes. It was intended to encapsulate visually the process of being well prepared mentally for a great performance. The smaller circle displays the ‘in the moment’ focus required, which could include specific technical aspects of the performance, strategies of the game or race, feelings of confidence, calmness and perhaps aggressiveness, depending on the requirements of the sport. As well, it would often include balancing those specifics with the sense of trusting in one’s physical capabilities and ‘letting it happen.’

The larger circle would include any number of aspects that might take an athlete out of the smaller circle. This focus on outcome is often related to winning, to past poor performances and to the pressures imposed from both the outside world and from the athletes himself. The task is for the athlete to recognize where she or he is, and, if in the large circle, to bring oneself back to the ‘in the moment.’ The eight athletes in this study understood how to do this and were very successful at being in the small circle for their performance. Nevertheless, it was an on-going process for each of them.

Overview of 'Living with Excelling'

The second objective of this study was focused on achieving a better understanding of the whole life of an athlete competing at the Olympic level. As mentioned throughout the present study, this was unexplored territory. Rimejorde (1995) felt the high performance athlete in the '1990's was a very much a '24 hour-a-day' athlete and their time outside of training and sleeping needed to be considered and understood in order to find new ways to enhance performance. Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza (1989, 1991) felt that a more complete understanding of the joys and stressors in an elite athlete's life required a broader perspective encompassing the totality of an athlete's experience. And the Canadian sport system was moving toward a sense of concern with the development of the whole athlete in order to not only produce great international performances but also good citizens (NSCC Strategic Plan, 1997).

With this second objective in mind, it was important to move beyond the 'particular perceptions' of each of the eight athletes that have been developed in Chapter Four to a more representative and perhaps metaphorical description. I began by rereading each of the twenty-four interviews and all of my memos and notes written over the course of the study. This was a process of combining the objectivity of the interviews, and the subjectivity and intuitiveness of personal memos and notes. The components of the ten general dimensions were reviewed as they appeared in the completed conceptual framework (see Figure 2, p. 45).

Over time, what kept rising to the surface was a sense that each of the eight athletes, as they were being studied, were 'living with excelling.' As the researcher, I was talking with them, interviewing them and observing them as they were training, competing, winning, losing, celebrating and struggling. It seemed that there were some commonalities in terms of the path taken to excelling in sport, and, at the very same time, a uniqueness in the individual characteristics that colored how each of the athletes viewed her or his journey in life.

The commonalities of the eight athletes were as follows: getting an early start, having a strong sense of belief, self confidence and will, having support from a number of individuals, finding joy inside and outside of sport, accepting and learning from the

inevitable ups and downs and difficulties, and finding a degree of balance in their lives that worked for each of them.

Commonalities of 'living with excelling':

1. **An early start in sport** (for most of the athletes). Seven of the eight athletes got an early start in sport, with one of the athletes beginning his sport at age three. On the other hand, one athlete did not begin training and competing until fifteen years of age. It took at least six years for the athletes to make a national team and several years after that before they did well internationally. Again, there was one exception, with an athlete taking just three years to make his first national team. For all eight of the athletes, these years were spent in increasingly more serious training and competing.
2. **Belief, self-confidence, will.** All of the athletes, when they were excelling at the international level, had a great inner will or resolve, and a strong sense of self-confidence and belief in their abilities. However, for seven of the athletes, their belief in themselves and their self-confidence fluctuated. Yet, they learned to ask for help from others and learned how to rebuild it in themselves. One of the athletes cautioned about not falling into the trap of overconfidence.
3. **Support.** All of the athletes had considerable support from parents, a brother or sister, partners, friends, coaches. One athlete related a powerful story of her relationship with her first coach who supported her and believed in her ability despite her seeming lack of physical talent. As a result she persevered, kept training and became an extremely successful Olympic medallist.
4. **Joy.** All of the athletes spoke fervently of the joy they found inside and outside of sport. They spoke about the intensity of the feelings of a great performance. "The feeling is just awesome" and "Those are the times when you think that's why I do what I do. For moments like that." They spoke about the joy in training. "The whole process is truly what I enjoy." They spoke about enjoying the uniqueness of being in sport, the intensity of it, the sense of control over one's destiny, the knowing that one is the best in the world. And seven of the

eight athletes spoke about joys outside of sport, about joys they experienced in their relationships, and in the simple joys of a good meal or a walk in the park. One athlete summed up her life by saying, “I just really enjoy what I’m doing every day right now.”

