

Creating the Climate for Success:
Exploring Motivational Climate in Elite Youth Soccer Clubs

by

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BA, University of Victoria, 2000

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of the Requirements of the Degree of

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Abstract

Objectives: The objectives of this research were to gain a detailed understanding of approaches, facilitators and constraints to creating an optimal motivational climate within elite youth soccer programs in North America by examining the insights of expert coaches in this field.

Design and Method: By using a case study design, six coaches were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format which explored perceptions about and key aspects of the optimal motivational climate and identified specific strategies while reporting challenges to the process of creating the desired climate. Inductive thematic analysis was used to identify major recurring themes that occurred amongst the participant responses and then discussed from the perspective of existing motivational frameworks.

Results: Five dimensions of the desired motivational climate emerged from the theming: developing the autonomous player, connectedness, the opportunity for player advancement, failure as part of the process, and context may have an influence on the climate. Five specific strategies used in creating the desired motivational climate were identified: communication within the group, player advancement, modeling, selection/de-selection, and communication with parents. Five challenges to creating the desired climate surfaced: contact time with the athletes, parents/parental involvement,

consistency within club staff, player movement within the club, and mentality of the player coming into the club.

Conclusion: The findings of this study show that coaches tried to create a motivational climate that was autonomy supportive and task involving. Some aspects of the motivational climate were consistent however with facets of an ego-involving climate. It was also found that parents were believed to have an impact on the motivational environment surrounding the players. The research highlights the complexity of motivational climate in elite youth soccer programs and demonstrates the need for further exploration into education for coaches as well as observation and intervention-based research.

Keywords: Autonomy support, mastery climate, parents, elite youth soccer

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables.....	vii
Acknowledgments.....	viii
Dedications.....	ix
Chapter 1- Introduction.....	1
1.1 - Research Questions.....	7
1.2 - Delimitations.....	8
1.3 - Operational Definitions.....	8
Chapter 2 - Review of Literature.....	10
2.1 - Motivation From a Dual Theory Perspective.....	10
2.2 - Self Determination Theory.....	10
2.3 - Achievement Goal Theory.....	12
2.4 - Motivational Climate.....	13
Chapter 3 - Methods.....	17
3.1 - Research Design.....	17
3.2 - Sample.....	18
3.3 - Researcher as an Instrument.....	19
3.4 - Data Collection.....	19
3.5 - Data Analysis.....	21
3.6 - Trustworthiness.....	22

Chapter 4 - Results.....	24
4.1 - Beliefs about Motivational Climate.....	24
4.2 - Strategies used to Create Motivational Climate.....	34
4.3 - Challenges to Creating the Desired Motivational Climate.....	39
4.4 - Results Table.....	42
Chapter 5 - Discussion.....	44
5.1 - Autonomy Support and Mastery Motivational Climate.....	45
5.2 – Complexity of Motivational Climate.....	47
5.3 – Parental Motivational Climate.....	50
5.4 - Limitations.....	51
5.5 - Conclusions and Recommendations.....	52
5.6 - Future Research.....	53
References.....	55
Appendices.....	65
A. Interview Schedule.....	65

List of Tables

Table 1 - Results Table.....	42
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Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to my children, and all of the other children within sport. May you always be surrounded by coaches and leaders who care about you and give you the best that they can offer. Your best is always good enough, believe in yourself, and be proud of who you are.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The professional soccer system in North America has had tremendous growth over the past several years with the introduction and advancement of Major League Soccer and the United Soccer Leagues. More than ever the structure of youth development has been an area of focus with the vast majority of the professional and elite youth clubs continent wide. North American soccer clubs are adopting a top to bottom organizational structure common across the world's leading soccer nations. Although the professional teams are the most visible team within the clubs, there often exists a multi-layer developmental system, generally known as the academy system, designed to develop future professional soccer players able to make the step into the club's first team (Mitchell et al., 2014).

The developmental journey of an elite soccer player is not always straight forward, as there is much to consider in what characteristics make a professional soccer player. High level physical, technical, tactical, mental, emotional, and even social characteristics must become ingrained in the young athlete as they journey from amateur to professional players (Bourke, 2003). This process requires several thousands of hours of deliberate practice (Ericsson, 2008) and can take a decade or more, with no certainty that the goal of being a professional player will ever be reached.

It has become common-place throughout the North American soccer scene to hire club technical directors and/or head coaches to take on developing systems and strategies designed to produce top level players. Detailed long term plans looking at technical and physical development are ever present as are ideas on how best to create an environment for learning the principles and tactics of the sport.

