

## CHAPTER

# 7

## The Sport Team as an Effective Group

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*After losing three key players to the WNBA, the [University of Connecticut] Huskies are looking to build chemistry quickly as they prepare for more players to see the floor. . . . UConn is hoping the chemistry they're building away from the gym will translate into cohesiveness on the court. Building chemistry is one of the many steps to reclaiming the national title after two years of disappointment. (Stacy, 2018, paras 2 and 10)*

Membership and involvement in groups is a fundamental characteristic of our society. We band together in a large number and variety of groups for social reasons or to carry out more effectively some job or task. Thus, each of us interacts daily with numerous other people in group settings—in the family, at work, in social situations, and on sport teams. The result is a reciprocal exchange of influence; we exert an influence on other people in groups and, in turn, those groups and their members have an influence on us. Accordingly, there are many positive aspects to social influence and group involvement. For example, the opening quote to this chapter highlights the perceived importance of team unity to the performance of sport groups. The University of Connecticut (UConn) women's basketball team is a perennial powerhouse in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), winning 50 percent of the national titles over the

past two decades (1999–2018). In addition to recruiting skilled athletes and developing effective strategies/tactics, UConn team members deliberately develop positive relationships prior to the season by arranging social events (e.g., celebrating birthdays or hosting potluck dinners), participating in off-season training together, and reinforcing the general expectations and culture of the team. These activities are anticipated to help the performance of the group. As incoming player Christyn Williams noted, “The team chemistry is amazing already and it's just summer, so it's going to be a good year” (Stacy, 2018, para. 9).

A second illustration, however, shows another side of group influence. In April 2018, a first-year high school quarterback (14-year-old Rodney Kim Jr.) was the victim of hazing while being initiated onto the football team at Davidson High School in Alabama. Hazing is a process of humiliating new

group members and represents the extreme of initiation rites; it is also inappropriately rationalized as necessary for building team cohesion (Johnson, Guerrero, Holman, Chin, & Signer-Kroeker, 2018). In Kim's case, several upper-year players physically abused him to such a degree that he broke his arm, among other injuries (Skiver, 2018). Other-high profile hazing cases show an astonishing array of abusive behaviors, whereby team members have profoundly negative effects on one another through harmful physical, verbal, relational, and sexual acts. As Kim's lawyer communicates, "They've taken from him his dream of playing football. . . . he is damaged for life" (Skiver, 2018, para. 9).

These anecdotes show the dramatic influence groups can have on their members. In the first example, the influence was a positive one, whereas in the hazing case, the influence was negative and destructive. The fundamental question is how groups can come to exert such influence on individual members and their behaviors. From a coaching perspective, insight into this issue could produce prescriptions for the development of a positive, productive sport group—an effective, cohesive team. In this chapter, both the nature of groups and group cohesion are discussed, and some suggestions for the development of effective groups in sport settings are offered.

### *The Nature of Sport Groups*

As Carron and Eys (2012) noted, "every group is like all other groups, like some other groups, and like no other group" (p. 12). What this means, of course, is that individual groups not only contain characteristics that are common to every other group but they also possess characteristics that are unique to the group itself. The uniqueness or diversity among groups has led group dynamics theoreticians to advance a variety of definitions in an attempt to portray what a group is. With regard to sport groups, Carron and Eys defined a team as:

a collection of two or more individuals who possess a common identity, have common goals and

objectives, share a common fate, exhibit structured patterns of interaction and modes of communication, hold common perceptions about group structure, are personally and instrumentally interdependent, reciprocate interpersonal attraction, and consider themselves to be a group. (p. 14)

To understand how this definition applies within sport teams, explanations for each of the key characteristics are provided in Table 7-1.

Many of the characteristics of a group summarized by Carron and Eys (2012) underpin a concept termed "groupness" (Spink, Wilson, & Priebe, 2010). Although groupness is likely present *to some degree* on all sport teams, each group will vary in the amount that is evident. For example, interactive team sports such as soccer or hockey generally necessitate teamwork among members during competition—a feature that is less evident in sequential team sports (e.g., baseball) and typically absent among members of teams in individual sports like running or golf (Evans, Eys, & Bruner, 2012). Hence, these sports differ in the degree to which they require group processes—this is important to consider when (a) predicting how group members will interact and (b) developing efforts to improve the group environment.

Nonetheless, groups in each of these settings rely on one another in several ways (e.g., sharing a collective group goal) and, as such, team members are likely to have a powerful influence on one another. Thus, coaches or leaders of all types of sport teams must develop a strong sense of "we" to encourage positive group outcomes. Hand-in-hand with developing a sense of "we" is the development of cohesiveness.

