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Matthew Jones

University of Colorado Boulder

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A Qualitative Study Examining Sustained Motivation in Sport

Matthew Jones

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Thesis Adviser:

Dr. Alphonse Keasley, Honors Program

Committee Members:

Dr. Andrea Feldman, Program for Writing and Rhetoric

Dr. Robert Tubbs, Department of Mathematics
Abstract

The question of how different races sustained involvement in their sport for an extended period of time originated from the investigator’s personal interest in sport and sustained motivation. To explore this question, 20 athletes from varying sports, races, and age groups were selected to participate in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Through qualitative analysis, several preponderant themes were identified as vital to sustaining participation in a sport regardless of race or ethnicity. These themes were as follows: the need for reasonable goals, practical rewarding life skills that were a result of working towards these goals, and an overall feeling of enjoyment from participation in their sport. It was concluded that the motivation to participate in an activity as physically and mentally demanding as sport required a particular energy source, one that is renewable and not whimsically challenged. This study underscores the need for renewable sources of motivation in order to stay active and satisfied with a sport for an extended period of time.
Introduction

“Better to have a short life that is full of that which you like doing than a long life spent in a miserable way. And after all, if you do really like what you are doing - it doesn't really matter what it is - you can eventually become a master of it. It's the only way of becoming the master of something, to be really with it. And then you will be able to get a good fee for whatever it is.”


This lengthy quotation was taken from a famous address titled, “What If Money Was No Object,” by Alan Watts (2012). Watts was speaking to the important matter of motivation. Watts was only one voice on a topic that has sustained a great deal of interest over the decades. This interest translated into this particular project as well.

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivation of individuals who sustained consistent involvement in a sport for five years or more. The primary research question addressed the motivations that allowed athletes to perform in their sport for the extended period of five years or more. How do athletes motivate themselves through the various aspects of their sport with regard to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as hypothesized by the Self-Determination Theory? This theory will be explained later in more detail. These questions are interesting because there is literature that suggests proper motivation and performance are facilitated by certain internal and external factors.

Background

Vallerand (2004) described some key points of motivation in sport. Vallerand claimed that motivation that was “self-authored” had a greater positive effect on participant interest, excitement, and all around performance in an activity over motivations that stem from external sources.

This line of reasoning was directly influenced by a specific theory of motivation titled “Self-Determination Theory;” this theory stressed the need for autonomy,
relatedness, and competence in your field, which are needed to enhance one’s intrinsic motivation and mental health (Ryan, 2000). There could be different reasons for one’s intrinsic motivation including the pleasure to “know” (pleasure of learning your game), “accomplishment” (pleasure of surpassing oneself), and “experience stimulation” (gain pleasure through action itself). Intrinsic motivation has been repeatedly corroborated to be the most effective form of motivation (Vallerand, 2004).

With that point enumerated, the alternative to intrinsic motivation is extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is that motivation which encourages action through external means (Ryan 2000); however, similar to the different sources of intrinsic motivation, types of extrinsic motivation may vary as well. For example, a child that does soccer drills because the coach ordered him to do so is not the same as a child that chooses to do drills after practice in order to have a better performance in an upcoming game. These examples have different levels of autonomy in the child’s decision to do their drills, yet are both still examples of extrinsic motivation.

It is that level of autonomy in the extrinsic condition that allows different forms of extrinsic motivation to have greater success at motivating individuals than less autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation. When the extrinsic motivation is low in autonomy, the individual runs the risk of “burnout,” which is a form of dissatisfaction, that is a lowering in motivation, performance, and an increase in cynicism (Cresswell and Eklund, 2005). Another factor that led to dissatisfaction in participants was when the driving factor to perform was competition. To clarify, participants in a study on martial artists did not list the competitive aspect of their sport as a high-ranking reason for their participation in the sport (Jones, Mackay, & Peters, 2006).
Alderman, Beighle and Pangrazi (2006) had an interest in researching the best ways to motivate children to pursue physical fitness. The reason for their research was that fewer high school students were choosing the physical fitness elective. To combat this trend, the research team proposed promoting intrinsic motivation, enhancing perceived physical competence, and creating a mastery-oriented (technique quality over quantity of attempts) physical-activity environment because these factors resonated in the literature that they reviewed for the article. The researchers suggested enhancing intrinsic motivation by giving young people the freedom to make a choice out of several options of physical activities to become involved with. Alderman et al. even went so far as to prescribe that instructors allow the students to modify the activity to better suit their inclinations. For example, the student could request a basketball hoop be lowered to their level.

Alderman et al. also championed the notion of instilling “perceived competence” within participants. The researchers claimed that people are less likely to engage in an activity if they feel incompetent. One of the best ways to facilitate competence, they proposed, was through creating a mastery-oriented environment over an object-oriented environment. The mastery-oriented environment was one where students were provided a certain amount of time to perfect their technique, in comparison to struggling to complete a certain quantity of attempts. For example, telling a student they must score 5 baskets in 5 minutes is less effective than giving the student 5 minutes to work on the technique of shooting the ball while the coaches and instructors give the student feedback on their form. The mastery-oriented form of practice helps to stress proper technique, and by extension of proper technique, mastery of the technique and competence in the sport.
Baumeister and Leary (1995) set out to examine one of the fundamental motivations within humans. These researchers focused their efforts on the need to belong to a group and the proper criteria for meeting that basic need. This vital need had two main features. The first criterion was that people needed frequent personal contact and interaction that should be positive interactions; however, these interactions absolutely must be free of conflict and negative affect. The second criterion Baumeister and Leary posit was that interpersonal relationships must have had a sense of stability to fulfill the need for belonging. These researchers suggest that failing to meet these needs will result in “ill effects that go beyond temporary affective distress,” within an individual.

Baumeister et al. also stressed that this is different from a need for contact because constant contact with enemies or hostile dealings with strangers would not suffice. The need to properly satisfy this impulse should lead to activities to satisfy the need, as described by the researchers’ examples. Within this particular document, the researchers reviewed the classic case of Robber Cave boys. In this study, boys were selected into groups for the task of competing against one another. These participants were then reorganized into one group with a new, unifying task. The boys were recorded working together and formed new relationships among this new collective group. Other cited studies within this article showed that assigning participants to groups through completely arbitrary means still resulted in in-group favoritism over out-group members. All of this research on the supposedly vital need to form groups relates to this study on motivation because it could lend insight to some of the motivations of the athletes in competition and practice.
Kilpatrick, Herbert, and Dee (2002) were yet another group of researchers that were interested in the best way to motivate children to be physically active. These researchers took the position that Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was a key aspect in strengthening a child’s motivation to perform in physical activities. The researchers go on to prescribe ways to enhance intrinsic motivation through techniques that facilitate Self-Determination.

Kilpatrick et al. posed that positive feedback promotes self-confidence along with a sense of competence in an activity. Corrective and instructive feedback was also listed as a good way to improve achievement in higher-level athletes. The researchers also underscored that “process goals,” as in activities where the success of the student was attributed to improvement, was superior to other goals such as the number of attempts at a target. The researchers prescribed giving students a choice in the task that they wished to partake in and provided a social aspect to the activity that was being engaged in. These suggestions of choice and mastering craft for increasing motivation are relevant variables in Self-Determination and intrinsic motivation.

Mowling, Brock, Eiler, and Rudisill (2004) pointed out that intrinsic motivation, *ipso facto*, required researchers to find what motivated different people at an individual level. They posed problems associated with external rewards. Extrinsic motivations could have deleterious effects if overused or used improperly, such as rewards for doing what was expected of students. This evidence would support some of the claims of Self-Determination that extrinsic motivation was less than ideal, and thus gave a measure of credence and reason for using the SDT in this study. One of the key points of this theory is autonomy.
Perlman and Webster (2011) basically rehashed SDT but specifically enumerated ways to boost autonomy. The authors pointed out that opportunities of choice, initiative, problem solving, and many other experiences existed within the classroom and could be seen as a point to foster Self-Determined motivation through autonomy. The five ways Perlman and Webster prescribed increasing autonomy were to: nurture inner motivational resources; provide explanatory rationales; use informational, non-controlling language; acknowledge and accept negative feedback; and demonstrate patience.

Page, O’Connor, and Peterson (2001) approached the topic of motivation in sport by examining the motivations of disabled people who practice sports. Through interviews with disabled athletes, the researchers found that participants longed to escape the societal perception that they were handicapped. It was important to these athletes that they be viewed as competent athletes and they also gained a sense of camaraderie with a team of other disabled competitors that were similar to them. Once again, competence was revealed as a motive for engaging in sport.

There is evidence in the literature, however, that would seem to contradict the credence of the Self-Determination Theory. One such example is a study conducted by Martin, Harrison, Harrison, Stone, and Lawrence (2010) where black athletes in elite Division I schools were interviewed. Some of the participants in this study claimed that they were externally motivated to perform well as a way to prove their worth and even superiority to their peers. Some participants reported that many days they did not want to work as hard as they did, but felt that they had no choice because they were obligated to do so for their scholarship. Obligation, or a lack of autonomy, was one of the key factors in burnout among previous studies.
In the earlier mentioned research by Page et al. (2001), many disabled participants felt that they did not need a team to support them because complete strangers watching them compete motivated them. The thought of being competent in someone’s eyes was all that they needed to feel motivated to work hard.