5. **Ups and Downs.** All of the athletes faced difficulties, poor performances and injuries or illnesses over the course of their careers in sport. Some of the injuries and illnesses were serious, such as a broken back, or missing an entire season of training and competing. What enabled each of them to fight back was an understanding and acceptance of the inevitability of such ups and downs, a period of self reflection, and finally, ‘putting their head down’ and training hard again with a renewed sense of inner resolve.
6. **Degrees of Balance.** Each of the eight athletes found a balance in their life that worked for her or him. Some athletes chose to concentrate fully on their sport careers, and other interests and friends outside sport became quite secondary. These athletes did feel that they had some balance in their lives and interests outside of their sport, it was just always secondary to their focus on competing and training. Other athletes felt that it was, in fact, important and crucial to their success in sport to have other interests and a focus outside of sport. They chose to continue with their education and, for some, to have friends and partners outside sport.

Uniqueness of ‘living with excelling’

Along with the commonalities of ‘living with excelling’ were a number of unique characteristics of each of these eight athletes that should not be lost. Five of the eight athletes were ‘living with excelling’ with a fierce intensity, one was living with a sense of fragility, one was living his excelling in a reflective manner and one was living in an uncomplicated way.

Fierce Intensity

The five athletes who displayed a fierce intensity were raised in their sport and three of them knew very little else. They were quoted as saying things like: “I want to be first because that’s what I train for and that’s what I want. I want to win”, and “I’m very intense and very focused and that makes it hard on the rest of your life,” and “You don’t give up. Like when we are doing intervals, it doesn’t matter that you can’t finish it, you finish it. If you’re going to pass out, well you pass out and then you get up and you finish it.” These words display a powerful intensity that several of these athletes took into not only their sport career but the other parts of their lives as well.

Four of these athletes had consciously chosen to focus very exclusively on their sporting life, with few friends outside of sport, with partners inside sport, and, in two cases, with siblings in the sport as well. The fifth, fiercely intense athlete and her ‘living with excelling’ looked a bit different as she chose to continue with her education on a full time basis and stay in touch with friends outside of her own sport. She was, however, no less intense than the other four athletes.

Sense of Fragility

One athlete was ‘living with excelling’ in a fragile sense. His self-confidence and drive to train and perform fluctuated over the course of his sport career. “I think the confidence goes up and down” and “I need my coach to have confidence in me.” He was ‘living with excelling’ with a need for constant reassurance from his coach. He did take responsibility for ensuring that that happened and his relationship with his coach was solidly reestablished over the course of the nine months of interviews. He also had made a choice to continue with his education and enjoyed a relationship with a partner outside of sport.

A second athlete, one of the five intense athletes mentioned above, showed, at times, a fluctuation in his self confidence as well, mostly due to physical illness and injuries he had faced. In his first interview his confidence and will were quite low. He was quoted as saying, “I think I had lost my hunger. I was a little hesitant” and “I just felt I wasn’t quite as much into it as before.” Yet, he turned it around, trained hard, managed to

stay healthy and built his will and confidence back up to go on and do well at the 1997 World Championships. His 'living with excelling' was also characterized by a good but independent relationship with his coach, by a long-term relationship with a partner who was also an athlete and by a choice to not pursue his education at this time.

Reflectiveness

This athlete was 'living with excelling' in a critically reflective manner. He said "I've always been quite reflective" and he recounted how he loved to go out with his father on his house calls and just sit in the car and think, waiting patiently for his dad. He also told me, prior to the third phase of interviews, that the process of interviews had helped him really think about his life and question why he was working so hard at pursuing a career in high performance sport. He found he wasn't content with just being 'egocentric' and orienting everything in his life to being good at one thing and on beating everyone else. And he came up with an answer. He felt that it was a big challenge for him personally, but he also wanted to bring joy to his family and friends by racing against the best in the world. This was an individual whose 'living with excelling' included university, early success in business, a great relationship with his coach, and a later start in sport at this level than the other eight athletes.

Uncomplicated

Our final athlete described herself "... as a balanced person. I'm not complicated." She was 'living with excelling' with a partner and friends outside of sport, a very supportive mother and sister, an emphasis on her university education and an independent relationship with her coach. "I don't ask much from my coach. I don't need that close a relationship." However, such an 'uncomplicated' nature did not preclude her commitment and drive to being one of the best in the world. When she didn't make one Olympic team she admitted that she was 'devastated' and that devastation pushed her to make a greater commitment to her training and competing to where she is presently a World Record holder and an Olympic medallist. Such seeming contradictions within one individual

clearly illustrate the complexities that are inherent within each of these eight, high performance athletes.