An area of highlighted importance within player development is the creation of a motivational climate (Mills, Butt, Maynard & Harwood, 2012), the motivational influence exerted by key social agents (Keegan, 2014), that supports the overall development of high performing athletes. The commitment and dedication required to become a professional athlete can be influenced by the motivation of the athlete and their ability to maximize their potential. In turn, this motivation can be impacted by the goal orientation of the individual and the perceived motivational climate in which they operate (Allen & Hodge, 2009). The central importance of the environment to the successful development of professional players is highlighted well by Mills et al. (2012) when they discussed English Premier League academy systems stating:

I think the most important element is the environment . . . that is the real key. There's 40 academies in the country; they all operate under the same criteria; it's all stipulated that you must have a certain number of staff with certain qualifications etc. So why is one better at producing players than another? It all comes down to the people and creating the right environment.
(p. 1601)

Considerable research has been done related to motivational climate (Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014), yet a systematic review of motivational climate in sport in physical activity (Harwood, Keegan, Smith, & Raine, 2015), stated that a gap remained between the literature and the behaviour of coaches in terms of creating a desired motivational climate in sport. Over half of one hundred and four studies within the

review made explicit recommendations that key social agents such as coaches should change their behaviour when it comes to creating a more positive motivational climate.

The significant amount of study done in this field has provided important insight into the effect of the participant's perception of the motivational climate on the psychosocial functioning of the individual in a sport setting. Harwood et al (2015) suggests that perceptions of a mastery climate, one that promotes personal improvement and effort, leads to positive motivational outcomes, such as improved sense of competence and higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Perceptions of an ego climate, where normative comparison and outperforming others is valued, leads to negative motivational strategies, and dissatisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy and relatedness.

The majority of research within this area of study has used self-report questionnaires and cross-sectional designs and thus were limited; generating positive associations but not showing causation. In addition those studies typically looked at the athlete's perception of the coach's behaviour ignoring the coach's perceptions of the created climate or the observable behaviours of the coach (Tessier et al., 2013). Limited research has been conducted to gain a deeper insight into the coach's perceptions and actions in creating a desired motivational climate.

Related to this need, a common recommendation outlined by Harwood et al (2015) is the need for intervention-based studies. This would not only contribute to the literature on motivational climate by examining whether there is an observable causal relationship between motivational climate and player motivation but, if efficacious, would also support coach education by providing evidence-based strategies aimed at creating a more positive motivational climate. However, these intervention studies may

best be designed after understanding both the beliefs and the current actions of coaches when it comes to creating the optimal motivational climate within their teams or programs. Adding to the theoretical literature by exploring cases where coaches are already attempting to create the optimal motivational climate to gain insight into the barriers they face could be instrumental in developing educational information and intervention studies for the greater population of coaches. This is in line with a qualitative study (Mills, Butt, Maynard, & Harwood, 2014) which examined the perspectives of coaches in England as to their perceptions of the optimal developmental environment within English soccer academies. It stated that attention to expert coach perceptions of best practices could lay the foundation for creating the optimal environments in elite youth soccer development.

A case study on motivational climate with an elite men's rugby team (Hodge et al., 2014) did just that and made specific recommendations for coaches of elite sports teams. This study highlighted the importance of adopting transformational leadership and autonomy supportive coaching skills and learning how to be emotionally intelligent coaches. Hodge pointed out that implementation of these recommendations could be dependent upon the competitive level of the team and recommended that future research should focus on similar issues in other sports and at different levels of sport.

This is supported by a review of competitive sport motivation research (Clancy, Herring, MacIntyre, & Campbell, 2016) that highlighted not only the importance of furthering motivation research in competitive sport but of extending the findings gained from the widespread use of quantitative methods with qualitative information that could provide further insight.

With the importance of qualitative exploration of motivational climate in competitive sport and a focus on the perspectives of the coach highlighted, it is also important to consider the research challenges. Motivational climate is a complex topic. The subjective nature of perception means that different interpretations of the motivational climate amongst a group of individuals (players or coaches) could exist within the same setting (Boyd, Kim, Ensari, & Yin, 2014; Keegan, 2014). A second potential problem lies in the fact that the perception of climate could also change for an individual depending upon the current circumstances of the team (Høigaard, Jones, & Peters, 2008). An individual may perceive a different climate, even when the climate hasn't changed, if the team is winning versus losing or, in terms of the player, depending upon whether they are getting significant versus limited playing minutes. Finally there could be a discrepancy between the climate that the coach believes they are creating and the one that is perceived by the athletes within the team (Møllerlækken, Lorås, & Pedersen, 2017).

This complexity confirms the growing necessity for studies that deliver a deeper understanding of the roles, behaviours and interactions of people surrounding the athlete in a sport setting (Keegan, 2014). Specifically, there is a need for research that examines the specific ways that social agents (coaches as a primary social agent) can influence an athlete's perception of motivational climate (Harwood et al., 2015).

