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**Leadership development and sport participation: Perceptions of  
selected business managers**

Kerbaugh, Gale Denise, Ed.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1986

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LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND SPORT  
PARTICIPATION: PERCEPTIONS OF  
SELECTED BUSINESS MANAGERS

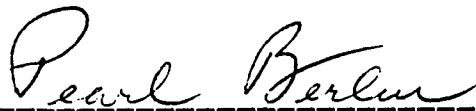
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APPROVAL PAGE

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of selected business managers of their competitive sport experience and whether or not ten events previously identified by researchers of The Center for Creative Leadership were associated with the events. The interview technique was chosen as the research tool to obtain original descriptions of the subjects's sport experiences.

The ten events were organized into four categories. The category of OTHER PEOPLE included role models and values playing out. The OTHER EXPERIENCES category was represented by early sport experiences and purely personal. The category of ASSIGNMENTS included only scope. HARDSHIPS were represented by breaking a rut, demotions/missed promotions, failures and mistakes, traumas, and performance problems.

A semistructured interview format was used. A short questionnaire was devised to obtain demographic information. The fifteen subjects were enrolled in the Master's of Business Administration Executive Program of the Babcock School of Management at Wake Forest University.

The following conclusions were drawn:

1. The ten events identified by CCL researchers had analogies in sport. The subjects collectively perceived all ten events in their competitive sport experiences.

2. Sport was considered by the subjects as a developmental experience which contributed to their leadership talents. The two lessons which contributed the most to leadership development were teamwork and discipline.

3. The present study and The Center for Creative Leadership research found similar lessons learned for each event investigated.

4. Subjects indicated that they learned many valuable lessons from role models in sport. Most often the role models were former coaches.

The business managers participating in the study expressed the view that sport taught lessons which carried over into business. Many subjects indicated a positive comparison between a sport team and a business. The subjects recalled their sport experiences with almost exclusively positive memories. None regretted participating and all found the experience predominantly enjoyable. Perhaps such attitudes explain the finding that presently all subjects except one are regularly physically active.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A prevailing myth about sport today is that it contributes to the "character development" of its participants (Kleiber and Roberts, 1981; Layman, 1970; Snyder, 1980; Stevenson, 1975; Bredemeier, 1984). As yet, there has been little evidence to support the positive influence sport may have on the attainment of traits that are traditionally thought to be part of character such as courage, honesty, and integrity. In fact, some researchers have argued strongly about the contrary effect of sport experiences (Ogilvie and Tutko, 1971).

Despite the lack of documented proof, the myth continues to be accepted by our society. There is considerable authoritative opinion and a traditional point of view that sport is a major vehicle for the socialization process (Greendorfer, 1978; Snyder, 1980; Sage, 1980(a); Stevenson, 1975). Apparently, involvement in an organized and competitive sport can play a role in teaching youngsters valuable and socially desirable characteristics such as competitiveness, teamwork and a desire to win. Clearly, sport is a powerful social institution with organized and competitive opportunities available for children as young as

pre-school age. Personal development is considered to be a primary reason that athletic programs exist (Sabo and Runfola, 1980; Sage, 1980(b); Stevenson, 1975; Snyder, 1980). The idea has been accepted that as an integral part of the public school system, sport certainly has "educational value" for its participants.

Character development is no longer of central concern in human psychological research (Kleiber and Roberts, 1981). We can, however, and in fact do, investigate more specific personal qualities in order to determine their relationship to the sport experience. One personal quality which sport may possibly help develop is leadership (Stevenson, 1975; Hoch, 1972; Cratty, 1968; Exum, 1957). Opportunities for athletes to assume roles of leadership certainly exist within athletic teams.

There has been considerable research concerning leadership and the sport experience. A great deal of the research seems to be devoted to how leaders emerge within teams and who does so (Yukelson, Weinberg, Richardson, and Jackson, 1983; Grusky, 1963; Cratty, 1968; Loy and Sage, 1968; Ball, 1973; Massengale and Farrington, 1977; Chelladurai and Carron, 1977). Other inquiries identify types of leader behavior (Chelladurai and Saleh, 1978 and 1980; Rees, 1980; Case, 1974; Rees, 1983; Danielson, Zelhart and Drake, 1975). There is little research, however, that investigates which particular events in sport contribute to leadership

development and what the participant considers to be "learned" from his/her involvement.

This study was concerned with whether or not the competitive sport experience was associated with the leadership development of selected business managers. More specifically, it was aimed at identifying situations within sport which were thought to have influenced an individual's attainment of leadership qualities. The particular situations within sport that were examined were drawn from events previously investigated at The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in a study entitled The Lessons of Experience (McCall, Lombardo and Morrison, in press). The CCL researchers interviewed high-level business executives and determined sixteen events the subjects' perceived to be influential in developing their own leadership. Ten of these events appear to have analogies in sport. The present research examined these events in sport and sought to determine if the outcomes of the lessons learned from the situations were perceived by the business managers to have contributed to their development of leadership qualities.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of selected business managers of their competitive sport participation and to consider whether or not these were associated with ten events previously identified by researchers affiliated with The Center for Creative

Leadership. The inquiry was broadly concerned with whether sport experiences were perceived by the managers to have contributed to their development of leadership qualities. More specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. Do business managers perceive in their competitive sport backgrounds the events identified by the CCL in their research entitled The Lessons of Experience? If so, which ones?

2. What, if anything, was learned from these events? How do the lessons relate to each event?

3. In what ways, if any, were the events perceived to have contributed to the development of leadership qualities?

4. How do the perceptions of selected events compare with CCL research findings?

5. What other thoughts about the competitive sport experience, i.e., affects and/or behaviors, do business managers recall? Are these associated with leadership? If so, how?

#### Definition of Terms

For purposes of interpretation in the present research, the following definitions were specified:

Competitive sport experience. Active participation on a competitive athletic team at the high school or collegiate level.



Selected business managers. Individuals, with competitive sport background enrolled in the Master of Business Administration Executive Program of the Babcock Graduate School of Management at Wake Forest University, who willingly participate in the study.

Events adapted from the CCL research. The following ten events, found by the CCL study as influential in leadership development, are presented with sport-related definitions within their original categories. The events represent situations that are thought to occur within the sport context. They are not considered to be mutually exclusive of one another.

#### OTHER PEOPLE

Role models. People within the world of sport who have had a profound influence upon the athlete.

Values playing out. An event involving a person(s) acting toward others in a manner which greatly affected the athlete.

#### OTHER EXPERIENCES

Early sport experiences. Events that occurred in one's childhood or adolescent sporting career and subsequently broadened the athlete's perspectives.

Purely personal. A private individual experience in sport which had a lasting effect on the development of the athlete.

#### ASSIGNMENTS

Scope. An increased range of an athlete's responsibilities, most likely given by the coach, which broadened or varied the previous roles.

## HARDSHIPS

Performance problem. A situation which hindered an athlete's performance. It may have existed with a peer, coach, or within the individual.

Breaking a rut. The situation in which an individual altered the course of his/her athletic career or personal performance.

Personal trauma. Crisis experiences in sport which have had an identifiable emotional impact on the athlete.

Demotions/Missed promotions. Failure to attain a particular status or position or the loss of such, i.e., being benched.

Failures and mistakes. A critical error, performance flaw or having not made the most out of a sporting opportunity.

Lessons. That which subjects in the CCL study and the present research perceived to be a learned outcome of the events investigated.

### Underlying Assumptions

The following statements were accepted as given and, therefore, were not tested as a part of the present study.

1. The Lessons of Experience by McCall et al. (in press) at The Center for Creative Leadership was a valid study and, therefore, provided an appropriate point of departure for studying meaningful leader events.

2. In response to interview questions, answers were honest.

3. The interpretations of the researcher were honest, straight-forward statements that were derived directly from

subjects' responses as recorded and the immediate impressions noted after each interview.

### Scope

Fifteen business managers from the Master of Business Administration Executive Program of the Babcock Graduate School of Management at Wake Forest University served as subjects in this study. All interviews were completed in the spring of 1986. The procedures and setting were standardized for all subjects.

### Significance

Sport is a pervasive element in today's society with virtually all persons having the opportunity to participate. It occupies an important and powerful position in our educational system. For sport to be regarded as an educational experience in our society, we need to understand better how people perceive the benefits of their participation. If there are questions as to whether or not scholastic/collegiate sport has a legitimate educational function, the athlete's recognition of what was learned from competitive experience is also important information.

This study contributed descriptive information about the perceived effect sport has on leadership development. Specific situations in sport from which participants claim to have learned valuable lessons were identified. The study extended research carried out at The Center for Creative Leadership.

There also existed an important personal value for the researcher. The study provided an opportunity for her to become involved with persons in the world of business and to engage in thought-provoking discussions of the experiences of managers.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study was conducted to learn whether or not the competitive sport experiences of selected business managers were perceived to have influenced their leadership development. A semi-structured interview was used to determine the perceptions of the managers' own leadership development and of ten specific events identified in prior research by The Center for Creative Leadership.

The review of literature presented here in four major sections was conducted to provide background essential for the study. This chapter summarizes the materials reviewed. The first section presents information about sport participation and its effects on athletes. The second section reports the current status of research on leadership development. The third discussion focuses on the interview technique as a research tool. The study entitled The Lessons of Experience (McCall et al., in press), from which ten events were selected for use in this study, is described in the final part of the chapter.

#### Effects of Sport Participation

Much has been said and written about the effects of competitive sport involvement on its participants. There is a

well-accepted myth that sport contributes to the character development of athletes. Although little documented proof exists, belief in the notion is widespread. Such speculation is associated with many people--authorities, superstars and even everyday performers. Characteristics which may presumably be learned in sport include responsibility, risk taking, and sacrifice (Kleiber and Roberts, 1981). Based on his research, Shifrer (1956) stated that (a) confidence, (b) poise, (c) teamwork, (d) loyalty, and (e) leadership may be learned through sports. Cass (1971) quoted General Douglas MacArthur as strongly supporting athletics as a teacher of (a) humility, (b) courage, (c) strength, (d) pride, and (e) adventurousness. Frost (1973) believed that traits such as determination, cooperativeness, and sportsmanship may be learned through organized competition. Knicker (1974) recognized competition, security, and self-control as values commonly believed to be gained from sport.

Examination of the myth relating sport to character building dates back to at least the 1920's when Tunis wrote, "Let us grant that sport between individuals is a working laboratory for the building of character" (1928, p. 18). What Tunis termed the "Great Sports Myth" held that sport taught its participants self-control and sportsmanship.

Further support for the "Great Sports Myth" has come from such a well-known person as former President Gerald R. Ford (1974). He strongly advocated the character-building

potential of sport and the ultimate importance of winning. Ford believed that "our better athletes today ... are really the vanguard of our young leadership" (p. 23).

In his examination of sport in a capitalistic society, Hoch (1972) focused on the exploitation of sport by powerful and greedy capitalists. Hoch's attack was aimed at a capitalistic society rather than at sport, per se, or at the nation. Hoch credited sport as the most obvious way of training youngsters for the leadership roles in later life.

Coakley (1984) investigated the role of sport in society and questioned whether it was an inspiration or an opiate. There is, he pointed out, a common assumption that sport is a training ground for the development of desirable characteristics. It is thought to prepare young people for participation in society outside of the sport world.

Few studies have been published which report how former athletes perceive their sporting experiences and the effects of such encounters on their individual lives. One of the most well-known studies was done by Shifrer (1956) thirty years ago. Using a mailed questionnaire, he asked seventy-four former high school athletes about their sport experiences. The results showed that sport was perceived to have a generally favorable impact on their development. In varying degrees, a vast majority of the subjects felt that athletics had positively contributed to the following characteristics to a considerable or great degree: (a) self-confidence and

courage (84%), (b) calmness and poise under pressure (88%), (c) cooperation and teamwork (94%), (d) loyalty and school spirit (93%), and (e) leadership (77%). Ninety-two percent of the athletes felt that sport helped them establish friendships to a considerable or great extent. The full sample studied, one hundred percent, enjoyed the practices and games either to a considerable or great extent. Shifrer's findings showed that athletes readily credited sport as a teacher of numerous positive personality traits.

More recently, Zinn (1984) investigated the perceptions of fifty females who were former high school athletes. Using a structured interview with open-ended questions, she found that all fifty described their experiences as fun, exciting and challenging. All would advise younger females to experience sport. Subjects reported that they have continued to participate in physical activities on a regular basis since graduating.

In spite of the above acclaims, there are some individuals who appear to question or even denounce the "Great Sports Myth". In his well-known work, Sports in America, Michener (1976) addressed the popular legend that athletics build character. Although Michener felt that sport had contributed positively to his own character development, he stated, "I am very doubtful that big-time sports ... do much to alter or enhance the character of the young men who participate" (p. 30). Michener rejected the idea that



football had much, if anything, to do with the leadership development or military brilliance of successful admirals and generals.

Ogilvie and Tutko (1971) reported that after eight years of studying the effects of sport, they found no empirical support for the belief that sport builds character. They did not, however, produce any specific data to support their contention. Ogilvie, a psychologist, guarded the confidentiality of the information he obtained in professional counseling interactions. Rather than the building of character, they argued that the ideal athletic personality is a product of the "ruthless selection process" inherent in sport (p. 62). Sport survival and success come only to those who are already "mentally fit" and have dominating personalities.

Kleiber and Roberts (1981) investigated the effect of sport participation on the development of social character of children. They were particularly interested in the development of cooperative and altruistic behaviors. Results provided evidence that sport may have negative effects on the prosocial behavior of males. Although somewhat inconclusive, their findings did not support the belief that sport contributes positively to the character development of its participants.

Vanderzwaag (1972) recognized the common belief that sport builds character and develops positive attitudes among

its participants. Vanderzwaag and Sheehan (1978) argued, however, that any positive values derived from athletic participation are most likely idiosyncratic rather than universal.

Wandzilak (1985) stated that although coaches and physical educators have long considered the development of values a primary objective, there is little evidence that such an objective is achieved through physical activity. Considering the need for accountability and the prevalence of budget cuts within educational programs, "it is important to establish what it is that physical education and athletics are capable of doing" (p. 183). If not, athletic and other physical activity programs will be among the first cut in times of economic stress.

For years educators have justified the existence of sport in the academic world because of its potential for building character. Quoting General George W. Wingate, Caulkins (1932) supported the place of sport in education because athletics teaches "better than anything else" (p. iii) qualities such as determination, self-control, and self-reliance. Wilbur (1932) specified character development as a primary educational objective of athletics. Similarly, Kilpatrick (1932) stated that an educational aim of athletics is a well-integrated, healthy personality. Broudy's (1952) educational philosophy included the thought that sport is a great builder of character. Team sports enhance a sense of fair play, courage,

loyalty and perseverance.

Hughes and Williams (1944) believed that sport provided unique educational opportunities for the athlete's socialization process, setting of standards, and the formation of attitudes. Sport within the academic environment cannot be justified, they argued, on the basis of catharsis or professionalism. "The sole justification for athletics in educational institutions is to make desirable changes in the habits, skills and attitudes of young persons" (p. 64).

Statements by Caulkins, Wilbur, Kilpatrick, and Hughes and Williams refer to competitive sport as it existed fifty years ago. Competitive sport sponsored by educational institutions at that time was certainly not comparable to present day, highly technical competitions with improved performance standards, recruitment of athletes, media attention, increased monetary risk/reward--to name but a few differences.

