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**Defining Success within a "Successful" Men's  
NCAA Division I Sport Program**

Dr. Seth E. Jenny

Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, USA

Dr. Glenn F. Hushman

University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA

**Authors' Notes**

Seth E. Jenny, Ph.D., is an assistant professor within the Department of Physical Education, Sport and Human Performance at Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC. Glenn F. Hushman is an assistant professor within the Department of Health, Exercise and Sports Sciences at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Seth E. Jenny, Department of Physical Education, Sport and Human Performance, Winthrop University, 216B West Center, Rock Hill, SC 29733. Contact: [jennys@winthrop.edu](mailto:jennys@winthrop.edu)

### **Abstract**

A coaching philosophy is a personal doctrine, or individual set of experiences and values, that guides a coach's beliefs, actions, and coaching style (Huber, 2013). The humanistic coaching philosophy involves a collaborative coach/athlete process which considers individual athlete differences, abilities, and goals, with the long-term aim of developing a self-confident and self-regulated athlete (Lyle, 1999). Opposite of the traditional model where success is determined by wins or losses, within the humanistic approach winning is redefined so that the process is emphasized and achievement of individual athlete goals indicates success. Through coach interviews, athlete interviews, training session observations, and artifact collection, the aim of this case study was to explore the coaching philosophy and methods of a successful men's NCAA Division I cross country coach and explore to what extent they are humanistic. Definition of success emerged as a primary theme where results indicated that while the participant coach was extrinsically motivated by outcome measures (i.e., winning NCAA national championships), his methods ascribed to the humanistic values of striving for individual athlete potential, holistic development, and self-actualization. Findings suggest that while the NCAA espouses to holistic development of the student-athlete, it is hard to separate athletic outcome measures as at least a portion of the definition of success for coaches working within this setting.

*Keywords:* coaching philosophy, humanism, distance running, cross country

### **Category**

Original Research

### **Introduction**

A coaching philosophy is a personal doctrine, or individual set of experiences and values, that guides a coach's beliefs, actions, and coaching style (Huber, 2013). Parsh (2007) ascribes to an eight-step approach to developing a coaching philosophy. He feels that writing down the answers to the following eight questions will assist in organizing a philosophy: "1) What do you want to accomplish?, 2) What are your priorities?, 3) What are the responsibilities [of the coaching staff, athletes, and parents]?, 4) What are your teaching methods?, 5) How do you define success?, 6) How will practices and games be organized?, 7) [What are the] team rules and consequences?, [and] 8) How will you communicate your philosophy?" (pp. 56-57). Undoubtedly, not defining one's coaching philosophy can lead to inconsistent behavior which can destroy personal relationships and create turmoil within a team (Martens, 2012).

Three different coaching styles have been noted by Martens (2012) – the command style where the coach makes all of the decisions, the submissive style where the coach makes as few decisions as possible (i.e., throw-out-the-ball-and-have-a-good-time approach), and the cooperative style where decisions are shared with the athlete(s). Similar to the cooperative style, the humanistic coaching philosophy involves a collaborative coach/athlete process that considers individual athlete differences, abilities, and goals, with the long-term aim of developing a self-confident and self-regulated athlete (Lyle, 1999).

### **Success in the Humanistic Philosophy**

One of the most critical features of humanistic coaching is that the definition of success is not directly related to winning as in the traditional model. The humanistic model forces a reassessment of how humans examine themselves and encourages success measured only against one's own potential. Within the individual-centered approach of humanism, winning is redefined

so that the process is emphasized and achievement of individual athlete goals indicates success or winning (Danziger, 1982). This approach differs from the “traditional” model where final results are the only indicator of success.

Goals are set collaboratively with the athlete and are reevaluated regularly to monitor progress and measure success. Reaching each individual athlete’s potential and striving for self-actualization are primary aims of the humanistic coach. Because the individual is celebrated for what he or she is, it is likely that this will lead to intrinsic motivation and a more satisfied outlook of themselves and the world around them (Cross, 1991). Moreover, coaching in a humanistic fashion can be considered worthwhile because it has the potential to stimulate the necessary qualities of self-determination, self-control, and individuality (Lyle, 2002). While no empirical evidence could be found suggesting that coaching with a humanistic philosophy improves athlete performance, considerable evidence exists indicating athletes may prefer being coached within a humanistic paradigm (Cuka & Zhurda, 2006; Parker, Czech, Burdette, et al., 2012).