Thus, the purpose of this case study is to use qualitative methods to gain detailed insight into the experiences of elite youth coaches that have been identified as attempting to create the optimal motivational climate for player development in an elite youth soccer environment. Specifically, the study will explore a) how participant coaches understand

and conceptualize the creation of the optimal motivational climate and b) the strategies they use and c) their experiences in applying these strategies in a real world setting with a particular focus on barriers and facilitators. This qualitative exploration will provide insight into how motivational climate is perceived and created within a selection of elite youth soccer development programs. With a better understanding of the unique techniques used and challenges faced by coaches in these settings, interventions can be designed and tested that may serve as a foundation for broader implementation of recommendations for youth coaches of all levels (Harwood et al., 2015).

Research Questions

The specific research questions addressed by this study were:

- 1) What are the beliefs of the coach about the creation of a motivational climate in elite youth soccer environments?
- 2) What specific strategies are currently being used to create the desired motivational climate in their club setting?
- 3) What challenges are faced in creating an optimal motivational climate in elite youth soccer development programs and how is it possible to overcome these challenges?

Delimitations

The study was delimited to coaches who served as club technical directors or youth head coaches for Major League Soccer clubs or equivalent elite level soccer clubs in North America that compete at the United States Soccer Development Academy (USSDA) level. Participants needed to be working with male players at the highest elite youth level and ideally preparing them for potential professional careers in the game or at minimum collegiate level sport. The study was also delimited to those coaches that were identified through colleagues as engaging in strategies to enhance motivational climate.

Operational Definitions

A number of operational definitions were included based on the theories and terminologies present in the literature on motivational climate.

Autonomy: An individual's desire to determine their own behavior and feel they have acted of their own free will (Vazou, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2005)

Autonomy- Support: A style of coaching that acknowledges the athletes' feelings and perspectives and allows them to be involved in the decision making process. (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003)

Competence: The effective ability to interact with the environment and demonstrate success and control over outcomes (Koka & Hagger, 2010)

Controlling Behaviours: Coach behaviours employed to pressure or control an athlete's behaviour. while ignoring their personal needs and feelings. (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003)

Ego Involvement: A motivational state where one judges their ability in reference to that of other people. (Gershgoren, 2011)

Ego Orientation: A relatively stable dispositional tendency to be ego involved (Gershgoren, 2011).

Ego-Performance Motivational Climate: An environment where the emphasis is on normative comparison and out performing others (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2009).

Extrinsic Motivation: Motivation to perform a behavior or engage in an activity for motives that are outside the activity itself (Jõesaar, Hein, & Hagger, 2011).

Intrinsic Motivation: Motivation that comes from the pleasure one gets from engaging in the task itself (Jõesaar et al., 2011).

Key Social Agents: The individual's coaches, peers, and parents or significant family members (Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavalley, 2009).

Motivational Climate: The motivational influence created by an athlete's key social agents (Keegan et al., 2009).

Relatedness: The individual feels connected to others when engaged in the activity (Koka & Hagger, 2010).

Task (Mastery) Orientation: The use of self-referenced criteria such as mastery or learning a new skill as a gauge of success (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010)

Task or Mastery Motivational Climate: An environment where the emphasis is on effort and personal improvement as well as on mastery and personal competence (Smith et al., 2009)

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

Motivational Climate from a Dual Theory Perspective

Motivational climate (Ames, 1992) has been studied within the framework of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and from an achievement goal perspective (Nicholls, 1984). This study examined the concept of motivational climate through integration of the two theories due to the complexity of the subject and suitability of both theories.

Self-determination Theory

Self-determination theory distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation (Vazou et al., 2005). Autonomous motivation includes intrinsic motivation and forms of extrinsic motivation that have been identified as part of the individual's value system or sense of self. In contrast, controlled motivation consists of forms of motivation that are externally driven. This form of motivation is based on reward or punishment or on the avoidance of negative emotions (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Self-determination theory suggests that individuals are motivated to fulfill the three basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Hollembek, 2005). The need for competence can be expressed as the desire to interact effectively with the environment and demonstrate success and control over outcomes. The need for autonomy reflects an individual's perception that they have participated in a task or activity of their own free will while relatedness implies that the individual feels connected to others when engaged in the activity (Koka & Hagger, 2010). If an activity fulfills these three basic needs then the activity will likely be freely chosen. If any of

these three needs are not met, the individual may still engage in the activity but this participation would be less self-determined (Hollembek, 2005). Research has shown that there is relevance to whether or not an individual participates in an activity due to more self-determined motives (Amorose, 2007). Evidence suggests that self-determined motivation is associated with greater performance, persistence and overall psychological health.