More recent literature provides a different point of view. Chu (1982) credited the character-building capabilities of sport as the traditional rationale for the existence of athletic programs in education. After investigating the literature, however, he reported finding very little support for "the notion that school sport, or sport for that matter, builds character, that is, imbues a particular set of valued psychological traits" (p. 231). Similarly, Eitzen (1984) questioned whether sport accomplishes any educational goals.

In order to do so, he suggested the need for proper equipment, mandatory participation, and the elimination of all playoffs.

The literature examined indicates that there is a widespread belief that competitive sports foster the development of such desirable personality traits as (a) courage, (b) self-control, (c) confidence, (d) self-reliance, (e) sportsmanship, (f) teamwork, (g) poise, (h) loyalty and (i) leadership. There is, however, little evidence that participation in sport actually enhances the development of such positive characteristics.

#### Current Status of Research on Leadership Development

Leadership is a fascinating topic for study. The term itself suggests such desirable individual characteristics as charisma, power, assertiveness, and inspiration. Leadership is a relatively new subject of scientific research; it did not receive serious attention until the early part of the present century. Suffering from several of the same problems besetting other areas of psychological research, leadership studies have yet to answer crucial questions concerning if, and how, individuals lead others.

The following discussion is concerned with research about leadership development. It is organized in three sections: (a) leadership theory, (b) sport as a teacher of leadership, and (c) centrality within sport teams.

## Leadership Theory

Initial efforts to study leadership were directed at the search for traits which would differentiate leaders from followers. It was assumed that by studying established leaders, a prototype of the ideal leader possessing certain critical traits would emerge. Such a line of thought became known as the "Great Man Theory" because of the assumption that some individuals are born having particular traits necessary for leading others. It was also assumed that mankind depended upon the personal accomplishments of outstanding men. Research failed to support the theory. In 1972 Cribbin identified 17,000 one-word descriptors of leaders. His findings pointed out that the "Great Man Theory" did not adequately consider leaders' behaviors. Nor was there any consideration of the situation in which the leader functions.

The "Great Man Theory" slowly gave way during the 1940s to theorists who focused on the actual behaviors of the leaders as they carried out their responsibilities. The behavioral approach was overwhelmingly dominated by two projects beginning in the late 1940s commonly referred to as the Ohio State Studies and the Michigan Studies. Both research projects were concerned with identifying behaviors universally displayed by leaders. The most important development from the Ohio State Studies was the eventual identification of two major dimensions of leader behavior: consideration and initiating structure (Halpin and Winer,

1957). Meanwhile, studies at the University of Michigan yielded comparable results. Researchers found two similar dimensions of leader behavior: employee orientation and production orientation (Katz, Maccoby and Morse, 1950). The most important contribution of these two projects was defining and describing leaders' behaviors and roles (Carron, 1980).

The behavioral leadership theorists did not account for the fact that leadership behaviors could vary across different situations. More recently, situational theories have become increasingly popular in leadership research. They suggest that a leader's effectiveness depends on situational variables. In a relatively early situational trait approach, Fiedler (1967) proposed the Contingency Theory which considered the interaction of three variables: leader-member relations, position power, and task structure. It involved the use of the Least Preferred Coworker, a unique measure of one's style of interaction. Fiedler set forth a complex theory based on the premise that a leader's effectiveness depended upon his/her style of interaction with subordinates and also on the favorableness of the situation.

The situational behavior view accounted for differences in behaviors across various situations. One of the most well-known models of the situational behavior school of thought is Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Theory (1977). Their theory is concerned with two types of leader behavior, task behavior and relationship behavior, and one situational

variable, follower maturity. The Situational Theory prescribes that as subordinate maturity increases toward a moderate level, the leader's relationship-oriented behavior should increase and task-oriented behavior should decrease. As subordinate maturity increases beyond the moderate level, the leader should decrease relationship-oriented behavior and continue to decrease task-oriented behavior.

Another well-known situational behavior model is House's Path-Goal Theory (1971) which focused on the needs, goals and situations of subordinates. House viewed the leadership role as a supplemental one aimed at providing the coaching and guidance necessary to enhance the subordinate's motivation and satisfaction. The subordinate characteristics thought to be most important were personality and ability.

An increasing number of researchers have tried to discover specifically what managers do in their jobs and how their time is spent. Stewart (1968) reviewed research findings and revealed that (a) managers spend a great deal of time with other people, (b) have episodic jobs, (c) have horizontal as well as vertical contacts, and (d) primarily communicate verbally.

Mintzberg (1973) found through direct observation that the manager's job was characterized by fragmentation, brevity and a relentless pace. He developed a set of ten managerial roles which included all of the activities observed. The interpersonal behavior roles were that of figurehead, leader

and liaison. The information-processing behavior roles were monitor, disseminator and spokesman. The decision-making behavior roles were entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator.

Cribbin's (1972) formal view of a manager's job included the following tasks: (a) plan, (b) organize, (c) staff, (d) direct, (e) coordinate, (f) gain cooperation, (g) control, (h) review and evaluate, (i) lead, and (j) budget. Admitting that such a listing suffered greatly from oversimplification, he also presented an informal view of the manager's job. Thus, he acknowledged the following tasks: (a) work to implement, (b) endeavor to be sensitive, (c) negotiate, (d) cultivate, (e) respond, (f) oversee, (g) be alert, (h) represent, (i) try to remain his own man, and (j) attempt to cope.

Lombardo (1978) considered the managerial job a reactive one. "Managers spend their days assimilating, sifting, and responding to fragmented, varied, and brief inputs" (p. 2). He summarized what is known about leadership in four points. First, the relationship between consideration/initiating structure and leadership effectiveness is not clear or simple. Second, the relationship between leadership and various behaviors exists only in specific situations. Third, leadership research has produced "laundry lists of traits, personality and behavioral variables" (p. 4), from which little can be determined. And fourth, some of the most interesting findings in leadership research pertain to exactly



what managers do during the day. Lombardo's comments seem to be appropriate at the present time insofar as the status of leadership theory is considered.

### Sport as a Teacher of Leadership

Harragan (1977) offered the opinion that competitive sport was an invaluable experience for anyone wanting to enter the business world. "The traditional boys' games ... are training grounds for life, preparation for adult imperatives of working with others, practical education for the discipline of business" (p. 73). She also pointed out that corporate structure descended directly from the military; however, corporate functions and operations are specifically related to team sport. In addition, Harragan indicated that female college graduates without sport experience are at an immediate disadvantage to individuals who have played sport, particularly those who played football. According to the author, the specific lessons taught by sport include (a) teamwork and cooperation, (b) authority, (c) camaraderie, (d) self-sacrifice, (e) competition, (f) self-criticism, and (g) sportsmanship. Harragan made the connection between the business world and sport by saying, "the principles of team play are among the most important unwritten rules in business" (p. 92).

Waller (1932) stated that athletes serve a very important school function. He expressed the view that they assist the faculty as controllers of social order. "Athletes ... are the

natural leaders, and they are leaders who can be controlled and manipulated through the medium of athletics" (p. 116).

Early investigations in leadership development through physical education primarily involved authoritarian leadership, according to Exum (1957). Because of the predominance of authoritarian style, he specifically investigated democratic leadership qualities and determined that its components were (a) personal involvement, (b) individual worth, (c) field relations or climate, (d) guided group interactions, (e) goal-centered activity, and (f) shared responsibilities. Exum concluded that physical education activities have educational potential for the development of democratic leadership qualities.

Hennig and Jardim (1977) reported that males and females approach the working world with entirely different attitudes. One important reason accounting for the difference, they alleged, is sport. Males learn and internalize valuable concepts such as (a) teamwork, (b) winning and losing, (c) competition, (d) hard work, (e) cooperation, (f) perseverance, and (g) a drive to win. The suggestion is that females do not learn the concepts because of their limited participation in sport. All of these lessons enhance the development of skills necessary for corporate management. Moreover, sport causes males to view the world as it is in business--a world of winning and losing, according to Hennig and Jardim.

Williams (1977) stated that learning sport strategies allows one to understand corporate thinking. "The male achievement model that has had the biggest influence on the business world is sports" (p. 47). Men, claimed Williams, are motivated by the thrill of competition. Accordingly, the desire to win is the primary motivator and source of energy behind the capitalistic way of American life, and sport teaches this desire.

The high number of top corporate executives who had competitive sport experience was reported by Byrne (1985). Former varsity athletes occupy the chief executive office at corporations such as IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Phillips Petroleum, Goodyear Tire and Rubber, Heinz, Mesa Petroleum, Phelps Dodge, and G.D. Searle. "In fact, it's hard to find a single major corporation in America that lacks a former jock in the executive suite" (p. 198). Byrne indicated that these top executives overwhelmingly credited sport as a major contributor to the development of their career skills. The lessons they learned in sport were (a) teamwork, (b) humility, (c) poise, (d) outgoingness, (e) living with defeat, (f) the desire to win, (g) risk-taking, and (h) the self-sacrifice necessary to win. He further speculated that individuals without sport experience, particularly women, are at a definite disadvantage within the corporate structure, according to Byrne's findings.

### Centrality Within Sport Teams

The issue of centrality within sport teams has received increasing attention by researchers. Centrality is a measure of the strategical location of a given position in relation to others in the pattern (Mulder, 1963). Central positions are closer to all others than peripheral ones. Grusky (1963) defined three dimensions of formal organizational structure which affect centrality: spatial location, nature of task, and frequency of interaction.

Chelladurai and Carron (1977) developed a model of centrality based on the two dimensions of propinquity and task dependence. Propinquity was concerned with the visibility of the position by others and how much observation of the on-going action the position allowed its occupant. Task dependence referred to the degree of performance interaction with the others involved. Examining data from previous baseball studies, they found support for the model. For example, catchers were found to be considerably high in both propinquity and task dependence. At a moderate to high level, the catchers were followed by the shortstops, first basemen, third basemen and second basemen. At low to moderate levels were the center fielder and, finally, the left and right fielders. Following the catchers, the infielders clearly fell into a more moderate level and the outfielders into a lower level of propinquity and task dependence.

Grusky (1963) hypothesized that high interactors are

chosen for executive positions more often than low interactors. Using baseball as the setting, he defined high interactors as catchers/infielders and low interactors as pitchers/outfielders. Data gathered from almost thirty years of professional baseball revealed that 76.9% of all managers were from positions of high interaction; only 23.1% had occupied positions of low interaction.

Loy and Sage (1970) found that fourteen out of fifteen captains and co-captains of interscholastic baseball teams were high interactors (catchers and infielders). In addition, the high interactors were perceived as better liked than low interactors.

Massengale and Farrington (1977) studied over one hundred press guides from NCAA Division I football teams. They found that 65% of head coaches, 63% of assistant head coaches and 49% of assistant coaches occupied central playing positions in their prior competitive years. They concluded that experience at a central playing position increased the likelihood of becoming a head coach.

Primary positions were defined by Ball (1973) as those with the tasks of basic achievement and realization of goals. Support positions were considered only as assisting in the goal attainment. Ball found that 70.6% of professional football coaches occupied primary playing positions in college while only 29.3% participated in supporting positions.

In sum, researchers have found some empirical support for the relationship between leadership and centrality in sport. Centrality of position may be associated with leadership status on a team as well as the emergence of coaches as leaders. Whether or not centrality carries over to leadership in business cannot be inferred from present information.

### The Interview as a Research Tool

Phenomenological methodologies purportedly allow the researcher to enter the other person's perspective. They have the capability of revealing thoughts and feelings not directly observable. The interview is one such phenomenological methodology. It often yields descriptive data and is intended to discover what one is thinking without forcing thoughts to fit into preconceived categories. "The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms" (Patton, 1980, p, 205). It is assumed that the subject's perspective is meaningful and known to him/her.

An interview is a type of vocal questionnaire (McMillan and Schumacher, 1984) and also a conversation with a purpose (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Kahn and Cannell, 1957). Thomas and Nelson (1985) reported that an interview is similar to a questionnaire in terms of preparation, but that an interview is more valid and reliable. Clarke and Clarke (1970) also referred to the interview as an oral questionnaire, but added that it tended to benefit from a greater rate of return.

The interview is a "specialized pattern of verbal interaction--initiated for a specific purpose, and focused on some specific content area, with consequent elimination of extraneous material" (Kahn and Cannell, 1957, p. 16). As an interaction process, both the interviewer and interviewee contribute significantly to the pattern of communication. The interviewer should be aware of the interviewee's background, needs, goals, motives and experiences in order to interpret his/her responses. These aspects relate to the perceptions through which external events are internalized into a person's psychological field.

Although the interview has been recognized to be a direct, ubiquitous method of obtaining information, only relatively recently, since the growth in popularity of naturalistic inquiry, has it been included in scientific research. There are numerous advantages for such a direct means of communication. Perhaps the most important advantages of the interview are its flexibility, adaptability, and versatility (Kerlinger, 1973; McMillan and Schumacher, 1984; Thomas and Nelson, 1985). For example, the investigator may change the course of the interview whenever necessary.

The interviewer may probe, follow up, clarify and elaborate in order to obtain additional information (McMillan and Schumacher, 1984; Clarke and Clarke, 1970; Van Dalen, 1973). Moreover, the technique can produce a greater amount of information than the questionnaire particularly if the

topic is of a personal nature. If the interviewer builds a strong rapport with the respondent, the latter may feel enough confidence and trust to speak candidly.

Another way the interviewer obtains information not available from use of the questionnaire is through nonverbal behavior (Van Dalen, 1973; McMillan and Schumacher, 1984; Thomas and Nelson, 1985). Voice tones, facial expressions and bodily movements can reveal a great deal about an individual's feelings and emotions. They may also give the interviewer an indication of whether or not the person is telling the truth.

Well-conducted interviews establish rapport between the individuals involved (Clarke and Clarke, 1970). They permit the interviewer to encourage, motivate and support the respondent. Compared with the questionnaire, the interview also receives a greater rate of return from the subjects (McMillan and Schumacher, 1984; Thomas and Nelson, 1985; Clarke and Clarke, 1970).

It has been readily acknowledged that the interview is a unique research tool because it yields very personal and subjective information. This characteristic is one of its most valuable assets; however, it can also be the interview's biggest disadvantage. If used improperly, this type of tool used to collect data is highly susceptible to researcher bias (Clarke and Clarke, 1970; McMillan and Schumacher, 1984; Van Dalen, 1973; Borg and Gall, 1979). For example, the interviewer's personality, knowledge, expectations, language



and nonverbal cues may greatly affect the respondent's choice of answers. The obtained responses may also be influenced by the interviewer's age, race, sex, religion, ethnic background, and social class. In addition, the respondent may be influenced by the investigator's fatigue, boredom and communication skills. Therefore, the interviewer must make efforts not to let personal biases enter the picture. Some of this risk can be lessened if the investigator educates himself/herself in interviewing skills, devotes practice time to it, and develops a good rapport with the respondent.

Other disadvantages of the interview process are the time and money needed to conduct the exchange (Kerlinger, 1973; McMillan and Schumacher, 1984). It is a time-consuming technique particularly when highly personal information is desired. The interview can also be a costly procedure since it requires the researcher to meet personally with all of the subjects.