Humanistic coaching promotes holistic development through taking an educating, caring, and athlete-welfare approach. Such an approach lessens dependence on the coach while strengthening a facilitating/reinforcing role versus a directive one (Lyle, 1999). In summary, humanistic coaching practice supports an individual athlete’s autonomy through a close interpersonal relationship emphasizing open communication, shared goal-setting and program decision making, wherein success is measured against the individual athlete’s goal attainment and personal self-actualization.

### **Success and Effective Coaching**

The word “successful” in the context of coaching is problematic as coaches are most often considered successful by association with successful performers, but this does not automatically mean the coach has been personally effective (Cross, 1999). Similar to successful coaching performance, the effective coach is one whose capacity for effective coaching performance has been demonstrated over time and circumstance. Factors affecting effective coaching must be taken into consideration when evaluating a particular coaching philosophy (e.g., humanism) – i.e., factors such as availability of support, resources, etc. Two ways that have been suggested to evaluate successful and effective coaching is to assess athlete goal attainment or measure the “value added” by the coach (i.e., coaching decisions made and strategies used that directly affect performance) (Cross, 1999). Both are complicated ventures.

Moreover, effective and successful coaching means different things to different people; including the coach, the athlete, the coach’s employer, the athlete’s parents, the governing body, the community, or any other organization. When one considers the many people involved it must be considered who is defining success or the effectiveness of the coach. In line with a humanistic philosophy, Douge and Hastie (1993) suggest coaching effectiveness depends on what the athlete desires to get out of the program. The coach must consider each individual athlete’s goal for success and these goals may not necessarily be related to athletics. The key humanistic goals of elevating self-perception, striving toward self-actualization, gaining self-understanding, and improving interpersonal relations could also be considered objectives for success in a humanistically administered coaching program. For a full review of coaching effectiveness in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) distance running see Jenny (2007).

### **Winning and Humanism**

However, humanistic coaching does not negate winning as an important part of the sport process. One of the practical goals of a coach must be winning, but this does not have to be inconsistent with other humanistic goals. The athlete's will to win can certainly be stressed within the humanistic philosophy, but of utmost importance is the complete development of the total person (Lyle, 2002).

Winning is still very much important in humanistic performance coaching, but priorities change within the humanistic model. For example, if an athlete does not win a competition, he or she can still be successful within the humanistic paradigm if he or she performs a personal best or fulfills some other athlete-centered goal within the competition (e.g., running even splits in a race). Nevertheless, some (particularly elite) athletes may have winning as the primary aim, thus qualifying success as winning by these athletes, and the humanistic coach must facilitate this goal.

Finally, within the humanistic paradigm, competition is seen as a vehicle to reach the athlete's full potential. Competitors are not seen as enemies, but rather tools to assist each individual or team in the quest to attain meaningful performances and potential (Cross, 1991). Scores in competition are also meaningful to the humanistic coach because they assist in measuring the quality of the athlete's performance. The pursuit of fulfilling athlete potential is paramount to the humanistic coach and competition facilitates this objective.

### **Humanistic Coaching Philosophy within NCAA Sport**

A problem may exist when the priorities and goals of the sport organization or society are different from that of the athlete. For example, if the athlete is learning/mastery-oriented and the organization is performance/outcome-oriented a conflict of interest may occur. The humanistic coach's job may be on the line in some sporting settings if outcome success is not attained. Lyle (2002) notes that engagement in the "fast track" of elite-level (i.e., top tier NCAA Division I) sport is seen to require an almost total commitment by the athlete, potentially working to the disadvantage of many other aspects of the athlete's life (e.g., academics). The supreme goal of elite sport is winning. Furthermore, this elite-level reward structure for both coach and athlete that emphasizes outcome success may result in coaching practice being performance-oriented, valuing competition success more than the concern for the individual – all in opposition of the humanistic paradigm. For example, a coach whose sole top priority is winning may direct an athlete to re-enter competition against medical advice or the athlete's wishes shortly after a concussion rather than displaying concern for this athlete as a person. On the other hand, outcome-oriented coaches can still assist student-athletes in being "the best they can be" on and off the field if they feel that this will improve their athletic performance, externally appearing as synergistic with the humanistic philosophy. The coach's motivation for these actions – winning as measured by wins or losses versus individual holistic development – would be the tell-tale indication of his or her philosophy.

