

A coach's facilitation of developmental outcomes in Masters Athletes

Chelsea Currie

Submitted to Dr. Bettina Callary

Special thank you to Justin MacLellan

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### **Abstract**

Coaches of Masters Athletes (MAs) facilitate training sessions for adults aged 35+. Côté and Gilbert (2009) suggested five coaching objectives when developing adult athletes within a recreational context. Fraser-Thomas and colleagues (2013) proposed that sport can serve as a platform for specific developmental outcomes in mid-life. The purpose of this undergraduate honours thesis is to examine the reflections of a coach to understand how she perceived that her actions facilitated potential developmental outcomes for her MAs. In this single case study design, one female alpine ski coach's reflections of her training sessions throughout one season were audio-recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Findings suggest that this coach engaged in specific coaching actions mostly in line with Côté and Gilbert's coaching objectives with the intent of developing positive outcomes in her MAs consistent with Fraser-Thomas and colleagues' findings, highlighting the importance of specialized coaching for MAs.

*Keywords:* Masters Athletes, coaching, developmental outcomes, perceived actions

## Literature Review

### *Coach learning situations*

There are many different situations from which coaches learn their craft (Callary, Werthner, & Trudel, 2012; Werthner & Trudel, 2009; Wright, Culver, & Trudel, 2007). One example is through formal education, which is a structured lesson typically instructed and controlled by a more knowledgeable other (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009). Mallett et al. (2009) suggest that formal education offers access to experts, as well as recognition and certification for achievements; however its downfalls include a lack of context, meaning and authenticity. Informal learning on the other hand, can provide a more holistic approach to coach education. In these types of learning settings, the learner is not directed by a more knowledgeable other, but is instead self-directed (Mallett et al., 2009). For instance, if a coach intended to teach his/her athletes a skill but was not knowledgeable of a sufficient drill to do so, he/she could turn to a manual, a peer coach, or even the Internet to find what he/she is looking for.

Finally, with learning from experience or, learning by doing, coaches are able to gain extensive information that might not be as easily accessible through formal education. Continuing off of the preliminary example: after running a drill in a practice setting, the coach could then identify if the drill worked for the athletes, or if it should be modified to better suit them. Therefore, by setting out to find knowledge from an informal source and applying it to a true coaching situation, the coach is able to gain learning experience about drills and his/her athletes.

Gilbourne, Marshall and Knowles (2013) have explained that reflective practice, when applied to a practice setting, can be beneficial to a coach when developing critical self-awareness

and can also be used as a mechanism for coaches to monitor and improve what they do. Coaches can ask themselves: What worked? What didn't? How did the athletes respond to the level of difficulty? Could progression smoothly be applied to the exercise? The International Sport Coaching Framework (Bales, Ryan and Minten, 2013) states that both professional development and ongoing learning is directly underpinned by evaluation and reflection. Reflection is important because, regardless of the coaching context, the main goal of those facilitating a sport is to create opportunities within both practice and competition settings that allow the athletes to achieve what they desire. It is the responsibility of the coach to reflect on how their teaching techniques and routines meet the requirements for what the athletes need to be successful.

Callary, Werthner, and Trudel (2012) interviewed women coaches with long careers in coaching and found that when coaches committed to extending their knowledge through reflection of their practice, they opened themselves up to the opportunity of learning from episodic experiences. Jarvis (2006) noted that in learning throughout our lives, we have certain experiences, termed episodic experiences, from which we can learn by sensing the world and transforming the learning experience into knowledge. These types of experiences have the potential to change coaches' perceptions of what they know already, as well as future lessons, because the experiences are meaningful and relevant to the individual (Callary et al., 2012). Learning by reflecting on episodic coaching experiences (such as individual training sessions or competitions) may be especially important to coaches working in contexts for which there is little formal education. This is the case for coaches working with Masters Athletes (MAs) (Callary & Young, in preparation).

*Coaching Masters Athletes*

Masters Athletes (MAs) are adults typically over 35 years of age who are registered in sport (Young, 2011). As a consequence of there being no formal coach education courses that deal with coaching Masters Athletes, coaches of MAs resort largely to experience to figure out how to go about teaching this fast-growing cohort (Callary & Young, in preparation). The vast majority of published information and coaching seminars are focused on the development of youth in sport. Callary, Rathwell, & Young (2015) noted that MAs, like adult learners in general, may prefer coaches who use adult learning principles. In the 1970's, the term andragogy was introduced (Knowles, 1977); andragogy is a model of learning that assumes an adult learner should have accumulated life experiences that guide their learning, an independent self-concept that creates more opportunity for self-directed learning, as well as an intrinsic motivation to learn (Merriam, 2001). Andragogy put into a coaching context, however, is still a new area of study.

MacLellan's (2016) case study of one coach, who was in charge of both a youth group and a MA group of competitive canoe/kayakers, suggested that because of such vast differences in the lifestyles of youth and Masters athletes, the MA cohort needs to be coached distinctly. For instance, youth feel more obligated to attend practice, do as they are told without questioning, have been previously coached by other coaches, and need to be directed to be productive and are given a set program to follow. MAs however, cannot be expected to attend every practice due to other priorities, they make inquiries about drills/practices, some MAs have picked this sport up later in life and have not been previously coached, and they are more disciplined and self-directed (MacLellan, 2016).