### *Group Cohesion*

#### **Definition**

Groups are dynamic, not static. They exhibit life and vitality, interaction, and activity. Their vitality may be reflected in many ways—some positive, others negative. For example, at times the group and

Table 7-1 Characteristics That Are Used to Describe a Sport Group

| Characteristic   | Description  | Sport Example   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Common identity and/or self-categorization</b>          | Members collectively view themselves as group members                                    | A high school basketball team wearing team coats around school and referring to the group as “we”                                   |
| <b>Common goals or objectives</b>                          | Implicit or explicit long- and short-term goals that relate to all members               | A cheerleading squad that has goals regarding performance during the season outlining what they expect to achieve                   |
| <b>Common fate</b>   | Success or failure is shared by team members to some extent                              | A national ski-jumping team whose existence depends on receiving funding from the national governing body                           |
| <b>Structured pattern of interaction and communication</b> | Verbal and nonverbal communication and interaction styles that are specific to the group | A football team with highly refined verbal and nonverbal communication to convey plays  |
| <b>Group structure</b>                                     | Developing common beliefs and behaviors involving roles, status, and norms               | A swim team with structured expectations for behavior (e.g., being at the pool before 6 A.M.) and with established leadership roles |
| <b>Personal and task interdependence</b>                   | Members rely on one another to perform, to achieve goals, and to develop relationships   | An ice hockey team whose members rely on one another to work together on the ice, to host social events, to get to practice, etc.   |
| <b>Interpersonal attraction</b>                            | Friendships and closeness typically develop among teammates                              | A rock-climbing squad whose members become friends and spend time together away from the gym  |

its members may be in harmony; at other times, conflict and tension may predominate. Sometimes communication may be excellent between leaders and members, but at other times, it may be nonexistent. Also, commitment to the group’s goals and purposes may vary over time. All of these variations represent different behavioral manifestations of an underlying, fundamental group property that is referred to as **cohesion**—an emergent state that is “reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998, p. 213).

Cohesion has many dimensions or aspects—it is perceived in multiple ways by different groups and their members. As one major differentiation, perceptions about the degree of unity within the group are assumed to be manifested in two principal ways: in relation to the group’s **task** and **social** aspects of the unit. This task versus social cohesion distinction appears to be important for all age groups (e.g., Carron et al., 1985; Eys, Loughead, Bray, & Carron, 2009; Martin, Carron, Eys, & Loughead, 2012). With respect to adult sport groups, a finer distinction was proposed (Carron et al., 1985), in that these perceptions of the group are organized and integrated by individual members into two additional categories (see Figure 7-1).

**Group integration** represents each individual's perceptions about the closeness, similarity, and bonding within the group as a total unit (i.e., it consists of "we" and/or "us" evaluations). **Individual attractions to the group** represent each individual's personal attractions to the group and, more specifically, what personal motivations act to retain an individual in the group (i.e., consists of "I" and/or "me" evaluations). As Figure 7-1 shows, then, cohesion within adult sport groups is considered to have four facets: individual attractions to the group (task), individual attractions to the group (social), group integration (task), and group integration (social). It should be noted that qualitative and quantitative studies with youth and children suggest that their perceptions of cohesion appear to be less defined and that assessing the broader dimensions of task and social cohesion is sufficient to gain an understanding of their group environment.

### The Correlates of Cohesiveness

Carron and Eys (2012) provided a framework to discuss the main correlates of cohesion in sport teams, including four general categories: *environmental factors*, *personal factors*, *leadership factors*, and *team factors*. In the following sections, some of