Tuckman (1978) warned researchers to be aware of respondents attempting to show themselves in a good light. This is a problem particularly when the researcher is not verifying the subjects' perceptions through direct observation. He suggested that interviewers be careful if subjects appear to be trying to figure out what type of answer is desirable. Tuckman also instructed investigators to be aware of whether or not a question may ask for information which the respondent does not have.

The labeling of types of interviews varies considerably from one researcher to another; however, they are most often classified by the degree of structure involved. One of the most commonly used classification systems identifies two forms of interviews: the structured and unstructured interviews (Van Dalen, 1973; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Kerlinger, 1973; McMillan and Schumacher, 1984). Another commonly used classification is that of the standardized and nonstandardized interviews (Kerlinger, 1973; Richardson, Dohrenwend and Klein, 1965). Structured or standardized interviews are sometimes considered more scientific in nature. Problems are defined and questions are devised prior to the interview. The format is rigid, formal and uniform. Responses tend to be limited frequently requiring the interviewee to choose from among a set of answers. Unstructured or nonstandardized interviews are considerably more flexible imposing fewer restrictions on responses. The format may change at any point to accommodate various types of situations or subjects. Unstructured interviews utilize no schedule or established guideline. These types of depth interviews are used more often for exploratory research or in clinical situations.

McMillan and Schumacher (1984) identified an intermediate category called the semistructured interview. It is characterized by an open-ended question which has specific intentions but allows the subject great freedom of response. No preconceived categories for answers exist.

Benjamin (1981) discussed two types of interviews. The interviewee-initiated approach is similar to the phenomenological, unstructured, clinical approach. The interviewer-initiated approach is closely related to the standardized, structured approach in which the investigator is seeking specific information.

Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1956) revealed four distinguishing characteristics of the focused interview. First, all individuals are associated with a particular situation. Second, a content or situational analysis is conducted to determine significant elements, patterns or structures of the situation in question. Third, the interview guide is constructed based on the analysis. Fourth, the interview centers on the subjective experiences of individuals to determine their definitions of the situations.

Merton, Fiske and Kendall identified the following four criteria of the effective focused interview: (a) range, (b) specificity, (c) depth and (d) personal context. Range is the "extent of relevant data provided" by the session (p. 41). Interviewers should attempt to maximize the range of relevant responses given by the subjects. Specificity involves reducing the gap between the respondents' perceptions and reports of situations. Questions must be sufficiently explicit to allow the individuals to indicate significant aspects of the situation and also to associate particular responses with them. Depth necessitates "reports of affective

responses which are elaborated considerably beyond limited, one-dimensional reports of 'positive' or 'negative', 'favorable' or 'unfavorable' responses" (p. 95). It is the interviewer's responsibility according to Merton, Fiske and Kendall to maximize the degree of self-revelation with which the respondents speak of their experiences. The personal context of an individual's responses depends on his/her attitudes, values, social status, and roles. It is imperative that the interviewer gain knowledge of the experiential nature of the responses. The interviewer must understand what the subject brings with him/her to the discussion if it is to be fruitful.

Richardson, Dohrenwend and Klein (1965) established three criteria of a good interview. The degree of respondent participation, they alleged, is directly related to the quality of the information received. That is to say, the interviewer will receive higher quality answers if the subject participates to a great degree. Characteristics of responses which are desired in all types of interviews include (a) validity, (b) relevance to the research question(s), (c) specificity and clarity for ease of interpretation, and (d) complete coverage of the full range of information. Characteristics of responses which are desired in certain types of interviews are depth, sufficient length of answers, and the existence of unanticipated responses.

An interesting and unique approach which is relevant to the present study was presented by Dexter (1970) in the form of the elite interview. The elite or specialized interview is a technique recommended for use with persons in important, prominent positions who warrant "VIP" treatment. It tends to be used with influential, eminent and well-informed individuals. Dexter's discussion underscored the importance of fitting the interview technique to the individual.

The elite approach stresses the respondent's definition of a situation. It allows him/her considerable freedom to determine what is and is not relevant. Whereas the focused interview requires the investigator to define the problems and questions, the elite approach allows the respondent to contribute significantly to this process. It is characterized by a very conversational nature rather than a highly structured series of questions.

Obviously, the development of the interview schedule and also the attainment of effective skills in conducting the exchange between the writer and subjects posed a serious challenge to carrying out the present study. To this end, the literature cited above was most helpful.

#### The Lessons of Experience

In 1982, at The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Greensboro, North Carolina, research about leadership was initiated by Morgan W. McCall, Jr., Michael M. Lombardo, and Ann M. Morrison. The effort was undertaken to help

corporations understand how to prepare leadership talent for the complexities and uncertainties of the working world. The research was predicated on the idea that experiences have the capacity to teach and, moreover, varied types of experiences teach different things. The study became known as The Lessons of Experience.

McCall et al. (in press) recognized that they first needed to identify factors which differentiated successful executives from those who were less successful. Nineteen individuals from three Fortune 100 corporations were originally designated as subjects in their initial study. Extensive interviews were conducted with each of the individuals. The number of subjects then grew to forty-one. Approximately half of the total number reached the top ten or twelve positions in their respective corporations. The other half reached high levels before they were derailed for various reasons. It was found the two groups possessed remarkably similar characteristics. Yet, the study revealed some distinctions. The successful executives had more composure when dealing with stress and adversity. Successful executives were also able to work and get along with more diverse kinds of people. Moreover, successful executives were forced to face mistakes and learned from them better than the unsuccessful executives. McCall and Lombardo (1983) acknowledged that derailment can result from a manager failing to adapt when situational changes occur. In order to succeed,

it was clear that managers must be able to adjust to environmental changes.

Research about adult development revealed that critical life events may initiate change within an individual. Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) defined marker events as occurrences which have a "notable impact upon a person's life" (p. 54). Examples of such occasions include illness, marriage, divorce and the birth or death of loved ones. Levinson et al. (1978) noted that marker events require adaptation in that they change one's life situation and require the individual to cope with the resulting uncertainty. According to Levinson and his associates, changes occurring in one's personality or in relationships with others are a result of the adaptation process.

Knox (1977) indicated that the life of an adult is marked by trends of stability and change. Such trends include the family, the work situation, and the community life as well as changes in condition, personality and learning that may affect one's performance or behavior. Knox reported that individual developmental trends are influenced by historical factors. Moreover, one's development in a work situation is affected by the nature of the working environment around him/her. Knox emphasized that "major change events, such as the onset of parenthood, a move to a new community, and occupational retirement, tend to influence not only performance but also condition, personality, and learning activities" (p. 552).

Specific "life events" (p. 368) are more and more important in understanding life-span development theory (Brim and Ryff, 1980). Such critical events include combat, entering school, marriage, parenthood, widowhood, and migrations. Life is "patterned by major social events that are customary in a given society" (p. 368). Brim and Ryff found that changes can result from biological, social and physical events such as puberty or marriage. An individual can also undergo psychological changes from events such as a religious experience or midlife crisis.

The research of Levinson et al. (1978), Knox, and Brim and Ryff pointed out the importance of critical events in an individual's life from which significant personal changes may result. Such a point of view was clearly consistent with the ideas of McCall and his associates about leadership. Davies and Easterby-Smith (1984) acknowledged that in the last decade there has been an increasing interest in what and how managers learn from everyday work experiences. They indicated that such an interest developed from skepticism concerning the value of formal management training.

Davies and Easterby-Smith (1984) interviewed middle- and upper-level managers regarding their personal developmental experiences. According to the subjects, learning involved products of training and knowledge and tended to be viewed on a short-term basis. Development, on the other hand, resulted from acquiring greater competence and was seen as more of a



long-term experience.

The findings of Davies and Easterby-Smith (1984) revealed that development occurred both between different jobs and within an existing job. They concluded that experience is a key to the development of managers. Some types of experiences provided more effective development than others. The research indicated that managers developed primarily through exposure to novel situations and problems. In such situations, the manager's so-called available behaviors tended to be inadequate and he/she was required to find new ways to deal with the situation. The researchers emphasized the necessity of the "developing culture" (p. 181) within organizations, in which reward systems are flexible and provide support for those attempting to develop new alternatives. Of the managers who reported developmental experiences, approximately half believed that they had benefited from a lengthy relationship with another manager who acted as a mentor.

Davies and Easterby-Smith (1984) stated that "there is not a great deal of research into the learning and developmental processes of managers within the context of their normal work" (p. 170). Research is particularly lacking with regard to long-term studies of individual development. Despite these problems, they strongly encouraged exposing managers to a certain amount of ambiguity and novelty to enhance development.

With respect to a scholarly body of knowledge underlying the acquisition of leadership talents and how such traits relate to success in business, McCauley (1986) found "no systematic body of research focused on what experiences or events may be important in managers' careers" (p. 2). The vast majority of research has centered around the end product, such as what a successful manager is like, rather than the processes by which he/she became a business leader. McCauley further addressed the importance of understanding what factors cause managers to change. She seemed convinced that the nature of managerial work is such that change is necessary in order for one to climb the corporate ladder. Moreover, an executive's ability to continually grow, particularly in terms of the development of leadership characteristics, is important to success. It is fitting, therefore, that McCall and his associates directed their efforts to studying experience, that is, the specific events in one's life that seem to impact on the ability to change and grow in managerial stature.

#### Research Strategy

McCall et al. (in press) continued to question what caused some individuals to be more successful. Recognizing that adults tend to undergo the most significant changes following major incidents, they next sought to determine what kinds of events changed the executives' lives.

The preference for studying high level management led the researchers to identify executives and individuals thought to

be in line for the highest positions in three large American corporations. McCall and his colleagues depended on subjects and key individuals inside the corporations to designate those persons destined for the top jobs. Such individuals became subjects of their next study. A total of seventy-nine individuals participated in the investigation. The average subject was forty-seven years old, had a twenty-five year career, earned a six-figure salary, and was a candidate for one of the company's top ten jobs. Most already occupied one of the top hundred positions. All subjects were white and only one was female.

The researchers conducted interviews that averaged just slightly over two hours in duration. Interview questions were sent prior to the interview to allow subjects to formulate their responses. According to McCall et al. (in press), most of the managers prepared notes, enjoyed the opportunity to share some of their experiences, and were genuinely interested in the results of the study.

Interview questions were developed to reveal subjects' (a) greatest triumphs and worst defeats, (b) best mentors and most difficult superiors, and (c) greatest challenges and worst mistakes. The initial and most productive question asked of the executives was about the important events that led to lasting changes in their styles of management.

## Results

The researchers generated 286 key events and 529 lessons from the primary question alone according to the investigators' interpretations. The responses became the focus of the study. Events were grouped into 16 types. Thirty-two groups of lessons were developed. Responses to the twenty-four questions from the questionnaire were similarly analyzed. It was felt that the latter responses added detail and depth to the key events already specified.

McCall et al. (in press) further classified the 16 types of events into four broad categories (see Chapter I, Definition of Terms, page 5). The four categories were designated as (a) assignments, (b) hardships, (c) other people, and (d) other experiences. Within assignments were the following specific events: (a) fix it/turn it around, (b) project/task force, (c) starting from scratch, (d) scope, and (e) line to staff. Hardships included (a) subordinate performance problem, (b) breaking a rut, (c) personal traumas, (d) demotions/missed promotions/lousy jobs, and (e) business failures and mistakes. Other people included (a) role models and (b) values playing out. Other experiences included (a) coursework, (b) first supervision, (c) early work experiences and (d) purely personal.

Figure 1 identifies categories and events from The Lessons of Experience (McCall et al., in press). Ten of these events were judged by the present investigator to have

## OTHER PEOPLE

- Role models\*
- Values playing out\*

## OTHER EXPERIENCES

- Coursework
- Early work experiences\*
- First supervision
- Purely personal\*

## ASSIGNMENTS

- Fix-it/Turn it around
- Project/Task force
- Starting from scratch
- Scope\*
- Line to staff

## HARDSHIPS

- Subordinate performance problem\*
- Breaking a rut\*
- Personal traumas\*
- Demotions/Missed promotions/Lousy jobs\*
- Business failures and mistakes\*

\* indicates event studied in the present research

Figure 1. Categories of events from The Lessons of Experience (McCall, Lombardo and Morrison, in press).

analogies in sport. They are discussed below.

Scope referred to a change in role which broadened one's perspectives. It taught lessons such as (a) personal realizations, (b) broadened management perspectives, (c) interpersonal skills, and (d) management problem-solving skills. Subordinate performance problem was designated for events that required the manager to confront the subordinate who was not performing adequately. It taught the managers how to deal decisively with confrontation, how to maintain the subordinate's dignity, and was associated with lessons concerning whether to develop the subordinates or release them. Breaking a rut involved altering the course of one's career. According to the principal investigators, it taught the necessity of managers' controlling their own destinies and provided other primarily manager-specific lessons.

Personal traumas were events that required the managers to deal with a crisis that left a significant emotional impact. The lesson themes, as they were referred to by the researchers, were (a) reevaluating priorities, (b) humility/mortality, (c) personal fortitude, and (d) how to treat other individuals humanely. Demotions/Missed promotions/Lousy jobs pertained to mismatches of job and person or failure to attain valued positions. These events taught managers the personal lessons of coping, persistence, self-reliance and sometimes led to reevaluation of goals and needs. Business failures and mistakes included conflicts,

deals that were lost, and missed opportunities. Managers learned to consider others before making decisions.

Role models were designated as individuals who had a major influence on the executives and primarily taught them values through observation. Role models also taught the managers how to delegate responsibility and how to deal more effectively with subordinates through trust, support and recognition. Values playing out was the category of events that involved clearly remembered incidents in which the treatment of a person (or persons) made a vivid impression on the managers. Lessons included such themes as broadened perspectives as a result of utilizing new management techniques, treating individuals with respect, and adjusting to and succeeding within corporate politics.

Early work experiences were compiled from events occurring previously in the managers' careers in nonmanagement positions. The events were considered to have taught self-confidence, the ability to deal with adversity, and broadened perspectives. Purely personal events were developmental experiences which occurred outside the work environment. Lesson themes for the category included (a) dealing with flak, (b) going beyond limitations, (c) values and ethical standards, and (d) broadened perspectives.

McCall et al. (in press) found that most learning did not occur in an orderly, progressive fashion. Rather, it proceeded somewhat chaotically depending on the individuals'

experiences, ability to learn from such experiences, and the qualities the individual brought to the situation. Luck, it was found, also plays a role in the learning process particularly with regard to the chance timing of experiences.

The lessons taught by events categorized as ASSIGNMENTS primarily related to (a) business and technical knowledge, (b) managing relationships, (c) coping, and (d) problem-solving. OTHER PEOPLE provided most of the lessons of human values, managing and directing people, and motivating individuals. Lessons in humility, self-perspective and how to treat others were associated with events classified as HARDSHIPS. Events grouped as OTHER EXPERIENCES also taught lessons in (a) self-perspective, (b) how to manage others, (c) going beyond limitations, and (d) dealing with adverse conditions. (See Figure 1, page 37.)

In order to conduct follow-up studies, the principal investigators took the first question concerning key events and lessons and developed a survey form. To verify their findings, they sent the survey to 318 successful executives which comprised a much more diverse group than those participating in the original study. Results supported the previous findings and showed that the categories of events and lessons were applicable to various groups.