Humanistic coaching within the United States school-sports model may prove to be another problem. Lyle (1999) notes that the goals of the humanistic coach – long-term whole-person development – may not come to fruition for many years. The four-to-five year cycles of the United States high school and collegiate sports models typically call for short-term success and

development with different coaches across an athlete's career. Some coaches may not feel motivated to "put in the effort" of whole-person development if they know they will only coach the athlete for a short time. The European club sports system may be more conducive to the humanistic philosophy as the athlete and coach may stay together from youth to the professional ranks.

On the flip side, humanistic, rather than authoritarian methods, may be more natural for coaches working within the NCAA. As the NCAA places an increased emphasis on both athletic and academic excellence, coaches at colleges or universities within this competition structure may be more prone to humanistic methods of holistic development as minimum academic standards are required for student-athlete eligibility. Incoming student-athletes in all divisions must meet the following requirements to participate within the NCAA: graduate from high school, complete a minimum amount of core academic courses with a minimum grade-point average (GPA) across these courses, attain a qualifying score on the SAT or ACT entrance exams, and meet amateurism criteria (NCAA, 2014). Then, to remain eligible, student-athletes must continue to meet minimum academic requirements according to their NCAA division. NCAA Division I student-athletes must meet certain benchmarks toward degree completion and as a team, pass Academic Progress Rate (APR) standards.

Due to this academic push, coaches operating within the NCAA may be more prone to humanistic methods regarding holistic development through supporting athletic and academic development of their athletes. However, the coach's motivation to support holistic development in this setting is certainly influenced by meeting student-athlete NCAA eligibility requirements. Nonetheless, the NCAA environment may be more attuned to humanism as it forces the coach to also pay attention to academic achievement outside of sport.



No study could be found which methodically explores the philosophies of NCAA coaches and the methods in which these philosophies are implemented, particularly through the lens of humanism. Past empirical research on coaching philosophies have primarily investigated high school coaches through data collection methods of questionnaire (Pratt & Eitzen, 1989), online survey (Miller, Lutz, & Fredenberg, 2012), interviews of the coaches (McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000), interviews of the coaches and their athletes (Bennie & O'Connor 2010; Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012), or written coaching philosophy statements (Collins, Barber, Moore, & Laws, 2011). NCAA cross country coaches such as Adams State University's Joe Vigil (1995), Gonzaga University's Pat Tyson (Tyson & Binder, 2014), and State University of New York-Cortland's Jack Daniels (2013) self-report tenants of their coaching philosophy as they tout recipes for their teams' successes in their training books. Additionally, biographies of the University of Arkansas' John McDonnell (Maloney & McDonnell, 2013), University of Oregon's Bill Bowerman (Moore, 2007), and University of Colorado's Mark Wetmore (Lear, 2003) all non-empirically describe the coaching philosophies of each of these NCAA coaches. However, actual coaching practice may not always parallel a coach's stated or written philosophy (Martens, 2012). Qualitative methodologists prescribe multiple methods of data collection and analysis known as "triangulation" to increase internal validity (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Through coach interviews, athlete interviews, training session observations, and artifact collection, the aim of this case study was to explore the coaching philosophy and methods of a successful men's NCAA Division I cross country coach and explore to what extent they are humanistic. The primary question guiding this research was: To what extent is the participant coach's stated coaching philosophy and actual coaching practice humanistic?

## **Methods**

### **Design Rationale and Pilot Study**

The exploration of an in-depth analysis of the coach and athletes in a natural setting in this study lent itself to qualitative inquiry methods. A case study was utilized in order to capture the circumstances or conditions of a typical situation with the lessons learned assumed to be revealing about the experiences of the person or organization – i.e., NCAA sport (Yin, 2009). Interview questions, participant athlete sampling, and observation techniques were all piloted and strengthened to increase the validity of the study.