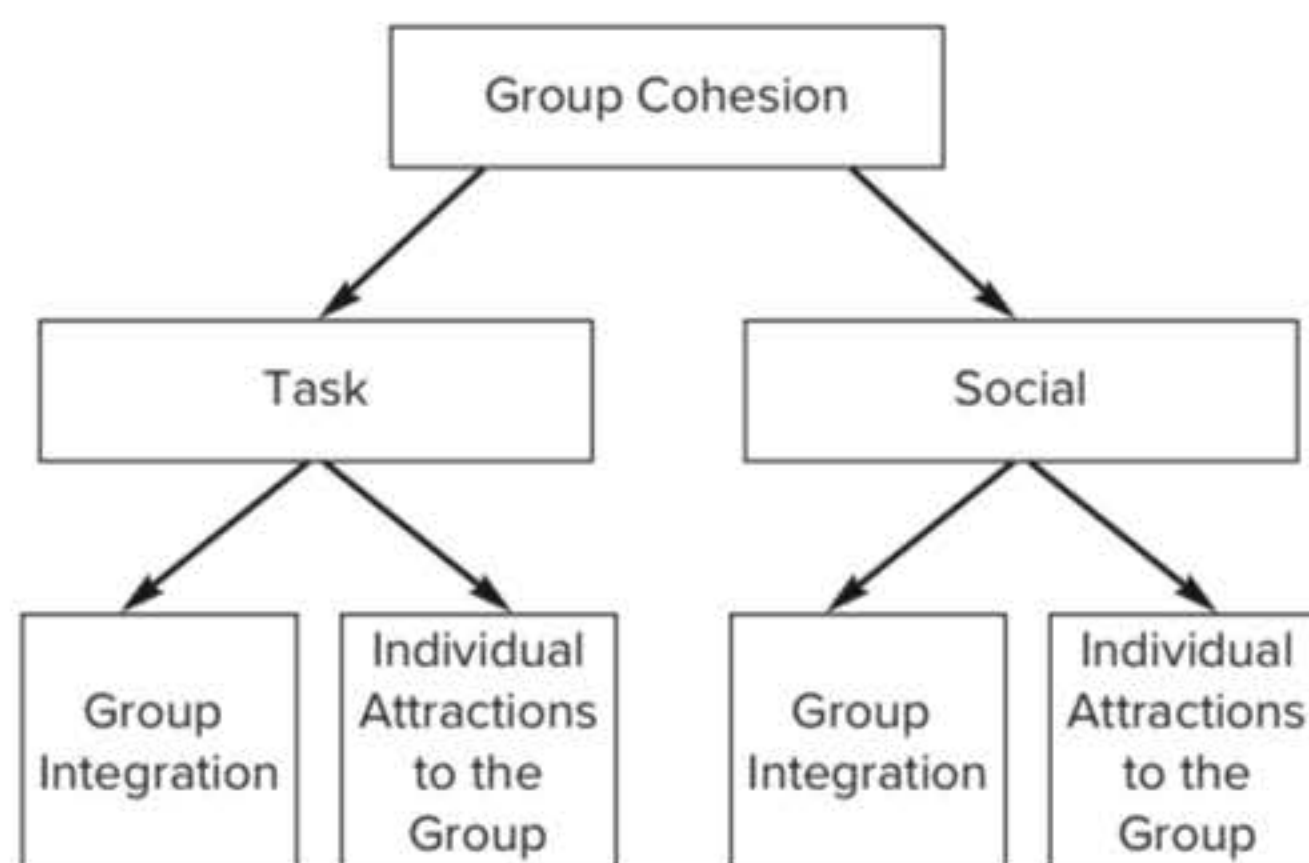


Figure 7-1 A conceptual model for group cohesiveness

Source: Brawley, Carron, & Widmeyer, 1987; Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985; and Widmeyer, Brawley, & Carron, 1985.

the main correlates within each general category are discussed.

### Environmental Factors

Perhaps the most easily identifiable correlates of cohesion are environmental factors—those that are demonstrated by the setting in which group members interact (e.g., physical characteristics of the environment). Most notably, individuals who are in close **proximity** (i.e., who are physically close to each other) have a greater tendency to bond together. Being in close contact provides the opportunity for interaction and communication, which may hasten group development. To provide this opportunity, team members should be placed into situations that make interaction inevitable. Some situations in sport that ensure physical proximity among group members include having a team locker room, encouraging team members to take classes with one another, or scheduling games that require the team to travel and/or stay with one another.

The team's **size** also is associated with the development of cohesiveness. Widmeyer, Brawley, and Carron (1990) demonstrated that there is an inverted-U relationship between social cohesion and team size in intramural basketball teams. That is, moderate-sized groups showed the greatest cohesiveness, and larger and smaller groups exhibited the least. Interestingly, the results of this study also showed that task cohesiveness decreased with increasing group size. Widmeyer and colleagues felt that this decrease could be attributed to the fact that it is more difficult to obtain consensus and task commitment in larger groups. Although these studies are limited to a basketball setting, it is clear that the number of athletes, coaches, and staff members have an influence on team cohesiveness.

### Personal Factors

Personal factors that are associated with cohesion include the characteristics, beliefs, or behaviors of group members. An important personal factor associated with the development of both task and social

cohesion in sport teams is **satisfaction**. Satisfaction is derived from many sources, such as whether a team provides opportunities to feel valued and competent, as well as whether an individual feels socially related to his or her teammates (Reimer & Chelladurai, 1998). Satisfaction also results from the recognition from others and, as such, the coach-athlete relationship is a key contributor. Ultimately, satisfied athletes are likely to have a positive influence on team functioning and, conversely, athletes who experience high cohesiveness will likely feel more satisfied (Widmeyer & Williams, 1991).