MacLellan (2016) found that the coach used a collaborative back-and-forth method of coaching that allowed for MAs to fully understand and interpret the information, whereas with youth, the coach was more authoritative and demanding when it came to delivering tasks and

information. MAs were often given only small amounts of information at once to ensure that they could remember and perform what was asked and felt comfortable asking questions to proceed further. The youth were given more information all at once to avoid further questioning. Furthermore, the MAs were involved in sport along a wide spectrum from a more social motive, to a more competitive one and strove for intrinsic goals. The youth were typically involved in order to be competitive and to achieve extrinsic goals.

Callary and colleagues (2015) interviewed 10 Masters swimmers who described their coaching needs and preferences. The MAs noted that they wanted coaches that encouraged a sense of self-efficacy and competence, yet were caring, supportive and relatable. These MAs also emphasized the importance of a coach that could pay attention to their individual needs in order to provide instructional strategies and feedback but also appreciated compete alongside them in competitions. In a separate study examining Masters swimmers, Ferrari, Bloom, Gilbert and Caron (2016) asked athletes to describe their desired coaching characteristics. Researchers found that MAs valued the coaches' organization of the program in terms of intensity and length, they appreciated having a coach there and having a coach give motivational cues in practice and competition. They also valued a coach preparing them technically and tactically for competition, a coach's ability to teach technical skills and deliver those skills, and a coach that is present at competitions along with them (Ferrari et al., 2016). Some MAs particularly value the latter of these. Based on these findings, it is evident that to coach a group of MAs, a coach should typically be more aware of the desires of their athletes and use an approach respectful of those desires, as well as be relatable and understanding of adults' priorities (Callary et al., 2015; Young, Callary & Niedre, 2014). Recent work, as described above, has shown that coaching masters requires a different approach. There are nuances in the ways that coaches coach adults,

and these warrant an investigation into the thoughts and reflections of a coach to better understand how coaches may reflect on episodic experiences when learning to coach MAs.

### *Conceptual Framework*

Côté and Gilbert (2009) developed an integrative definition of coaching effectiveness, which they have broken down using three components: coaches' knowledge, athletes' outcomes, and coaching contexts. Coaches' knowledge includes a coach's behavior, dispositions, education and experiences. A coach's knowledge can then be broken down into declarative and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge is readily available information about concepts, elements, and the relationships between them. Procedural knowledge includes steps or activities needed to perform a task. The application of these types of knowledges is germane in a coaching setting.

The coaching context changes depending on the athletes and the competitive level. Thus, it is important to understand the context of who one is coaching, for example, recreational or competitive athletes, and children, adolescents, or adults. Côté and Gilbert go on to explain that certain coaching objectives are valued within certain contexts. The coaching objectives specifically listed for developing adolescent and young adult athletes within a participatory (recreational) context include:

1. Provide opportunities for athletes to interact socially
2. Afford opportunities for athletes to have fun and playfully compete
3. Promote the development of fitness and health-related physical activities
4. Teach and assess sport-specific skills in a safe environment for long-term sport involvement
5. Teach personal and social assets through sport (citizenship) (Côté and Gilbert, p. 317).

Finally, the athletes' outcomes are based on 4 categories, which Côté and Gilbert (2009) call 'the 4 C's'; competence, confidence, connection, and character/caring. Competence refers to an athlete's performance abilities in sport, aided significantly by a coach's guidance. Côté and Gilbert note that confidence is one of the most important attributes that coaches aspire to bring out in their athletes. Its occurrence in an athlete, among other characteristics, can be dictated by the relationship (i.e. the connection) between the coach and the athlete. Lastly coaches possess a responsibility to enable athletes to build character by becoming a valuable and caring individual on and off the playing field. Accordingly, coaches are encouraged to use language and behaviour that encourages athletes not to separate sport experiences from real life experiences (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Competence, confidence, connection and character within athletes could all be consequently built through the application of coach knowledge within the objective guidelines for the context in which the coach works. For instance, providing social opportunities allows for connections to be made, and by promoting fitness athletes develop a greater sense of competence.

The 4 C's model has been created based on research with youth coaches and frameworks of youth's development in sport (e.g., Lerner, 1995) but has not been examined with coaches of MAs. Thus, in this study the 'developmental outcomes' of MAs will be assessed. A developmental outcome is considered a process of learning or becoming over time, whereby the person learns as she/he experiences social situations (Jarvis, 2009).

While the coaching context is taken into account in Côté and Gilbert's model, it is not clear how the context of working with adults, with their particular learning needs, will influence a coach's approach in regards to the athlete outcomes (4 C's). For example, does a coach of MAs strive to foster confidence, competence, connections, and build character in adults? Fraser-

Thomas, Stone & Dionigi (2013) interviewed 14 MAs to explore their development in sport using frameworks of positive youth development to interpret their findings. Their preliminary findings indicated that MAs develop 6 C's: Competence & Confidence; Character; Connection; Commitment; Cognitive development; and Challenge. While Fraser-Thomas and colleagues conclude that development is ongoing and that sport can serve as a platform for development in mid-life, these findings were based on MAs' perceptions, and did not include coaches.