The topic of sport is far reaching across the globe. Perhaps one of the largest contributing factors to motivation in sport is a sense of nationalism. Bairner (2008) specifically reviewed the connection between sport and nationalism. From the start of modern global competition, there has been a motivation of nationalism involved. Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the man who established the modern Olympics in 1896, brought together young competitors from around the world. His main priority was to boost French morale after a crushing loss in the Franco-German War. Furthermore, Bairner asserted that Canadians try to separate themselves from the US through a symbolic ownership of hockey.

Post WWII America used baseball to spread Americanization to Central America, the Caribbean, and Japan (Bairner, 2008). Kaufman and Wolff (2010) showed socialization and Americanization in the early 20th century through introducing immigrant children to the "American" way of sport. Sport has been used as a battlefield without bullets between nations through advertising a country’s success through international competition (Bairner, 2008). Further, Bairner (2008) claimed that politicians claim international sporting success for ideological and propagandist reasons. Therefore, the motivation of athletes and politicians alike may be to perform for the sake of proving the worth of their people.
Cheska (1984) showed how a nation could show its superiority in decision-making when it came to cultural representation in sport. Euro-American rule over culture in some events, such as traditional Native sports like hoop and pole, were not even part of 4th of July games of a particular American community, and thus did not give the Native people a fair chance to compete against the Euro-Americans. By choosing what games would and would not be played, the Euro-Americans had the power to give themselves an advantage in competition. This document will later show how sometimes sport is the most reasonable way for indigenous people to “fight” their invaders. When the Native games were removed, so was a measure of their power to fight back. This is a critical issue when considering the motivation of participants in a sport to compete for the honor of their nation.

Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan, and Leggett (1996) showed that there was a nationalistic bias in the Olympic games when former Soviet teams were described as being robotic and harboring political agendas while American competitors had none. This bias in the media was only yet another reflection of how competition between nations facilitated a motivation to bring one nation into a more favorable public perspective than the other.

Bairner (2008) showed how British citizens played a role in the globalization of many sports, which one might think would eventually be seen as a way to assimilate indigenous elites to British games (and then to British rule). Sports could also be seen as a platform for expression and power for minorities and other underrepresented peoples; however, as indigenous people were now given a chance to “fight back” against their invaders with the platform the British had given them. This could be seen in the cricket
competitions Britain had against Australia, English-speaking Caribbean, and the like. Bairner (2008) also points out how submerged nations, such as Scotland, Wales, etc., revel in a sense of cultural nationalism when their specific athletes win, even if it is under the banner of the United Kingdom.

Cheska (1984) described the classic native resentment to white European settlers for a history of subordination and slavery and how a contact situation such as 4th of July games gave them an opportunity to flaunt their cultural differences to the Euro-Americans. The Navajos would, for example, enter the playing field in a different manner from the other competitors (such as a covered wagon). Just because these Natives played games that came from Euro-Americans does not mean that they assimilated to these games. They created their own version of games. For example, Navajo and Anglo versions of basketball are very culturally specific. The desire to play fairly, for example, was more highly favored than the desire to play for skill, as is the American way. Therefore, this study showed how the Native people were able to make a game their own and find intrinsic motivation to play without regard for other forces, such as resistance against hegemony.

Kaufman and Wolf (2010) echoed this sentiment in their research. Their findings suggested that sports can in fact be malleable and there can be different goals within the sport itself. Their researchers also aimed to point out that sport could have a positive transformative impact on society. In short, sport is a platform for social activists or, at least, the ones that are successful in their sport. One need only remember the iconic image of John Carlos and Tommy Smith on the 1968 Olympic pedestal, heads bowed with fists in the air.
As Martin et al. (2010) and Page et al. (2001) both show, people in minority roles could find sport as a means to prove their worth. Martin et al. (2010) revealed sentiments from young black athletes in Division I schools that felt a need to outperform their peers both on the field and in the classroom. Whereas Page et al. (2001) found that disabled individuals felt that, because society viewed them as handicapped, they had a chance to prove their competence through sport.

Sport does not, however, always empower underrepresented people. Leonard (2004) used Kobe Bryant’s rape trial as a case study for racialized athletes. Leonard also referenced a slew of other high profile racialized cases from our American history. He proposed that there was an attempt in general to claim colorblindness with regard to today’s athletes. Cases, such as the Mike Tyson rape case, the O.J. Simpson trial, and Kobe Bryant’s rape trial, revealed racial divides in public opinion. If the colorblind rhetoric were true, then different reactions to the Simpson or Tyson trial would have been seen. Leonard also points out the link to American obsession with black male sexuality, especially on white females. Then again, perhaps this is an issue that go beyond the boundaries of race.

Washington (2001) argued that there was a link between certain social classes and sport, such as boxing being associated with a working class background. Golf and polo, on the other hand, were relegated to exclusive clubs, which created opportunity to gain social capital. Within professional sport, there is racial disparity such as “packing” key positions with whites in administration and on the field, and differences in pay for the same work. Washington (2001) showed how in the 1998 National Football League (NFL) season “packing” was evidenced in the following positions: quarterback (91% white),
center (83% white), wide receiver (92% black), running back (87% black), cornerback (99% black) and safety (91% black). Within these confines, blacks were depicted as successful because of their natural ability by the media, while whites were successful because of work ethic.

Kyllo and Landers (1995) were concerned about the scholarly literature’s handling of the topic of goal setting in sport. Their research of previous literature found conflicting results as to whether or not goal setting had a significant effect on performance in a sport. Through a meta-analysis of 36 previous studies, Kyllo and Landers were able to conclude goal setting improves performance in sport.

Harackiewicz, Barron, Carter, & Lehto (1997) lend exceptional help to clarify the topic of achieving goals. Though their study examined goal setting in the educational sense and therefore cannot be directly related to the topic of this thesis, it does provide exceptional contextual information about the topic of goal setting. These researchers identified two dimensions for goal setting: “work mastery” and “performance orientation.” The work mastery orientation described an individual that was driven to improve their understanding of their craft (e.g., gaining an understanding of every aspect of psychology) while the performance orientation validated their efforts through external sources of appraisal (e.g., test scores). They hypothesized that students with mastery goals would have higher intrinsic motivation, and students with performance goals would have greater success on graded performance. The performance-goal oriented students did, in fact, score better on graded performance tests, but no significant relationship was found between goal mastery orientation and graded performance.
Goleman (2013) described families of emotion. The basic families of emotions that he describes were fear, anger, sadness, enjoyment, love, disgust, surprise, and shame. McCarthy, Jones, & Clark-Carter (2008) examined a critical emotion for involvement in sport. That emotion is the need to feel enjoyment, and these researchers used questionnaires to examine the different sources of enjoyment for children ages 8-15. The researchers marked age 11 as a cut-off point between young children and older youth. McCarthy et al. intended to explore the different sources of enjoyment from a developmental standpoint: that is, a standpoint that emphasizes the progression of sources of enjoyment from one source to the next. McCarthy et al. hypothesized that older athletes would not enjoy their sport as much as younger athletes because they would be able to pose a more critical review of their performance than a younger athlete would. Task goal orientation was important for all ages. Team sports reported significantly greater enjoyment than individual sports. Their findings, to the researchers’ collective confusion, revealed that younger athletes actually enjoyed their sport more than older athletes.

To bring all of this information into focus, this study examines how participants in sports motivate themselves through the various aspects of their sport with regard to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as prescribed by the Self-Determination Theory. Much has been written in this literature review about the merits of SDT, yet it is still a theory and not necessarily true for all people, especially athletes who have sustained motivation in their sports. Also, race/ethnicity in this literature has been shown to be a factor that affects motivation, and scholars must examine how that aspect interacts with motivation of the select population.
Methods

To answer the research question pertaining to the means by which athletes are able to motivate themselves through training and competition, a qualitative ethnographic interview design was used. There are seven stem open-ended questions. For example, “Could you tell me about how you became interested in competing seriously?” Through this main question the participant offered comments that required follow-up questions to be asked. These follow-up probe questions were essential for capturing the richness of the participants’ responses (“Could you tell me more about…”). The overall qualitative interview is typically used to obtain what is referred to in anthropology as a “thick description.” From thick descriptions useful information about lived experiences that are oftentimes not captured in a priori survey questions. The principal stem questions were limited to the key variables in the overall research question. The follow-up probes were oftentimes numerous and were based on the responses provided by the participant. (Appendix 1 presents all of the stem and some of the basic, follow-up questions.)