### **Researcher Positionality**

The principal investigator of this study, a former NCAA Division II distance runner, acted within Merriam's (2009) "observer as participant" role as he ran with the team in some of the training sessions, but the participation was unquestionably secondary to the role of data gatherer and researcher. Similarly within the pilot study, this appeared to enable the researcher to have the athletes and coach "let their guards down" as they related to him as a fellow runner. However, researcher bias was reduced through researcher reflexive journaling throughout data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). The researcher attempted to enter the study without any preconceived notions about the coach's philosophy or methods – a concept called bracketing or epoche in which the researcher refrains from judgment and sets aside past experiences as much as possible to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Through keeping a researcher's journal while conducting the study, the researcher made a conscious effort to display reflexivity throughout and was aware of the biases, values, and experiences he brought to the research and kept an open mind during all data collection and analysis – assisting in keeping personal biases at bay (Creswell, 2007).

## **Participants**

**Coach.** Purposeful criterion sampling was utilized to make certain the participant coach met the desired criteria of the study to inform the guiding research question and central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The participant coach was the current head coach of a successful men's NCAA Division I cross country running team in the west region of the United States. In this study, "success" equated to the coach having distance running athletes and teams qualify for the NCAA national championships. At the time of this study, the participant coach had led 15 teams (9 men's, 6 women's) to the NCAA Division I Cross Country Championships with all but 2 squads earning top-25 finishes. The participant coach's background information and accolades can be seen in Table 1.

The participant coach's university defines itself as a public "research intensive" organization and has a total of 36,722 students. Of the total student population, 38.1% is Hispanic, 41% is Caucasian, 5.7% is American Indian, 2.5% is African American with the remaining population is defined as "other." Regarding aspects of athletic facilities and culture, this institute has an established reputation in many sports and has facilities similar to most Division I universities. In addition to the track and cross country programs, the men's soccer and basketball programs regularly achieve national recognition through repetitive conference championships and NCAA Division I championship tournament appearances which often take them deep into post-season play. The track and cross country teams have access to an all-weather outdoor track, a temporarily-staged banked 200 meter indoor track (set up in conjunction with the city in the winter), an athlete-only weight and athletic training facility, as well as ample running trails throughout the surrounding area. The university's annual athletic expenditure is approximately \$33.7 million.

**Athletes.** In order to increase validity and remove selection bias, random purposeful sampling occurred of five men's cross country team runners who were under the tutelage of the participant coach (Creswell, 2013). It was essential to interview athletes with varying levels of experience with the coach as the humanistic coaching philosophy includes an incremental empowerment of the athlete based upon athlete age and, more significantly, experience level of the athlete (Hogg, 1995). One athlete with one, two, and three years of experience each, as well as, two athletes with four years of experience with the coach were randomly selected. Participant athletes' background information and running accolades can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1

*Coach Background*


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<b>Gender / Age</b>	44 / Male
<b>Ethnicity / Nationality</b>	Caucasian / United States
<b>Education</b>	Master's Degree
<b>Non-Coaching Working Background</b>	Technical Writer (5 months)
<b>Personal Athletic Background</b>	NCAA D-I middle-distance runner: 4 years track, 2 years cross country (800m – 1:50.11 personal best)
<b>Yrs Coaching Distance Running</b>	20
<b>Coaching Background</b>	1 year NCAA D-III head cross country / track & field coach, 1 year NCAA D-I cross country / track & field grad assistant; 18 years NCAA D-I head men's and women's cross country / track & field coach
<b>Coaching Certifications</b>	None
<b>Current Coaching Position(s)</b>	NCAA D-I head men's and women's cross country, indoor and outdoor track & field (in 6th year at current university)
<b>Primary Events Coached</b>	Cross country; 800m to 10k (track)
<b>Men's Cross Country Team Size</b>	20
<b>Current Men's Team Age Range</b>	18 to 22 years old
<b>Standard of Current Athletes</b>	Up to "sub-international" ("European-type championship level"), 4 former athletes turned professional distance runner (2 at current university)
<b>Coaching Accolades</b>	NCAA D-I national men's cross country coach of the year; 4-time region and 25-time conference men's and women's cross country coach of the year; 2-time men's conference indoor track coach of the year; coached 17 men's and women's distance running NCAA D-I All-Americans

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Note. D = Division.