Therefore, we do not know if coaches of MAs strive to develop these C's in their MAs. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the reflections of a coach, as she learned to coach MAs through her experiences, to understand how she perceived that her actions facilitated potential developmental outcomes for her MAs. In doing so, it is an assessment of whether Côté and Gilbert's 4 C's model or Fraser-Thomas' 6C's model is relevant in the context of coaching recreationally competitive MAs.

## **Methods**

### *Case study*

A single case study design is used in this thesis. I present both benefits and limitations. Willis (2014) points out that single case study methodology is proficient in providing both a context-specific and empirically-rich data set. These types of studies allow for the researcher to investigate in-depth and identify subtleties of the collected data. However, a single case study may lack the guidelines of a systematic generalizability, as well as denoting variability within/across cases (Willis, 2014). This study for instance, assesses the experiences of a single coach, in a single sport.

### *Participant*

This study focused on the reflected experiences of one female coach (aged 32 years) in her first year of coaching Masters Alpine Skiers. However, she had previous extensive experience coaching within the sport for 15 years at various levels such as grassroots level (children), development level (youth athletes striving for better competitive performances), and finally elite youth and young adult populations as well, which included working with two national teams. Further, the coach had extensive professional knowledge in the field of coaching. She had a National Coaching Institute certificate in High Performance coaching through the Coaches Association of Canada, in addition to the highest level of alpine ski specific coach education. Additionally, this coach does research on coach education and development. She had recently begun reading literature on coaching MAs, which influenced her reflections of her coaching experiences with MAs.

The MAs that she coached were a group of 14 adults (5 women, 9 men), between the ages of 40-70 years, who ranged between intermediate (n=2), advanced (n=9), and expert (n=3) level for their respective ages. The majority of the skiers had competitively raced in previous years at a regional level (adult recreational league), although the two MAs at the intermediate level had not competed before. The MAs competed in this league on a weekly basis as well as weekly training sessions. Many of the MAs were returning athletes who had been coached in previous years by another coach (pseudonym: "Gary").

The coach was invited to co-coach the MA group by Gary, who had been working with the MA group for six previous seasons. This was a male coach, 56 years old, with extensive coaching experience with youth and adults. The two coaches knew one another from working with the youth club and co-facilitating coach education courses, and trusted and respected one another.

The coach volunteered to coach training once per week for two hours of evening training. The coach was not required to attend races, and went only when she herself was racing. However, when she attended the race to compete herself, she also coached the MAs.

### *Procedure*

The coach reflected on her experiences with athletes and Gary. All athletes and coaches signed consent forms and ethical clearance was granted by the host institution before data collection proceeded. Over the course of a nine-week winter season, reflections were audio-recorded post-training on seven occasions (roughly once per week) and post-races on two occasions. The reflections were based on the training and races that the coach attended, and were recorded one day after the experiences. The reflections were guided by the coach's knowledge of the literature on MAs and on how her current experiences differed or were similar to her previous coaching experiences within different contexts.

### *Data analysis*

Each reflection was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 45 pages of double-spaced text. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines. According to these authors, thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within a given data set. These 'patterns' are thus dubbed the term 'themes'. In order to perform this type of qualitative analysis for this study, themes are established based on the conceptual framework. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six steps: familiarization of the data, generating codes, assembling codes into potential themes, reviewing themes to see if they work in relation to both the coded excerpts and the entire data set, defining and naming the themes and finally, selecting excerpt examples, analyzing them and producing a scholarly report of the analysis which relates it back to the research question.

Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke, is beneficial for a number of reasons. Its flexibility allows for a rich, detailed yet complex account of data, it is not wedded to any pre-existing framework, and finally it can be used as either an essentialist, realist or constructivist methods. An essentialist or realist method of analysis reports the reality and meaning of experiences of the participants; whereas a constructivist approach examines the ways in which events, realities and experiences are the effects of a range of discourses operating within a society. For the purpose of this study, a constructivist approach was used in order to associate the athletes' outcomes with the coach's approach.

Eight coaching actions and 7 athlete outcomes were determined based deductively on Côté and Gilbert's (2009) coaching objectives for coaches working with young adults, and Fraser-Thomas et al.'s outcomes in MAs, as well as inductive analysis of codes that did not fit into those frameworks. Themes were cross-coded in order to reveal significant coach-athlete interactions. Certain themes from the two frameworks were absent throughout the data, other 'coaching action-athlete outcome' pairs were prevalent on numerous occasions.

## **Results**

The results are displayed under sub-headings regarding athlete outcomes. Within each subheading, coaching actions that the coach perceived led to developmental outcomes in her Masters Athletes are described (see Table 1 for details). The coach reflected upon certain contextual quotes that are sufficient in providing a more thorough understanding of the MAs' mindsets, and how the coach perceived her coaching actions. For example, the coach described:

With masters coaching it's just back to the basics of coaching. You just arrive at the hill you don't have to worry about how are they getting to the hill or what their parents are organizing for them or not organizing for them... You know these are adults who arrive

at the hill ready to go. They're able to figure things out on their own beforehand to make sure that they have the time and energy.