Future Research Considerations

It has been extremely enlightening to look in-depth at a number of individuals' lives, thoughts and emotions as they sought to excel in high performance sport. While much has been learned based on both the results and the observations of the researcher, it would be worthwhile to consider the following suggestions:

1. Continued research with the eight athletes from the present study would be valuable for a number of reasons. First of all, a number of the athletes indicated that they would be retiring from sport at the end of the 1998 competitive season. Follow-up with these athletes would further advance our knowledge in the area of transition from sport. Second, a continued, longitudinal study of the athletes in the present study who continue to compete at the international level, perhaps over the next quadrennial leading to the Olympics in 2002 in Salt Lake City, would allow a refinement of the ten general dimensions presented in the present study.
2. The present research was limited to eight athletes competing in the winter Olympic sports of long track speed skating, short track speed skating and women's ice hockey. An investigation of the lives, thoughts and emotions of athletes in other sports, such as summer sports, and team sports, would allow further refinement to the ten general dimensions presented in the present study.
3. It would be useful to further explore the dimension of Ebb and Flow of Self Confidence of high performance athletes. The findings within the present study indicated that seven of the eight athletes, at different times in their sport careers, experienced fluctuations in their level of self confidence. Although this has

perhaps been implicitly understood within the field of sport psychology, it has not been well researched. It is certainly a dimension that warrants further study.

4. From a methodological perspective, the three phases of qualitative interviews were instrumental in providing the depth and richness required to understand and detail the uniqueness and complexity of the lives of each of the eight athletes. With the three-phase process, it was possible to build a level of trust and rapport with the athletes, which resulted in more openness, deeper discussions and, ultimately, a greater understanding of their lives. It also resulted in a reciprocity, a reflectiveness and, I believe, a degree of growth on the part of the athlete/participant as well as the researcher.

Contributions to the Fields of Sport Psychology and Education

From the perspective of the field of sport psychology, this research has advanced our understanding of the whole life of a high performance athlete. It has provided elements that complement and extend the work of Orlick (1996). It has provided a model of the Mental Mindset that visually illustrates, for the benefit of athletes, coaches and sport psychologists, the specific process required to be 'in the moment' and to perform well at the highest level of sport. The present study has also developed ten general dimensions that illustrate the components of an athlete's life, both inside and outside the world of sport. We now better understand some of the commonalities and uniqueness of pursuing such a 'life of excelling.' The complexity and contradictions among and within the eight athletes demonstrate clearly that there is not just 'one way' to excel or one 'type' of individual who manages to perform at the highest level.

The present research also provides a lesson for the field of education and for those of us who work in the education of others. To hear these athletes' stories, full of the ups and downs and difficulties of their lives both inside and outside sport, to see the ebb and flow of their confidence, and yet, at the same time, to see them persevere in their drive to a high level of performance, reminds us of the indomitable human spirit.

As well, finding joy in the process of pursuing one's dreams is important. Those of us in education can help develop an environment that creates that enjoyment. Clearly, support from significant others is crucial. The comments of one of the athletes regarding the support of her coach in her early years of competing should not go unheeded. Without that coach's unwavering support and continual encouragement, she would probably not have risen to the highest levels of her sport. To understand that need for support and that building of belief in one's ability is crucial for all those working with individuals who are striving to excel in any field of endeavour.

Considerations for the Sport System, Coaches and Elite Athletes

It is important for those working within the Canadian sport system, as leaders, coaches, and sport psychologists, as well as for the athletes themselves, to recognize the diversity and the multidimensional nature of the life experience of a high performance athlete.

To the National Sport System: it is recommended that the National Sport Centres continue to expand their services to athletes to meet both the needs of high performance athletes and younger, developing athletes. There is a responsibility on the part of the leaders in sport, and the coaches and sport psychologists that work directly with athletes, to be concerned with not only the performing side of the athlete, but the athlete as a whole person. It is important that these athletes not only succeed in their sport experiences but that they are well equipped from an education and social perspective to continue to contribute to society long after their sport career is completed.

To Coaches: the present study has clearly shown that while there are commonalities among athletes at the high performance level, there are also unique ways in which each of the eight athletes made choices regarding his or her life both inside and outside of sport. To best help athletes, it is important to treat each of them as individuals and to design training programs and competitive schedules that meet each athlete's unique needs. It is also important to realize that, as physical training and psychological training become more universally shared and practiced, what is left in terms of enhancing performance at the

world level, are the relationships, issues, dilemmas, thoughts and feelings that are also part of an athlete's life. As we have seen in the present research, these dimensions, both inside and outside sport, have the potential to influence, in both positive and negative ways, the life and performances of an athlete.