The findings of McCall et al. (in press) struck an important note in the writer's awareness of leadership research. Moreover, the specific methodology used, that is,



the interview as a data collection tool and the specific classification scheme of events and lessons suggested the strategy could be applied to leaders who had engaged in competitive sport. It is, then, the CCL research that provided events that were systematically examined in the present research.

## CHAPTER III

### PROCEDURES

This study was designed to determine the perceptions of selected business managers of their competitive sport participation and how the sport-related events may have contributed to their leadership development. The research strategy employed was to obtain detailed first-hand accounts of specific events which the subjects experienced in sport. These were suggested by prior research conducted by McCall et al. (in press). The interview technique was selected as the data collection tool to acquire such information.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the procedures used in the study and the steps taken to analyze the data. More specifically, this chapter discusses the instrumentation, pilot study, selection of the subjects, collection of the data, and the preparation of the data for analysis.

#### Instrumentation

The data for this study were original accounts of particular events which subjects directly experienced in sport. Subjects recalled their sport involvement during college and high school years. Although 10 of the 13 questions were predetermined by the events, unforced information, e.g., narrative that does not fit into

prearranged response categories, was sought. Therefore, the data collection technique that was utilized was one that granted freedom of response. A semistructured interview with standard questions and completely unstructured and unforced responses provided information about the subjects' perceptions.

The interview schedule was developed directly from The Lessons of Experience (McCall et al. in press), a study conducted at The Center for Creative Leadership. Appropriate permission was obtained from the Center. McCall et al. (in press) list of sixteen events found to have contributed to the development of the subjects served as the basis for the interviews conducted in the present study. Refer to Figure 1, page 37. However, only ten of these events were used in here. The ten events that were selected from the original set were those which were arbitrarily associated with the sport situation. For example, according to the researcher's experience, there seemed to be no analogy from the business environment to the competitive sport situation for an event such as coursework. On the other hand, scope could be regarded as a change in responsibilities which result in a broadened role. The researcher, therefore, judged that scope could be studied further. In effect, then, the events were selected on the basis of the researcher's ability to place them in sport situations.

In the ASSIGNMENTS category, only scope had analogies in sport. From the HARDSHIP category, all five events were selected: (a) performance problem, (b) breaking a rut, (c) personal trauma, (d) demotions/missed promotions, and (e) failures and mistakes. The two events in the category of the OTHER PEOPLE were role models and values playing out and both were included. In the OTHER EXPERIENCES category, the investigator selected early work experiences and purely personal. McCall et al. (in press) made no attempt to "load" the categories with any particular number of events. No attempt was made in the present study to "load" the four categories or have an even number of events for each one. Rather, judgments about sport-related events were made based on the researcher's own experiences as a player and coach. As a result, one category contained five events and one contained but a single event.

The interview schedule was devised considering the problem under investigation as stated and the ten events. It was designed to be completed within a one-hour time frame. A standardized statement describing the purpose of the project was developed for use at the outset of the interchange. Then the interview began with a very broad question concerning the type of memories the subject had about his sport career. The question was intended to indicate the subjects' overall feelings about his athletic participation.

Following the first question, each of the ten selected events that may have contributed to subjects' leadership development were probed. The ten questions were arranged so that the items seeking information that was relatively easy to discuss were at the beginning. An example of an easy question is one about role models. Questions about more personal and/or emotional information, such as traumas and mistakes/failures, were placed later in the interview schedule.

The interview closed with two broad summarizing types of questions. Subjects were asked about the most important lesson learned in sport and whether or not they felt the lesson was specific to competitive sport experience. The most important lesson contributing to their leadership development was also explored. Finally, a question which requested additional comments was added to the end of the interview schedule.

Three trial sessions, one purpose of which was to judge the appropriateness and clarity of the schedule, were conducted. The subjects of the trials were a young businessman, a teacher, and a high-ranking state government official. The intended time frame of one hour was also verified by the trials. Finally, the trials provided an important opportunity for the researcher to sharpen her interview skills. After these trials, the interview schedule was modified for clarity, particularly the questions

concerning values playing out and role models. The sequence of the questions was again altered to place the relatively easy questions at the beginning of the schedule and the ones asking for the emotional information at the end.

A short questionnaire was developed to provide supplementary data. It was used to obtain demographic information that could permit better understanding of the subjects participating in the study. Appendix A1 presents the questionnaire.

#### Pilot Study

Following the trial sessions, the researcher conducted three pilot interviews. The three pilot subjects were invited to participate because of their knowledge of research and prior sport experience. One subject owned his own business, one was a university staff member and one was a corporate loan officer. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the pilot subjects. The subjects were then sent a copy of the interview schedule, demographic questionnaire, and informed consent form. They were encouraged to consider the questions prior to the interview.

Each of the pilot interviews was tape recorded. They were scheduled at different sites in accord with convenience to the subject. This procedure was intended to parallel the actual data collection sessions. One was conducted in a local restaurant, one in the subject's home, and the last in a University conference room. The investigator took sparse

notes during the one-hour interview to help gauge the amount of note-taking ultimately needed. At the end of each session, the investigator asked the subject for reactions to the process and substance of the interview. Suggestions to improve the study and/or the data collection process were also solicited. Based on their comments, the introduction was altered to make the interviewee more comfortable. The questions concerning the events of values playing out and early sport experiences were changed slightly to enhance clarity. The investigator made one important change by learning to ask the questions in a more relaxed conversational manner. Appendix A2 presents the interview schedule as used in the present study.

Immediately following each session, the researcher wrote out responses to the interview guide from her notes. Impressions of the session and the subject were noted. After this process, the investigator listened to the tape, verified notes and filled in the written interview form to complete or elaborate any responses that were lacking sufficient detail. An example of the researcher's interview notes is presented in Appendix B.

The pilot study allowed timing, audio taping and note-taking practice for the researcher. More importantly, it allowed further practice to enhance her skills in communication and interview techniques. In accord with the need to be effective, the final pilot session was videotaped

to serve as a learning tool for the interviewer. By studying the tape, the investigator was able not only to hear the discussion, but also to benefit by observing the nonverbal behavior of each participant as well as her own technique of communication.

### Selection of Subjects

Initially, the investigator hoped to study successful managers who were well-established within their respective businesses. Also, the nature of the questions suggested that educated and well-informed individuals would be preferred subjects. Realizing that a random sample would not provide such an elite group of subjects, another method for selecting subjects was sought.

Through the assistance of a Wake Forest University administrative officer, the investigator was permitted to use students in the Master of Business Administration Executive Program at Wake Forest University's Babcock Graduate School of Management as her pool of subjects. The School is renowned for its fine programs of study. Candidates admitted to this program must have had significant experience as a manager or professional. Moreover, candidates hold current managerial positions and are expected to make valuable contributions to class exchanges. They range between thirty and forty-five years of age, have successful backgrounds, and have at least seven years of professional experience. Obviously, the students represent a talented and elite group. They were



regarded by the researcher as individuals capable of providing unique and interesting insights. Cooperation with the Babcock Graduate School officials was then sought and received.

Each subject for the study had to meet several criteria. Males only were selected because females over thirty years of age would most likely have had very limited experiences in athletics, that is, only relatively recently have women's sport opportunities expanded. The original criteria called for subjects' ages to range between thirty and fifty-five. Only those with three or more years experience as a manager in business and who occupied middle- to upper-level managerial status within their respective companies were eligible for selection. All subjects had to have had competitive sport experience at the interscholastic or intercollegiate level.

With the help of the Assistant Dean for External Relations of the Babcock School, the investigator met with the individuals satisfying the above criteria. Records were checked in the Office of the Assistant Dean to help identify potential subjects. The researcher met with the first- and second-year groups at the Babcock School on successive days in mid-March to solicit their participation. A total of fifteen individuals met the criteria; eight were from the first-year MBA Executive Program group and seven from the second-year class. After an explanation of the nature and purpose of the study, involvement in the research was invited from the fourteen people in attendance. All fourteen present indicated

a willingness to serve as subjects . Names, addresses and phone numbers were obtained for each subject. One person was not present at the group meeting. He was subsequently contacted by letter and also agreed to participate.

The following week, the investigator contacted the subjects by telephone to arrange each interview. One hour of time was planned. Interviews were scheduled beginning in the final week of March and extending through the third week of April. Approximately seven to ten days prior to the interview, each subject was sent via mail the following: (a) an interview schedule, (b) a demographic questionnaire, (c) an informed consent form, and (d) final verification of the interview time and place. The intent was to have the demographic questionnaire and the informed consent form completed prior to the interview and collected before the exchange got underway. Appendix A contains all of the materials utilized in the collection of data.

#### The Collection of Data

The interviews were conducted during a four-week period in the spring of 1986. Eleven of the interviews took place in the subject's office or nearby conference room. Two sessions took place in the subject's home, one at the Babcock School, and one at a local restaurant. Most interviews were within thirty miles of the researcher's home location; however, three were approximately one hundred miles away. Times ranged from eight o'clock in the morning to seven in the evening. Most of

the interviews lasted approximately one hour. The longest was one hour and twenty minutes. The shortest was completed in fifty minutes.

Each session began with conversation as the interviewer set up the tape recorder. The subjects were informed in advance that the interviews would be tape recorded; each gave consent. All subjects reported that they had reviewed the interview schedule. It was also noted that most seemed genuinely intrigued by the topic. All of the subjects remarked that it was a valid topic for study, and all but one were very interested in learning of the findings and conclusions.

Most subjects made notes on their schedules sent prior to the interview. All but one had their schedules with them; the person who failed to bring it with him was given an extra copy to follow. All but two had the demographic questionnaire and informed consent already completed. Nine of the interviews proceeded without interruption.

The investigator took notes during the session and expanded these afterwards by recollection. As was done in the pilot interviews, the notes were then verified by the tape recording. Impressions of the subject and interview were also documented. Appendix B presents a sample of researcher notes.

#### Preparation of the Data for Analysis

The data collected in this study were first-hand accounts of experiences participating in competitive sport situations.

Responses to questions were completely unforced and unstructured. The data obtained, therefore, were descriptors of uniquely individual experiences. Following the last interview, the investigator organized the data for analysis.

The first step was to examine the data from the demographic questionnaire. Frequency tabulations were conducted on data from questions such as sports played and activities in which subjects continue to participate. Simple measures of central tendency were performed on data such as age, race, and years in a management position.

The next step was to summarize each response obtained for the interview items. This was done for all items including the follow-up questions. All fifteen responses were then listed under each question providing an overview of all comments.

From this list, the investigator determined principal themes which emerged from the responses. This was accomplished by reviewing both notes and tapes. The overriding themes were grouped within responses and then tabulated for each question. In the analysis used in The Lessons of Experience, a percentage was calculated to show how many of the subjects had reported such an experience. The present research, however, involved only fifteen subjects, so the percentages were omitted. Emphasis was placed on the event and the lessons learned unless the probes revealed particularly telling information.

The next step of the analysis was to report similarities and differences among responses. Recurring situations in which there were events that taught lessons contributing to leadership development were of critical importance to the researcher.

The lessons were next grouped with the associated events to permit the determination of which events taught which particular lessons. These associations were then compared with those from The Lessons of Experience. The final step was to identify unique experiences described by the subjects.

As Scott (1973) pointed out, it is more difficult to generalize from interview data than that which is obtained from a standardized questionnaire. From the outset of the study, the subject selection procedure dictated that there be no generalizing beyond the sample studied.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of selected business managers of their competitive sport experience and whether or not ten events previously identified by researchers of The Center for Creative Leadership were associated with the events. The interview technique was chosen as the research tool to obtain original descriptions of the subjects' sport experiences.

This chapter describes the findings. The text is organized according to demographic data, events arranged by category and impressions about sport participation.

#### Demographic Data

All fifteen subjects studied were male. Fourteen of the men were white; one was black. The average age was 33.3 years, with the youngest subject being 27 and the oldest 40 years of age. A characterization of the fifteen individuals who participated in the study is presented in Appendix C.

#### Prior Sport Experiences

There were a total of 34 sports which subjects played at the junior high level. Eight subjects played football, 8 played baseball, and 7 played basketball. Four competed in track and field and 3 in swimming. There was one report of

participation for each of the following sports: wrestling, tennis, hockey, and lacrosse.

At the high school level there were 32 reports of sports participation. Football was the most popular; seven subjects participated in the sport. Five men played basketball, 4 swam, 4 wrestled, and 3 men competed in baseball. There were 2 reports each for track and field, hockey and tennis. Hockey, soccer, and weight lifting were each designated by one subject.

The total number of sports played at the intercollegiate level was 11. Two subjects reported participation in lacrosse. There was one subject who took part in each of the following sports, baseball, triathlon, track, hockey, swimming, riflery, and basketball.

#### Athletic Accomplishments

The subjects had long and varied lists of athletic accomplishments. Five individuals indicated that they set various high school records in baseball, swimming, basketball, wrestling and football. Three were All-Conference/Region in high school, one each in baseball, lacrosse and basketball. Two reported team Most Valuable Player honors. One man won two MVP awards in high school tennis and one was an MVP in both high school and college basketball. Two reported winning high school state championships; one of these individuals won the state wrestling championship three consecutive years. The other was a track championship. One person won a college

intramural handball championship and one was a football all-star in a military league. One subject was a national qualifier in NCAA Division I track and field. A lacrosse player received third-team All-American honors. One individual won All-Conference and All-American honors in NCAA Division I basketball and was drafted by a professional team.

#### Sport Leadership

Twelve of the 15 subjects were co-captains or captains of teams. There were seventeen reports of team captainships among the subjects. Eleven served during high school years, 4 in college, and 2 while in the military. One subject was a captain for six consecutive basketball seasons.

#### Educational Background

Fourteen of the 15 individuals participating in the study had earned college degrees. There was a total of 16 bachelors degrees among the subjects. Four were awarded in business administration, 2 in accounting, and 2 in engineering. There was one degree each in the following fields of study: (a) education, (b) zoology, (c) economics, (d) industrial management, (e) fine arts, (f) sociology, (g) biology, and (h) finance. One subject had earned his Doctorate of Dental Science.

#### Current Positions

The most commonly reported current position was that of manager. Six men were at the managerial level, i.e., district manager, plant manager, 2 directors of financial planning, and



2 marketing managers. Four men were vice-presidents within their respective companies. One was the associate superintendent of a large county school system in North Carolina. One was the president of his own company. There was one engineer, one loan officer, and one senior dental resident.

#### Managerial Experience

The subjects' years in management positions ranged from three to twelve. The mean number of years was 7.7.

#### Current Sport Participation

There was a total of 48 activities in which the subjects continued to participate. The most popular sports were tennis and golf, both with eight subjects. Six men ran/jogged, 4 played softball, 3 played basketball. There were 2 participants each in weight lifting, cycling, snow skiing, flying and swimming. There was one report for participation in each of the following activities: (a) ice hockey, (b) flying a sail plane, (c) hunting, (d) volleyball, (e) walking, (f) water skiing, (g) aerobics, (h) sailing, and (i) vita parcours. Many of these activities were not engaged in during subjects' earlier school years.