Additionally, MAs further demonstrated autonomy by being selective in their participation:

It was a cold evening last night. And that I think that after two hours she said that she had enough and that she was going to go in and she wasn't going to continue with the last part of the course.

Table 1. MA outcomes that are potentially developed based on specific coaching actions

Coaching actions	Connections	Competence & confidence	Commitment	Cognitive development	Challenge	Enjoyment
• Coach teaches skills in a safe environment, offers individualized feedback, promotes long term involvement	x	X	x	x	x	x
• Coach creates opportunity for MAs to have fun, playfully compete						x
• Coach creates opportunities for MAs to interact socially	X					
• Coach creates opportunities for MAs to develop fitness/health						x
• Coach challenges MAs		x	x	x	x	x
• Coach inspires MAs			x		x	x
• Coach provides intellectual stimulation			x	X	x	
• Total	X	X	x	X	X	X

*Note.* x= low outcome (under 5 instances found); X = high outcome (5 or more instances found)

Outcome of “Character” and coaching action “Coach teaches personal and social assets” were not found and thus not included in this table

The remainder of this section is an assemblage of descriptive quotes that aim to represent the subtheme to which they are associated. The subthemes include Connection, Confidence and Competence, Commitment, Cognitive Development, Challenge and finally Enjoyment; which we added as an outcome to be interpreted as the MAs taking pleasure in activities or general involvement with the skiing group. The MAs did not necessarily need to develop any skills in order to enjoy themselves.

### *Connection*

The coach described facilitating many opportunities that allowed her MAs to develop connections to the sport and to her and one another. She described how she was able to connect with her MAs by interacting socially, and by offering individualized feedback. On one occasion, the coach and her athletes found themselves delving into discussion while at a ski event:

We went inside and were waiting for the results. It took a really long time but it was actually a really nice time, because it was a very informal opportunity to socialize with the athletes [and] to get to know them a little bit more, to get them to know me a little bit more, and to talk about skiing/their skiing in particular.

The coach remained approachable so that she and her athletes could interact socially. On a separate occasion weeks later, the MAs were intrigued to learn about their coach. At the end of the coach's first session back after a vacation, she explained that the athletes were asking her questions about her trip, which led to a fun night of exchanging stories. MAs were also quite vocal about their opportunity to connect at the end of season get-together. The coach said, "last year they hadn't had the closing [party], and that they had appreciated having it this year to be able to say thank you." Essentially, the coach illustrates the usefulness of open dialogue between herself and her MAs.

Another way in which she was able to build a connection with the MAs was through teaching skills in a safe environment, by offering individual feedback and promoting long term involvement. The coach helped the MAs develop connection through a channel of individualized feedback. She described, “When I went up on the chair lift with the athletes I tried to give them individualized feedback, which I think they took well. They seemed to engage in conversation with me when we had the time.” According to the coach, it was often difficult to find the time to meet with every athlete one-on-one throughout the course of a session, but when she had the chance, the MAs appreciated the feedback and the coach felt better connected to them.

### *Confidence and Competence*

On many occasions the coach reflected on actions that we interpreted as developing MAs’ competence and confidence. In particular, the coach was able to teach skills safely, offer individualized feedback, and promote long term involvement, and she was able to challenge her MAs.

In order to instill feelings of confidence and competence in her athletes, the coach often reflected on providing individualized feedback. One-on-one coaching often assisted in promoting safe skill learning as well as long-term sport involvement. For instance, during a race, which involved two runs through the course, the coach took a prime opportunity to coach two of her MAs with individualized feedback:

I went back up the chair lift with a couple of guys who I had watched go down and I talked to them about their skiing. I gave them little tips on how they could help themselves get through the course a little bit faster the next time, or with a little bit more control and speed. They were very thankful and they really agreed with what I was

talking about. We went back to do our second run and both of the individuals I gave feedback to looked a bit stronger on the second run.

In this case, the coach did not necessarily even need to demonstrate her ideas, but by simply explaining some fine-tuning adjustments she was able to encourage confidence, interpreted by their agreement and willingness to use the coach's feedback, and competence, interpreted by their positive change in their performance on the second run.

At a Women's Ski Clinic put on near the end of the season one MA initially felt out of place amongst the other women. However, the coach was able to cater to her specific needs allowing her to feel both competent and confident to enjoy the clinic despite her reservations:

One woman in particular, the weakest of the group, told me she wasn't sure if she really belonged in the group because she wasn't sure if she considered herself to be an intermediate skier. I modified some of the exercises for her so that she could still complete them. Everybody enjoyed it; she even said she enjoyed it a lot.

On more than one occasion the coach was able to assist individuals develop their skills both safely and effectively, and her reflections helped to demonstrate that both confidence and competence were established in her MAs because of giving individual attention when it was called for:

She (a female MA) came in at the beginning of the year and she was very uncomfortable skiing around steeper terrain. She spent a lot of time going very slowly and was very cautious. At one point, we did a drill where she had to drag her poles on the ground as she was skiing, thus creating a separation as her skis came across the hill while her body remained down the hill. For her that was a major breakthrough; it was the first time she

actually felt like she had a little bit of her core muscles engaged. Now she is looking a lot more confident on her skis.