To Athletes: there are different paths to the highest levels of sport. What is important to every athlete is developing an attitude that emphasizes a level of self-awareness, of regular self-reflection and of creating a trust in one's own ability. As well, it is understood that most athletes will need some help along the way, perhaps from a parent, a brother or sister, a partner or a coach.

In Conclusion

It has been a wonderful journey with these eight high performance athletes. They have proven to be open, patient, and reflective participants. Thanks to each of them, we have gained a better understanding of the nature and the complexities involved in excelling in sport. The findings of the present study demonstrate that there are different paths to the highest level of international sport and that it is possible for many different kinds of individuals to rise to that highest level. Each of the eight athletes in the present study found their own path to becoming one of the best athletes in the world. For some it was a narrow road, with a focus on their sport career and with friends and partners within that world. For others, it was a broader road that included university and friends and partners outside of sport.

At the same time, for all of the athletes, great performances came only after years of hard training and many competitions. For all of the athletes, it meant struggling through losses, injuries, illnesses and sometimes all three. For most, self-confidence, will, and belief in oneself were not built by the athlete alone, but with the help and support of others. Clearly, for all of the athletes, excelling in sport required persistence and a drive that translated into an incredible level of 'willpower.' Sometimes this will and intensity carried over into other aspects of an athlete's life outside of sport, and sometimes it did not. Such persistence and continued will to excel also required a love and a sense of joy in the

pursuit. Without a passion for not only the great performances but for the very process of training and physically working hard, an individual would not persist. And yet, these eight athletes did persist, and were living a 'life of excelling.'

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APPENDIX A
OUTLINE OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR PHASE I INTERVIEWS

OUTLINE OF QUESTIONS FOR PHASE 1 INTERVIEWS WITH HIGH PERFORMANCE ATHLETES

Personal experiences

Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself?

Describe for me a typical day in your life. Who were you with, what were you doing, what were you thinking about, what were you feeling:

- (i)during the competitive season
- (ii)on an actual race day/game day
- (iii)during the non-competitive season/summer training
- (iv)on a day off, during competitive season.

Describe for me what you were doing yesterday?

Describe for me the time you spend at school/work.

Tell me how you prepare yourself psychologically/mentally for training and for competition.

Describe for me one of your best performances. How it felt, what you were thinking.

What does it mean to you to be one of the best in the world in your sport/event?
(in terms of thoughts, emotions, concerns, relationships etc.)

What is important to you, at this point in your life? – training, competing, people, activities, work, school. Has it changed over the years? (do you have a number of interests in your life, or is it necessary to be quite single-minded about your life as an athlete?)

Tell me about some of the joys in your life. What kinds of things lift you in your life?

Are there any difficulties or dilemmas you face, as an athlete, and/or outside of sport?

Background

Tell me about when and how you became involved in sport. What were your early experiences?

Describe for me how/when you realized you could be one of the best. What happened, was anyone/anything an influence?

Relationships

Tell me about your relationships with your coach(es), your teammates, rivals, partner, parents, friends outside and inside sport, sponsors, agents.

Have they been influenced/helped/hindered by you sport involvement?

APPENDIX B
LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

March, 1997

To

When a research study involving individuals is undertaken by researchers at the University of Ottawa, the Human Research Ethics Committee requires the written consent of the participants. This does not imply that the study is risky in any way; the intention is simply to assure the respect and confidentiality of the individuals concerned.

The purpose of the study is to look at the life of a high performance athlete. Specifically, this means looking at that life both inside sport – the training, travel, and competitions – and life outside sport – school and work situations, and family/social aspects. The study will be carried out over the next year and with your permission, I would like to begin collecting the data as soon as possible. If you consent to participate, you will be interviewed for approximately 2 hours, on three occasions over the next eight months.

With your permission, I would like to tape record the interview to ensure that all your thoughts and comments are accurately captured. You will have an opportunity to read and comment on the entire transcript of each of the three interviews. Each interview will remain strictly confidential. Personal information will only be used in summary form.

You are free to withdraw from the project at any time, and may refuse to answer questions without penalty.

The research study has been approved by the Faculty of Education and the Human Research Ethics Committee. Inquires or any ethical questions may be addressed to the chair at (613)562-5800 ext. 4091. The University of Ottawa requires its researchers to obtain formal consent from those participating in such a study. Your signature at the bottom of this letter would serve such a purpose.