**Competitive state anxiety** is another personal factor that is related to cohesion. Athletes who perceive their teams to be higher in task cohesion experience less cognitive anxiety and are more likely to view their symptoms of both cognitive (e.g., worry) and somatic (e.g., sweaty palms) anxiety as beneficial and necessary for peak performance (Eys, Hardy, Carron, & Beauchamp, 2003). In describing the relationship between cohesion and anxiety, Wolf, Eys, Sadler, and Kleinert (2015) proposed that athletes feel like they have more resources at their disposal, and feel less pressure, when they are members of cohesive teams. Thus, cohesive settings should lead to more facilitative perceptions of anxiety because athletes perceive the sport situation as a challenge (i.e., “this is an exciting situation that I can cope with”) as opposed to a threat (i.e., “this is an impossible situation and I am hopeless”). Chapter 12 contains more information about competitive anxiety.

### Leadership Factors

The interrelationships among the coach, the athlete, cohesiveness, and performance are complex. In a mutiny, for example, cohesion is high, the leader-subordinate relationship is poor (and the leader is excluded from the group), and performance from an organizational perspective is poor. When examining the characteristics of optimal leaders, or the situations in which they succeed, sport researchers tend to focus on models highlighting the relationships formed between leaders and followers. For

example, the importance of transformational leadership has been emphasized in sport psychology (see Chapter 6), which describes at least four influential behaviors (Bass & Riggio, 2006), including idealized influence (e.g., setting positive examples and adhering to group values), inspirational motivation (e.g., clearly conveying the shared vision for the group), intellectual stimulation (e.g., encouraging followers to be involved in problem solving), and individualized consideration (e.g., paying attention to the needs of each group member). Generally speaking, transformational leadership behaviors have been demonstrated to have a positive association with athletes' perceptions of team cohesion (Price & Weiss, 2013; Smith, Arthur, Hardy, Callow, & Williams, 2013). Furthermore, the positive effects of transformational leadership have spurred researchers and practitioners to develop interventions and workshops to teach coaches how to engage with their athletes and teams consistent with this leadership style (e.g., Turnnidge & Côté, 2017).

It is important to remember that the coach is not the only source of leadership within the team. **Peer leadership**, or athlete leadership, allows for additional guidance regarding task, social, and motivational objectives of the team, and those in leadership roles also represent the group's interests outside of the sport context (e.g., media) (Fransen et al., 2017; Loughead, Hardy, & Eys, 2006). As with coach leadership, the quantity and quality of peer leadership are influential with respect to the experience of task and social cohesion with sport teams (Hardy, Eys, & Loughead, 2008; Price & Weiss, 2013).

### Team Factors

When a set of individuals is brought together with the intention of performing as a group, cohesion can be influenced by a number of structural characteristics that emerge as the group develops (e.g., roles and norms), processes that take place among group members (e.g., group goals, communication), and group performance outcomes that occur throughout the duration of its existence. The emergence of

these factors is inevitable and essential if the set of individuals is to become a more cohesive group.

**Roles.** A **role** is a set of behaviors that is expected from the occupants of specific positions within the group. Thus, when we think of the “role of a coach,” a number of expectations for behavior come to mind: instruct athletes; set up the team’s offensive and defensive alignments; communicate with parents, media, and the general public; organize practices; and so on.

Within every group there are two general categories of roles: formal and informal (Mabry & Barnes, 1980). As the term suggests, **formal roles** are explicitly set out by the group or organization. Coach, team captain, and manager are examples of explicit leadership roles within a team. Spiker and setter in volleyball; forward, guard, and center in basketball; and scrum-half and prop in rugby are examples of explicit performance roles. The sport team as an organization requires specific individuals to carry out each of these roles. Thus, individuals are trained or recruited for these roles, and specific expectations are held for their behavior. **Informal roles** evolve as a result of the interactions that take place among group members but are not specifically prescribed. Some examples of the informal roles that often emerge on a sport team are leader (vocal or “lead by example” leaders), task booster (spark plug), enforcer, mentor, social convener, cancer, distracter, team player, star player, and comedian (Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011). Informal roles can have a positive (e.g., mentor) or negative (e.g., distracter) influence on the team. For example, Cope, Eys, Schinke, and Bosselut (2010) interviewed coaches regarding their perceptions of individuals occupying the “cancer” or “bad apple” role. They noted several consequences of dealing with this type of individual, including increased distractions to the group, negativity spreading among members, clique formations, performance decrements, member attrition, and decreased cohesion.