In this particular case, the athlete also mentioned that she wanted to have the same feeling of her core working hard when she was free skiing (outside of lessons). Her confidence and desire to continue to participate in skiing outside of training hours suggests the potential for long-term involvement in the sport, all due to the individualized feedback from the coach.

The coach reflected on how she challenged her MAs with the objective of developing their confidence and competence. That is, in offering a chance for the MAs to step outside their comfort zones, the coach enabled them to have the confidence to push the limits of their abilities and thus develop new competencies. The coach challenged the MAs by modeling high performance skiing and demonstrating high level skills that the MAs were encouraged to follow. As a professional skier, what came easily to the coach, came as a reasonable challenge for the MAs:

We had the athletes try to ski my exact line, basically to force them to have that nice round turn shape and use steering in their turn. That resonated very well with them, you could see some of them doing things with their skis, having the control over their skis that they normally wouldn't have.

When the coach put the MAs in a position that they were unaccustomed to, she was able to really see improvements in the athletes that she may not have necessarily seen without applying an appropriate challenge. Since the MAs had confidence in the abilities of their coach, they could bring about confidence in themselves to perform, or at least attempt the task.

### *Commitment*

Several different coaching actions were found to motivate MAs to commit to the skiing group, or skiing in general; including teaching skills safely, offering individualized feedback, and promoting long term involvement, as well as providing intellectual stimulation, challenging them, and inspiring them.

When the coach created an opportunity for the MAs to develop their skills over a three-day intensive course, she noticed that they “were really working to maintain what they had learned, and integrated it into their skiing.” She reflected that these MAs in particular had made significant progress over the span of three days, which duly encouraged them to continue after its completion.

Furthermore, the coach developed commitment by eliciting a challenge for the MAs to compete. When MAs were given the opportunity to compete in a race setting, they specifically asked whether the coaches would be present. The coach also mentioned that these athletes were not only expecting the coaches to be there, but were also expecting them to compete. The simple presence of the coach evoked a challenge and prompted the MAs to commit to their race participation.

By really breaking down the exercises, and emphasizing both what the women did well and what could be improved, the coach provided intellectual stimulation that encouraged the MAs to return in the future. The coach created commitment in her athletes off the hill, by engaging in video analysis and debrief after the training, developing MAs’ desire to improve and persist in training. She led video analysis of the skiers’ lessons during the Women’s Clinic, which “everybody seemed to appreciate, and almost everyone said they were planning on doing the Master’s program next year.”

Finally, the coach was able to inspire her athletes not only to continue with skiing but to continue being physically active in general:

We also talked about all sort of other sports and things they could get into. Things like yoga, fishing, snowmobiling and snowshoeing. We talked about a wide range of different sports so it was kind of nice to see them being active and enjoying the winter.

By making time to vocalize about a broad spectrum of activities, the coach created an opportunity for MAs to discuss with her, or amongst themselves, different ways to stay active, that perhaps they hadn't previously considered, and the benefits that accompany doing so.

### *Cognitive Development*

The coach described actions that she believed developed an extent of cognitive processing in the MAs. Three themes were prominent in assisting to do so; teaching skills in a safe environment, offering individualized feedback and promoting long term involvement, providing intellectual stimulation, and challenging the MAs.

Regarding teaching skills in a safe environment, the coach was very aware of her surroundings in the environment within which she taught her athletes, and she made sure to share any present risks with the MAs. She discussed that a lot of older skiers may not have been aware of certain safety issues, such as skiing alongside snowboarders:

They don't realize that snowboarders can't see behind them, which means they can't see half the hill when they're going down, so it's really important to stay on the snowboarders' front side as you try to pass them. So, we talked a little about that and they seemed to appreciate that.

Having an experienced coach present to relay details such as these to MAs is imperative in order to run safe sessions. The coach informed her athletes of a potential risk and that way the MAs could both gain knowledge based on their surroundings and continue their practice more safely.

Other ways that the coach encouraged cognitive development was by providing intellectual stimulation; specifically by sharing useful, factual information with her athletes about topics regarding skiing in general, or each individual MA's skiing in particular. There were many instances in which she engaged her athletes in learning via conversation, visual information, or even both simultaneously. Video feedback proved to be very useful for these MAs:

When we went in, they watched the video of themselves as they just came down the steeper pitches doing short radius turns, and they were all very interested. I tried to give each of them a little piece of what they were working on, but [I] also talked to them about some positive things they were doing nicely.

Simply by giving them the opportunity to view their own skiing, the MAs were really able to understand the advice that the coach was giving. The coach and some of her athletes also discussed professional racing as it is viewed on television, and she illustrated the difference between different ski events (e.g., speed vs technical). As a result, she reflected, "somebody mentioned to me that they learned more in this ski group than they have ever [learned before] and they have been skiing their whole lives." The coach was also able to spark the interest of her athletes by educating them on the equipment that they were using. In one particular instance, one skier was having difficulty with his boots, and as the coach proceeded to help him with them, she noticed that more of the other skiers were curious:

Everyone was interested; we had a little group of our athletes standing around and watching us work on the boots... and asking us what we were doing. In every session, I try to educate them a little bit on an aspect and I think they appreciate that.