One of the main influences on the athlete's self-determined motivation is the behaviour of the coach and the coach-athlete relationship. Mageau et al. (2003) suggests that in order for coaches to nurture the intrinsic and autonomous extrinsic motivation of their athletes seven elements of autonomy supportive coaching should be followed. These elements are: providing choice within specific limits or rules, providing rationale for decisions, acknowledging the feeling of the athlete, allowing opportunities for the athlete to take initiative, providing non-controlling feedback, avoiding controlling behaviours, and limiting ego-involvement.

It has also been suggested that the use of specific controlling behaviours should be avoided due to their ability to undermine the basic psychological needs of the athlete (Bartholomew & Ntoumanis, 2010). These include the provision of tangible rewards, the use of controlling feedback, using excessive personal control, using intimidation, promoting ego involvement, and demonstrating conditional regard.

Achievement Goal Theory

Achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984), states that individuals are motivated to engage in achievement settings in order to demonstrate competence or ability, or to avoid demonstrating lack of competence (Sit, 2005). According to Nicholls, perceptions of what constitutes competence are subjective to an individual. The importance of competence within achievement goal theory and as one aspect of self-determination theory support the integration of this theory with discussions of self-determination theory; to further explain the basic psychological need of competence (Ntoumanis, 2001).

Nichols argues that there are two states of involvement that drive the individual's perception of competence within such settings; task involvement and ego involvement (Abrahamsen, Roberts, & Pensgaard, 2008). A task-involved individual will use self-referenced criteria such as mastery or learning a new skill to gauge success and failure. An individual who is more ego involved will use normative referencing such as outperforming others or gaining recognition to judge success.

An individual's goal involvement is a situation-specific state where as a disposition towards either involvement can be defined as the goal-orientation of the individual (Ntoumanis, 2001). The specific goal involvement is an outcome of the interaction between the individual's orientation and the motivational climate. According to Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) an "individual can be high or low on either or both goal" (van de Pol, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2012, 491). Task oriented individuals are concerned with learning, personal improvement and mastery of a set task, where as ego orientated individuals compare their own performance with that of others (Sit, 2005).

When an individual is task oriented they tend to use self-referenced assessment to define success, and they interpret personal improvement as competence. Individuals high in ego orientation use external reference or normative data to define success and often feel competent only when superior ability has been demonstrated (White, Kavussanu, Tank, & Wingate, 2004). The development of goal orientation and the situation specific goal engagement can be influenced by environment (Ames, 1992) and one environmental construct discussed in the literature is motivational climate.

Motivational Climate

Motivational climate can be defined as the motivational influence created by coaches, parents and peers, defined as the athlete's key social agents (Keegan, 2014). Motivational climates can be task (mastery) or ego (performance) involving (van de Pol et al., 2012). In a climate that is task involving, the emphasis is on effort and personal improvement as well as on mastery and personal competence. Each individual in a team setting is believed to have an inherent importance and there exists a collective mindset that mistakes provide a learning opportunity. (Boyd et al., 2014; García-Calvo et al., 2014) In an ego-involving climate the focus is on normative comparison and out performing others. Generally, within this setting the top players receive the most recognition and there is often an overemphasis on winning. In this environment social comparison and interpersonal standards and rivalries are promoted. External rewards as well as punishments for failure or mistakes are common (Boyce, Gano-Overway & Campbell, 2009; Heuzé, Sarrazin, Masiero, Raimbault, & Thomas, 2006; Machida, Marie Ward, & Vealey, 2012; van de Pol et al., 2012)

According to achievement goal theory, both task and ego-oriented individuals strive to achieve competence. They use different feedback mechanisms to assess their competence. Specifically, their assessment of competence involves either an internal or external point of reference, which can have lasting implications for motivation and behavioural outcomes. According to Sit (2005) task orientation is associated with desirable achievement behaviours such as exerting high effort, selecting more difficult tasks and demonstrating lasting persistence in the face of challenge. Ego orientation on the other hand can lead to less desirable behaviours such as providing less effort, choosing simpler tasks and decreased persistence particularly in the face of difficult challenges.

Task involved individuals become intrinsically motivated because the markers of success are internal and controllable, and the individual participates in the activity for its own sake. Ego involved individuals on the other hand engage in a task to demonstrate normative competence leading to a decrease in intrinsic motivation (Spray, 2006). In fact, Sit (2005) found that high ego orientation was related to status motives. Ego-oriented youth desired to outperform others to display their superior ability and attain recognition or social status. Unfortunately, the adoption of performance goals, as characterized by ego involvement, has been found to have a negative effect on achievement emotions therefore ego orientation can lead to motivational fragility when individuals doubt their own competence (Huang, 2011). Conversely, individuals who strove for mastery goals focused on improving ability developed a strong positive affect so a perceived lack of competence had little effect on their motivation because the motivation itself was to achieve competence (Spray, 2006).