Sincerely,

Penny C. Werthner

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which you may keep.

I agree to participate in this study _____ Date _____
 I would like to receive a summary of the findings of this study, which will be available in
 late fall of 1997 _____

APPENDIX C
LIST OF INITIAL CODES

LIST OF INITIAL CODES

Typical Day	= TD
(a)in competitive season	= TD comp.
(b)in non-competitive season	= TD non-comp/transition time
(c)on race day	= TD race day/game day
(d)on day off	= TD day-off
(e)in summer training	= TD summer
Education level	= EDU
Training (physical)	= TR
Mental Preparation/mindset	= MP
Balance	= B
Work	= WK
Difficulties/Dilemmas	= DIFF/Dilemmas
Beginnings	= BEG
Turning point	= TPt
Relationships	= REL
(a)with teammates	= REL team
(b)with parents	= REL parents
(c)with friends	= REL friends/outside/inside
(d)with girlfriend/boyfriend	= REL girlfr/boyfr
(e)with agent	= REL agent
(f)with coaches	= REL coaches
(g)with rivals	= REL rivals
(h)with sister/brother	= REL sis/bro
Meaning	= M
Best Performance	= BP
Joys	= J
(a)in sport	= J in sport
(b)outside sport	= J outside
Self Description	= SD

APPENDIX D
LIST OF EMERGING CODES

LIST OF EMERGING CODES

Typical Day	= TD
(a)in competitive season	= TD comp.
(b)in non-competitive season	= TD non-comp/transition time
(c)on race day	= TD race day/game day
(d)on day off	= TD day-off
(e)in summer training	= TD summer
Education level	= EDU
(a)high school	= EDU h.s.
(b)university/college in progress	= EDU univ.in prog
(c)university/college completed	= EDU univ compl.
(d)not in school	= EDU not
Training(physical)	= TR
(a)technical	= TR technical
(b)intensity	= TR intensity
(c)team	= TR team
Mental Preparation/mindset	= MP
(a)losing concentration	= MP losing concentration
(b)focus, in the moment	= MP focus
(c)visualization	= MP visualiz
(d)relaxation	= MP relax
(e)intensity	= MP intensity
(f)analysis	= MP analysis
Balance	= B
(a)only sport	= B only sport
Work	= WK
(a)clinics	= WK Clinics
Difficulties/Demands	= DIFF/Demands
(a)coaching	= DIFF coach
(b)pressure	= DIFF pressure
(c)teammates	= DIFF team
(d)technical	= DIFF tech
(e)\$	= DIFF \$

(f)sponsors/agents	=DIFF sponsors/agents
Beginnings	= BEG
Turning point	= TPt
(a)making the team	= TPt making team
(b)not making the team	= TPt not making team
(c)successful performance	= TPt successful
(d)changing disciplines	= TPt changing discipl
Relationships	= REL
(a)with teammates	= REL team
(b)with parents	= REL parents
(c)with friends	= REL friends/outside/inside
(d)with girlfriend/boyfriend	= REL girlfr/boyfr
(e)with agent	= REL agent
(f)with coaches	= REL coaches
(g)with rivals	= REL rivals
(h)with sister/brother	= REL sis/bro
Meaning	= M
Best Performance	= BP
Joys	= J
(a)in sport	= J in sport
(b)outside sport	=J outside
Self Description	= SD
Future Plans	= FP
(a)in sport	= FP in sport
(b)outside sport	= FP outside
Motivation/Will	= MOT
(a)doubt/fragility	= MOT frag.
(b)down/ lack of	= MOT lack
(c)positive/up	= MOT +
Burnout	= BURNOUT
Individualized Training need	= I/TR/N
Illness/Injury	= I
Self Confidence	= SC

(a)fragility	= SC frag.
Lillehamar	= Lille.
(a)fear	= Lille fear
(b)loss of medal	= Lille loss of M
(c)bad refereeing	= Lille bad REF
(d)expectations	= Lille expect
Emotion	= E
(a)negative	= E neg
(b)positive	= E +
(c)no emotion	= E none
Feeling	= FEEL
Sponsors	= SP
(a)negative	= SP -
Racing Strategy	= RS
Perspective	= PERSPECT
Drugs	= DR
Technology	= TECH
Worlds	= W
Olympic pressure	= OLY PRESSURE
Financial	= F\$
Self Responsibility	= SR
Refereeing	= REF
Race/Performance Example	= RACE EG.
Team	= T
(a)team success	= T success
(b)team issues/problems	= T problems
Life	= LIFE
(a)what is important	= LIFE importance
(b)after Nagano/retirement	= LIFE ret.
(c)after Nagano/not retirement	= LIFE not ret