The coach was able to stimulate the MAs intellectually by sharing information, as well as by being available to answer their questions.

Finally, by challenging the athletes, the coach sought to develop their ability to critically think about skiing:

Yesterday in particular, I ended up asking them a lot of questions; sometimes it was a question of ‘think about this as you’re going down the hill and give me the answer when you get to the bottom’.

Other times, the coach reflected that she gave her athletes something to think about on their way up the chair lift, and then they would discuss at the top. This way, athletes were challenged to come up with an answer on their own, and they were given some time to do so. She expressed that, “they liked that because it got them reflecting on their own movements” and “they seemed to smile and be very engaged with that kind of questioning approach.” By being versatile in her methods of delivery, the coach facilitated each of her athletes’ cognitive development regarding some aspect of the sport.

### *Challenge*

Challenge as an outcome refers to MAs developing an intrinsic sense of wanting to accomplish a skill or task. The coach found that several coaching techniques led to provoking a sense of intrinsic desire to improve including challenging them to partake in tasks on their own, inspiring them to challenge themselves and by providing intellectual stimulation in order to provoke the MAs to think about different skiing techniques. First off, challenging the MAs

served as a coaching action, because the coach challenged her MAs to work on something further without her assistance, on their own time:

I gave them homework; that they should try, in the next week, to work out some of those kinks, work out some of those details, and work out the timing and coordination as they were going through based on what we had discussed. And that was the first time I had left them with a feeling that they had to work something out still before we met again, in order for them to feel comfortable with what we had done.

Therefore, in this circumstance, the coach's action was to challenge the athletes, and the outcome for the MAs that resulted from doing so was, suitably, a personal challenge. By doing so the coach kept her athletes engaged in the sport both physically and mentally.

Another way the coach acted in order to develop challenge in her MAs was by inspiring them. Even when it was unintentional, the coach led her athletes by example, which challenged them to follow suit. She noted that, "they're really quick to tell you that, you know, 'your demonstrations are great' and that as the coach [I am] looking really good when I'm going down the hill, and they want to follow my track." Inspiration developed challenge in the athletes because they were given a visual example of a performance that they could potentially achieve themselves. As a coach, it's one thing to talk about a skill and explain it. In doing so the athletes are left to figure out a potentially new element of skiing on their own; but by giving the MAs a visual example they are better able to understand what the coach is describing and thus feel more challenged to repeat what they've seen.

Additionally, the coach induced a mental challenge in her athletes by helping them to piece together a skill that they had previously done, but not thought about doing in great detail, in order to better understand what worked and what did not.

“We basically deconstructed their pole plant and tried to put it back together again. I found in doing so, it became very apparent that very few of them had never really thought about their pole plant before.”

By thoroughly introducing the MAs to a method that they hadn't previously been exposed to, they were challenged to maintain these newfound techniques, and to continue to think about how to use them.

### *Enjoyment*

Our findings indicate that the coach fostered enjoyment amongst the MAs as an outcome of her coaching actions. Firstly, the coach created an opportunity for her MAs to playfully compete. Secondly, she provided MAs with individual feedback that they could use to get the most out of their individual performance. Thirdly, the coach worked to develop the MAs' health and fitness. Finally, the coach inspired the athletes to find enjoyment in training and skill development.

In anticipation of one of the first official races during the 9-week program, the coach attempted to create an opportunity for her MAs to playfully compete, to get a feel for their emotions going into the event. The coach reflected that this opportunity resulted in “keen and excited” reactions. She continued to gauge their enjoyment levels by “[making] a little joke at the beginning of the evening; everyone seemed to laugh at that so [she] could tell that everybody was feeling really good.” Due to the coach reinforcing the relaxed nature of the environment, the MAs felt as though they were already enjoying themselves before heading into a race, rather than developing any stress or uncertainties that often accompany competition.

Another situation that stands out as a relevant example of the coach creating an opportunity for her athletes to playfully compete was by adding a competition factor to a drill within a lesson:

I took the ones who were doing well at that drill and I actually made it into a little competition to see who could do 15-20 turns and be the highest up the hill. They seemed to really like that; they thought that was a fun little challenge for them so it was nice that we could kind of grade that drill according to ability.

The MAs were thereby able to enjoy participating in light competition amongst their peers. It was rewarding for the MAs in the sense that they could experience a competitive drive in a more recreational setting, allowing them to enjoy competition while still working on their basic skills.

On a separate occasion, the coach reflected that during an Atlantic Masters Association race, her athletes were confiding in her for advice. In this situation, the coach was able to provide the MAs with individual feedback that was helpful to both their performance and overall outlook on the day:

Over the course of the day I had pretty much all of the athletes who were competing come over and ask me for some advice on how they could ski the course to the best of their ability. So, I was talking to them about different tactics and I think they really liked that, and really appreciated having me there.