A variety of elements associated with athletes’ roles determine how effectively they can be

performed. One element is the degree to which athletes understand or do not understand what constitutes their role. **Role ambiguity** refers to the lack of clear, consistent information regarding one’s role (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, and Carron (2002) noted that it is important for athletes to understand four aspects of their role: (a) the scope of their responsibilities or generally what their role entails, (b) the behaviors that are necessary to successfully fulfill their role responsibilities, (c) how their role performance will be evaluated, and (d) what the consequences are should they not successfully fulfill their role responsibilities. In general, previous research has shown that athletes who understand their roles better are more satisfied (Eys, Carron, Bray, & Beauchamp, 2003), experience less anxiety (Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, & Carron, 2003), and are likely to view their teams as more cohesive (Bosselut, McLaren, Eys, & Heuzé, 2012). A National Hockey League coach once observed that the worst thing that could happen to a team was to have its “enforcer” score a few goals in successive games. The enforcer would then begin to see himself as (and prefer the role of) goal scorer, to the detriment of the team as a whole. In sum, the roles that individuals are expected to perform should be clearly spelled out.

A second element of role involvement related to group cohesiveness is the degree to which athletes accept and are committed to their role responsibilities (Benson, Eys, Surya, Dawson, & Schneider, 2013). An athlete may be more inclined to accept his or her role responsibilities within a group that is united and on the same page with respect to their collective goal. Thus, the success of the total team and the importance of all roles for team success should continually be emphasized. When all group members perceive that their responsibilities are important and contribute to the common good, they more willingly accept and carry them out.

Finally, these and other elements of role involvement that are important to the group environment and are likely contributors to the

Table 7-2 Important Role Elements for Sport Teams

| Element           | Definition  |
|-------------------|---|
| Role ambiguity    | A lack of clear, consistent information regarding one's role (Kahn et al., 1964)                              |
| Role acceptance   | The willingness of athletes to execute their role responsibilities (Benson et al., 2013)                      |
| Role efficacy     | Athletes' beliefs about their capabilities to carry out role responsibilities (Bray, Brawley, & Carron, 2002) |
| Role conflict     | Athletes' perceptions about the incongruent expectations of others (Kahn et al., 1964)                        |
| Role overload     | Athletes having too many role expectations and/or being unable to prioritize them appropriately               |
| Role satisfaction | How happy athletes are with their given role(s) on the team   |
| Role performance  | Athletes' behaviors pertaining to role responsibilities   |

cohesiveness of sport teams are briefly defined in Table 7-2. The applied practitioner or coach should be conscious of these role elements when working with sport teams.

**Norms.** The presence of **norms** also is associated with increased cohesiveness (Gammage, Carron, & Estabrooks, 2001). A norm is a standard for behavior that is expected of all members of the group. It may be task irrelevant or task relevant; in either case, a norm reflects the group's consensus about behaviors that are considered acceptable. The athletes' treatment of team managers (Gammage et al., 2001) or trainers is one example of a task-irrelevant norm. On one team the manager might be regarded and treated as little more than an unpaid servant; on another team he or she might be considered a member of the coaching staff. In both cases new team members quickly become aware of the standard of behavior considered acceptable in their interactions with the manager and begin to act accordingly.

In a sport setting, Munroe, Estabrooks, Dennis, and Carron (1999) asked athletes to identify the types of norms that exist within their teams. They found that important, and sometimes similar, norms existed in four different contexts: *competition*,

*practice*, *off-season*, and *socially*. That teammates put forth maximum effort and support each other were the most relevant in competition and practice. Off-season norms included continuing training and development, as well as maintaining contact with other group members. Finally, in *social* situations, group members were expected to attend social events (e.g., parties) and have respect for each other. Interestingly, Bruner, Carreau, Wilson, and Penney (2014) found that female youth athletes endorsed norms for competition, practice, and social contexts more strongly than males and suggested that an applied implication of this finding is that coaches of youth sport teams, particularly male teams, should develop strategies (e.g., a team behavioral contract) that will promote normative behaviors that are positive for the group.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between the presence of group norms and the degree of group cohesiveness is

<sup>1</sup> We recognize the complexity of examining gender differences in sport research, and important issues are not elaborated upon within the present chapter. However, please refer to Gill and Kamphoff (present volume), Eys et al. (2015), and Krane and Kaus (2014) for a more in-depth discussion of gender in sport and sport teams.

circular. The development of norms contributes to the development of cohesiveness. With increased group cohesiveness there is also greater conformity to group standards for behavior and performance. A recently formed group has minimal influence over its members. But as the group develops and becomes more cohesive, adherence to norms for behavior increases. Failure to conform can lead to sanctions or punishment. For example, the group can control the amount of interaction it permits members, their degree of involvement in decision making, and their accessibility to task and social rewards.