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited through snowball sampling methods. The study started with athletes familiar to the investigator who met the criteria to be involved in this study. The first few participants were 18 or older and had competed or trained in a sport consistently for five years or more. From these participants, a list of friends and acquaintances who met the criteria for involvement in this study was collected from each participant. Through this process 20 people that were over 18 years old and had been consistently involved in a sport for five years or more were identified and interviewed.
A diverse range of participants was included in this study. This diverse sample included college students, young professionals, professionals, and retired adults, all of whom had some college education. In addition, every effort was made to identify a balance of male and female athletes within the 20 athletes to be interviewed. A diverse range sport and racial representation was also to be involved.

**Procedure**

The informed consent form was filled out in compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards. Participant consent was obtained in the agreed upon meeting space. Because spaces varied depending on participant preferences, the exact location varied for each interview.

The testing site had to be a quiet space, as is required for any interview. All of the participants were knowledgeable adults and therefore understood the principal investigator’s explanation of their rights as a participant to leave at any time without repercussion.

With these stipulations in place, the interviews began. The examination was a qualitative semi-structured interview using the ethnographic style (Spradley, 1979). The questions that the Principal Investigator (PI) asked were only used as general guides to pull rich data from the participants about their motivations.

The interviews lasted no more than 45 minutes and were transcribed. After the transcription process, overarching themes in responses were recorded and analyzed.
Method of Analysis

Prior to the analysis phase of this research, it was imperative for the PI to identify possible biases and expectations. This was a crucial step, as a bias in interpretation would affect the validity of the analysis. As an African American, male, former athlete, it was imperative to identify any expectations the PI might have held with regard to factors such as race, gender, and sport that might have influenced interpretation of the data. It was also critical for the PI to focus on trends among the responses given as opposed to responses that compare directly to the previous studies’ findings.

Through a minimum of three reads of the transcripts the Principal Investigator was able to pick out three critical questions to answer the primary research question regarding sources of sustained motivation for athletes. The three most useful questions that were used as the primary source of analysis were: “What did you look forward to the most while involved in your sport?”; “Describe the most consistent feelings you experienced while involved in your sport.”; and, “What were the most rewarding aspects to you for being involved in your sport?”

There were four other primary questions that were asked during the interview, and though they delivered rich data in their own right, they did not present themes in a manner that could be tied back to sustained motivation in sport. These questions were useful as they often served as a point of stimulation that would prime participants to remember experiences that were no longer at the forefront of their minds.
Results

The data collected from the 20 participants in this study have been divided into several different sources of variance including age, race, sport, and number of years involved in their sport.

Table 1
Participants by Sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Number of Participants Involved in this Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martial Arts/ Wrestling</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track and Field/ Distance Running</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Participants by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Participants by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino/a</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4
Participants by Range of Years Involved with Sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range of Years Involved with Sport</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After a thorough review of the participant responses to the interview questions, several preponderant themes were identified among participants regardless of age, race, sport, or time given to that sport. These three themes were as follows: a need for a goal to work towards, a feeling of enjoyment, and rewards of learning practical life skills while working towards their goals. These overall themes were preponderant amongst all sports, but one should also note that there are variations within a smaller scale when one examines the specific variations in “goals,” “feelings of enjoyment,” and “rewards of vital life skills for participation.”

Whenever one of these athletes stepped forward to participate in their sport, they had a goal in mind. Many of the participants felt that they had to train simply as a means to an end in order to compete. A goal to look forward to was crucial for the majority of athletes, even though that goal varied from athlete to athlete.

PI: What did you look forward to the most while you were involved in basketball?

Rick: I think I looked forward to game day. I looked forward to playing, meeting challenges. I looked forward to game day. I remember I think I overthought things way more than anyone else who was playing like I
wanted to know how the other games went. I wanted to know kind of going in whether we were playing a team with a good record or a bad record, I wanted to know exactly when and where the game was going to be. I remember my freshman year … I started practicing about a month before the season started. I remember the 2nd week of practice, and . . . I had the entire schedule already memorized like what order we played them, where we were playing them, the day and they were they thought that was weird. First of all, they didn’t think it was normal for me to have memorized the schedule 3 weeks ahead of time, but I wanted to know everything that was going on and I think it was kind of I wanted to feel that this was important and in my mind it was and it got more and more important as I got older.

(Basketball, Male, 20-25, White, 5-10)

PI: Could you tell me what you looked forward to the most while you were involved with basketball?

Linn: Bus rides with the team after we won a game. On the road.

PI: … So you think you could tell me a little bit more about that?

Linn: Well, when you win a game at home everybody disperses, leaves the gym and goes in 15 different directions… everybody goes separately so you don’t really celebrate together as a team… In the latter days, we were on chartered flights, but you’re on flight singing the fight song, you’re still eating pizza, you’re together in the 2 or 3 hours after the game— 4 hour 5 hours after the game. You’re together as a team celebrating the win cause you put a lot of hard work in it in preparation. You prepare every, every minute detail is prepared to win. There’s no stone left unturned to win a game and when you do that on the road, which is theoretically harder to do, and then to be with your team is just a great, great feeling. A great feeling.

(Basketball, Female, 55-60, White, >30)

PI: Ok, now you were involved in basketball for quite some time so what did you look forward to the most when you were involved? And that could be anything not just winning, anything. I don’t know even people that you looked forward to. It’s a very open-ended question

Mark: I mean that’s an easy question: game day. All the hard work, nobody really sees you when the lights are low in the gym and you’re shooting one on one by yourself; you’re dribbling up the street no one sees that, but they do see you on game. They see the fruits of your labor and that’s what it was about. It’s… especially in college, college was awful. College was an awful basketball experience because it becomes a business and you lose basically control of your life. It was tough but game days were worth it. We played about 35 to 40 games a year and when you go out and they turn on the lights and the stands are full of people. Game day was worth it that was the driving force that’s what we looked forward to.
PI: Ok, so I think you did a pretty good job describing what was so exciting in game day. I’m trying to see if there is anything you can tell me in terms of why game day was so important to you…

Mark: You know, I can’t think of anything more to add to it. It’s just a great experience, so much energy.

(Basketball, Male, 35-40, White, >30)

PI: Do you think you could tell me what you looked forward to the most while you were involved in both football and grappling?

Gary: I looked forward to the most… I guess in football the thing I looked forward to the most was getting up and playing… I liked it, it’s easy to get up and give 100% on game day you know but it’s, it’s all the other work; it’s all the other work in there— all the practices and training and everything else. Football the thing I always looked forward to is just game day you know. I hated football practice. I hated it. It never, I never enjoyed a single football practice in my life. I hated every single second of it… I want to be out there on game day, you know. That, that I can handle. That I can enjoy but the, the preparation getting there for football was always a struggle cause I didn’t enjoy it. So the thing I always looked forward to the most was just getting out there and actually getting to play as opposed to all of the, all of the practicing and stuff. Cause football, you practice and you do your practice all week and then you get your 1 game and, and then you’re right back to practicing 3 or 4 hours, you know, 3 hours a day…

(Football, Male, 20-25, White, 5-10)

PI: Can you tell me… you liked playing sports but you didn’t look forward to practicing the sport you were involved with for the longest period of time?

Arnold: Yah. I don’t know it’s the I guess it’s like the competition so like maybe game day of football or wrestling tournaments and duels, but I guess to get to those places you have to go to practice otherwise you know you’d be wasting your time if you didn’t…

(Wrestling, Male, 20-25, Hispanic, 5-10)

PI: And what would you say that you looked forward to the most? While you were involved with soccer? Or even you still are involved with it actually.

Jane: The games.

PI: Why the games?

Jane: It’s kind of like a test of all the time you spent practicing and you get to see if your skills have improved or if you’re gonna make a goal. It’s kind of like I said a test or a final result of your effort throughout the week…
PI: So you saw it as something separate from training?

Jane: Yes.

PI: Even though you were doing a lot of the same things?

Jane: Not really the same things in training in practice. It would be repetition of simple drills and skill and skill setting. But games was using those skills and implementing it in strategy so it, causes more thinking on that end.

PI: And could you maybe go into a little more detail as to what was so exciting about participating in game day? You touched on it quite a bit but if you could just maybe a little more information as to what was so exciting to you personally?

Jane: I think it’s because you’re, at least in high school I don’t know when I was younger, you have there your people there to support you. In the sidelines either family or friends or other teammates and you get a burst of endorphins. When you’re caught up in the in moment of the game and so you’re, you’re solely concentrated on making the goal and winning and I think that’s what’s exciting is the suspense but also the opportunity to, to defeat the other team.

(Soccer, Female, 20, Black, 15)

PI: And what would you say you looked forward to the most in both basketball and football?