Having the coach present as a resource at competition came as a pleasure to the athletes, because they were not troubled by trying to figure out their performance issues by themselves.

Additionally, the coach recognized ways that MAs could enjoy themselves outside of the skiing atmosphere, and created an opportunity for the MAs to develop fitness and health in other aspects of sport. During the Women's Clinic, a yoga class was offered after the ski training. This

way, the coach created an opportunity to develop fitness in a way that was new to some, but enjoyable for all participants. She explained, “after the session we went inside and did a group-centered yoga class upstairs; it was challenging but in the end, it was great and everybody really enjoyed it.” Adding yoga to the curriculum was an enjoyable way for this group of MAs to experiment with other aspects of fitness, and without the coach’s organization of this event, these women may not have been exposed to it.

Lastly, the coach inspired her athletes without even interacting with them directly. She explained how, after all the MAs had gone ahead, she and another coach came down the run last, synchronously skiing side-by-side and the athletes were observing from the bottom of the hill. As a response, one athlete said, “you make it look so easy, and you do it with no problems at all; it’s so great to watch you come down.” The MAs were all reportedly “in awe” over their coaches’ demonstration. The MAs valued and enjoyed being able to witness the knowledge and experience of their coaches in action. It was not unusual for the coach to receive feedback from the MAs on her performance, and it was clear that they enjoyed doing so.

Overall, it seemed apparent that some outcomes were fostered in the MAs more commonly than others. Confidence and competence, for instance, occurred as a result of numerous coaching actions whereas character did not appear to whatsoever. As well, enjoyment was seemingly a relevant addition to the assemblage of Côté and Gilbert’s (2009) and Fraser-Thomas et al.’s (2013) athlete outcomes, because it was apparent as an outcome on several different occasions. Additionally, adding *individualized feedback* to Côté and Gilbert’s (2009) original coaching objective, *Teach and assess sport-specific skills in a safe environment for long-term sport involvement*, was appropriate, as this sort of feedback brought about a positive response from the MAs and contributed to many of the investigated outcomes.

## Discussion

The intention of this thesis was to examine the reflections of a coach over the course of a season to understand how she perceived that her actions facilitated potential developmental outcomes for the MAs she coached. In doing so we found that the coach perceived that the MAs responded well to a number of her coaching actions. Some of these were consistent with Callary and colleagues' (2015) findings which established some qualities that Masters Swimmers looked for in a coach; including being capable of challenging, inspiring and intellectually stimulating them. Because the coach was not prompted on the study's theoretical models nor the purpose of our study prior to recording her reflections, it is fair to surmise that the coach's reflections regarding how she perceived athlete outcomes were genuine.

The coach noted several coaching actions, including teaching skills in a safe environment while offering individual feedback that promotes long term involvement, creating opportunities for the MAs to have fun and playfully compete, creating opportunities for the MAs to interact socially, creating opportunities for the MAs to develop health and fitness, challenging the MAs, inspiring them, and providing them with intellectual stimulation. She perceived that those actions were developing certain developmental outcomes, including competence and confidence in her MAs' skiing abilities, connections with others, commitment to staying physically active, developing cognitively, feeling a sense of challenge, and finally enjoyment in the activities. In the context of this study, a 'developmental outcome' is considered a process of learning or becoming over time, whereby the person learns as she/he experiences social situations (Jarvis, 2009), so that the outcomes have the potential to be changing continuously rather than considering them as finalized products. Sport participation, as explained by Baker, Fraser-Thomas, Dionigi and Horton (2009), is promoted in older adults as a way to maintain health and

well-being; and so the maintenance of skills and fitness developed by the MAs over time is the focus, rather than a fixed outcome. The specific outcomes that we discuss have the potential to be very fluid. For example, the coach observed connections in her reflections, which were built amongst the athletes as well as with the coach. Essentially, new relationships were being made amid the MAs that could expand and change over time. Additionally, while the coach's reflections described that she promoted cognitive development in her MAs, we do not suggest that she fully developed the MAs' cognition.

Despite some of the influences that the coach had on her group of MAs, our analysis did not show all of the outcomes and coaching actions that were part of the original frameworks that we were using. The coach did not discuss coaching actions that she perceived influenced the MAs in a way that improved or altered their character attributes. Similarly, the coaching action 'coach teaches personal and social assets' was not observed. Previous research has indicated that MAs are coached in a context of general autonomy, and therefore coaches of MAs do not readily focus on guidance in areas such as responsibility, time management or attendance (Callary et al., 2015; Rathwell, Callary and Young, 2015). This study corroborates with the previous research on coaching MAs, and indicates that coaches of MAs do not necessarily teach life skills that lead to character development, perhaps because MAs are adults whose character development has been shaped over the course of their lives. While sport is an important vehicle for character development and coaching life skills in children and adolescents, this is not necessarily a focus for adults whose motives in taking part in coached sport are not in developing life skills. However, this does not imply that MAs' do not change over the course of their adult life; indeed, learning and development are continuous throughout life (Jarvis, 2006). Learning occurs as a result of an individual transforming their experiences into knowledge, skills, attitudes or

emotions. The outcomes of these experiences can then be incorporated into their life (Jarvis, 2004).