Learning about oneself	= L
Fears	= FEAR
Other Sports/Physical Activity	= OTHER SPORTS
Influences	= INFLU
Results at previous Worlds	= RESULTS
No excuses/No fear	= NO EXCUSES
Creativity	= CR
Playing on a boy's team	= PLAYING WITH BOYS
Opportunities because of Sport	= OPP

APPENDIX E
OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF CODES

DEFINITION OF CODES

Typical Day (TD)	The athletes describe their day at various points in their season, during the competitive season, during the transition from competitive to summer training, during summer training, during a day off, and what an actual race day or game day looks like.
Education (EDUC)	The education level i.e., finishing high school, in university, not going to school, how many courses, what subjects etc.
Training (TR)	When the athletes speak about their physical training, the technical nature of their sport, the intensity of their training, training together as a team.
Mental Preparation/ Mental Mindset (MP)	When the athletes speak about their preparation from a psychological perspective, what they focus on, how important it is, how, when and what they visualize, when they lose concentration or focus, the intensity they are seeking, the skill of relaxation, etc.
Balance (B)	Athletes talk about the importance of having other things in their lives to balance the intensity of sport, or the need to be only focused on their sport.
Work (WK)	Work that athletes do, such as clinics.
Difficulties/Demands (DIFF)	Any difficulties or demands that the athletes face, with their coaches, with their team or teammates, with finances, technical problems, with the pressure.
Beginnings (BEG)	Information on how and when an athlete got started in their sport.
Turning Point (TPt)	Point at which an athlete realized that they could excel in the sport.
Relationships (REL)	All the information about relationships in an athletes life, both inside and outside the sport world.

Meaning (M)	Speaking about what it means to each of the athletes to be one of the best in the world.
Best Performance (BP)	What a best race or game looked like and felt like.
Joys (J)	Whatever brings them joy, both in sport and in other aspects of their life.
Self Description (SD)	How the athletes see themselves, how they describe themselves.
Future Plans (FP)	Describing their plans for the 5-7 months leading up to the Olympics in Nagano, both from a sport perspective and outside of sport.
Motivation/Will (MOT)	What drives these athletes, where does the will come from, – how it rises and falls, often in direct relationship to their level of performance.
Burnout (BURNOUT)	The athlete speaks about being burned out, sometimes both physically and mentally.
Individualized Training Needs (I/TR/N)	Athletes refer to the need for an individualized training program.
Illness/Injury (I)	Athletes refer to illness or injury issues.
Self Confidence (SC)	Athletes refer to their confidence or when their confidence is low/ fluctuating.
Lillehamar (LILLE)	Athletes refer to the problems around the last Olympics, whether they ‘lost’ a medal, fear that it might recur, the referring, the huge expectations.
Emotion (E)	Athletes talk about their emotions, their feelings.
Feelings (FEEL)	Athletes refer to how they want to feel, particularly in the competitive setting.
Sponsors (SP)	References to their sponsors and any problems with those sponsors.
Racing Strategy (RS)	How the athletes set up/plan an actual race.
Perspective (PERSPECT)	Keeping things in perspective, not getting too anxious,

	either in the past, or this Olympic year.
Drugs (DR)	When drugs are discussed.
Technology (TECH)	When the technology of their sport is talked about.
Worlds (W)	When the World Championships are referred to.
Olympic Pressure (OLY PRESSURE)	When the pressure of the Olympics is mentioned.
Financial (F\$)	Whenever money is discussed, as in funding from Sport Canada, or not having enough to live on.
Self Responsibility (SR)	When an athlete talks about their level of responsibility or self reliance in any aspect of their life.
Refereeing (REF)	Any comments about referring.
Race/Performance Example (RACE EG.)	When an athlete talks in detail about a race or a game.
Team (T)	References to the team, and it's success and any problems.
Life (LIFE)	When an athlete talks about their life, what's important to them, and what they plan to do after Nagano, either retirement, or continue competing.
Learning about oneself (L)	The athlete talking about lessons learned.
Fears (FEAR)	Fears that the athletes bring up.
Other Sports (OTHER SPORTS)	Other sports that they play or enjoy.
Influences (INFLU)	Who influenced them in the early years.
Results at previous World Championships (RESULTS)	How they performed in the 1997 World Championships.
No excuse/No fear (NO EXCUSES)	When an athlete referred to not allowing an 'out', an excuse to not perform to potential.
Creativity (CR)	When an athlete referred to the creativity required in their sport.