An important aspect of group norms is their *stability*. An arbitrary norm can persist for four or five generations after the original members have been removed from the group (Jacobs & Campbell, 1961). Thus, if a sport team develops negative norms, such as abusive behavior toward officials or other team members, a laissez-faire attitude toward training, or a reliance on individual versus team goals, those norms could persist over a number of seasons unless steps are taken to eliminate them.

Thus, establishing positive group norms is extremely important in sport teams, particularly if an inappropriate norm is in place. One technique that has been used successfully is to enlist the formal and informal leaders of the group as active agents. If athlete leaders (in addition to the coach) accept and adhere to specific standards, other group members soon follow. In some instances, the athlete leaders may be resistant to change. This poses a problem because on sport teams the formal and informal leaders are usually the most highly skilled. If this is the case, the coach must decide how important the new standard is to the long-term success of the organization. In the event that the new standard is considered to be very important, the coach may have to release the resistant team members.

**Group processes.** Another important team factor that influences the development of team cohesion is the interactive processes that occur among the members. Teamwork processes and behaviors are

numerous and can be directed to the (a) preparatory (e.g., planning), (b) execution (e.g., coordination), (c) evaluation (e.g., performance monitoring), and (d) adjustment (e.g., problem solving) objectives that govern team performance (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014). One major process associated with cohesion is communication. As the level of communication relating to task and social issues increases, cohesiveness is enhanced (McLaren & Spink, 2018). And as the group becomes more cohesive, communication also increases. Group members are more open with one another, and they volunteer more, talk more, and listen better. In short, the exchange of task information and social pleasantries increases with cohesiveness.

**Performance outcome.** As has been the case with so many other factors, the relationship between cohesion and performance outcome is a circular one. More specifically, cohesiveness contributes to performance success, and performance success increases cohesiveness. Carron, Colman, Wheeler, and Stevens (2002) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the cohesion-performance relationship, from which a number of issues arose. First, *both* task and social cohesion were positively related to performance and the relationships were cyclical. That is, the strength of the cohesion-to-performance relationship was as strong as the performance-to-cohesion relationship. Second, there was no significant difference between the strengths of the task cohesion-performance relationship (i.e., effect size = 0.61) and the social cohesion-performance relationship (i.e., effect size = 0.70) although the latter was slightly greater. Finally, these relationships (a) existed equally for teams that were task interdependent (e.g., volleyball) and those more individual in nature (e.g., track and field), (b) were present across the spectrum of skill and competitive levels, and (c) were found to be stronger in female teams. Overall, performance success is an important team factor for developing cohesion. Consequently, if possible, a coach should try to avoid an excessively difficult schedule early in a season.

## Team Building

*The midfielder Eric Dier said: "I think a lot of the work that we've done with [sport psychology consultant Dr. Pippa Grange] has been prior to the tournament starting, over the last six or seven months." This has reportedly included getting the players to sit down together in small groups to share their life experiences and anxieties, and to reveal intimate truths about their character and what drives them. The point, [England manager] Southgate has said, is to build trust, "making them closer, with a better understanding of each other."*

*—Reflections on teambuilding by members of England's 2018 World Cup of Football/Soccer team (Saner, 2018, para. 7)*

The importance of developing an effective sport group environment is recognized even among athletes whose performances are almost exclusively individual. As such, coaches and sport psychology specialists invariably seek ways to build an effective team by using the process of **team building**—defined by Carron and Eys (2012) as “team enhancement or team improvement for both task and social purposes” (p. 368). Team building consists of strategies to help members work together more effectively and provides meaningful experiences for both athletes and coaches that ultimately lead to a greater sense of unity.

Team building can either be directly applied by sport psychology specialists (e.g., a specialist conducting a goal-setting seminar with athletes and coaches) or indirectly applied, where coaches and sport psychology specialists develop an intervention together and then the intervention is applied by the coach. Sport team-building interventions are often indirect to permit the coach to be the primary arbitrator of the group environment.

### Carron and Spink's (1993) Team-Building Approach

Although team building promotes a number of individual and group outcomes (e.g., self-confidence, communication, role understanding, trust), cohesion is typically at the core of any team-building

program (Bruner, Eys, Beauchamp, & Côté, 2013; Martin, Carron, & Burke, 2009). Notably, cohesion is a primary focus of the team-building approach developed by Carron, Spink, and Prapavessis (Carron & Spink, 1993; Prapavessis, Carron, & Spink, 1996; Spink & Carron, 1993), which is the most commonly adopted approach in sport research (Bruner et al., 2013). The following paragraphs describe how it is used within sport.