Fourteen of the 15 subjects have continued to participate in various athletic activities. Seven individuals reported they exercised three or four days a week. Two reported exercising twice a week, and 2 hours per week. At the extremes with regard to participation, one individual had

yearly goals for running, swimming and cycling measured in distances. In contrast, one subject said he exercised very little.

### Events and Lessons Learned

The findings concerning events and lessons learned that are reported below are intended to be primarily descriptive. In the process of interpreting responses, it was readily discernible that neither the events studied nor lessons perceived to be learned were mutually exclusive of one another. The judgmental nature of analyzing the substantive element(s) of the responses suggested they be explained without elaboration.

### Other People

Two events fell under the category of other people. Role models are discussed first and values playing out follows.

Role models. Role models were investigated by posing the following question:

Was there one person in your sporting career who had a major influence on you?

The subjects indicated they had a total of nineteen role models. Two men had no perceptions of significant role models. Eleven of the role models were former coaches. Five were friends, 2 were famous athletes, Mark Spitz and Eddie LeBaron, and one was the subject's father. Only one of the nineteen role models was referred to as having a negative influence; he was a former coach.

Role models taught the subjects a total of 31 lessons. Seven subjects reported learning valuable lessons about personal discipline from role models. Four individuals reported lessons of perseverance, 3 learned basic fundamentals of sport, and 3 also learned the value of hard work. There were two reports for each of the following lessons: (a) strategy/outwitting the opponent, (b) teamwork, (c) motivation, (d) the will to do one's best, and (e) the carry-over of success to later life. The following lessons were reported once: (a) know thyself, (b) professional commitment, (c) competitiveness, and (d) confidence.

No particular role model story stood out as being exceptionally different or interesting. Although almost all of the reports were positive, seven of the individuals seemed to view the role model as a mentor. In each case, the role model took the subject "under his wing," followed him throughout his career and was "always there in the background." Each role model went the extra mile to care for the subject and teach him valuable lessons.

Values playing out. The second event in the other people category was values playing out. The interview attempted to reveal information about this event by posing the following question:

Sometimes in sports we witness or are involved in events where someone treats another person in a manner which makes a lasting impression on us. We are often left

with a vivid "snapshot" of the occasion in our minds. Describe a time when you participated in or witnessed just such a situation.

There were fifteen widely varied reports of events which left indelible pictures in the subjects' minds. One subject reported experiencing no such situation and one man gave two responses. Two reports involved illegal or dirty plays, 2 told of coaches who intimidated or embarrassed players, and 2 were incidents where coaches physically struck players in some manner. There were nine unique stories. They were (a) watching his team pull together under pressure, (b) faking an injury in order to rest, (c) a "ridiculous" football drill, (d) coach playing favorites, (e) injuring an opponent, (f) "hanging on" at the brink of defeat, (g) talented individuals sharing their wisdom, (h) ostracism of the "new kid on the block," and (i) being the victim of an unnecessarily vicious hit in football.

Fifteen lessons resulted from these events. Five, one third of the lessons, involved how or how not to treat others. Two lessons learned were giving one's all and not giving up. Eight lessons were reported only once: (a) honesty, (b) leader behavior, (c) alertness, (d) confidence, (e) push beyond limits, (f) awareness of new situations, (g) appreciation of other's interests, and (h) self-control.

The subjects told several interesting stories which they perceived to influence their development. One report bore a

resemblance to Leonard's (1975) well-known story of Babcock, the classic fat boy. A subject was paired for a rope climb with an overweight teammate who in addition to his heaviness, also happened to be petrified of heights. The subject reported that he watched the fat boy refuse to climb and then receive a blistering barrage of insults from a coach. He remembered the event vividly and learned a valuable lesson in the treatment of others.

Two subjects saw high school football coaches strike players. One man watched an opposing coach rattle a defensive end's facemask and then punch him in the stomach. Another subject watched a teammate pass out during wind sprints only to see his coach kick him until the youngster got up to run. Both men reported that these events offered enduring lessons in the treatment of others.

One subject was removed from a high school football game after making an illegal block. He then received a classic mixed message on the bench as the head coach berated him and the offensive line coach patted him on the back and complimented him. These conflicting behaviors provided still another lesson that had implications for leadership development. He learned a lesson in differences among people and how differently two individuals can look upon a situation.

#### Other Experiences

The category referred to as other experiences included two events. Early sport experiences are presented first and

purely personal events follow.

Early sport experiences. Early sport experiences were probed by the following question:

Describe for me an experience you had very early in your sporting life which had a great impact on you.

Subjects collectively reported fifteen varied events occurring early in their careers. Two men had no remembrance of such an event and two individuals reported two experiences each. Three of the events were moments of recognition and awards. Two accounts involved direct responsibility for winning a game/meet, and 2 were stories of being cut from a team. The following events were reported only once: (a) a freak injury, (b) witnessing a death in sport, (c) positive early team experience, (d) a competitive situation one cannot handle, (e) quitting a team, (f) assessment of strength/weakness in sport, (g) being forced to play a sport, and (h) a mistake resulting in a loss.

Interestingly, over one-third of the feelings reported by the subjects were "enjoyable, proud" and "positive" memories of their early feats. Sixteen lessons were reported by the subjects. Three lessons were of a motivating, confidence-building experience. There were 2 accounts of each of the following lessons: (a) determination, (b) value of repetition/feedback, (c) teamwork, and (d) reality. Five lessons were reported only once: (a) to be patient, (b) that the game is not over until the final whistle, (c) that hard

work pays off, (d) the feasibility of redirecting attentions, and (e) the importance maximizing strengths/minimizing weaknesses.

The most interesting report involved a subject as he tried out for his seventh grade football team. In order to make the team, all players had to run out and catch a pass thrown by the coach. Those who caught the pass made the team and those who missed the pass were cut. The subject, being a lineman not particularly adept at receiving passes, missed the throw and had to wait until the following year. In the eighth grade he caught the pass and made the team.

Purely personal.

Events of a purely personal nature were recalled in response to the following question:

Sport itself is a very personal experience. We all take different lessons from our participation. Describe for me a very personal experience which left you with a strong lasting impression.

Fourteen subjects reported fifteen purely personal experiences. One subject had no response and another had two. Six reports involved season- or career-ending injuries either experienced or witnessed. Four events were related to victories and honors. The following five events were reported only once: (a) failure to make a team, (b) losing games, (c) marathon competition, (d) seeing son get hurt and bounce back, and (e) being forced to play football.

Fifteen lessons were learned from purely personal events. There were two accounts of each of the following lessons: (a) flexible goals, (b) realization of limitations, and (c) pushing to overcome obstacles. Eight different lessons were reported only once: (a) self-confidence, (b) pay off for hard work, (c) the worth of risk-taking, (d) the ultimate challenge, (e) ability can be demonstrated, (f) attentions can be redirected, (g) conformity should not be forced, and (h) the element of danger in sport.

Six subjects told stories of debilitating injuries. Subjects reported a football career ended by a broken collarbone, a baseball career ended by a broken back, a tennis season ended by a cracked sternum, and an entire career in contact sports ended by a motorcross bike accident. One subject recalled running up on the end of a football play in time to see and hear a close friend's leg break.

### Assignments

Scope. In order to consider how tasks assigned in sport participation were perceived by subjects, the following question was asked:

Coaches often give players new tasks or responsibilities that result in broadened perspectives or changed roles. What was the one most challenging new task that you were ever asked to undertake in sport?

Each of the fifteen subjects reported a change in scope in his athletic career. Six of the 15 reports involved having



to change positions or weight classes in wrestling. For each response, the change was initiated by a coach. Three responses were described as a changed role, job or duty within the offensive structure of the team. There were six assignments/situations which only one person experienced. They were (a) driving the team bus, (b) the challenge to master one's own destiny, (c) organizing athletic teams from scratch, (d) being forced to box, (e) swimming when ill, and (f) motivating teammates of superior skill.

Eight of the subjects declared that they had handled the change in role "very well". Five said they "did well" in the new situation. An impressive thirteen of the fifteen subjects perceived that they handled the change of assignment successfully. Only two individuals indicated they performed poorly in their new roles.

The subjects reported learning nineteen lessons from the change in the scope of assignments. Four men stated that the change in scope of assignments boosted their confidence. Four men learned that they were highly motivated by the challenge of the new assignments. There were eleven singularly reported lessons: (a) doing some things that one must do, (b) recognizing a coach's confidence in his players, (c) mastering one's destiny, (d) acknowledging that talents do not transfer to other sports, (e) doing what one thinks is right, (f) dealing with the cards dealt, (g) going beyond reasonable limits, (h) not letting the team down, (i) being humble, (j)

being aware of opposition, and (k) earning respect by having "fought in the trenches."

The most interesting event involved a man enrolled at a national military academy where sport participation was mandatory. The subject was "strongly encouraged" to replace a boxer who became ill. Having little choice, he had to lose twenty-five pounds in three weeks in what he called "the biggest challenge" of his life. Although he performed well, "it was hell" routinely getting battered. He reported that he learned how to push beyond reasonable limits and to do whatever is necessary when there is no choice.

#### Hardships

Five events were probed in the hardship category. They were (a) breaking a rut, (b) demotions/missed promotions, (c) failures and mistakes, (d) traumas, and (e) performance problems.

Breaking a rut. Recollections about breaking a rut were provided in response to the following question:

Everybody in sport experiences the "rut" or "slump" when performance just isn't up to par. Describe the most significant slump you can remember going through.

Subjects reported thirteen instances of enduring a slump. Two individuals revealed that they had never experienced a slump. Three individuals experienced losing a high number of consecutive matches and 3 endured long periods of not being able to hit/score. The following five events were reported

once: (a) less playing time because of better players, (b) no visible improvement early in college career, (c) performing poorly in tough competition, (d) "blowing a golden opportunity" to start, and (e) never playing golf well.

Subjects learned a total of 12 lessons. Two individuals learned not to worry and deal with pressure. Two subjects reported lessons of perseverance. The following eight lessons were reported once: (a) reality, (b) humility, (c) preparation for the future, (d) the value of stepping back and analyzing, (e) need for long-term view, (f) slow rebuilding of confidence (g) control of senses, and (h) perfection.

Several subjects reported short periods of subpar performance such as a four-game hitting slump, losing streaks of five and seven matches, and not being able to "throw the puck in the ocean." The most interesting report came from a subject who perceived that his golf game suffered from a "congenital rut." Feeling that he has never performed as well as he should, he admitted concentrating too much and "second-guessing myself to death" on the golf course.

Demotions/Missed promotions. Concerning demotions/missed promotions, the following question was set forth:

Getting "benched" or demoted is a part of sport that everybody seems to experience and no one enjoys. What was your most memorable benching?

The subjects collectively recalled twelve accounts of getting benched; three men said they had never been benched.

There were 2 instances of each of the following events: (a) benchings as a result of performance slumps, (b) lost positions previously won, and (c) missing a team cut. A surprisingly high five subjects stated that they never bounced back from these setbacks. Three individuals came back by persevering and working harder. Twelve lessons emerged from these experiences. One-third of them, 4, were lessons of perseverance and hard work. The remaining eight were (a) learning how others view one's ability, (b) acquiring patience, (c) never underestimating others, (d) looking long-range, (e) removing person from the "front line" when in trouble, (f) staying in control of senses, (g) not getting upset easily, and (h) overcoming obstacles by "something more than perseverance."

The most interesting account of a demotion involved an event that occurred when the subject was a sophomore football player in high school. Several games into his first varsity season, he got an opportunity to start because of an injury to the first-stringer. After performing admirably in the first quarter, he "lost it completely." Suddenly, his concentration was gone and he could do nothing right. He got benched and lost a "golden opportunity" to play regularly. To this day, he has no understanding of what happened.

Failures and mistakes. Data about failures and mistakes were elicited by the following question:

It is always fun to win the game by scoring in the final seconds or hitting a ninth-inning home run. But, we're not always so fortunate. Describe for me the occasion in sport where your failure at a task had the most impact on you.

Fourteen subjects recalled fifteen failures which left great impressions on them. One subject reported no significant failure and another recalled two. Ten of the failures involved a critical mistake or poor performance which led directly to losing. Two reports concerned changes in position. The following three events were reported once: (a) quit the football team, (b) missed qualifying for a state tournament, and (c) failed to make the varsity team.

The fifteen feelings associated with the failures were vivid. Six subjects felt "devastated," "miserable," "helpless," "dejected," and "poorly." Five felt directly responsible for the loss. Four feelings were reported once. They were (a) rejection, (b) realized that others were better, (c) made excuses, and (d) still questions whether quitting meant he failed.

Sixteen lessons were learned from failure events. Three of these were lessons of reality/destiny. There were two reports for each of the following lessons: (a) being humble, (b) never underestimating an opponent, (c) dealing with losing, and (d) remembering that people are fallible/nobody is perfect. The following five lessons were reported once: (a)

one must move on with life, (b) it is important to see all things through, (c) nothing comes without hard work, (d) when the pressure is on, do the job and do it well, and (e) know thyself.

There were several similar responses to this interview question. Nine reports of failures were associated with leading directly to a loss. However, the most interesting response was not a mistake which caused a loss. One subject went through the grueling preseason football workouts only to quit the team just prior to the first game. Although he was quite "fed up with it all," he has wondered for years if he had failed. He stated that he never reached a satisfactory conclusion about the experience.

Trauma. The question seeking the subjects' recall about a sport-related traumatic event was:

We occasionally have the opportunity in sport to witness or be involved in a "crisis" situation, which we view as being highly traumatic. These experiences may have a lasting emotional impact on us. What crisis situation affected you the most in sport?

There were twelve traumatic events reported by eleven subjects. Four individuals reported that they did not experience a traumatic event in sport; one person recalled two events. Five of the events involved bodily injury. There were two accounts each of death and an important competitive loss. The three events which occurred once were (a) the fat

boy forced to climb a rope even though he was afraid of heights, (b) vicious racism in intramural football and (c) a locker room uprising because of team problems.

Thirteen lessons were learned from the traumatic events. Three lessons taught the subjects the element of danger in sport. There were 2 accounts each of lessons about how (not) to treat people and paying one's dues. The following six lessons were reported once: (a) the need to have a positive mental attitude, (b) confirmation that people have negative characteristics, (c) people are fallible, (d) one should never give up, (e) the group can rally together to overcome adversity and (f) some things are out of our control.

Subjects reported two events involving death which were traumatic. While wrestling in a junior high school match, one subject saw an opponent break his neck. The boy died on the way to the hospital. The other death was not directly related to the subject's sport experience. It involved a college fraternity brother who died after a long battle with cancer. The fraternity brother had been a good athlete and possessed an eternally positive attitude. According to the recall of the trauma, the death was a major crisis within the fraternity. Yet, the subject learned a valuable lesson of a positive mental attitude.

Another interesting event involved a subject who became a marathon runner. The marathon was his first sport event where completion was a major uncertainty. Marathons also presented

the subject with serious questions of doing damage to himself if he continued. The subject revealed that he learned to have a tremendous amount of confidence in his own judgment.

Performance problem. The final question in the hardship category concerned a performance problem:

Describe to me a time when you found yourself in an athletic situation where certain individuals or surroundings actually hindered your sport performance.