**Playing on a boy's team
(PLAYING/BOYS)**

Discussion about being a girl playing on a boy's hockey team.

**Opportunities because of
Sport (OPP)**

Opportunities that the athletes felt they had gained because they had excelled in their sport.

APPENDIX F
EVOLUTION OF THE CODING PROCESS

Evolution of the Coding Process

Initial List of Codes	Higher Order Theme	General Dimension
-----------------------	--------------------	-------------------

losing concentration in
 competition
 focus/ 'in the moment'
 visualization
 planning and preparation
 intensity
 aggressiveness
 analysis
 instinct/trust

Mental Preparation

loss of medal in Lillehamar
 fear
 bad refereeing in Lillehamar
 expectations in Lillehamar

Distractions re: Lillehamar

perspective

MENTAL
MINDSET

negative emotions
 positive emotions
 no emotion

Emotions/Feelings

racing strategy

race example

best performance

fears

'no excuses'/no fear

creativity

technology

learning about oneself

Olympic pressure
 worlds

Olympics/Worlds

Initial List of Codes	Higher Order Theme	General Dimension
-----------------------	--------------------	-------------------

making a team/not making a team	
successful performance	
changing disciplines	

Turning points

BEGINNINGS

influences

beginnings

self description

PERSONAL
DESCRIPTION

self responsibility

typical day in summer	
typical day on day off	
typical day in competitive season	
typical day in transition (from competitive season to summer)	
typical day on race day	

Typical Day

technical training	
intensity of training	
training with team	

Training

high school completed	
university/college in progress	
university/college completed	
not in school/university	

Education Level

DEGREES OF
BALANCE

other sports/physical activity

work	
clinics/camps	

Work

income

Finances

plans in sport	
plans outside sport	

Future Plans

Initial List of Codes	Higher Order Theme	General Dimension
-----------------------	--------------------	-------------------

strong self confidence
fragile self confidence

Self Confidence

results at previous Worlds

EBB AND FLOW
OF SELF
CONFIDENCE

doubting oneself
lacking will, drive
feeling really driven, 'up
inner resolve

Motivation, Will

WILL

meaning
opportunities because of
excelling in sport
life, what's important now,
and in future

MEANING OF
EXCELLING

joys inside sport
joys outside sport

JOY'S IN AN
ATHLETE'S
LIFE

teammates/rivals
parents
friends, inside/outside sport
partners
coaches
agents/sponsors
siblings

Relationships

RELATIONSHIPS

team success
team issues/problems

Team

<u>Initial List of Codes</u>	<u>Higher Order Theme</u>	<u>General Dimensions</u>
refereeing _____		
relationships with partners _____		
issues with teammates _____ problems with rivals _____	Teammates/Rivals	
burnout _____		
individualized training needs _____		
injury, illness _____		
sponsors that helped _____ sponsors that were difficult _____	Sponsors	
media _____		
not enough money _____		
blades, new type of skates _____ trying to get the 'right' feeling _____	Technical Challenges	
coaches _____		
playing on boy's teams _____	A Girl on Boy's teams	
		DIFFICULTIES AND DILEMMAS
		SPECIAL CASE

This Appendix illustrates the complete analysis of data, starting with the initial list of codes on the left and moving to the right, culminating in the ten general dimensions.

APPENDIX G**CONTACT SUMMARY FORM FOR PHASE I INTERVIEW, ATHLETE A.**

CONTACT SUMMARY FORM FOR PHASE I INTERVIEW, ATHLETE A.

First Interview with athlete A., in Calgary, December, 1997.

1. What were the main issues or themes that stood out?

This athlete does very little other than train and compete.

After two tough years, in terms of results, motivation/will is fragile, questioning whether he should commit or not.

Still affected by bad referring at previous Olympics, mistake made that took away the bronze medal.

Skating and competing is very important to him at this point in his life.

Learned a lot from mistake at '94 World Championships.

2. Summary of major questions.

Question	Information
Typical days	Spends most of his time training. Is taking one class to finish high school. Training is 6 days/week, 2 workouts/day in competitive season.
Relationships	Has good relationship with his coach, but needs a more individualized training program. Has good relationship with teammates. Has girlfriend who is also an Olympic level athlete.
What does it mean to be one of best in world?	"Means a lot to be good at what I do". 10 years of life. Works hard, with little financial compensation.
Mental Preparation	Learning from '94 Worlds, should have sat down before last race and thought about strategy (had a cut finger that rattled him, lost focus). Likes to visualize beating his toughest competitor.