The Spink and Carron team-building approach involves an indirect intervention process composed of an *introductory stage*, a *conceptual stage*, a *practical stage*, and an *intervention stage*. The initial three stages occur during coach-sport psychology specialist interactions as the coach learns about group dynamics and prepares strategies that will be used to develop cohesion within his or her team (Carron & Spink, 1993). In the introductory stage, the sport psychology specialist teaches the coach about group dynamics and the general benefits of group cohesion (e.g., the relationship between perceptions of cohesiveness and enhanced team dynamics can be discussed). This understanding is further established during the conceptual stage; here the sport psychology specialist teaches the coach about the various components of the team-building protocol and helps the coach identify key areas to focus efforts on (e.g., the specific needs of the group).

During the practical stage, coaches engage in an interactive brainstorming session with the sport psychology specialist and/or other coaching staff to generate strategies to use for team building in their group. Active involvement of the coach(es) is valuable for three reasons:

1. Coaches differ in personality and preferences, so a strategy that might be effectively implemented by one coach might not be by another.
2. Coaches are the individuals most familiar with their groups and will have a sense for the most appropriate strategies.
3. Coaches have control over the protocol, which leads to increased coach investment and commitment to team building.

Although coaches are largely responsible for this brainstorming process, it is helpful to provide examples of strategies that can be used. Table 7-3 contains examples of these team-building strategies that are applied to sport.

The team-building protocol is finally introduced and maintained by coaches during the intervention stage. The intervention stage may last throughout the entire season, as coaches continually use team-building strategies and evaluate the process and suitability of strategies.

### Additional Team-Building Approaches

Team-building approaches are rarely designed to suit all situations, and many team-building intervention alternatives are available in addition to the Carron and Spink approach. Although many of these cannot be fully described within the confines of this chapter, it is important to consider approaches that may be used to suit the needs of distinct groups.

One example of an approach that is typically used to increase mutual understanding and cohesion

Table 7-3 Examples of Team-Building Strategies for Coaches to Enhance Group Cohesiveness

| Factor                               | Example Strategies  |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Distinctiveness</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the team with unique identifiers (e.g., shirts, logos, mottos).</li> <li>• Emphasize any unique traditions and/or history associated with the team.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Individual roles</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a team structure in which there is a clear differentiation in team positions/roles.</li> <li>• Ensure that all members understand how their role(s) can contribute to team success.</li> <li>• Establish mentorship opportunities between veterans and rookies.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Group norms</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish standards of conduct across all team-related settings (competition, school, etc.).</li> <li>• Use input from team members to form norms.</li> <li>• Show individual team members how group standards can contribute to more effective team performance and a greater sense of team unity.</li> <li>• Reward team members who adhere to the group's standards and sanction those who do not.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Individual sacrifices</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage important team members to make sacrifices (e.g., ask a veteran athlete to sit out to give a novice athlete more playing time).</li> <li>• Members contribute to fundraising or other community-related activities (e.g., assisting in the maintenance of a trail used for training).</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Interaction and communication</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for athlete input.</li> <li>• Create an environment that fosters mutual trust and respect so that athletes feel comfortable communicating.</li> <li>• Have all players identify (on paper) why they want their fellow players on the team, then create a summary sheet for each player.</li> <li>• Establish an online group or forum on social networking websites.</li> </ul>            |

Adapted from: Bruner & Spink, 2011; Bull, Albinson, & Shambrook, 1996; Carron, & Spink, 1993; Munroe, Terry, & Carron, 2002; Prapavessis et al., 1996; Yukelson, 1984; Zander, 1982.

late in the season (e.g., during playoffs) with well-established groups is the Personal-Disclosure Mutual-Sharing intervention (PDMS; Dunn & Holt, 2004). During PDMS, sport psychology specialists assign team members “homework” by asking the team to prepare a written passage that answers a personal question about their sport involvement (e.g., “why do you compete in this sport?” or “what are you willing to sacrifice for your team?”). Once all members have prepared their passage, the specialist leads a team meeting where members read their passage aloud. These group sessions can be very powerful and often last several hours. PDMS demands a high level of responsibility to ensure that the statements remain confidential and should be used only when members are comfortable enough to reflect on personal experiences as a group.

Another example that may be useful in facilitating team building is the Mastery Approach to Coaching (MAC; Smoll & Smith, 2008), which is ideal for youth sport settings. The use of the MAC protocol for team building is based on the expectation that positive and task-oriented coaching behaviors will enable positive group environments. McLaren, Eys, and Murray (2015) conducted an intervention study to compare soccer players’ perceptions of coaches who participated in a MAC training session early in the season with coaches who did not experience the training. They found that athletes who belonged to teams with coaches who attended a MAC training session reported increased group cohesion, providing evidence for the usefulness of MAC training for youth sport team building.