Research has demonstrated that the motivational climate created by social influences such as peers, parents, and coaches can influence the athlete's goal orientation (Smith et al., 2009). For instance individual perception of coach behaviours and individual feedback were shown to be important factors associated with motivational climate (Stein, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2012).

Parental feedback (Gershgoren, 2011) or even the perceived goal orientation of a parent has been shown to have an influence on the goal orientation of the individual. Tessier et al (2013) found that the perceptions of a task-involving motivational climate were positively associated with perceived competence as well as enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, overall satisfaction, and higher moral standards. In contrast, perceptions of an ego-involving motivational climate have been positively associated with anxiety, worry, distress, anti-social behaviour and overall dissatisfaction (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010),.

In a further study of elite versus non-elite soccer players in England, elite players were found to be significantly higher in task orientation than non-elite players suggesting that task orientation was related to high level of sporting achievement (Kavussanu, White, Jowett, & England, 2011). Despite the commonly held belief that sporting success is based on outperforming others, it may be that it is the task oriented athletes within a mastery climate who have the achievement advantage through more adaptive behaviour traits (Stuntz, 2009).

In a systematic review of this subject area (Harwood et al., 2015), over fifty percent of the studies analyzed made specific mention that key social agents should alter

their behaviour after measuring participants subjective views of the motivational climate. Recommendations were also made to explore specific ways that social agents can influence the individual's perceptions of the motivational climate, and gain information that could lead to intervention studies.

Based on these recommendations this case study was created to look at how coaches in elite youth soccer programs in North America conceptualize motivational climate, with a focus on specific strategies and challenges that could bring benefit to future research.

Chapter 3 - Methods

Research Design

This study utilized a case study design due to its ability to develop an in-depth, understanding of the topic area (Hodge & Sharp, 2016). The case study allows for exploration from multiple perspectives and a view of the particular subject within a real-life context, with the purpose to generate knowledge and aid in professional practice. A qualitative descriptive research design was used to explore the case of motivational climate within elite youth soccer programs in North America (Hodge & Sharp, 2016) through the exploration of the coaches' perception of, and strategies used to influence motivational climate. This method of design was selected due to the ability of qualitative methods to understand the knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes of the participant (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013). Qualitative research allows for evidence based information that is able to focus on meaning rather than measurement (Holloway & Biley, 2011). The use of qualitative research allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' beliefs, behaviours and experiences adding a dimension of research that cannot be created through quantitative evaluation (Pathak et al., 2013). Therefore, by taking a qualitative approach to the research, this study was able to gain meaningful insight into the current knowledge of this subject among members of the target population, ultimately providing the foundation for more thoughtful creation of targeted interventions and potential coaching recommendations.

Sample

Six coaches were emailed and invited to participate in the study. Three coaches replied to the email, all of whom accepted the invitation to participate. One additional participant was recruited in person at the event where data collection occurred. Four of the participants were head coaches of their respective club's development program while two of the participants were age group coaches working within their clubs. The two age group coaches were invited by their technical director and participated as a coaching staff in the interview. The technical directors ranged in ages between 43 to 54 years. These coaches had between 24 and 30 years coaching experience and between 10 and 19 years of experience in their current or similar coaching positions. The two age group coaches ranged in age from 31-33 years had between four and seven years of experience in their current positions. All participant coaches coached within elite male youth clubs within the United States Soccer Development Academy. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to identify potential participants for this study. The researcher had a past professional coaching encounter with the initial participant and this individual was identified as someone with the appropriate expertise and experience to speak on this subject. Snowball sampling was then used to extend the reach of recruitment. These individuals were recommended for recruitment based on their coaching positions within the highest levels of youth soccer development in North America and as being knowledgeable about the influence that environment has on the development of the young soccer player.

Researcher as an Instrument

It is widely accepted that qualitative research is socially constructed and the relationship of the researcher to the topic can be relevant (Hodge et al., 2014; Ryan, 2007). The researcher, who also conducted the interviews in this study, had similar experiences in the sport of soccer to the participants being interviewed. At the time of writing the study, the researcher was a collegiate level coach with over 20 years experience as a coach in other high-performance levels of the sport including acting as the technical director for an elite youth soccer development program. More specifically, the researcher had personally explored and experienced the impact of implementation strategies to enhance motivational climate in their coaching practice.

Data Collection

Procedures. Following completion of ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Board (Ethics Protocol 17-148), target participants were contacted via email, with a brief description of the study and a statement indicating the researcher's interest in speaking to the participant. A follow up phone call was made to the individual to confirm the details of the study and to gain approval for further contact. Once the coach indicated their willingness for further contact about the study an informed consent package was emailed to them. Following receipt of a signed informed consent form, an interview time and location was agreed upon. The interview questions were sent to the participant ahead of the interview so that they had time to consider their answers before the interview.