3. Anything else that stood out?

Frequent comments on his commitment level due to previous two seasons not going well. Commented that he burned out. He was quite sick previous year, losing three complete months of training in '96. Self confidence, motivation low, perhaps initiated by loss of medal, "I think it had a big effect on me, emotionally, mentally". The fragility of confidence and motivation, related to lack of good performances. Yet he says he will train, it's just really tough after two weak seasons.

4. What follow up questions for interview #2?

Follow up to see how individualized training program has developed, whether he has committed to training or not. Ask him to describe himself. Perhaps further clarification around last Olympics. Ask about other interests in his life. Ask a bit more about relationships, and how he got started. Get him to talk a bit more about his race preparation.

APPENDIX H**CONTACT SUMMARY FORM FOR PHASE II INTERVIEW, ATHLETE A.**

CONTACT SUMMARY FORM FOR PHASE II INTERVIEW, ATHLETE A.

Second Interview with athlete A., in March, 1997.

1. What were the main issues or themes that stood out?

This athlete has just won the 500m, and finished third overall in the World Championships. Spoke of how great this is for his confidence, it's one of the Olympic distances.

Talked about training hard and spending a lot of time visualizing the 500m. Was quite explicit about his mental preparation, visualizing, planning his race strategy, what he says to himself.

Gave explicit example of the final of the Worlds 500m that he won.

Expressed concerns about the quality of the refereeing in this sport.

2. Summary of major questions.

Question

Information

How does it feel to win Worlds 500m?

Knew he could do it, if he could be one of top three Canadians. Now looking forward Olympic year.

What are you thinking about the day of racing?

Thinking of technical things to go fast and smooth. Felt someone was going to have to come after me – lots of confidence.

Take me through the race.

Description of the race, with what he was thinking and feeling, and what he and the other competitors were doing, step by step analysis.

Refereeing.

Teammate got messed up by bad calls, comments on being disappointed by a number of refereeing calls.

Balance.

Says he has some balance in his life, like his family, his girlfriend, snowboarding, his dog.

Joy

Skating definitely brings joy, when you work really hard and you achieve.

How would you describe yourself?

Hate to lose. Respect to others.

3. Anything else that stood out?

His positive emotion and confidence with this win, and his very detailed description of the race – very rich. At this point in time he is very committed to going for next year. NOTE: Interesting to note the difference in tone from #1 to #2, from questioning and doubtful to full of confidence and will.

4. Follow up questions for interview #3.

Ask about financial situation, team issues and relationships, his plans leading up to Nagano, specifics about how he maintains a 'balanced' perspective, will he retire after Nagano, more on his mental preparation, what it means now, to be a World Champion.

APPENDIX I**EXAMPLE OF ONE-PAGE SUMMARY OF PHASE II INTERVIEW, ATHLETE D.**

ONE-PAGE SUMMARY OF PHASE II INTERVIEW, ATHLETE D.

- Re: school -3 classes last fall, pretty hard, 8 hrs/week
 -in summer, just training, no work or school
 -in winter, only 2 classes, 6 hrs/week
 -now, in an internship, 6 weeks long, in the hospital for 4 weeks
 -for this next year, only going to have one class, more focus for '98
- Re: results at
 Worlds, '96 -2nd in 500m and the World record, 1st in relay, 4th overall
 -season was 'all right'; had a few too many 'things' to do, school, sponsor
 -was more focused and thinking about '98
 -was happy with the 500, but disappointed at the same time – got the
 World record, but not first place in the final
 -but, have written down, on paper, everything that I need to work on,
 like my passes
- Re: meaning of
 being one of the
 best in W -not doing it for recognition; know that I'm good, among the best
 in the world, but don't *have* to be World Champion to be happy, but
 I want to because I know I can
- Re: sponsors -has two good ones sponsors, \$ and promise of a job on
 graduation, don't have to worry
- Re: difficulties-media pressure, too many activities with the sponsors
- Re: joys -what makes me happy are the very simple things, a walk in the park
 a good meal
 -I like skating, I like the feeling of it, I like the speed
- Re: self
 description -I'm a balanced person, a happy person, doesn't take much to please me
 -I like the company of people, but I need time and space to be alone
- Re: beginnings-started in '81, when I was 10 yrs. my sister had been skating
 -in '89, at 18 yrs, made the national team
 -in '92 didn't make Olympic team
 -made '94 team and was medallist
- Re: relationship-5 years with boyfriend, relationship is good, balanced, not
 just focused on me.