Finally, sport psychology specialists may be well advised to include athletes as active contributors to team-building strategies, particularly experienced athletes who may prefer ownership over the process. The applied example found in the box highlights a protocol the Toronto Maple Leafs used to develop “team values” that enlisted and depended on the opinions of all team members. The inclusion of selected high-status members of the team (i.e., captains, co-captains) in

implementing this team-building strategy was considered particularly critical for its delivery. team-building strategy was considered particularly critical for its delivery.

### Developing team values

*The Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team, a member of the National Hockey League, has engaged in several values-based team-building exercises. Values are beliefs that influence behavior and serve as guidelines to evaluate behavior (Crace & Hardy, 1997). A modified version of the Crace and Hardy intervention model was introduced to the Toronto Maple Leafs at the beginning of the 2005–2006 season. Although the model recommends that the players and coaches be introduced to the principles behind team-building interventions, it was felt that professional hockey players already had a clear understanding of what constitutes a functional team environment.*

*Thus, the session began with players divided into four groups of six, each table with a group leader who was one of the team’s captains. The player development coach, Dr. Paul Dennis, asked the leaders to discuss in their groups the important beliefs that would help guide their behavior and motivation for the upcoming season. After a 20-minute discussion, the group leaders reported three or four of their groups’ most important beliefs. A general discussion ensued, and the players collectively rank-ordered the beliefs. Following are the results:*

#### *Team Values Summary, 2005–2006 Season*

- 1. Team Toughness: Mentally and physically, never quit. Stick up for one another.*
- 2. Team Speed: We must all take short shifts so we can wear down our opponents by the third period. We’ll be able to win the close games if we can do this.*

3. *Team Defense: We can score, but in the past we've hung the goalies "out to dry." We need a commitment to play solid defense.*
4. *Work Ethic: On and off the ice strive toward your goal. Push yourself to be better.*
5. *Accountability: Being truthful and up-front to your teammates. Don't make excuses. It has to be 24 players held accountable by each other and the coaches.*
6. *Respect: Respect must be earned. Respect each other's roles and what different players bring to the table, for example, goal scoring, checking, penalty killing.*
7. *Positive Attitude: We need to be more positive. No complaining about line combinations, defense partner, and so on.*
8. *Loyalty: Don't cheat yourself or your teammates from your best effort. If you play 5 minutes or 20 minutes, work hard whenever you get the chance.*
9. *Leadership: There are 24 leaders in this dressing room, no passengers.*

10. *Commitment: Make the commitment to team concepts, systems, and office conditioning.*

*The ten beliefs the players presented to the coaching staff were transformed into a plaque, and each player took ownership by signing his name to it. The plaque was mounted in the dressing room as a reminder of what the group valued as a team. Throughout the season, head coach Pat Quinn often referred to one of the values as a theme to begin his team meetings in preparation for an upcoming game. In addition, if the team was underachieving, he would target one of the belief statements. For example, if there was a lackluster effort after a period, the coach would refer to "loyalty," which the players had defined as not cheating themselves or their teammates from giving their best effort. The coach implied that they were letting each other down and not adhering to their own values. Such tactics would help motivate the players into giving a more concerted effort to achieve their goals.*

### Summary

Like all groups, sport teams are dynamic. As such, they are subject to change, to growth, to modification, and to improvement. The coach is probably in the best position to influence change in a positive direction. To do this efficiently and effectively, it is beneficial to draw on the wealth of research information that has been developed over a number of years in management science, social psychology, sociology, physical education, and kinesiology. Given the influence that groups have on their members, knowledge of group structure, group dynamics, and group cohesiveness is essential for coaches. This understanding will provide an excellent base from which to weld athletes into a more effective team.

### Study Questions

1. Briefly describe the six characteristics of sport groups.
2. Define cohesiveness. What are the four facets of cohesion specific to adult sport teams? How does cohesion among youth sport teams differ from that among adult sport teams?
3. List the four factors that contribute to cohesiveness and give one specific example of each.
4. Discuss the relationship of team size to group cohesiveness.
5. Describe the environmental, personal, and leadership factors that contribute to the development of cohesiveness.
6. Four team factors related to cohesion are roles, norms, group processes, and performance outcome. Distinguish among each of these factors and describe how the factors might be manipulated or modified to enhance team cohesion.
7. Give at least one example (using a sport of your choice) of a strategy that a coach or sport psychologist could employ to enhance group cohesiveness using each of the following factors: (a) distinctiveness, (b) individual positions, (c) group norms, (d) individual sacrifices, and (e) interaction and communication.

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