Frank: Winning. That’s probably what I looked forward to the most is to you work and you work and you work and then you go out there and you ball out so that’s winning. And definitely it feels a little better in football than it does in basketball because in football you get 1 game a week so it’s like you work for a week to go out there and play so that this week of preparation and game day finally happened you finally get to go out there and ball out and you went so that is a good feeling. So I at least, that’s what I looked forward to the most… I mean it’s things that come with winning like there’s respect, girls like just like yah respect in girls because you’re in high school and that’s all you gonna get you don’t get no money, especially in high school, college even. I mean stop, even professionals, girls tend to flock to successful ambitious dudes so you winning, they like ‘oh, my god, he’s the best football player,’ or whatever the case may be you gonna get some type of comeback for being good. It’s not like the games… people gonna walk up to you and be like man you played great this that and the other whatever. Like for instance I just got kicked out of a intramural game Tuesday because I caught a, I know I shouldn’t, I had a dunk early, I shouldn’t of done it, on the next one I banged it hard and like it’s cool cause people walk up to you, ‘that dunk was dope’ that’s a good feeling, that’s the reason you do it. That’s part of the reasons . . .
PI: Part of it being that adulation from…

Frank: Yah you want to be recognized, in anything you do well you would like people to acknowledge the fact that you do that well.  
(Basketball/Football, Male, 18-20, Black, 5-10)

PI: What did you look forward to the most being involved with football?

Anderson: What I look forward to the most in football is just the game day atmosphere that’s what you, I mean as a football player you train 9 months out of the year for that three months that you’re playing. That’s what you get and if you don’t love playing. If you don’t get excited for the games for that 60 minute or that 3 hour period, I mean that’s when you know you shouldn’t be playing.

PI: So, to say that you looked forward to game day the most just consistently to when you started to even now as a coach...?

Anderson: Yah

PI: Think you could tell me a little bit more about what’s so amazing about game day?

Anderson: It’s, it’s just it’s just the atmosphere of it there’s, I don’t know, I mean, the people who play for ---- there’s 60,000 people there to see you I mean you’re the center of attention for a day. A lot of people don’t get that. 60,000 I mean even in high school we had games where there was 6,000 I mean ---- high is a small stadium, but it’s just that, just that feeling of there’s over, there’s thousands of people just to see you and you’re the center of attention you’re the main attraction so...

(Football, Male, 25, Black, 10-15)

PI: What did you look forward to the most in basketball?

Tate: Definitely game days.

PI: Think you could, elaborate?

Tate: The excitement of game day?

PI: The excitement and what was so exciting about game day?

Tate: Facing opponents. Trying to win something then like all the practice was about to mean something, exciting.

(Basketball, Female, 20-25, Black, 15-20)
In addition to playing well on game day, some participants’ goals dealt specifically with the need to feel superior to their competitors. Two of the combat sport participants revealed their desire to impose their will on opponents. These participants made a specific distinction that they want to claim a position of dominance over another athlete.

PI: Do you think you could tell me what you looked forward to the most while you were involved in both football and grappling?

Gary: … When it comes to grappling the thing that I look forward to was that there’s a moment in every, every match where you won or lost. There was that moment where I knew that I either was going to lose… there were a couple of examples where it came right down to the wire but there’s always that, that moment where you just know ’I’m better than this guy.’ And it happened immediately it might even happen before a match I mean you can just, you know ‘I’m better than this guy, I can beat this guy, I’m gonna win the match’ . . . There’s that moment in the match where at least for me I know that there’s always a moment where I think I’m better than this guy and I’m gonna win this match. Either if it’s right before I hit my favorite takedown or right before I lock in whatever move I wanted to lock in that, it kind of dinged in my head ‘I’m gonna win this match I’m gonna beat this guy,’ and that feeling that that’s like that high I feel like. Just that knowing that I’m going to dominate that that’s what I always look forward to. I mean it happens in almost every match, there is a few examples where it’ll come right down to the wire you don’t know one way or the other whether you’re gonna beat this guy or not. But matches where you have that moment of clarity like, ‘I’m better than this guy. I’m gonna win.’ that’s what I always look forward to I love that feeling, that’s just awesome. That’s what I always look forward to.

(Wrestling, Male, 20-25, White, 5-10)

PI: Think you could tell me what you looked forward to the most on a regular basis?

Alex: In wrestling? I mean. Getting prepared for a tournament, those grinding matches all the condition all that, there’s something really primal that’s awakened when you wrestle. It’s something every human being understands how to do. We’re fighters by our very nature. We’re still animals and a lot of those emotions the epinephrine all that really you could say ‘alpha feeling’ being in combat it’s just something you, over time, get addicted to and that was probably one of the most exciting things for me was just that sympathetic response you would get before you step onto the mat it’s a high unlike any other. You can’t get it from extreme sports or something like that, I mean it’s the thrill that comes off knowing you are about to fight a fellow man and you better
be ready cause if you aren’t he is, he’ll kick your butt and hurt you a lot. So the thrill of competition.

(Wrestling, Male, 20-25, White, 5-10)

Two participants that were cross country runners, felt that at their age level, the most important goal to have was to maintain good health.

Edward: … What you want when you’re 12 is not what you want when you’re 17. It’s not what you want when you’re 26 which is not what you want when you’re 35 and so what’s exciting also evolves. And, of course, one gets to be a certain age and what’s exciting then is vastly different… right?

PI: You could say that some sort of change... You personally matured as…

Edward: When I was 16 my dream was to be on the varsity, the varsity mile relay team and maybe break 50 seconds for 40. And at 45 what’s exciting might be was, in my case, might be completing your first marathon. I have a friend who actually coached when he was in high school and he was an excellent runner. State championship college scholarship runner eventually. But he’s now 46 and he, what’s exciting to him is to see for how many more years he can break 3 hours in a marathon and so it might be something like that. He’s content with his competitive career beyond the time that I did. But it’s basically the same. You set new goals, reasonable goals and that’s what to me is exciting. New reasonable goals.

(Distance Running, Male, 55-60, White, >30)

PI: Things you look forward to most about running.

Kyla: The thing that, that I look forward to the most is, the fact that, I do keep my weight down that I do keep, blood pressure and my numbers good and my, bone density is good. So I look forward to a good, review at the doctor, when I go.

PI: Are there any other things about running that you look forward to because it’s the things…

Kyla: Running itself I guess I look forward to you know just feeling good you know it feels good to get out in the morning it’s quiet and you just. You just kind of clear out. You know you clear your mind. And get ready for the day.

PI: ‘Clear your mind get ready for the day,’ I’m sorry think you could, elaborate about that a little bit more?
Kyla: I guess I don’t know wh[y] it feels good to get out in the morning if it’s nice outside or if it, you know, you dressed properly for the conditions. It just feels good to be outside. Running it’s, yah.

PI: But even though you’ve said that you want it to be over as soon as possible though, right?

Kyla: I do like to be outside I do like to get it over with my main reason for being out there is to keep my numbers down to keep everything, you know everything, keep my weight down, so it is enjoyable to be outside. But if I’m, if I was one of those people that didn’t have to, to do exercise and could just be, normal, every, all my number be normal and everything be good I wouldn’t do it.

(Distance Running, Female, 55-60, Black, 15)

Participants set out to perform different activities in hopes of achieving a goal as stated earlier. Yet the data show that accomplishing a goal was not always the most rewarding aspect for being involved with a sport. For this study, rewarding aspects of sport involvement are not goals. For example, one might have a goal of making his way to the state finals, achieve that goal and feel the rewards were not great enough to sustain the activity any further. In addition, a participant might not reach the goal he or she set out to obtain yet they still felt enough of a reward for their action to sustain involvement in their sport. Many participants found that achieving the goals that they set out to achieve was not the only positive aspect to be gained from participating in their sport. These participants discovered that learning valuable practical life skills including how to achieve a goal was a rewarding aspect to their involvement.

The most rewarding aspects of involvement with sport were as follows: gaining practical life skills through sport, the ability to pass down learned skills (both life skills and technical skills) to a younger generation of players, and one participant plainly stated that physical health was a rewarding aspect to her pursuit of performing well on game day.
PI: ...What were the most rewarding aspects of being involved? And also if you could think about even your professional life too?

Edward: To me the rewarding aspects. What is rewarding to me is identifying a challenge, creating strategy for addressing the challenge. Facing it. And, hopefully accomplishing it. So that’s true of running... An 8th grade 4-40 and a once a year track meet it’s true of the high school career when you train 5 or 6 days a week. It’s true of 35-year-old weekend-warrior road racing and it’s true on your profession. Establishing an interesting goal, a strategy for achieving it. Yah.

(Distance Running, Male, 55-60, White, >30)

PI: And what would you say the most rewarding aspects for being involved with football at different stages when you were trying it and as you got older and also with grappling?