Each participant was provided with a standardized description of what the topic area was based upon that read as follows, 'Motivational climate' refers to the motivational

environment, atmosphere, culture within a team. It specifically relates to issues like individual/group motivation, the relationships between coaches and players, and the cohesion between players themselves and overall team spirit.’ No further specific information about motivational climate was provided to the participant. This was deliberately avoided to ensure that participant’s responses to questions were based on their own understanding, perceptions and experiences rather than socially desirable responses based on knowledge gleaned from past research.

At the outset of the interview participants were reassured that involvement and any subsequent dialogue in the study was confidential and that their data would be anonymous in reporting. Participants were also reassured that they could stop the interview at any time (Ryan, 2007). They were also provided with the opportunity to review and approve any responses from the interview to be used in the study. The aim of this step was to build trust, ensuring that the participant felt as comfortable as possible in providing honest answers during the interview.

Instrument. Data was collected from the study participants using a one-on-one, semi-structured interview. The researcher travelled to a soccer event to meet up with the participants and face-to-face interviews were conducted with each one of them. Open-ended questions were used to allow for detailed description and elaboration of the thoughts of the participant. A semi-structured interview schedule was created (see Appendix A) and utilized throughout the process. This approach was selected to avoid a rigid interview structure that limited the ability to capture the full experience of the participant (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001) which would have been counter-productive to the study’s purpose. The interview questions addressed

the participant's general thoughts on motivational climate, challenges to and facilitators of the motivational climate, and specific strategies utilized by the coaches. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes per interview.

The interview questions were piloted with a coach currently serving as a director of a youth development program in North America to ensure that the line of questioning was appropriate for creating relevant discussions on the intended topic. A debriefing after the interview was conducted integrating the participant's feedback to help adjust questions for the final interview process.

Specific prompts and probes differed with each participant based on the flow of conversation that ensued from each question. Each interview was audio-recorded using a digital device after the researcher received participant permission.

Data Analysis

The researcher's aim during the analysis phase was to comprehend the topic of motivational climate within the current elite youth development setting. All transcription, coding and theming was conducted by the researcher. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, with transcriptions ranging from 10 to 24 single space pages. Initial open coding (Saldana, 2016) was done on the printed out transcriptions. This initial coding was done to gain familiarity with the transcripts and look for general similarities and differences that occurred between the participants. Nvivo TM (11.4.1) software for Mac was used to enhance the process of coding and identify the related themes amongst the interviews. This study used the process of inductive thematic analysis to explore the data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Through inductive analysis major recurring themes occurring amongst the participant responses were identified from the

initial coding process. A digital mind map was also created using SimpleMind for Mac. Mind maps have been identified as a powerful graphical method of systematically organizing research data (Whiting & Sines, 2012) and this technique was used to help provide a visual overview of the findings and aid in linking the coded data. Together these processes aided in the detection of major themes, subsequent subthemes and specific findings related to the relevant theories from the discussions with the participants (Nowell et al., 2017). Themes were organized based on the three specific research questions these being: beliefs about the desired motivational climate, strategies used in creating the climate, and challenges faced while attempting to create the desired climate.

Theorizing allowed the researcher to generate explanations for why these themes appeared as they did and new insights were contextualized from the perspective of the researcher to add to the context of what has been articulated by the participants. Relevant quotations from the participants were used to highlight any key areas of interest to the study and to support the analysis.

Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness is an important feature of qualitative research due to the subjective nature of the research and the fact that researcher bias can affect the outcome of the study (Ryan, 2007). This study ensured that practices of procedural rigour as well as ethical rigour were well implemented. With this aim, the study design and implementation ensured that the process was well documented, that researcher bias was limited and that confidentiality issues and other ethical considerations were taken into account. Issues of credibility were addressed by ensuring there was sufficient detailed description of the topic. The researcher also ensured the participants were involved in the

confirmation of the presented data. Member checking (Hodge et al., 2014; Keegan, 2014) was conducted whereby participants were offered the opportunity to review, confirm, edit, and/or comment on and approve any information used by the researcher. Member checking was conducted within two phases. First the transcribed documents were emailed to the participants for their review. Any additions, omissions, or clarifications were asked for at this point. At this point one participant asked for a few omissions of specific language used. Second the participants were emailed a copy of the results from the study and given an opportunity to contribute final feedback at this time. No participants asked for changes to the presented results. This collaboration with the participants ensured that their intended message was included in the study. An audit trail (Hodge et al., 2014; Ryan, 2007; Sagar, Lavalley, & Spray, 2007) was also created during the data analysis process. The original printed transcripts with initial coding, related mind maps, Nvivo theming results and the interview audio recordings were kept; allowing for verification to occur and ultimately limit interpretive bias.