Based on our results, we made minor modifications to Côté and Gilbert's (2009) and Fraser-Thomas and colleagues' (2013) frameworks in order to draw compatibilities from our data. Consistent with Fraser-Thomas et al., but inconsistent with Côté and Gilbert, we kept the outcomes confidence and competence together to make a single outcome. Fraser-Thomas et al. (2013) combined confidence and confidence into one category, which included subthemes that related to one's sense of accomplishment, self-control, and pride in their abilities. Our results showed compatible findings, for in all the quotes regarding these outcomes, the MAs needed to have an intrinsic sense of ability to succeed (confidence) before they could perform a skill or task (competence).

One alteration that we made to the coaching actions in Côté and Gilbert's (2009) original objectives was adding 'individualized feedback' to the action: 'teach and assess sport-specific skills in a safe environment for long-term sport involvement'. Thus, our coaching action was 'coach teaches skills in a safe environment, offers individualized feedback, and promotes long term involvement.' Adding individualized feedback to the original objective was relevant because in our study, one-on-one coaching assisted in promoting safe skill learning as well as long-term sport involvement. The coach would consult with the MAs individually to shed some light on some improvements they could make, and in doing so the MAs had time to ask questions and try to apply the coach's advice to their practice. Individualized feedback is a common finding in research on coaching MAs. Callary and colleagues (2015) also noted that MAs wanted coaches to tailor their communication with the individual MAs. Thus, we feel that the inclusion

of ‘individualized feedback’, while novel to Côté and Gilbert’s coaching objectives, is warranted for coaches working with MAs.

We’ve included the notion of challenge as both an aspect of coaching, as well as a potential athlete outcome because it appeared to be present in both contexts. As a coaching action, it was often as uncomplicated as giving the MAs a new skill to attempt by themselves. For challenge to be considered an outcome however, the coach’s reflections had to indicate that she felt that MAs had an internal sense of determination to achieve a trying activity. Research has shown that in youth athletes, challenging or ‘stretching’ the participants’ abilities is an important developmental key (Baker et al., 2009). Based on our results, the possibility of this element being successful when applied to MAs is also likely.

Enjoyment was linked to a number of coaching objectives including the coach creating opportunities to playfully compete, develop health and fitness, provide individualized feedback and inspire the MAs. Enjoyment was also found overlapping with other athlete outcomes. We noticed that enjoyment indirectly influenced commitment for instance, in that when the MAs appeared to take pleasure in their lessons, they were more likely to stay interested in alpine skiing, or physical activity in general. Young and Medic (2012) discuss how commitment can be enhanced by higher enjoyment, personal investment, social support and involvement opportunities based on the sport commitment model (Scanlan et al., 2013). When an athlete anticipates enjoyable experiences as a result of sport involvement, there are predicted higher levels of commitment (Young and Medic, 2012). Therefore, although enjoyment and commitment were not directly related, this association showed how enjoyment potentially acted as a link between another coaching action and a separate resulting outcome. We recognize that the consideration of enjoyment as a developmental outcome could vary within coaching

contexts. In this particular group of MAs, enjoyment was recognized regularly as an outcome, but with differentiation in sport, age cohort, gender etc., the results could deviate.

### *Limitations*

The limitations of this study revolved primarily around our small participant number. The single case study design allowed us to really delve deeply into the data as it relates to the frameworks, in order to make a novel exploration of coaching MAs. However, future studies could analyze the reflections of numerous MAs, coaches of MAs, and in varying sports. This would help us understand if our results were generalizable to coaches of MAs more broadly. Further, analyzing the perspectives of the MAs regarding the outcomes that they perceived to have learned from their coached context could be beneficial in determining coaching effectiveness.

### *Personal Reflection*

This experience has been particularly meaningful to me for a number of reasons; it has allowed me to develop an interest in an area of sport with which I was unfamiliar, it has expanded my knowledge and capabilities in terms of literature reviews and formal writing, and finally, similar to one of our observed athlete outcomes, I simply enjoyed doing it. First of all, before beginning to read up on coaching expertise, as well as Masters Athletes, I was generally unaware of the two when put in the same context. I later learned that this was likely due to the fact that it has been virtual un-studied until recently. This fact alone encouraged me to want to contribute to research in the same area. Next, by receiving endless productive feedback from both Dr. Callary and Justin MacLellan, and practicing both my formal reading and writing skills I feel as though my literacy has improved significantly since this time last year. Finally, as I

mentioned I genuinely valued the time I spent doing work on my undergrad thesis. Being able to learn about topics that interest me made it easy to stay committed, regardless of the work load. On top of all of that, being able to present the work I had done at the Eastern Canadian Sport and Exercise Psychology Symposium (ECSEPS), in Kingston, Ontario, was incredibly rewarding! I felt quite a sense of accomplishment presenting amongst students and professionals with a great deal of experience in sport psychology. It was also great to get an idea of all the other research that is being done regarding development in sport. Additionally, as an athlete who has recently retired from high performance sport, I would like to be able to envision a future that includes well trained Masters Athlete coaches for myself and countless others who choose to pursue sport for life.

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