Table 2

*Athletes' Background.*

	<b>Athlete 1</b>	<b>Athlete 2</b>	<b>Athlete 3</b>	<b>Athlete 4</b>	<b>Athlete 5</b>
<b>Age</b>	20	22	20	21	22
<b>Nationality</b>	Swedish	British	Naturalized U.S. Citizen (S. Africa)	American (Hispanic)	American (Caucasian)
<b>Years Distance Running</b>	5	9	6	8	4
<b>NCAA Cross Country Eligibility</b>	Freshman	Red-shirt So.	Red-shirt So.	Red-shirt Jr.	Red-shirt Jr.
<b>Years Coached by Participant Coach</b>	1 ( <i>mid-1st year</i> )	2.5 ( <i>started mid-year</i> )	3	4	4
<b>Personal Best Times</b>	1500m (3:44.13)	1500m (3:43.9)	5000m (14:47)	800m (1:49.99)	5000m (14:03)
	<b>Additional Running Accolades</b>			<b>Finishing Places in Current Season among Teammates on the Cross Country Team</b>	
<b>Athlete 1</b>	European Junior Championships: 14th (1500m, T&F), 56th (XC)			7, 5, 3, 7, 2 (range: 2-7)	
<b>Athlete 2</b>	UK Olympic T&F Trials: 800m (semi-finals) & 1500m qualifier; 1st Team All-American Distance Medley Relay			4, 7, 7, 5, 3 (range: 3-7)	
<b>Athlete 3</b>	Four-time high school state 800m champion			2, 8, 8 (range: 2-8)	
<b>Athlete 4</b>	1st Team All-American Distance Medley Relay			Not on traveling squad (approximately 10-12)	
<b>Athlete 5</b>	All-Conference Indoor Track (3k, 5k) & Outdoor Track (10k); All-Region (XC)			1, 3, 1, 5, 3, 6 (range: 1-6)	

Note. "Coach" = participant coach; T&F = track and field (athletics); XC = cross country.

## **Data Collection**

The sources of data collection in this study included coach interviews, athlete interviews, training session field observations, and artifacts. Data was collected until a saturation point was reached – where regularities emerged and any new information attained was far removed from the guiding research question (Merriam, 2009).

**Coach and athlete interviews.** Two semi-structured interviews lasting about one hour each of the coach were conducted. Similarly, one semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes each with five different athletes occurred. Interview questions focused on the coach's philosophy, ambitions, decision-making processes, and coach/athlete interactions. Example question topics included: 1) Describe your coaching philosophy. 2) In general, what is your definition of success? 3) What is your definition of success for the team and for the individual athlete? 4) What do you think "success" means to your athletics department and academic institution? Similarly, example athlete questions included: 1) What is your definition of success for yourself? 2) What is your coach's definition of success for the team? 3) What is your coach's definition of success for you?

**Observations.** Eight overt naturalistic field observations occurred across the two weeks leading into the national championships during the team's peaking training cycle. Utilizing the narrative method of recording (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2011), the researcher described observations in note form with a pencil and notepad as they occurred including descriptions of training events and strategies used, coach/athlete quotes and interactions, and general impressions perceived by the researcher. The handwritten notes were later typed within 24 hours to improve recall.

**Artifacts.** Artifacts, what Creswell (2013) describes as what people make and use, were also collected and used to help determine the coach's coaching philosophy. The team handbook and planned training session schedules sent via email to the athletes were collected and used in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data was then transcribed verbatim and imported into the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software *Atlas.ti version 7.0* (Scientific Software Development, GmbH, Germany) to aid in organizing and categorizing the data into themes. Coding of names (e.g., "Athlete 1", etc.) assisted in maintaining privacy of the participants. As prescribed by Creswell (2013), the qualitative data analysis strategy used included open coding, axial coding, and then selective coding. Data was first analyzed through open coding where primary categories and themes within the data were coded. Next, central open coding categories were identified as the core phenomenon and then the data was re-analyzed around these core phenomenon. Finally, findings were generated through the interrelationships of the major coded categories or themes.

### **Validity**

Coach interviews, athlete interviews, training session observations, and collected artifact data were triangulated as well as an external audit by a content matter expert were utilized to increase the internal validity of the findings (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2011). Moreover, randomly selecting the athletes assisted in strengthening the internal and external validity of the findings (Cozby & Bates, 2011).