Gary: ... And then when it comes to grappling, the biggest reward I’ve ever had was just overall confidence in myself when I was growing up I was really heavy I was a little heavy kid I was 280 something-ish pounds 285 lbs. when I was 13, 14 years old. And you know it was before I was lifting so I was all fat I mean I was constantly picked on, made fun of, self esteem was destroyed, depressed, the whole thing and, grappling changed my whole world. When I was getting out there and I was winning matches, winning way more than I was losing I think, my final, winning percentage when it came down to high school at least grappling was my final winning percentage was something like 81% out of 106 and 24 I believe was my record. I still remember that because I am proud of that for me. I’d never wrestled and then to show up at a high school and, and just find my niche and be good at it and to win 8 times out of 10 that’s awesome. So the greatest reward for me is just the confidence it gave me. I found my thing, you know, I found the thing that I was good at I found the thing that I want to do. It wasn’t to make my dad happy; it wasn’t to make my friends happy; it wasn’t for anybody else. It was it was for me I was good at it. I enjoyed it and it made me tougher it made me more confident and it made me a completely different person, you know. I used to not have any confidence in myself at all yah know, you know how kids can be, kids can be cruel. You know they can tear you down sometimes it can take a long time to get rid of those effects. But I would say that as ... it might sound corny and cliché but it really has made me the man I am today. It really has. It shaped my character. When I could even begin to tell you that is the biggest reward if I never was to win another match again then, you know, I would still have gotten so much out of it that I know, I love grappling I love the sport that, for just everything that it’s given me. Yah.

(Football, Male, 20-25, White, 5-10)

PI: Well given all your experiences that entire time span, think you could tell me what the most rewarding aspects for...
Teddy: Definitely the mental like stimuli. Because there were times when I would be. Like not be able to think very well and all the sudden – Bam! something happened like I’d be in… it was part of that moving around just loose thinking and then all the sudden like (snap) ‘that math problem that’s how you do it!’ And then it’s just this very mental stimulus, stimuli. And afterwards, after I do it I actually found myself learning faster. Like, essentially I can think a little bit better. More coherently and almost unrelated like how I like to do artwork and all that and it would actually help. Because it was training it was like mental training it was very stimulating the mind and so I carried that on and I just trained, my mind when I was learning how to do new whatever. And definitely the most rewarding thing is the mental aspect of it.

(Martial Arts, Male, 20-25, Hispanic, 10-15)

PI: What would you say was the most rewarding aspects for being involved in wrestling?

Alex: Won a lot of tournaments, learned a lot about myself. That’s probably the biggest thing. When you’re in the middle of combat you, your conscious mind isn’t really thinking it’s that deep animal that’s in everybody, your subconscious mind that’s doing everything. When you’re pushed to those limits you really understand who you are. The worst thing that I learned in nationals, that I can be broken and I’m not as awesomely tough as I wish I was. That was a sad reminder of that.

(Wrestling, Male, 20-25, White, 5-10)

PI: And what would you say the most rewarding aspects of, for being in soccer have been over the years?

Jane: Just appreciating the art of athletics to have a lot of respect for athletes even if I’m not on the same level as them; their dedication and, to be able to have interest in it and both playing and also to watching it. So I’m able to understand what calls are and everything when I watch FIFA, European leagues, World Cup those kind of things. And also the lessons I learned were discipline like I said, mental toughness teamwork. Sacrifice that kind of stuff.

PI: That kind of stuff think you could tell me a little bit more, in detail perhaps, that kind of stuff?

Jane: What do you mean?

PI: You were just talking about teamwork, mental toughness, that kind of stuff.

Jane: I meant like extra.

PI: Well, yah, if you would keep going a little bit.

Jane: With what I got out of it?
PI: You.

Jane: I would say, like I said it gives you something to look forward to it feels like you have a sense of purpose when you’re younger and you don’t have anything to worry about it’s nice to focus your energy on something and to feel responsible, responsible to your team to be able to eat a good meal to be able to keep up your fitness, to be able to help your teammates out. It causes a sense of like I said purpose when you could easily not really have that responsibility had you not been in a sport and it gives you goals and you’re able to go through those goals and just be determined and learn a lot of life lessons in the process and training and also in games in the whole season.

(Soccer, Female, 20, Black, 15)

PI: What would you say the most rewarding aspects were for being involved in football and basketball?

Frank: Like what do you mean?

PI: Rewarding as in something that you really looked forward to having like something you actually got out of it.

Frank: They give you these little certificates when you were all state all conference, I still got those little all state joints like that was the physical thing that I can look at and be like ‘Yo, that’s cool’ or, there’s this picture in the paper of me about to dunk on someone and my mom got it as far as a like physical evidence she like to look at that, she likes the memory of it so like physically rewarding like I can touch this those are probably the two.

PI: Well, even not exactly physically rewarding those other, many, many kinds of rewarding.

Frank: Probably, one of the most rewarding things is the teammate aspect like, my teammates especially the AU. My friends come from sports like cause we just spend so much time together like that’s probably the most rewarding things I have. I have like they always say it’s a cliché like you get your life long friends off these teams but I really do like we scattered across the country right now. One somebody went over seas to hoop. At every level we still will always be the best of homies because of that experience we had together. I got my oldest most enduring friends from sports.

(Basketball and Football, Male, 18-20, Black, 5-10)

PI: What would you say would be the most rewarding aspects for being involved in volleyball?

Eliza: Rewarding aspects? I mean the one I’ve learned I think the biggest one I’ve learned is leadership and just having a positive mentality no matter what happens no matter if its volleyball if it’s the
coach if it’s a teammate. I think I remember when I was 14 my mom and I we’d be driving to these tournaments and we would practice, ‘all right what are you gonna tell ----- when she gets sad or upset about something? What are you gonna yell at the girls when they look down? How are you gonna get them pumped up?’ We’d practice in the car and I’d be yelling and screaming and getting all excited in the car before we even got to the tournament. So I think definitely I developed as a leader and I think I’m still developing as a leader and I definitely think that I can transition to other things in my life. And then I think again, going back to that positive mentality I mean coaches will tell you, ‘You stink at this. You gotta get better at this.’ And if you can’t take the criticism and then do something with it then you’re kind of just left behind so it teaches you to kind of all right, ‘This is the feedback I’m getting this is what I need to do. How am I gonna respond to it?’ And so I think it helped me create a, ‘All right, next one, next one I got this. I can do this. No matter what, I can do this!’ So kind of like a positive view on everything and confidence in myself that I can do what I really set my mind to do, as cheesy as that sounds.

(Volleyball, Female, 20-25, Hispanic, 5-10)

PI: And you told me about how it was rewarding to see your name in the paper and these sort of accolades that you can receive after winning a game, think you can tell me about all of the most rewarding aspects for being involved in football?

Anderson: … [P]eople coming up to you and say, ‘You’re the best!’ That’s what I played for—just as simple as that. And there was other things, I mean. There were, I’m not sure, it was the other things. Just spending time with your friends and building those relationships with practices and off the field activities, but I was just more worried about becoming the best and proving a point…

(Football, Male, 25, Black, 10-15)

These practical life skills were acquired during the days these athletes were still involved with their sport. People cannot stay young and athletic forever, and once many of the older participants reached a point that they could not continue to compete, they found rewards in helping younger generations learn valuable lessons that sports had taught them.

PI: Think about the most rewarding aspects on a continuous basis for being involved?

Linn: The most rewarding? By far is making a difference in players’ lives, by far. No question, you make a difference, kids come to your program. You recruit them so I recruited in Minnesota a kid from Oklahoma kid from Oregon a kid from Texas and so they all come and
they all have different backgrounds different demographics, farm kids, city kids, private schools, public schools and you and they’re high school kids and it’s just like you, you know the difference between a 17 year old and a 22 year old is huge and you get to put a stamp on their development as a human being—as a person, as a student. Basketball is a vehicle to develop character; it’s a vehicle to offer kids opportunities to get an education. So what I got out of it was at the end of, you know when those kids graduated and they’re 22 years old you feel pretty good that you, ‘Hey, I’m pretty proud of the kind of person they have become.’

PI: And is there anything else that you would like to add on? Just about your experiences in general. Any last comments that you wanted to make?

Linn: Coaching is I will never do anything the rest and I knew this when I retired at the age of 50 I’ll never do anything that’s as fulfilling as coaching a college women’s basketball team. It’s a tremendous opportunity to do it, but to touch kids and to compete at a higher level and to be in the thick of the, college women’s basketball was a very cool thing to do and ...

(Basketball, Female, 55-60, White, >30)

PI: Think you can tell me about the most rewarding aspects, all the most rewarding aspects, even today or 10 years ago, of being involved with basketball?

Mark: The most rewarding basketball experience I’ve had is watching my daughter. Being able to pass on what I’ve learned to her and her... and apply to her life and be successful with it she had a lot of success in high school. She was the player of the year in the state; she won a state championship she is the MVP of the state tournament and you know a lot of pride in that because she started a lot earlier than I did and she started playing at 4 years old and that’s because I was in college at the time and I was a player and she was seeing me play and, you know, she just kind of latched on to it so the most rewarding thing is her you know even going further than I did with my experiences and pass that on to her, and the other thing is getting your school paid for, that’s kind of a big deal you go out and achieve a goal. I decided back in 9th grade I want to play in college I was able to achieve that and get my school paid for as a result

PI: Ok so you talked about your daughter and getting your school paid for, anything else that you can think of?

Mark: Learning the value of hard work, a work ethic. And understanding that you gotta work for something you can achieve it regardless of the odds stacked against you. I was able to do that time and time again in basketball. You set a tangible goal you work for it you get it and there is a lot of lessons learned... you learn from sport that
you probably don’t learn in any other context learning how to be part of
a team learning how to overcome adversity things of that nature.