Ten subjects reported ten performance problems; five individuals had no response. Three stories told of poor relationships with coaches. Two were accounts of the difficulties of playing in the opponents' home territory. Five events were reported only once. They were (a) athletic/academic conflict, (b) fierce hometown competition, (c) participating on a team with poor overall skills, (d) playing in poor facilities, and (e) playing tennis with a partner who is much worse/better in skill than the subject.

Responding to the follow-up question about how they handled the situations, six of the ten said it was a tough, trying experience, and they dealt with the problems simply because they had to be overcome. Six of the ten claimed that they learned to deal with and overcome the situation; three of the latter six indicated that they handled the performance problem extremely well.

Subjects reported several valuable lessons. However, events that were performance problems produced ten entirely



different lessons. They were lessons about (a) seeing a situation from another's perspective, (b) dealing with obstacles, (c) having self-control, (d) being disciplined, (e) concentrating, (f) knowing one's realistic limitations, (g) speaking up for oneself, (h) compensating for bad facilities, (i) moving on with life, and (j) leaving an unbearable situation.

The most interesting story of a performance problem was told by a subject who grew up in "Hockey Town, U.S.A." The town's nickname was given by its proud residents who claimed it had the best hockey competition in the United States. The subject revealed that youngsters began participating in competitive hockey leagues as early as four years of age. Most could skate soon after they learned to walk. The subject recalled the fierce competition and thought of it as a hurdle which he had to overcome.

Another subject commented on the problems caused by the academic/athletic conflict in higher education. Division I revenue-producing sports cause the athletes to miss a great number of classes and disrupt their studying virtually all year. The subject always considered graduation a high priority, but he recalled the difficult time demands that sport placed on him. The conflict taught him a lesson in discipline. He indicated that he learned a great deal could be accomplished if he set goals and budgeted his time.

To the extent possible, the above descriptions reflect the subjects unelaborated responses. The exact words of the individuals studied were not altered to simplify the explanation of findings.

#### General Impressions About Sport Participation

This section presents the findings of the remaining three interview questions. This includes the first broad inquiry, the final two interview questions, and their follow-up probes.

#### Thoughts About Sport

A very broad, general, question intended to allow the subjects the opportunity to spontaneously reveal how they felt about their sport experiences was asked at the outset of the interview:

When you recall your athletic career as a whole, what type of thoughts initially come to your mind?

The question produced a wealth of thoughts by the subjects. A total of thirty thoughts were recorded. Five of the responses revealed the importance of teamwork. There were four reports each of the idea that sports provided developmental experiences, and that sports were an excellent way to make friends and learn to deal with people. There were three accounts each that sports were fun/enjoyable, taught valuable lessons of competition and challenge, and taught each participant discipline. There were two comments each about the lessons of pushing oneself beyond reasonable limits, and the importance of winning/success. There were four thoughts

reported only once: (a) personal confidence, (b) healthy mind/healthy body, (c) the value of hard work, and (d) always do your best.

All subjects reported positive associations with competitive sport experience; all initial responses about sport were favorable. One of the most interesting responses came from a former hockey player. He stated that sport was an excellent learning experience particularly as a tool for assessing one's strengths and weaknesses. He reasoned that in sport, feedback and analysis of performance is given quickly and decisively. He made the remark that in the business world, winning and losing is also important and there is a means of scorekeeping.

As a follow-up to the central question, the researcher asked, "Do you mainly have positive or negative memories?" An overwhelming 13 of the 15 subjects reported that their experiences were positive. Only two individuals revealed that they had mixed emotions about their sport experiences although both said most of their feelings were positive.

#### Most Important Lesson

Another general question sought information that would require the respondents to evaluate the strength of their experiences. They were asked:

What do you think is the most important lesson that your sporting experience taught you?

Subjects reported a total of 32 primary lessons learned in sport. Two of these lessons were reported five times. The most popular lessons learned through sport were teamwork and discipline. In addition, there were three accounts of each of the following two lessons: hard work leads to success, and persistence/perseverance pays off. Two reports each were tallied for lessons about (a) competition, (b) reality, and (c) gaining new perspectives. Ten lessons were tallied only once: (a) sportsmanship, (b) goal setting, (c) achievement as a result of putting one's mind to the task, (d) the visions of leaders, (e) available resources, (f) strength/weakness assessment, (g) accept and enjoy challenge, (h) handle defeat or failure, (i) the priority of victory/success, and (j) the importance of never resting on past laurels.

Among the most interesting responses reported only once was the comment by one subject that he learned through sport that "leaders are visionary." Leaders, he went on to say, must be able to take the broad, long-range perspective. They must always have an overriding purpose or goal at which their activities are aimed.

A financial specialist among the subjects reported learning how to deal most effectively with the available resources. He stated that he was never the very best athlete, so he learned to make the most use of his talents. He indicated that the lesson had carried over to business very well.

In a further effort to focus on the value of sport, the follow-up question asked:

Do you think this is a lesson specific to sport or could you have learned this just as well through a different experience?

The subjects reported a wide variety of responses. Four of the individuals believed these lessons were specific to sport and could not be learned elsewhere. One person qualified his answer as being the case only for himself. Two subjects thought the lessons were "probably" specific to sport. Four believed that the lessons may not be specific to sport, but that they can be learned faster, easier, and at an earlier age through competitive athletics. Two subjects thought the lessons were "probably not" sport-specific. The subjects reported that other activities which might possibly teach the same lessons included the military, Outward Bound programs and the Boy Scouts. Two of the fifteen subjects said the lessons could be learned in other places. One individual said that some of lessons were specific to sport and some were not. He offered the example that pushing beyond one's reasonable physical limits would be difficult to learn outside of sports.

To further associate sport experiences and leadership development, another question was asked:

Which specific lesson learned through sport contributed the most to your leadership development?

The subjects again reported a wide variety of responses. A total of 27 lessons were credited as most important to their leadership development. The subjects' most common response was teamwork. This was cited in five responses. Discipline was the second most important lesson; it was the answer in three reports. Six lessons were each reported twice. They were the perceived importance of: (a) competition, (b) goals, (c) keeping life in perspective, (d) pushing beyond reasonable limits, (e) working hard, and (f) confidence. Seven lessons were reported only once. They were: (a) recognition, (b) be encouraging and supportive in leadership roles, (c) be visionary, (d) deal effectively with available resources, (e) do not underestimate your ability to take on challenge, (f) in new situation, fit into the norms of others, and (g) always do your best.

The most interesting response involved the lesson of keeping one's perspective in life. One individual in his twenties worked out a philosophy of life that was very important to him. He described eight aspects of his philosophy. In no particular order, they were "the physical, mental, spiritual, financial, professional/career, marriage, family, and social." He stated that when one aspect is not going well, he tries to make up for it in another. He tries, he alleged, to keep a balance in his life among these eight aspects. The philosophy, he pointed out, allows him to keep his life in perspective. He sees it as a challenging task to

master his own destiny. He concluded his remarks by indicating that although he will always continue to work at his philosophy, he believes he is doing very well.

#### Other Associations Between Sport and Leadership

The final interview question sought to reveal feelings/ideas about sport that had not been previously reported. Subjects were asked:

Considering what we have just talked about, are there other events in sport, not discussed, that you associate with your current professional leadership role?

The subjects reported 17 different final thoughts. Only two themes occurred more than once. There were three cases where subjects reiterated the point that teamwork was one of the most important and enjoyable aspects of their sporting careers. Three individuals also stated that sports were tremendous confidence-building experiences for them. Eleven other responses were recorded only once. They were: (a) the importance of discipline, (b) sports relieve frustration, (c) certain persons have innate leadership qualities such as charisma and personal magnitude, (d) sport contributed to an understanding of how individuals are motivated, (e) team captainship helped develop leadership skills, (f) sport "has to tie in" to leadership ability in business, (g) sponsors/mentors are of critical importance, (h) sport provided a "good foundation for business", (i) the personal question of "Why did I play?", (j) sport is "not much

different from working," and (k) sport contributes to development of "level headedness" under pressure.

One of the men citing confidence-building had reached a very high level of competition. He revealed that sports had thrown him into the national spotlight. He pointed out that experience helped him get over shyness and learn to communicate successfully with anyone in any situation. He also credited the role of captain, which he had occupied for six consecutive years, as helping him learn to communicate with others.

A subject remarked that one of his biggest challenges in business is learning how to motivate other individuals to do a task. Sport, he stated, contributed to his understanding of how people are motivated.

An interesting point was made by a subject who was a corporate vice-president. He emphasized the importance of sponsors or mentors in both sports and business. It is a popular practice in business for mentors to serve as friends, helpers, guides, and support systems. They make an investment in the individuals they choose to help. Although the subject had only a mildly influential mentor in sport, he had already benefited from the assistance of several sponsors in business. He added that he had also begun to serve as a mentor to some of those below him in the corporate hierarchy.

One subject strongly likened sport to the world of business. Both, he stated, are highly competitive situations



in which only the strong survive. He pointed out that athletics are an excellent teaching ground for business. Sport, he felt, provided him with a solid foundation for the world of business.

One subject remarked that some individuals have innate qualities of leadership such as charisma and magnetism. Some people simply look like leaders and naturally assume that role regardless of their sport background.

One individual made the interesting point that in sport situations, the new person on the block is the one who must conform to the norms of the others. The team members will not conform to the wishes of a new individual, especially if he/she is a star. The subject learned that when entering new situations, leaders must "take it slowly" and conform to the existing norms in order to gain the confidence of the subordinates. He found this to be so in sports, in the military, and in business.

Ten of the fifteen subjects volunteered comments that sport had been beneficial for them. Benefits cited were both personal and professional. Sports were credited with the following: (a) relieved frustration, (b) taught how to understand people better, (c) built confidence, (d) enhanced competitiveness, (e) provided foundations for business, (f) taught the virtue of teamwork and (g) was generally a very enjoyable experience.

The general impressions emanating from the open-ended questions were reviewed by the subjects prior to the interview as were interrogatives related to the events and lessons. There is, therefore, the legitimate question as to whether the responses were completely spontaneous, "flavored" with social desirability, or possibly even couched so as to fit what subjects thought might be the investigator's expectations. On the basis of the exchanges between interviewer and subjects and frequent reference to, "This may not be what you want to hear," the comments as given were taken at face validity.

### Discussion

The discussion is presented in three parts. The first reviews and comments about the lessons learned. The second part considers the findings of the present study and those reported by McCall et al. (in press). The chapter then concludes with a discussion that reemphasizes the general findings.

### Lessons Learned

Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 report the primary lessons learned in condensed form. Role models and values playing out were originally categorized by the CCL researchers as OTHER PEOPLE. Role models taught the importance of teamwork, and many personal virtues such as discipline, hard work, perseverance, and the will to do one's best. Values playing out taught the subjects how (and how not) to treat other individuals and not to ever give up. Sports provide a rich environment for role

## OTHER PEOPLE

### Role Models

Discipline  
Perseverance  
Fundamentals of sport  
Value of hard work

### Values Playing Out

How or how not to treat other individuals  
Give one's all/Never give up

Figure 2. Primary lessons learned in the present study  
from the category of OTHER PEOPLE.

## OTHER EXPERIENCES

### Early Sport Experiences

Motivation/Build confidence  
Determination  
Value of repetition/Feedback  
Teamwork  
Reality

### Purely Personal

Flexible goals  
Realization of limitations  
Pushing to overcome obstacles/Pressure

Figure 3. Primary lessons learned in the present study  
from the category of OTHER EXPERIENCES.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Scope

Build confidence  
Highly motivated by challenge

Figure 4. Primary lessons learned in the present study from the category of ASSIGNMENTS.

## HARDSHIPS

### Breaking a Rut

Stop worrying/Deal with pressure  
Perseverance

Demotions/Missed promotions

Perseverance and hard work

### Failures and Mistakes

Reality/Destiny  
Humility  
Never underestimate an opponent  
Deal with losing  
People are fallible/nobody is perfect

### Trauma

Element of danger in sport  
How or how not to treat others  
Pay one's dues

### Performance Problem

Ten manager-specific lessons

Figure 5. Primary lessons learned in the present study from the category of HARDSHIPS.

models; coaches have traditionally served as examples for their athletes. The subjects viewed eleven of their former coaches as role models. The coaches were overwhelmingly viewed by the subjects as positive influences; only one subject reported a negative role model.

The OTHER EXPERIENCES category included early sport experiences and purely personal events. Early sport experiences taught confidence, teamwork, the importance of feedback, and determination. Purely personal events resulted in lessons in humility, flexible goals, and pushing to overcome obstacles. It is often considered important that youngsters engage in positive experiences early in their development. The most commonly reported early sport experiences involved awards, ribbons and recognition. It can only be speculated whether the positive reports are directly related to their perceived recollection of predominantly positive memories.

The ASSIGNMENTS category was represented only by scope. Scope taught lessons of personal confidence and challenge. Changes in scope were perceived by four subjects as challenging tasks. Educators have long believed that gifted individuals must be challenged in order to realize their full potential. Sport appears to be one important way to challenge youngsters at an early age.

The HARSHIPS category included breaking a rut, demotions/missed promotions, failures and mistakes, traumas,

and performance problems. Breaking a rut resulted in lessons in perseverance and how to keep from worrying/pressing. Demotions/Missed promotions taught subjects lessons in hard work and perseverance. Failures and mistakes taught lessons in destiny, humility, dealing with losing and imperfection, and not underestimating an opponent. Traumas showed the subjects the element of danger and how to deal with performing at the home site of an opponent. Performance problems tended to teach manager-specific lessons, although most concerned personal values such as (a) discipline, (b) self-control, (c) concentration, and (d) realism. It should be noted that half of the events examined in the present study were in the category of HARSHIPS. Perhaps the HARSHIP events were the easiest to relate to sport because of the high frequency of their occurrence. As one subject pointed out, sport is a test of strengths and weaknesses, from which only the strong survive. The nature of competitive sport is such that losers far outnumber the winners. Participants in this type of activity cannot entirely avoid the presence of hardships.

#### CCL Findings and the Present Study

McCall et al. (in press) found that changes in scope events taught lessons of personal realizations, broadened management perspectives, interpersonal skills and management problem-solving skills. The lesson found in the current study that one is motivated by challenge is consistent with the Center's lessons of personal realization such as learning

about oneself. Although eleven of the lessons were only reported once, several of these involved a personal realization and were similar to findings in the CCL research. Examples included mastering one's destiny, humility, going beyond reasonable limits, and learning that personal talents were not transferable.

The CCL researchers discovered that role models taught values through observation. They taught how to delegate responsibility and how to deal more effectively with subordinates through trust, support and recognition. Many of the lessons identified in the present study with regard to role models involved more personal values such as (a) discipline, (b) perseverance, (c) hard work, (d) teamwork, (e) motivation and (f) the will to do one's best. Whether or not these derived from observation is unknown. Lessons concerning subordinates were not investigated in the current study.

Values playing out, according to McCall et al. (in press), taught broadened perspectives ranging from new management techniques and treating individuals with respect, to dealing with corporate politics. One-third of the lessons reported in the present study also concerned how to treat others and corresponded closely with CCL findings.

The findings of McCall et al. (in press) reported that early work experiences taught lessons of self-confidence, dealing with adversity and broadened perspectives. The most commonly reported lessons described above pertained to

increased confidence on the part of the subjects. There is, then, similarity between the CCL study and the present research. The current study reported that early sport experiences were motivating, confidence-building events.