Chapter 4 - Results

The results of the analysis are organized by research question followed by the main themes and subthemes that were identified. An overview of the results is located in Table 1. From the participant's responses their beliefs about creating the motivational climate emerged and formed five overarching themes. These themes were: developing the autonomous player, connectedness, opportunity for player advancement, failure as part of the process and, context influences climate. Coach responses about current strategies used to create the optimal motivational climate coalesced into the following themes: communication within the group, player advancement, modeling, selection/deselection, communication with parents. Finally, themes that emerged from the coaches related to challenges in creating the desired motivational climate including: contact time with the athletes, parental involvement, consistency within club staff, player movement within the academy / club and the mentality of player before coming to academy

In the following sections each of the themes and subsequent sub-themes will be discussed and illustrated with relevant quotes.

Beliefs About the Motivational Climate

Developing the Autonomous player. Central to each of the coach's motivational climate was the desire to support autonomy in their players. They placed an emphasis on fostering intrinsic motivation, getting buy in from the players and wanting the players to take the lead in their development process. The desired autonomy crossed several areas of the player's development. One area of autonomy that coaches reported encouraging was on-field decision making; exemplified by the following quotes:

We want to try to develop the autonomous player, the player that thinks and does at speed, the player that can adapt to the ever-changing demands of the game [Coach 1]

Now you have a sport that's a player-centric sport where the players make the decisions on the field, the coach is just the manager on the sideline and to develop autonomous players you have to give them autonomy [Coach 2]

Another area of autonomy for all of the coaches was in the area of personal development. Their statements reflected a desire to foster an environment where the player took the lead in their own development and became responsible for their own actions rather than waiting for constant direction from the coach. Coach 4 illustrated this by saying "I think the greatest intrinsic motivator is giving ownership to the player. Letting them be responsible for their own development, their own ideas." Coach 1 illustrated the fact that the coaches seemed to extend the importance of personal autonomy to areas beyond individual motivation on the field to communication with the coaches, other players, and parents with the statement "we have to build a person that is capable of having discussion, sometimes difficult discussion, and someone who is able to find their own way". Coach 2 indicated that autonomy for the player was important to their overall development when he said that coaches should be "allowing them the responsibility to fail and to be challenged and to be autonomous and to make decisions and to have a big say in what their pathway will look like"

Connectedness. Connectedness was also a central theme amongst the participating coaches. The first area of connectedness that was identified was the need for a positive relationship between the coach and athlete that is two-way in its nature rather than a situation where the coach was dictating to the player. The importance of the athlete knowing that the coach cared about them as an individual and not just as an athlete, that the coach was approachable and that the player had the ability to question the coach in a respectful manner was emphasized. Coach 1 illustrated this by saying "The relationship should be built on trust, and the first foundation you should always create is that you care about the player as a person. And then you care about them in what they do as a player."

Reciprocity was highlighted as a part of a trusting relationship with the athlete and was highlighted by Coach 3 when they said.

Two Way Street... Simple as. Keep things as simple as you can but it's got to be a two-way street. You cannot be the guy trying to motivate or trying... even if you take motivation out of the way...you cannot be the guy telling them what to do, when to do it, how to do it. There are rules. Rules are part of culture. Rules are part of motivation. Once you've set the rules then there has to be a two-way street between the player and the coach, the player and the player, the player and the team, and they are all two-way streets, there is no one way street in any of that.

The second area of emphasis related to the theme of connectedness was the dynamic among the players themselves as a key contributor to the motivational climate. There was agreement across the coaches, illustrated by a quote from

Coach 2, that there should be a strong sense of collectivity and cohesion within the groups and that there were benefits from the players getting to know each other socially and on a personal level. Coach 2 – “It’s healthy and fun and I’m getting to know my friends and my team mates, and that can only help you on the pitch.”

Coach 3 highlights a further important element that emerged called trust among players, with that being the basis of all other aspects of the relationships; "The easy first word is trust and I think that interconnectivity when it comes to how players act and react and anticipate on the field that is built over time and the trust to know what your team mates going to do". Coaches identified that one benefit of a strong personal relationship between players was a stronger relationship on the field, which aided performance

Positive intra-team relationships were also seen as a necessity; coaches believed that it helped with the challenges that naturally occurred during times of player selection to the game day roster and the promotion of players to higher opportunities within the club. Coach 2 - "if it's done in the right way where guys understand ok we're competing against each other to win the game but after this session is over this isn't carried over into the parking lot." The coaches highlighted that there was a natural amount of internal competition that results in high performance environments and the relationship amongst the players can help ensure this doesn't turn into a negative situation within the team. Coach 2 – “You’re not as worried about how it will affect the social bonds of you and your teammates if your competing against him to get on the field in the same position.”