PI: Ok this might be a little tough, but do you think you could go into
a little bit more detail about a lot of those experiences that you said you
don’t get in other contexts that you end up getting from a positive
experience in basketball?

Mark: I deal with this daily, in my current job, is I work with student
athletes. And we have to sit and visit with them about life after sport
and what they are going to do and for one, the first thing we do with
them is we try and help them build a resume and they sit and they look
at that resume and they look at the blank page and it is like, ‘Well, I’ve
never done anything.’ ‘Oh, well that’s not true. You understand how to
work with a team work in a team environment; you understand the
challenges of, of you know diverse populations; you’re on the college
team, yet people coming from all different parts of the country all
different parts of the world. You often overcome tons of adversity; you
know how to deal in pressure packed situation.’ We sit there and we
help them understand some of the traits they can pull out of their student
athlete experience to, to let employers know that they have transferable
skills that they’ve gained from the student athlete experience.

(Basketball, Male, 35-40, Black, >30)

PI: And in coaching then, what was the most consistent feeling?

Lucy: That I’m making a difference: that I’m making a difference in a
child’s life; that I’m giving them opportunities that they would not
necessarily have had they not, you know, entered into this particular
sport or any sport for that matter.

PI: Could you maybe tell me a bit about those opportunities?

Lucy: Well again, a lot of people that I work with are low income
people and so they wouldn’t have the opportunity to go to school, like
most people would so through track and field getting them to a level
where they can compete at the college level. They are given a
scholarship, and they are able to attend a university without having the
debt possibly later on in life.

(Track and Field, Female, 40-45, Black, >30)

One participant directly stated that staying healthy was a secondary
benefit to being involved with her sport. One could see the argument as to
how this generalizes to most other sports, but the other participants simply
did not think to state this point of view.
PI: What would you say were the most rewarding aspects to you for being involved with basketball?

Tate: I think just like the, well obviously being physically healthy was great. Knowing I could run up and down a court, that was awesome, and being good at what I did.

PI: Think you could tell me more about basketball as it relates to keeping your health up?

Tate: Just the workouts the practice, practice is basically a work out. So you were healthy while playing basketball.

(Basketball, Female, 20-25, Black, 5-10)

The literature also points to the importance of feelings when one is engaged in a task. It is at this point that strong note must be taken of how difficult it is for people to talk about their feelings. As a therapist once stated, “This is why so many people spend years on couches: they can’t figure out their own emotions!” This quote addresses the issue of not being able to draw out how people have problems talking about their feelings. Therefore, a bit of interpretation was needed to find out how people felt while involved in their sport. The predominant feeling while participating in a sport seemed to be enjoyment.

PI: Do you think you could describe the most consistent feelings that you experienced for martial arts?

Tommy: Honor, the, the, that’s the way I put it. You meet somebody who’s you know, 80 years old and a grand master of a martial art, that’s true like dedication and that’s I think it’s just something that makes me really proud to be a part of that, it’s still like part of like the ancient Asian ways of respect of and philosophy they’re carried through martial arts. Martial arts kind of connect east to west.

PI: Ok but going more along that topic of honor, honor from who? Honor from who what does honor mean to you?

Tommy: To me honor means respect when someone feels not envious but when somebody feels proud to be able to stand with you. You know? When I see an 80 year old, one of the greats one of the people that started the martial art, that just makes me feel, you know, that much
more important that much more respect, but also, you’re in the presence of something that great. It’s something everyone strives for, when obviously, having been out of this sport for a year and a half now I can’t … it takes a certain kind of person to do that.

PI: I just have to keep trying to tease out what you are trying to say here. And so that respect you are talking about, I guess the simplest question I could ask would be: respect from whom?

Tommy: Respect for dedication, respect for those grand masters who are 80, you know, it’s just respect for the time they put in, the tears they shed and the blood they shed perfecting the art. Because it’s really a way of life you know?

(Martial Arts, Male, 20-25, Other/Middle Eastern, 10-15)

PI: Think you could tell me about the most consistent feelings you felt when you were playing basketball.

Mark: The most consistent feelings?

PI: Yes.

Mark: Competitiveness… that was the feeling that truncated all other feelings. I always felt that I had to be better than the next guy, anytime you do an individual workout the thing that pushed me was thinking about rival players in our district or in the state and I would always ask myself, ‘What are they doing right now? Are they shooting one extra jumper? Are they shooting 100 jumpers today? I can’t let them outdo me!’ And that lasted all the way through college, and I’m watching teammates I’m competing for playing time with and using that competitive desire to drive me to do just one more. And that was my motto all the way through, ‘Just do one more.’ One more than the next person because if I’m not working hard eventually when we meet they’re probably going to beat me. So, I just stayed competitive throughout and that kept me motivated to keep going.

PI: And this feeling of competitiveness, what did that mean to you? To consistently feel that competitive drive?

Mark: I just I love the sense of accomplishment. I love the sense of accomplishment. I love to win I love to beat the next person and then that competitive desire is what, what pushes you toward accomplishment and when you accomplish things. For instance, we won a conference championship at my school for the first time in 30 years, and I was a big part of that. And that is something no one else can ever take from you we go and win state play off games—no one can take that from you. It was a sense of accomplishment and that even carried on into college. I wanted to be the best do the best and that competitiveness is what drives you to accomplish things you try to accomplish.

(Basketball, Male, 35-40, Black, >30)
PI: And in coaching then, what was the most consistent feeling?

Lucy: That I’m making a difference. That I’m making a difference in a child’s life that I’m giving them opportunities that they would not necessarily have had they not you know entered into this particular sport or any sport for that matter.

PI: Could you maybe tell me a bit about those opportunities?

Lucy: Well, again, a lot of people that I work with are low income people and so they wouldn’t have the opportunity to go to school, like more, most people would. So through track and field getting them to a level where they can compete at the college level, they are given a scholarship and they are able to attend a university without having the debt possibly later on in life.

PI: And, well, no I think unless there is anything else you’d like to add about how you feel about being, that contentment that you had, maybe how you feel about that difference that you are making sort of what thoughts that brings to your mind or what sort of emotions it brings to you, brings out of you. Like when you’re thinking about how you’re really changing somebody’s life or how you felt content back when you were competing?

Lucy: We have always been taught through our coach, track and field coach, and we being the remainder of the girls on the team to give back to our community and this is an opportunity for me just to do that the position that I am is not a paid position. So I actually do it for the love of the sport, it is very time consuming so I do sacrifice still to this day I’m sacrificing time, my time, my time with my kids. But just knowing that I’m making a difference in somebody’s life, just seeing that child, sign on the dotted line to go to a university and giving them the opportunity it just, it’s a feeling that I probably couldn’t describe: it’s just a feeling that makes me feel good, and it puts a smile on my face to know that this is what I’m here to do, and I’m actually, living out my dream to do something, to make that difference in that child’s life.

(Track and Field, Female, 40-45, Black, >30)

PI: If you could tell me about the most consistent feelings that you had in the different stages of your development.

Teddy: Enjoyment. I mean I thoroughly I thoroughly enjoyed it while I was there. Even. Even through some of the nastier parts like that guy that shoved kids around because I look past, I essentially told myself, ‘You know what, let it go.’ He’s being dealt with the responsibly adult way and essentially it was enjoyment. I loved the play fighting I loved the groundwork and it was, it was fun. I and the, when I got older there was some anxiety because of, it got more, it got more, I got more anxiety with it while I got older because I was learning from my father and then going down there and getting their feelings about that. And also getting to notice the faults in others. In their forms and in their
style. And in how they practiced and it was. But even after it was still enjoyable.

PI: And what, what made it enjoyable do you think?

Teddy: The atmosphere. Albeit it could be chaotic at times I mean that’s what you get when you get 20 kids that are all like five all the way up to puberty running around screaming their heads off during breaks and basically acting like little ants, kids can’t get them to sit down five minutes without fidgeting. And it was just the atmosphere because it’s one thing when you work out by yourself. It’s just kind of tedious but when you are working out with others you, essentially you work. You, you know, when you teach you learn. Like, like if you’re practicing a kata and you, you know it but you’re practicing it with someone who knows a little bit more because you suddenly like, you’re working on it and you look over and you’re like, ‘Oh, I’m not supposed to cross my leg. It’s actually that leg. It’s the opposite leg in front of the other.’ Or, ‘I’m not punching in the right spot. I have to actually punch a little bit higher because I’m not actually aiming for the throat.’ And also it gives you a chance to see like even though you see the faults in others it gave you a chance to essentially how to teach the children. Like you’d be working with kids and you see them struggling with something, so it’d be like it’d be like, ‘I know how to do this right,’ like, ‘Okay, kids, line up in a straight line, I’m gonna grab a punching bag we’re gonna practice your punches because you don’t put your thumb inside your fist because you’re gonna break your thumb.’ And it was that atmosphere of learning, teaching, learning, teaching that made it very enjoyable. Even in the frustrating bits. I know that’s probably confusing because I had talked about how all the like, the Tenyangs and all the looks they gave me and the whole ambivalence about all that but the same time. I was learning how they did it in a kid’s class. Which, which I could take back home and then my father because he worked with the kids class he would look over his notes and he’d actually find those and he’d be like, ‘Oh, yah.’ He began to find his own notes or he’d fill in the blanks about stuff and so it was this constant cycle of teaching and learning and I love school, I’ll be one of the first kids on this planet to admit that I love to learn so this whole aspect of me like learning constantly, it was it was very enjoyable.