The CCL investigators found that the purely personal events taught lessons of (a) dealing with flak, (b) going beyond limitations, (c) values, and (d) broadened perspectives. The most frequently occurring lessons in the present study were flexible goals, realization of limitations, and pushing to overcome obstacles. The only similarity existed between the lessons of going beyond limitations and pushing to overcome obstacles.

Breaking a rut, according to the CCL researchers, taught the necessity to control one's destiny as well as several manager-specific lessons. A comparison of the findings of McCall et al. (in press) with the present study revealed little similarity. An exception was that in both studies there was a high number of lessons unique to the individual among the breaking a rut events.

The CCL investigators also stated that demotions/missed promotions resulted in lessons of (a) coping, (b) persistence, (c) self-reliance and (d) occasionally led to reevaluation of goals and needs. The present study found that demotions in sport taught lessons of perseverance and hard work. There is certainly a strong similarity between the perseverance reported in the present study and the persistence found by the



CCL researchers.

According to McCall et al. (in press), failures and mistakes taught managers to consider others before making decisions. These findings were not at all like the lessons learned in the present study.

The CCL researchers reported that traumatic events taught (a) reevaluating priorities, (b) humility/mortality, (c) personal fortitude, and (d) how to treat others humanely. There were discernible similarities between the CCL study and the present study with respect to reports of learning how to treat others. The lesson of mortality cited by McCall et al. (in press) could be likened to the lesson of the danger element in sports.

Research by McCall et al. (in press) found that performance problems taught how to deal with confrontation, maintain subordinate's dignity, and whether to develop or release subordinates. The present study revealed few lessons of a similar nature. It should be noted, however, that similarities exist between the CCL lessons of handling confrontation and that of the current dealing with obstacles.

Because the present study was modeled after the work of McCall and his associates, it is appropriate to offer the following comments about the methodological and theoretical bases. Whereas McCall et al. (in press) investigated a variety of types of experiences suggested by the subjects, the present study was concerned only with selected competitive

sports events suggested by the principal investigator. Although the derivation of the sport events was from the work of McCall et al. (in press), the findings of the present study support the ideas of sport scholars who argue that sport is a microcosm of life (Boyle, 1963; Edwards, 1973; Snyder and Spreitzer, 1975). Further, the results of this investigation of lessons learned from competitive sports support the premise upon which McCall and his associates based their initial effort; that is, experiences have the potential to teach various "lessons."

The model study had a practical orientation and was not specifically associated with a single leadership theory. To the extent that the events of the present study were constructed from the researcher's own sport leadership experiences to complement CCL research, the present study was also of a practical nature. That is to say, the research was not intended to contribute to or build theories associated with sport leadership.

McCall et al. (in press) pointed out the absence of published research about what one learns from his/her experiences and how such learning occurs. More importantly, they further alleged that whether or not adults actually learn or change behaviors as a result of leadership experiences is also unknown. McCall et al. (in press) acknowledged that if adults do not change, then, leaders need to be chosen on the basis of their previously acquired talents.

Findings from the present study indicate that sports experiences serve as learning situations--at least in the perceptions of the business managers studied. Educators and individuals who study leadership seek to develop constructs that can ultimately explain leadership behavior. The project reported herein provides a broad beginning for identifying concepts about the contributions of sport-specific experiences to later life behaviors. While the present project is not tied to a theory, like the work of McCall and associates, the results of this study provide an incentive to continue systematically investigating sport and leadership development. The ideas/concepts perceived to be associated with sport should serve as a point of departure.

#### Summary of Pertinent Findings

The interview exchange about the subjects' sport experiences involved 13 interrogatives. Ten focused on specific events and the lessons perceived to have been learned from the events. One question was a summary type of inquiry seeking to recall the most important lessons learned in sport. Two questions were of a general nature and were totally unstructured.

Among the pertinent findings were the following:

1. The question which produced the most responses was from the ASSIGNMENT category and involved changes in scope. It was the only one of the ten specific event questions which was answered by all fifteen subjects. The question concerning

performance problems elicited the fewest responses; only ten subjects perceived a performance problem in the competitive sport experience.

The event which easily produced the greatest number of lessons learned was role models. The subjects reported that role models taught them 31 lessons. The next greatest number of lessons learned was produced by changes in scope, which resulted in 19 lessons. Performance problems produced the fewest number of lessons learned. They taught the subjects only ten lessons.

2. The subjects placed a great deal of emphasis on teamwork. Teamwork was the most commonly reported response to the initial question. It was one of the two most common thoughts given for the final question, which requested additional comments. Both of these questions allowed complete freedom of response. Teamwork was the leading response for the lesson that contributed the most to the subjects' leadership development. It was also one of the two most frequently reported lessons considered by the subjects the most important of all those learned in sport.

Subjects reported that they enjoyed the team aspect of sports. Teams allowed camaraderie, a sense of belonging, and the formation of valuable friendships. The team aspect enhanced the ability of many subjects to deal effectively with other individuals. Subjects tended to believe that the team aspects of sports were closely related to the team aspects of

business. One subject said that his work situation was analogous to a sports team. He believed strongly that all plant workers must cooperate and work together as a team to reach their goals. Many managers said they try very hard to teach the virtues of teamwork to their co-workers. One individual, a corporate vice-president, stated that he thought one of the most important contributions he could make to his company was to instill in others the same high regard for teamwork that he possessed.

3. Discipline was another important lesson the subjects gained from their sport experience. It was the second most important lesson contributing directly to leadership. Along with teamwork, discipline was considered to be the most important overall lesson learned from the sport experience. Subjects tended to believe that success was a result of hard work and perseverance. One must pay the price for success. Hard work and sweat can make up for a lack of innate skill. They recognized that success in anything is not an overnight process, but requires a great deal of hard work.

4. The subjects overwhelmingly thought sport had been a positive experience. Only two men reported any mixed feelings yet both said their feelings were primarily positive. It was pointed out by two subjects that they tended to remember the "good times" and had forgotten the "bad times" over the years. No subject regretted his participation, although one man still questioned his motives for playing and one said his

experiences became worse as his skills got better.

5. An interesting contrast was noted between responses of two of the subjects reaching high levels of competition. One former college basketball player had a seemingly endless list of accomplishments culminating with NCAA Division I All-American honors and receiving a draft bid by a professional team. He reported his experiences as 99% positive and described his illustrious college career as "the best four years of my life." He credited sport as being an important developmental experience. He now continues active basketball playing and runs three or four miles five times a week.

By comparison, the other high achiever was an NCAA Division I national qualifier in track and field early in his college career. His enjoyment of the activity decreased progressively as his skill level increased. He described his college years as more of an endurance test than as an enjoyable experience. Even though he described his experience in general as positive, he ultimately quit track and field in college and competed in an intercollegiate sport he had grown to enjoy more. He "had had enough of competition"; it had become too much of a job. He credited sport with contributing to his leadership development and recognized that he would not be as good a businessman without the sport experience.

Thus, the idiosyncratic nature of high level competitive experiences is illustrated by the comments of these two

individuals. This seems important to report along with the common elements discussed in this report.

6. Subjects indicated that an important aspect of the potential of sport to teach various lessons is that it requires participants to perform mandatory tasks in adverse situations. The lack of choice contributes to certain lessons, particularly personal discipline. Sport was compared to the military as an activity which forced individuals to perform despite adverse conditions. For example, subjects considered performing under intense pressure a situation from which lessons could be learned. They also indicated that playing at the opponent's home site was a recurring challenge in sport with which one had to deal effectively.

7. Subjects reported that sport taught the value of hard work. Success is not an overnight process; it involves years of dedication, sacrifice and sweat. The rewards in sport are not immediate. Success requires a long-term commitment. Hard work can even offset the lack of exceptional physical skill.

Two additional points merit comment. After reading the "tributes" given by the subjects to their competitive sport experiences, one could be easily persuaded that there is an important association between sport and business leadership. It should be noted that of the 85 MBA Executive students enrolled in the Babcock Graduate School only 15 met the criteria for participation in the present study. (Female students were excluded from the research.) Therefore, one

must not regard sport as the exclusive developmental experience of up and coming business leaders. There are other positive life influences which assist in leadership development.

Finally, upon consideration of how the data from this study fit the ideas about sport building character and having many educational benefits, regretablely, no new light is shed on these issues. Although there were positive reports of lessons learned that may give some support to the myth that competition contributes richly to the goals of education and to one's character, the present study was not intended for generalizing of findings. Also, it must be remembered that self-perceptions are only one means of assessing contributions of sport to character development. Nor was additional information revealed that clarifies the centrality of sport involvement with respect to leadership attainment.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the perceptions of selected business managers of their prior competitive sport participation and how the experience might be associated with leadership development. More specifically, it was intended to discover if ten events previously identified by researchers affiliated with The Center for Creative Leadership had analogies in sport that taught leadership lessons.

The final chapter of the research report is organized in three sections. The summary provides an overview of the study. Conclusions drawn from the findings that focus on the questions framing the study are presented next. Finally, recommendations for further study are offered.

#### Summary

The present study investigated selected business managers' perceptions of their sport experience with respect to ten events previously identified at The Center for Creative Leadership as contributing to leadership development. McCall et al. (in press) of the CCL discovered sixteen such events which they classified under four broad categories: (a) assignments, (b) other people, (c) other experiences, and (d) hardships. This study used these events in an effort to learn

if, and how, their competitive sport participation may be associated with leadership development. The subjects were fifteen students enrolled in the Master of Business Administration Executive Program at the Babcock Graduate School of Management of Wake Forest University.

From the ASSIGNMENT category, only one event, scope, was considered. The OTHER PEOPLE were represented by role models and values playing out events. OTHER EXPERIENCES included events designated as early sport experiences and purely personal. HARSHIPS were studied in association with the following five events: (a) breaking a rut, (b) demotions/missed promotions, (c) failures and mistakes, (d) traumas, and (e) performance problems.

The interview technique was used to obtain first-hand descriptions of the subjects' athletic experiences in relation to the events. A semistructured interview format was used. The format and questions were standardized and the responses were unrestricted and unforced. A short questionnaire was also devised to obtain demographic information.

Findings showed that the managers who served as subjects did perceive all ten events as occurring in their own sport experiences. Eight of the ten events were perceived by at least 87% of the respondents: (a) role models, (b) values playing out, (c) early sport experiences, (d) purely personal, (e) scope, (f) breaking a rut, (g) demotions/missed promotions, and (h) failures and mistakes. The question

seeking information about traumatic events received responses from eleven of the fifteen subjects. The question inquiring about performance problems was answered by ten subjects.

The subjects reported learning numerous lessons from their sport participation. Role models taught the value of teamwork and many personal virtues, such as discipline, hard work, perseverance, and the will to do one's best. Values playing out taught lessons concerning how or how not to treat others and also the value of never giving up. Early sport experiences resulted in lessons of confidence, teamwork, determination, and the importance of feedback. Purely personal events taught lessons in humility, flexible goals, and pushing to overcome obstacles. Scope was the only event from the assignment category used in this study. Its lessons included confidence and challenge. Breaking a rut taught lessons of perseverance, and how to avoid worrying and pressing. Demotions/Missed promotions taught the subjects hard work and perseverance. Failures and mistakes resulted in lessons of destiny, humility, dealing with losing and imperfection, and not to underestimate an opponent. Traumas were perceived to teach the element of danger in sport and taught how to deal with performing at the opponents' home site. Performance problems tended to teach manager-specific lessons, of which most involved personal values such as discipline, self-control, and realism.

There were some similarities between the lessons learned in sport and those reported in the the CCL study. The most similarities were found in experiences considered as scope, values playing out, early sport experiences, demotions/missed promotions, and traumas. Similarities existed to a lesser degree with respect to role models, purely personal events, breaking a rut, and performance problems. There were no similarities in lessons learned for events called failures and mistakes.

Results strongly revealed that the subjects held teamwork in high regard. Teamwork was the most frequent response to the general questions which gave the subjects no cue or prompt to guide the answer. The subjects tended to value teamwork because they enjoyed the camaraderie, friendships and the sense of belonging provided by sports. The second most highly regarded lesson from sport was discipline. Subjects were in agreement that success is a direct result of hard work and perseverance.

The subjects overwhelmingly reported positive memories of their sporting experiences. They enjoyed their participation. Most indicated that "even the bad times" now provided positive memories. Sport was credited as an exceptionally strong developmental opportunity. Each subject reported that his sport experiences had enhanced his leadership development. More specifically, they perceived lessons such as teamwork, discipline, competition, hard work, and confidence as factors

contributing to their leadership development.

### Conclusions

Findings of the present study permit the following responses to questions set forth in the problem statement. These are not intended to be generalized beyond the boundaries of this research.

1. Do business managers perceive in their competitive sport backgrounds the events identified by the CCL in their research entitled The Lessons of Experience? If so, which ones?

It was concluded that the ten events identified in The Lessons of Experience had analogies in the world of sport. The subjects collectively perceived the ten events in their competitive sport experience. Only one event, scope, was perceived by all fifteen subjects. Eight of the ten events were experienced by at least thirteen of the subjects. Traumas were perceived by eleven of the subjects and performance problems were reported by only ten.

2. What, if anything, was learned from these events? How do the lessons relate to each event?

The subjects tended to perceive sport as a developmental experience which made valuable contributions to their leadership development. The two most important lessons learned from sport were teamwork and discipline. Other lessons worthy of note were hard work, perseverance, challenge, how to treat others, and confidence.

3. In what ways, if any, did the events contribute to the development of leadership qualities?

The subjects indicated that sport was an experience which forced them to perform tasks under somewhat adverse conditions. They learned to accept the tasks about which they had no choice. Sport also requires its participants to perform under intense pressure. In order to succeed, the subjects indicated that they recognized not only did they have to deal with such pressure situations, but they had to excel in them.

4. How do the perceptions of selected events compare with CCL research findings?

It was concluded that both the present study and the CCL research found similar lessons learned from 9 of the 10 events studied. Similarities were discovered in events grouped as scope, values playing out, early sport experiences, demotions/missed promotions, and traumas. Similarities existed to a lesser extent in events described as role models, purely personal events, breaking a rut, and performance problems. No similarities were found for events called failures and mistakes.

5. What thoughts about the competitive sport experience, i.e., affects and/or behaviors, do business managers recall? Are these associated with leadership? If so, how?

The subjects indicated that they learned many valuable lessons from role models in sport. Most often the role models

were former coaches whom the subjects saw as positive influences. The subjects also learned many lessons from experiences such as changes in scope. Most of these lessons concerned personal challenge and confidence.

The fifteen business managers participating in the study associated their sport experiences and their current business roles. Sport taught lessons which carried over into business. That is, they said that their businesses were comparable to sports teams.

The subjects recalled their sport experiences with almost exclusively positive memories. None regretted participating and all found the experience quite enjoyable.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

This study was designed to gain understanding as to whether leadership development is enhanced by sport experience. Particularly in times of economic difficulties and budget cuts, it is important to know what benefits sport participation may provide. On the basis of her experience in conceptualizing and carrying out the present study, the author offers the following recommendations for further inquiry.