### **Results and Analysis of Themes**

One of the most critical features of humanism is that the definition of success is not directly related to winning as in the traditional model. Within the individual-centered approach of humanism, winning is redefined so that the process is emphasized and achievement of the individual athlete process goals indicate success or winning, as opposed to the traditional model where final results indicate success (Danziger, 1982). While the will to win may be important within the humanistic model, development of the person as they strive toward their potential and self-actualization must be seen as paramount. The primary topics in which the coach's definition of success were revealed included the coach's ambitions as a coach and primary goal for the program, the coach's definition of success for individual athletes and the team, and the coach's view on winning.

Collected supporting qualitative data will be provided for each theme which will then be analyzed in regards to the extent in which it does or does not parallel the humanistic coaching philosophy. The pseudonym "Coach" will be used for the participant coach as well as "Athlete" with an assigned code (e.g., Athlete 1, etc.) for the participant athletes.

#### **Coach's Ambitions as a Coach and Primary Goal for the Program**

Coach appeared to have both outcome and process aims for his program. On one hand, when asked what was the main goal of his program, Coach said, "To win a national championship." On the other hand, when asked what his ambitions are as a coach, Coach responded, "Just give kids every opportunity to be successful in the classroom and on the track, whatever they deem successful." Clearly, while his stated goal of his program was outcome-oriented, his ambition as

a coach was process-oriented in line with the humanistic ideals of holistic development of the person.

Moreover, Coach stated outcome measures regarding team goals, but hinted at striving toward individual athlete process goals to achieve those outcomes. He stated:

It's the same team goal every year...Win the conference championship, be in position to make the national championship, and get as high as you can...[at the] cross [country] regional [championships]...That's just the philosophy, that's the goal...It's up on our wall. Why else do we do it? It's that journey to get to that point. It's not, win a national championship; what have you done today to try to get there?

The majority of athlete's perceived Coach's goals or ambitions for the program as outcome-oriented. Athlete 4 stated, "Every year we all have the common goal of a conference team championship when it comes to cross [country] or...track. Ultimately, eventually it'll be a national championship." Likewise, Athlete 5 perceived that Coach's goals and ambitions were "to get men's and women's podium [team finishes at] NCAA cross country – top four." It appears Coach may not be certain as to his ultimate goals and ambitions. He continues to list outcome measures as the aim of the program, but also mentions humanistic process-oriented aims to try and attain those outcome measures. While outcome measures and humanistic process-oriented aims are not always incompatible, total development of each person (inside and outside of athletics) would be cited as the ultimate objective by a coach with a completely humanistic philosophy.

Finally, Coach provided an outcome-oriented definition of success for himself as a coach when he said, "I don't know because I don't think we've been successful. [Success] for me personally [is] winning [at] whatever we do. But that's contradictory to what I said earlier. But me, personally, I'm hypercompetitive." Coach admits he is conflicted regarding ultimately

aiming for outcome-oriented winning measures as a coach, but also feels the process of athlete's striving for those measures is important. Ultimately, it is apparent this area of Coach's coaching philosophy is not well defined.

### **Coach's Definition of Success for the Individual Athlete**

Overall, Coach's definition of success for individual athletes would be considered humanistic. "Being able to look yourself in the mirror and say you did everything you could" was how Coach described success for individual athletes. Attempting to fulfill one's potential while not focusing solely on the result of the competition would certainly be considered humanistic.

In addition, the majority of the athletes cited definitions which would fall within the humanistic framework regarding what they thought Coach's definition of success was for them personally. Athlete 2 felt Coach's definition of success for him was "to run as fast as I can, but to have done everything I can towards it...– to make the sacrifices." Athlete 4 perceived Coach's definition of success for him was to "train hard, stay healthy, [and] compete well." Notice winning was not a part of this definition. Moreover, Athlete 5 thought success for his teammates and himself, according to Coach, was "Giving it the best we have [and] living a lifestyle that's conducive of that. I think [Coach] definitely wants us to grow up as people through the program too." These three definitions of success are all process-oriented, de-emphasize winning, and focus on the holistic development of the individual as they reach toward achieving their potential. Athlete 3 explained what he felt Coach's definition of success was for him with the following:

I had a friend who...came here and he said, '[Coach] I don't know if I want to run. And [Coach] said, 'Well why run then? If it doesn't make you happy then why do it?' So [Coach] realizes that there's more to life than running...He knows winning isn't

everything...Even if you're running super well, if you're unhappy there are other things...[Coach] doesn't push running down our throats unless you ask for it.