(Martial Arts, Male, 20-25, Hispanic, 10-15)

PI: And do you think you could describe the most consistent feelings that you had when you were participating from childhood now to early adult hood?

Jane: While playing soccer?

PI: While playing it, training it, at the different periods of your life. Where you were a kid vs. more competitive high school student vs. even today.
Jane: I would say that a sense of accomplishment is something I felt for all three. And satisfaction from winning a game or making a pass and it’s also a sense of, drive and aggression that you can release on the field. It’s been consistent. When I was younger it, was probably more for making friends and having light-hearted fun, but being older it’s probably more for the competitive aspects.

(Soccer, Female, 20, Black, 15)

PI: So you have been involved with the sport for quite some time, think you could tell me what the most consistent feelings have been?

Jane: Honestly just joy. I love playing this game and it just it, I was able to meet so many different, different kinds of people. Some of my best friends to this day, my sisters or, volleyball players and we, one of my best friends is out in Virginia where I am from and we haven’t talked in forever but we get home and we’re still close as ever for, so, yah I just I love playing. It’s what it comes down to.

PI: I found it interesting you talked about how much you love the game and the friends you make, so is it that you love the game or love the people that you met?

Jane: I think it’s a little bit of both. I think it’s the memories I have of it, are of people of moments, and when I’m out there playing it it’s just joy cause I just I know those moments and I love those moments and it’s just a fun sport you get so excited. Very dynamic, very quick sport someone’s always scoring which I know like, like football it takes forever to score soccer takes forever to score volleyball there is a point every 30 seconds, so.

(Volleyball, Female, 20-25, Hispanic, 5-10)

PI: The question was, ‘Think about why it feels good.’

Rose: Feel good about is sustained, like you got a, a good note or a grade back from a professor you know that feeling of, feel good about something only it’s sustained for the whole time that I’m running where you might feel that for a few seconds and then go on with your life right? ‘Oh I got a good response back from my professor that makes me feel good,’ or somebody calls you with some good news and you feel good for a little bit, that kind of feel good. And, but then it’s the whole time that you’re out there rather than a few minutes or second.

PI: And those examples you were giving me about having somebody else give something to me in terms of a professor giving me a good grade or a friend giving me some good news, but when you are running there is no other person involved, so I’m kind of not connecting how those two.

Rose: Yah, it’s a physical, the running high is a physical high: it’s a physical good feeling that goes to you mentally so it’s not like my body feels good, it just goes to, to you mentally. Just like it does if somebody
told you something that made you feel good or, or say they didn’t tell you something you, you did something that made you good, so there’s no one else involved. What would that be? What could you do that makes you feel good and maybe proud of yourself it really doesn’t involve anyone else, something that you did like, I don’t know, random act of kindness or, I don’t know, something like that and then. But it really didn’t involve another person. But, but think of that as being sustained for a while, that kind of a feeling, and of course the longer you run, the longer you have it. It’ll actually start hurting, of course, then your mind goes back to, ‘Oh, my knee is really starting to hurt a little,’ then I better stop for a while. But as long as your body isn’t hurting, you get that running high. And then, of course, I’m thinking about things too that’s when I think about, you know, think about things I could be doing. You’re not, you’re not, not thinking about things you’re thinking about stuff you might do or the day or the weekend or what’s coming up. But you’re feeling good about that kind of thinking, you know. Oh, might visit so and so this weekend or whatever. It’s all positive, positive kind of thinking. So that’s another way to state it, positive thinking. Because you feel good, you have positive thinking.

(Cross Country, >60, Female, White, >30)

PI: Ok, think you could describe for me the most consistent feelings that were involved with being involved with basketball?

Tate: I guess accomplishment.

PI: How so?

Tate: Being a part of a team, winning a game. Having a good season.

PI: How much would you say you had to invest to be or to have a good season. How much would you have to invest time wise and energy wise in basketball?

Tate: I’m gonna think about the high school years. I don’t really remember middle school too much, like an hour and a half practices every single day, plus game nights. Weekend practices sometimes. Traveling time. So if, if you’re in season, probably an extra 12 hours a week.

PI: But going back to this accomplishment that you were telling me about, how often did you feel like you were accomplishing something? Was it just on game days or was it through practice time. How often did you feel that accomplishment?

Tate: I don’t think it was a matter of how often, it was just a general feeling in the background: it wasn’t a conscious feeling.

PI: It wasn’t a conscious feeling yet you were aware that you felt accomplishment.
Tate: Looking back, reflecting on it, yah, I say I felt accomplished I was on the team. Accomplished during practice. It wasn’t like I finished, ‘Aw, man, I feel accomplished today.’

(Basketball, Female, 20-25, Black, 5-10)

It is critical to note that some people did express enjoyment overall, but also made specific note of how they did not enjoy some aspects of their sport.

PI: Think you were describing quite a range of feelings you could have gone through being a coach. Do you think there was maybe one sort of consistent feeling that you experienced?

Linn: Pressure. And the pressure is self-induced. I think the consistent feeling of every coach feels is pressure. The pressure not to reach the fans expectation of your team but to reach your own expectations of your team: every coach has a little bit of perfectionism in them. And they, every good coach puts pressure on themselves to make sure they’ve done everything possible so that their athletes reach their goals individually and as a team—most important thing to me was as a team. I didn’t care as much about individual goals as I did team goals cause we played a team sport. Basketball is a team sport so the most important thing was not to have the leading scorer in the Big 12 Conference. The most important thing was to have the best team in the big 12 conference.

PI: Very interesting that you were talking about pressure is the most consistent feeling that a good coach should have. Think you could maybe tell me a little bit more as to what that feeling meant to you though personally? That feeling of pressure that you were just talking about

Linn: Well, there’s good pressure, and there is bad pressure. I felt good pressure every year I coached. I felt good pressure because it was my, it was self-induced pressure. I think if you have to really differentiate you’re asking me my opinion: Negative or bad pressure is pressure from the athletic director: you’re gonna lose your job if you don’t win. Pressure from the media, pressure from recruits, pressure from fans, pressure from family members, that’s negative pressure. Good pressure is your own pressure that you put on yourself: that’s a good pressure. It’s not a bad pressure at all. It’s good, good sort of pressure, feels good, feels… it is what motivates you.

(Basketball, Female, 55-60, White, >30)

PI: Well, within these two sports that we have been talking about, do you think you could tell me about the most consistent feelings you had? And I understand that there would be different sort of periods of your life that you had: childhood and, you know, your middle school age and then high school, so just in those different periods of your life what the
most consistent feelings are involved in your sport of football and grappling have been?

Gary: The most consistent thing I can say about grappling is it gives you the highest highs and the lowest lows. It really does. It’s something ‘bout you know winning a one-on-one competition, like that physically demanding—that hard and primal to win and be the alpha male, so to speak to be, that is a feeling that if someone hasn’t, hasn’t ever experienced that, they won’t understand it. You know, for somebody who never wrestled someone who never that stepped in a cage in to fight someone who never, somebody who’s never done a one-on-one competition like grappling to win. That feeling, I mean, it’s the highest high there is. But on the flip side of that coin, to be dominated by another human being, to be dominated by another man, to be, to have someone else claim alpha male status over you, that’s the lowest low there is. It’s not even a matter of trying to be the baddest guy on the block: it’s to know that he’s flat out better than you, and there’s no excuses. In football you could claim, ‘Oh, well that team had lucky things go their way,’” or the refs made this call bad call or whatever. You can blame it on my teammates just didn’t show up that day. You can’t really say that when it comes to, when it comes to grappling that you know if you can get deep and you get legitimately defeated, that I mean it’s, it’s devastating crushing. Every single one of them to me, anyway, how I looked at it I was embarrassed, you know, to me. I don’t like admitting weakness, you know, that’s kind of just how I was brought up: You gotta be tough. You gotta be strong. You gotta be hard. And for somebody to be bigger, stronger, harder than you, you know, it’s a tough pill to swallow. So, I mean, the there’s really, I mean, it will bold feeling like you’re king of the world to feeling like dirt it really is that way and a lot of people who have wrestled and grappled will be able to be able to back that up I mean there’s nothing quite like the emotion you get by either winning or losing a one-on-one match like that.

(Grappling and Football, Male, 20-25, White, 5-10)

PI: Ok, well, do you think you could in those 3 periods—that middle school, high school, and college period—talk about sort of the most consistent feelings that you experienced?