1. Replicate the research based on only one very broad question asked to solicit the most important events in the subjects' sports career which enhanced their leadership development. That is to say, follow the complete design of the CCL inquiry rather than identifying events in the interview questions. It would be an interesting project to

conduct such a study and then compare the results to those found by the CCL researchers.

2. The present study excluded women because it was felt those of an age to achieve the necessary level in business would have had very limited opportunities in competitive sport. With the growing female participation in sport, further research into women's perceptions might improve the understanding of how sport contributes to the leadership development of women.

3. Given current interest in "applied" learning experiences, the present approach could be extended to include leaders from other fields. Comments about the military, Outward Bound and The Boy Scouts in the present research suggest that leaders might provide interesting information about lessons learned in these other activities.



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APPENDIX A1  
DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

- I. Personal information
  - A. Age
  - B. Sex
  - C. Race
  
- II. Sport experience?
  - A. Sport(s) played (include position with each sport)?
    - 1. Junior high level
    - 2. High school level
    - 3. College level
  - B. Accomplishments and honors won?
  - C. Co-captain or captainship(s) held?
  
- III. Educational experience?
  - A. Degree(s) held and appropriate major?
  
- IV. Professional experience?
  - A. Current position and company
  - B. Number of years in management position?
  
- V. Leisure activities?
  - A. Do you currently engage in any sports or physical activities? If so, what?
  - B. If you exercise, approximately how much or how often do you do so?

APPENDIX A2  
DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS  
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I am interested in the development of leadership qualities and am trying to find out if competitive sport experience affects such development. More specifically, I want to identify certain situations within sport, from which we may learn various lessons. My primary interest lies in the leadership development of business managers, so your cooperation is certainly appreciated.

I am asking you to think back to your athletic experience during your high school and/or college years. I ask you to share with me some of your experiences, their specific situations and what lessons you may have learned from them. Please understand that there is no need for you to answer every question. If what I ask does not relate to your background, feel free to say so. That's perfectly all right.

Do you have any questions before we begin concerning the purpose of the project?

1. When you recall your athletic career as a whole, what type of thoughts initially come to your mind?  
Do you mainly think of positive or negative memories?
2. Was there one person in your sporting career who had a major influence on you?  
Who was he/she?  
What kind of effect did he/she have?  
What did he/she teach you?
3. Sometimes in sports we witness or are involved in events where someone treats another person in a manner which makes a lasting impression on us. We are often left with a vivid "snapshot" of the occasion in our minds. Describe a time when you participated in or witnessed just such a situation.  
How did it make you feel?  
What did you learn from it?
4. Describe for me an experience you had very early in your sporting life which had a great impact on you.  
Why do you think you remember it after so many years?  
What did you learn from such a situation?
5. Sport itself is a very personal experience. We all take different lessons from our participation. Describe for me a

very personal experience which left you with a strong lasting impression.

What was it about this situation that made it have such an effect on you?

What did the experience teach you?

6. Coaches often give players new tasks or responsibilities that result in a broadened perspective or changed roles. What was the most challenging new task that you were ever asked to undertake in sport?

How well do you think you handled it?

What lessons did you learn?

7. Everybody in sport experiences the "rut" or "slump" when performance just isn't up to par. Describe the most significant slump you can remember going through.

What did you do in order to break it?

Did the experience help you in any way?

8. Getting "benched" or demoted is a part of sport that everyone seems to experience and no one enjoys. What was your most memorable benching?

How did it make you feel?

How did you come back from it?

Did it teach you anything?

9. It is always fun to win the game by scoring in the final seconds or hitting a ninth-inning home run. But, we're not always so fortunate. Describe for me the occasion in sport where your failure at a task had the most impact on you.

How did you feel about it?

What do you think you learned?

10. We occasionally have the opportunity in sport to witness or be involved in a "crisis" situation, which we view as being highly traumatic. These experiences may have a lasting emotional impact on us. What crisis situation affected you the most in sport?

How did you feel during this experience?

What did you learn from it?

11. Describe to me a time when you found yourself in an athletic situation where certain individuals or surroundings actually hindered your sport performance?

How did you deal with these factors?

Do you think you overcame them?

What did this experience teach you?

12. What do you think is the most important lesson that your sporting experience taught you?

Do you think this is a lesson specific to sport or could

you have learned this just as well through a different experience?

Which specific lesson learned through sport contributed the most to your leadership development?

13. Considering what we have just talked about, are there other events in sport, not discussed, that you associate with your current professional leadership role?

## APPENDIX A3

## DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO  
SCHOOL OF HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION, RECREATION AND DANCE

## SCHOOL REVIEW COMMITTEE

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I understand that the purpose of this study/project is to determine the perceptions of selected business managers of their competitive sport participation and its relationship to leadership development.

I confirm that my participation is entirely voluntary. No coercion of any kind has been used to obtain my cooperation.

I understand that I may withdraw my consent and terminate my participation at any time during the project.

I have been informed of the procedures that will be used in the project and understand what will be required of me as a subject.

I understand that all of my responses, written/oral/task, will remain completely anonymous.

I understand that a summary of the results of the project will be made available to me at the completion of the study if I so request.

I understand that the information on the tapes will be destroyed immediately following the completion of the data analysis.

I wish to give my voluntary cooperation as a participant.

-----  
Signature

-----  
Address

-----  
Date

APPENDIX A4  
DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS  
INITIAL LETTER TO SUBJECTS

Gale D. Kerbaugh  
121-H Village Lane  
Greensboro, N.C. 27409  
(919) 299-7502

March , 1986

Inside Address

Dear Mr.

I appreciate your willingness to participate in my study. I am looking forward to many very interesting discussions with successful business managers like yourself.

The purpose of my study is to determine what effect sport may have on the development of leadership qualities of the selected business managers. I will ask you for approximately one hour of your time for the interview.

Enclosed is a copy of the interview schedule, a demographic questionnaire, and the informed consent form. I encourage you to read the interview questions to help formulate your answers. I ask you to complete the demographic questionnaire and bring it to the interview. The informed consent form is necessary to comply with university regulations.

The interview will be tape recorded for ease of analysis; however, the information will be kept strictly confidential and it will be completely destroyed at the conclusion of the project.

I have our interview scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_, April \_\_ at :00 am/pm. If this is incorrect, please notify me. Your participation is very important to my study and I thank you for being willing to assist me. See you on the \_\_\_\_\_!

Sincerely,

Gale D. Kerbaugh

## APPENDIX B

## SAMPLE INTERVIEW NOTES

I am interested in the development of leadership qualities and am trying to find out if competitive sport experience affects such development. More specifically, I want to identify certain situations within sport, from which we may learn various lessons. My primary interest lies in the leadership development of business managers, so your cooperation is certainly appreciated.

I am asking you to think back to your athletic experience during your high school and/or college years. I ask you to share with me some of your experiences, their specific situations and what lessons you may have learned from them. Please understand that there is no need for you to answer every question. If what I ask does not relate to your background, feel free to say so. That's perfectly all right.

Do you have any questions before we begin concerning the purpose of the project?

1. When you recall your athletic career as a whole, what type of thoughts initially come to your mind?

*very positive experience  
what he did, he enjoyed  
deal w/ others  
coop. + comp.*

*"people make the difference"*

Do you mainly think of positive or negative memories?

2. Is there one person in your sporting career who had a major influence on you?

*HS FB/wrestling/Asst. BB coach*

Who was he/she?

What kind of effect did he/she have?

*compassionate*

*"come on I want to show you"*



What did he/she teach you?

1. commitment to profession
2. know yourself
3. fundamentals

3. Sometimes in sports we witness or are involved in events where someone treats another person in a manner which makes a lasting impression on us. We are often left with a vivid "snapshot" of the occasion in our minds. Describe a time when you participated in or witnessed just such a situation.

paired w/ fat boy on rope climb  
HS FB  
coach verbally abused boy  
Babeck

How did it make you feel?

mad!

What did you learn from it?

direct approach not always best

4. Describe for me an experience you had very early in your sporting life which had a great impact on you.

nothing of significance

Why do you think you remember it after so many years?

What did you learn from such a situation?

5. Sport itself is a very personal experience. We all take different lessons from our participation. Describe for me a very personal experience which left you with a strong lasting

impression.

wrestling at Forbush, scared  
tried to stay w/ him

What was it about this situation that made it have such an effect on you?

god's fortitude together

What did the experience teach you?

flexible goals

6. Coaches often give players new tasks or responsibilities that result in a broadened perspective or changed roles. What was the most challenging new task that you were ever asked to undertake in sport?

only guy who could drive bus  
"tremendous resp."

How well do you think you handled it?

"pretty well"

What lessons did you learn?

-coach's confidence

7. Everybody in sport experiences the "rut" or "slump" when performance just isn't up to par. Describe the most significant slump you can remember going through.

HS BBall  
lost time  
new players - more talent

What did you do in order to break it?

saw reality

Did the experience help you in any way?

- reality

8. Getting "benched" or demoted is a part of sport that everyone seems to experience and no one enjoys. What was your most memorable benching?

several times

bad times

How did it make you feel?

quietly embarrassed

How did you come back from it?

soul search

Did it teach you anything?

- others view ability

- more than what you think

9. It is always fun to win the game by scoring in the final seconds or hitting a ninth-inning home run. But, we're not always so fortunate. Describe for me the occasion in sport where your failure at a task had the most impact on you.

No

on even keel

How did you feel about it?

What do you think you learned?

10. We occasionally have the opportunity in sport to witness or be involved in a "crisis" situation, which we view as being highly traumatic. These experiences may have a lasting emotional impact on us. What crisis situation affected you the most in sport?

Rope incident

How did you feel during this experience?

What did you learn from it?

11. Describe to me a time when you found yourself in an athletic situation where certain individuals or surroundings actually hindered your sport performance?

No

rope incident

How did you deal with these factors?

Do you think you overcame them?

What did this experience teach you?

12. What do you think is the most important lesson that your sporting experience taught you?

- 1 - realistic - in touch w/ self
- 2 - teamwork - groups at Babcock

Do you think this is a lesson specific to sport or could you have learned this just as well through a different experience?

doesn't know - probably yes

Which specific lesson learned through sport contributed the most to your leadership development?

- competition
- teamwork
- team-building approach

13. Considering what we have just talked about, are there other events in sport, not discussed, that you associate with your current professional leadership role?

as exec., is able to get others to play as team  
business - comp. by nature - parallels sport  
brings to company team approach

## APPENDIX C

## CHARACTERIZATIONS OF SAMPLE SUBJECTS

Subject #1 was a 36-year old white male who had earned a B.S. in Industrial Management. He participated in junior high and high school football, high school and college wrestling, and college lacrosse. He held the position of plant manager and had nine years of managerial experience. He occasionally played golf.

Subject #2 was a 34-year old white male and had earned a B.S. in Business Administration. In junior high he played basketball, football and ran track. In high school, he wrestled, lifted weights, played basketball and football, and served as a co-captain in wrestling. He had ten years of management experience and occupied the position of corporate vice-president in charge of merchandising. He exercised two hours a week primarily in tennis and golf.

Subject #3 was a 28-year old white male. He participated in junior high basketball, baseball, and tennis, and swam in high school. He held bachelors degrees in economics and zoology and had six years of management experience. He occupied a position of marketing and membership services manager. He exercised regularly in swimming, running and cycling.

Subject #4, a 27-year old white male, played junior high football and ran track. In high school he ran track and played ice hockey and then ran middle distances in college track. In track he won a high school state championship and was a participant in the NCAA Division I championships. He served as a captain for two years in high school track. He earned an undergraduate degree in education and was a district administrative services manager with three years in a management position. He regularly exercised in tennis and ice hockey and flew a sail plane.

Subject #5 was a 30-year old white male who played junior high football, basketball and swimming. He participated in high school swimming and served as a co-captain. He held a B.S. in accounting, occupied the position of vice-president in charge of finance, and had five years of management experience. He exercised for one or two hours a week in golf, softball and walking.

Subject #6, a 30-year old black male, played basketball throughout junior and senior high school and college. His list of accomplishments included various Most Valuable Player awards and school records, high school All-State, college All-Conference, and NCAA Division I All-American honors. He served as a co-captain for three years in high school and three years in college. He earned a B.A. in sociology, was a consumer loan officer, and had five years of management experience. He exercised five days a week running, playing basketball, volleyball or softball.

Subject #7 was a 39-year old white male who played junior high baseball, football and basketball. He also participated in high school baseball, football and wrestling, and in college played baseball and wrestled. His high school awards included three state wrestling championships, three years as an All-Conference baseball player, and various school records. He served as a co-captain in high school and college wrestling, and in college baseball. He held a B.A. in business administration, was the associate superintendent in charge of finance for a large county school system and served in managerial positions for twelve years. He exercised every other day in softball, tennis, golf and flying.

Subject #8, a 31-year old white male, played baseball and ice hockey in junior high and high school, and competed in college ice hockey. With a B.S. in accounting, he was a corporate director of sales planning and administration and had eight years of management experience. He exercised three times a week in tennis, softball and golf.

Subject #9 was a 33-year old white male with competitive experience in high school track, the college triathlon, and military boxing, swimming, lacrosse, cross country and track. He served as a captain in military intramural cross country and soccer. He held a B.S. in general engineering from a national military academy and was a company sales and safety engineer with twelve years of managerial experience. He exercised three times a week in long distance running, basketball, and vita parcours workouts.

Subject #10, a 37-year old white male, participated in junior high football, basketball and lacrosse and high school football and lacrosse. He also competed in college lacrosse at a national military academy. He won All-County and All-Region honors in high school lacrosse and third team All-American honors in college lacrosse. He earned a B.S. in engineering, had five years of management experience, and was a manager of marketing. He exercised three times a week running, snow skiing, or playing tennis.

Subject #11, a 32-year old white male, played football, basketball and baseball during junior and senior high school and swam competitively for seven years. He served as a basketball co-captain for two years in high school. He listed no undergraduate degree, but was a company vice-president in charge of operations. He had eight years of managerial experience. He exercised very little in sports such as golf, hunting and flying.

Subject #12 was a 37-year old white male with competitive experience in junior high basketball and baseball, high school basketball and tennis, and college riflery. His accomplishments included two Most Valuable Player awards in tennis. He held bachelors degree in Business Administration, was a company vice-president, and had 13 years of management experience. He exercised for one hour a week in skiing, sailing and golf.

Subject #13, a 32-year old white male, played baseball and swam in junior high school, played tennis and swam in high school, and swam competitively in college. He had participated on conference championship swim teams in high school and college, and been a co-captain in high school swimming. He earned bachelors degrees in fine arts and business administration, served as company president, and had nine years of experience as a manager. He exercised three or four days a week in tennis, swimming, aerobics, golf, and water skiing.

Subject #14 was a 28-year old white male who had earned a B.A. in biology and a Doctorate of Dental Science. He wrestled and ran track in junior high and played football, basketball, soccer and tennis in high school. He served as a captain in tennis. He occupied the role of senior dental resident and had three years of managerial experience. He exercised three or four hours a week in such sports as tennis, basketball, jogging, and bicycling.

Subject #15, a 40-year old white male, competed in football and baseball in junior high, football and wrestling in high school, and football while serving in the military. In the military, he was an All-Star football player and served as a co-captain. He earned a B.S. in finance, was a corporate director of finance, and had been in a managerial position for eight years. He exercised two or three times a week in tennis or weight lifting.