It appears happiness of the athlete is how Coach defines success according to Athlete 3. In line with the humanistic paradigm, happiness could correlate to having the individual athlete achieve their own personal goals and ambitions with performance outcomes being tertiary.

### **Coach's Definition of Success for the Team**

Paralleling his definition of success for the individual athlete, Coach stated his definition of success for the team was, "Them being able to look themselves in the mirror and say I did everything I could." Again, this is an individualized holistic look at success which could be perceived as striving toward self-actualization – a humanistic ideal. Additionally, the majority of the athletes believed Coach's definition of success for the team related to tenants which fall within the humanistic philosophy. Athlete 2 stated:

[Coach] just wants everyone to be running or jumping or vaulting or throwing as far or as best as they can...so that they are happy with it...No matter where you're ranked in the nation as long as that was the best you could do he'd be happy for you.

Athlete 4 echoed a similar definition relating to striving toward potential when he said:

[Coach] just wants us to go out there and compete hard. We're not going to win everything...and we're not going to be the best every single meet...I think he understands that and he just wants us to...put all our effort out there and leave everything out there that we can.

Athlete 5 felt Coach's definition of success for the team related to interpersonal relationships and "having a cohesive team." He noted:

Yesterday [Coach] was saying how we had a really successful season. And in a lot of ways we did...We were also way closer than we've ever been...In that way that's a huge success...And I think that sets up for a whole other year. So I think [Coach] has probably more than one definition of success, but that's one of them. And then, obviously, going out and running the best you can, especially at the big meets.

Similarly, Athlete 3 stated that at a team meeting after the NCAA national cross country championships (where neither team placed in the top 5) Coach said:

'This is the happiest I've ever been with any team. The girls are getting along really well. The guys...had a little bit of an off day, but...are a phenomenal group and nobody's competing [against each other]. People are running together, training together, and no one's competing to beat someone on the team. They're not competing for spots [on our team]. They're competing against another team.' So he was really happy with that...The vibe was just amazing. [Coach] was all smiles and it's a rare occasion when you see [Coach] that happy.

All of these descriptions de-emphasized winning and focused on athletes striving toward potential or having improved interpersonal relationships parallel to humanistic ideals.

### **Coach's view on Winning**

When asked which description best describes you and why: "winning is the only thing" or "winning is not everything," Coach responded:

Winning is not everything. I think it's the process to get there. I think it's growing as an individual...Because when you look at 330 [NCAA Division I] schools, winning is tough. So I think at some level...I don't want to say unrealistic. Next year's team I think can win

a national championship.

Again, Coach appears to mix process and outcome measures with his definitions and descriptions of success. In the humanistic model, the definition of success is not directly related to winning. Moreover, the majority of athletes believed “winning is not everything” with Coach. Athlete 4 said:

[Coach] enjoys winning, don't get me wrong, but...Like at conference indoor [track] last year, we didn't win and we had a chance to. And after the race [Coach] had nothing but positive stuff to tell us...Like, we hit everything we needed to. We just came up a little short.

Mirroring Coach's response, Athlete 1 stated:

I know that [Coach] talks a lot about just being able to push it to your limits. To see how good we can be...It's kind of hard saying winning is everything, especially in the NCAA where winning is super hard...I think [Coach] somehow defines winning also as being able to be as good as we are.

Both Athletes 4 and 1 felt it was more important to Coach to run and compete to their potential as opposed to focusing on performance outcomes. Finally, Athlete 2 said:

I think winning is not everything. I think if you can win, then that is everything. But that's because you can. But if you can just run 14:20 [for 5k] and that's the best that you can do, then he'll be over the moon with you doing the best that you can do. Like, if [former university athlete] came in second at NCAA's in the [1500 meters] the second year when he was expected to win, that would've been a disaster. But, if I [qualify for] the NCAA's [track championships] this year...and then I got All-American, he would be, like, 'this is a lot further than we've ever been before.'

Athlete 2 may have found that blend of outcome success with humanistic ideals as he felt that, according to Coach, if the athlete has the potential to win, then winning is everything.