Holly: I don’t know: In Junior High, it was just, you go to practice every day and you run and that was it. I don’t know, I didn’t. And it was also a long time ago. I don’t know if I remember specific feelings toward that. In, in high school, I was I was pretty good at, we, I won, most races that that I ran and so that was a lot of fun. And then in college, I never won anything. I don’t know: I guess I would just describe it as a lot of hard work.

PI: Think you could tell me a little bit more maybe about how it felt like to just keep winning all those races in high school?
Holly: It was, it’s, I don’t know, it’s an interesting feeling to go into a race and know you’re going to win and you don’t even have to try hard. Before races, you know, I do my research: look up results for whoever we were gonna run against and, and so, then, you know, I know I would know going into a race whether it was going to be something I was gonna have to try at or something that I just go out and run and win. So, I don’t know, the races I won that I didn’t have to try, those weren’t very exciting. But it was, it was the races where I really had some good competition that I won because I was really pushing myself. That meant more than the others.

(Cross Country, Female, 25, White, 15)

Discussion

This study pursued the following research question: What are the motivations for athletes in a sustained duration of involvement in their sport? This study utilized a qualitative methodology employing the ethnographic interview in order to determine what athletes with five years or more of consistent involvement used to motivate themselves within their sport.

As the previous section indicated, three major themes emerged from the participants’ responses: 1) a need for a goal to work towards, 2) gaining vital life skills for working towards those goals, and 3) an overall feeling of enjoyment for participating in their sport.

These findings were derived from a range of athletes. These athletes participated in a diverse number of sports, including martial arts, wrestling, basketball, track and field, soccer, football, volleyball, and tennis. These sports could be divided into categories of team and individual sports. There was almost a perfect split between the number of female and male athletes, with nine women and 11 men participating in this study. Thirteen (13) participants were in the 18-25 young adult age range. Seven (7) of the participants were over the age of 35, and there was a greater range in ages for this group
from 35 to >60 years old. Though this study utilized a qualitative methodology, the robustness of the distribution of males and females as well as sport and racial representation offers notable comparisons, particularly because the previously mentioned themes were evidenced regardless of demographic factors.

As demonstrated in this study, the participants expressed the need to feel competent which was manifested through the anticipation to compete on game day. Game day competence was a remarkable finding in this study, again, regardless of sport, age, or gender. As indicated earlier, Ryan’s (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was highlighted in several sport related studies, in which the need for competence as well as autonomy and relatedness for increasing intrinsic motivation and facilitating a pleasurable experience in an activity were emphasized. With this current study on sustained involvement in sport, a key finding was the need for consistent rewarding aspects in the form of practical life skills for pursuing goals within a sport. This adds to the key requirement of SDT with regard to extended motivation in sport for five years or more.

The participants that wanted to perform well on game day as a means to impress others, what Harackiewicz et al. (1997) would refer to as a “graded performance”, would define success as winning games. These participants also found success in this regard. Yet the participants that took a mastery approach to their sport would define success in terms of “personal bests” that were subjective by their nature. In terms of sustained motivation, however, it was the participants that defined their success with “personal bests” as opposed to “winning games” or “defeating opponents” that still participate in their sport today.
Alderman, Beighle and Pangrazi’s (2006) work with children and physical fitness dealt with the need to give children choices in their activity and to promote a mastery orientation towards their sport. The findings in Alderman et al.’s work are somewhat contradictory to Harackiewicz et al.’s (1997) earlier findings. Harackiewicz’s findings were such that students that set out to perform well on tests did in fact perform better on graded material than students that adopted the mastery perspective. The current findings on sustained motivation present information that lends itself to both conclusions, suggesting that additional research may be warranted on mastery and graded performance.

Few participants talked specifically about the importance of team cohesion with regard to enjoyment in their sport. For the three participants that did speak specifically to the importance of getting along with teammates in terms of enjoying the sport, mixed results were reported. One wrestler and one basketball player reported that not getting along with some teammates works to facilitate a competitive atmosphere that improved them as athletes. These reports are comparable to the soccer player that reported any sort of hostility within the team was poor for performance as a group. As stated earlier, Baumeister and Leary (1995) described the need to get along with other members of the group to maximize interest and feelings of relatedness in an activity. The findings of this current study do support that claim from the perspective of the soccer player who thought teammate cohesion was a necessity to the success of the team. Whereas the report that competition within the team (as reported by the two other athletes) would appear to be contradictory findings. However, the two athletes who made those claims were not able
to maintain their level of interest in their sports, whereas the soccer player was able to stay involved in her sport.

The point that individuals required their own individual sources of intrinsic motivation with regards to the different goals they worked to achieve was present in the findings of this research. The findings on needs for goals spoke to this issue as participants reported a need for “performing well on game day, need to claim alpha status, and good health.” These findings are in support of a particular piece of literature. Mowling, Brock, Eiler, and Rudisill (2004) defended the point that intrinsic motivation requires a level of knowledge about what personally interested an individual to participate in a physical activity. Thus, the varying sources of motivation are a key aspect to fully understanding a person’s intrinsic motivation to continue participating in a sport.

One of the descriptive variables collected was the race of the participant. This variable was used to help analyze the raw data. Through analysis of these qualitative data sets, absolutely no relationship between race and answers to any of the questions could be distinguished. As presented in the Literature Review, there is a wealth of information on how a person’s race can affect a person’s involvement in an activity, specifically their sport (Martin, 2010; Bairner, 2008; Kaufman, 2012; Cheska, 1984). However, according to the findings of the current study, race had no effect on responses. Along a similar line of research to racial/ethnic inquiry of sport is inquiry on the influence of socio-economic status on sport. As Washington (2001) revealed, there is a history of racial and socio-economic context for participating in one sport or another. A question with regard toward where a person grew up as related to socio-economic status may have given a more compelling comparison.
As previously stated, there were 12 clear examples of goal setting in the responses collected from participants. Although these goals could be different (performing well on game day, dominating opponents, besting personal records), the need to have goals among athletes who had sustained five years or more in their sport was critical. Kyllo and Landers (1995) dealt with scholarly literature on goal setting as a means to improve performance in a sport. They found an underlying need for goals to improve sport performance. This may lend itself to Ryan’s (2000) work with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Vallerand’s (2004) SDT work as it related to sport. In order to sustain a feeling of competence to continue participating in the sport, participants set reasonable goals to work towards and achieve.

The emotion that was clearly preponderant throughout these results was that of enjoyment, as Goleman (2013) described the term. The assertion that these findings represented a feeling of enjoyment support the findings of scholars that deal with emotion in sport. Scholars such as McCarthy et al. (2008), who reviewed a great deal of literature on the importance of enjoying the sport one participates in, is an example of such previous research on the importance emotional involvement in sport, specifically the feeling of “enjoyment.” This feeling is vital to the continued involvement in a sport. Therefore, the findings of the current study further support previous findings.

What this current research provides to the topic of extended motivation is the importance of reaping practical life skills through years of involvement with a sport. Where previous research dealt with theories of motivation that existed on a moment’s basis, through establishing the condition of extended period of time (five years or more) this research would suggest the need to continually receive rewarding aspects for
involvement in sport. This rewarding aspect for extended involvement in a sport was gaining practical life skills such as leadership, confidence, lasting friendships, and discipline.

**Conclusion**

The question of this research was to explore the sources of sustained motivation in athletes over an extended period of time. From the results and discussion of those results, it is apparent that athletes sustain their motivation through several methods. Clearly, the topic of motivation is a complex one, as evidenced by the varying responses to the questions posed to participants. Yet extended motivation, motivation which must be sustained for five years or more, is specific. The motivation to participate in an activity as physically and mentally demanding as sport requires a particular energy source, one that is renewable and not whimsically challenged. This study underscores the need for renewable sources of motivation in order to stay active and satisfied with a sport for an extended period of time.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

This study cannot be considered an all-encompassing representation of all sports athletes. To address the issue of race and using sport as a means to elevate one’s lot in life or as a means of proving racial competence, socio-economic status of the participants was never collected. Therefore, it is within reason to suggest future research focus on socio-economic status factored with race to determine if there is a relationship within race, socio-economic status, and participation in a sport.
References


Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1: Tell me about the sport you have been involved in for the longest period of time.
   - How did you become interested in your sport?
   - Were there ever times where you were not active in your sport?

2: Describe the regular activities you went through in your sport.
   - In what ways if at all did these activities change over time while you were involved?

3: Describe the experiences that stood out for you the most in your sport.
   - Describe some positive experiences while active in your sport.
   - Describe some negative experiences while active in your sport.

4: Describe the most consistent feelings you experienced while involved in your sport.
   - Describe what these feelings meant to you.

5: What did you look forward to the most while involved in your sport?
   - Describe what was so exciting about this event you looked forward to.

6: Is there a point where you stopped participating in your sport?
   - Could you describe the reasons for this decision?

7: What were the most rewarding aspects to you for being involved in your sport?