### **Conclusion**

While the coach appeared to be extrinsically motivated by outcome measures (i.e., winning NCAA national championships) not in concert with the humanistic philosophy, his methods ascribed to the humanistic values of not evaluating success through winning, but rather striving for individual athlete potential, holistic development, and self-actualization. The coach endorsed individual athlete and team definitions of success that were process-oriented focusing on individuals striving to meet potential. Moreover, winning was not “everything” to the coach as perceived by all of his athletes. For the most part, the coach’s outward methods relating to his definition of success were humanistic.

### **Implications**

This study’s findings contribute to the field of sport coaching due to its potential to shed light on what coaching philosophy may be the most effective for men’s NCAA Division I cross country running through an examination of a successful coach in the discipline – potentially assisting others in developing an effective coaching philosophy (Wootten & Wootten, 2012). In this study the participant coach was motivated by winning NCAA national championships, but embraced humanistic methods as striving to meet individual athlete potential was the prime aim that defined success for the coach. Bennie and O’Connor (2010) explored the coaching philosophies of professional Australian cricket and rugby coaches and findings indicated that these coaches revealed “elements” of a humanistic philosophy through reporting a focus on learning and assisting players on and off the field, opposite of a “win-at-all-costs” approach. Striving to win is

still consistent with humanistic ideals, but total development of the person (not athlete) must be prioritized ahead of winning. This appears to be the performance nature of the NCAA competition structure. To what extent can an NCAA coach in any sport espouse completely humanistic objectives and methods in an environment where winning and losing may cost the coach his or her job? This may be most evident in the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (I FBS) where an almost one in five annual head coach turnover rate has been reported (Daughters, 2013).

This study's findings suggest that while the NCAA espouses holistic development of the student-athlete, it is hard to separate athletic outcome measures as at least a portion of the definition of success for coaches working within this setting. While the NCAA Division I is known as being the highest level of competition in collegiate athletics in the United States, the NCAA Division III slogans reads: "Discover / Develop / Dedicate" and "the total student-athlete experience" (NCAA, 2014). It seems that the lower the NCAA Division the more conducive the environment may be to a humanistic coaching philosophy.

Barber and Eckrich (1997) investigated the methods and criteria employed by athletic directors (ADs) in the evaluation of men's and women's NCAA Division I, II and III basketball and cross country coaches. Seven factors emerged for cross country coach evaluation, including: player development, fundraising skills, program success, public-relations-program promotion, organizational skills, role model, and academic integrity. A key finding was that program success was rated higher in evaluating NCAA Division I cross country coaches than Divisions II and III coaches. Certainly, then, ADs with a win-only centered philosophy may become at odds when evaluating a coach who has a humanistic definition of success, particularly within NCAA Division I.



Finally, while not directly discussed in past humanistic coaching literature, evidence surfaced that if an athlete has the potential to win, then winning may be considered a part of success within the humanistic model as it may be deemed the athlete would not be competing up to their potential if they do not win. A participant athlete blended outcome success with humanistic ideals as he noted that, according to the participant coach, if the athlete has the potential to win, then winning is everything. It certainly is hard to separate outcome (i.e., results, winning, etc.) and process (i.e., development) measures of success as society tends to focus on outcome results. Likewise, ambiguous humanistic goals such as improving as a person are more difficult to measure than individual outcome success goals (e.g., taking first place). Until society moves away from being results-oriented, winning still may be at the forefront of many coaches' and athletic administrator's definitions of success.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While a coaching philosophy may transcend physical environments, generalizability to other coaches and specific coaching environments must be heeded with caution. Future research could capitalize on the limitations of this study through investigating a larger sample of coaches and athletes to improve this study's generalizability to other distance running coaching environments. Extending the observation period for the entire duration of a cross country season would also further strengthen the credibility of findings so that the coach(es) could be observed in several different coach-related situations. Investigating definitions of success of all stakeholders (i.e., ADs, medical staff, university administration, etc.) and its impact on coach/athlete relationships and performance success might be worthwhile. Future research could also investigate coaches' definitions of success and compare these to performance success. Finally,

other NCAA sports (e.g., football, basketball, etc.) and divisions could be investigated across genders to determine to what extent success is defined in humanistic terms.

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