Coaches encouraged a sense of service and support to other players within the club. Coaches wanted players to be selfless, rather than selfish, and some felt that creating a cooperative environment was vital for the creation of a successful climate. Coach 6 brought this topic up directly by saying - "The concept of selflessness is the one word that maybe we would preach to all the players." Echoed by Coach 4 who said "We preach a lot about collective don't we, we use the idea of collective all the time." And who stressed the behaviours they would look for as a sign of selflessness:

I am always looking to see if they're supportive of one another. Little things, you know, carrying bags and stuff, says so much. You look at a kid like _____ coming back from the Under 17 national team and he is the first guy to grab a bag. He is the first guy to help somebody else with their bag right. So that idea again, going back to that idea of service, tells you an awful lot about a group.

Some coaches noted that the players themselves had a responsibility in setting what the environment looked like within the program and that they were brought into the process of developing the climate. Coach 3 - "Players are part of setting the culture. Players are part of setting what do we want our players to look like"

Third, a sense of connection with the club itself was identified by some as a significant part of the motivational climate. It was evident that some of the coaches believed that a critical piece of motivational climate was that the players within the academy felt they were part of the club as a larger entity. Coach 3 said:

This is the sort of stuff that we have to do on a regular basis to make sure they feel part of the club, part of the framework, part of the DNA. Because it effects

the way you play. You pulled on the shirt because it had the badge on it. In tough times, when you face adversity, that miniscule piece will pull you through.

Opportunity for Player Advancement. Opportunities for player movement, and advancement of players within the club system was seen by all participant coaches as not only a responsibility of their academy but also as a major part of the motivational climate. An explicit goal of youth academies is to promote the top youth players in the club into professional contracts at the end of their youth career (Mitchell et al., 2014). In order to do this the coaches believed that you individualize the process and move the more talented players into higher levels of the club on a regular basis. For instance, when talking about their beliefs as to one characteristic of a successful technical director Coach 2 said:

I think he has to be able to tailor the goals or the development process to each one of those guys individually and the players who are a little more talented and who are a little further ahead and get invited into pre-season with the first team or train with the first team

The coaches' discourse also highlighted their belief that this challenged the top players and provided them with opportunities for growth. For instance, Coach 1 said:

And so, as a club I'm really pleased that we've developed this idea that if you're good enough you're old enough. And so, it's to constantly challenge the player but at the same time we have to be careful with that because we also have to breed confidence. So, we are really lucky to have a pathway where we can... its quite fluid and mobile. I think that is very important.

The coach interviews also illustrated a common belief among the coaches that this opportunity for advancement was seen as a merit-based approach that served not only as a recognition of competence but as a motivational incentive to all players within the system. Coach 1 said:

I think that breeds a meritocracy, opportunity, and nothing will surprise you more than young players when they are given opportunity. I feel that my job is that we provide players opportunity. And when we are brave in that, and what that's done is open up eyes of staff and players and I feel like now its created this environment that instead of giving someone an opportunity with trepidation, it creates more of an exciting environment.

It was also recognized that within the motivational climate setting, the needs and goals of all of the players should be to attended to and not just the players with the most potential to make it to the first team. Coach 2 highlights this when stating:

but the player who is, you know the left back, is just as important to the team and has the same type of goals whether it's going to a high level college and having a chance to play in college just as much as the number 10 who's been in with the first team ten times, so I think the coach has to really use their experience and their skills to be able to be able to motivate these guys.

While the advancement of players and opportunity for promotion within the club had an influence on the motivational climate, the interviews showed that this was not always in a positive direction. Coach 4 stated that "it can serve as a motivator, it can also

serve as a de-motivator.” Therefore, the opportunity for player advancement was also seen as a potential challenge to the climate.

Failure as Part of the Process. Another main theme that emerged from coach discussions was the fact that failure was essential to the process of player development. The coaches emphasized that it was important therefore that failure was accepted as natural, and that it was even built into the process of development. Coach 3 said “and you’ve got to let them fail. Failure is part of the process, in everything. And you try something and it doesn’t work, alright we’ll try something else and it doesn’t work.” Failure was not seen as a negative by the coaches and failure was not punished, rather it was seen as something to learn and grow from and bouncing back from failure helped produce resilient athletes. This sentiment was identified by a statement made by Coach 3:

I encourage it. You have to fail. You can’t just achieve your whole life. You have to fail, or you don’t learn. You don’t... you don’t... you can’t step forward if you don’t fail... failure has got to be part of it.

Context May Have an Influence. Participants were asked about how context influenced how they approached the creation of the motivational climate. The responses from the coaches varied in terms of whether or not participants felt that context changed how they approached the environment. There were however, several identified themes that were discussed in relation to context.

One of the main themes identified within context was the stated importance and emphasis on winning at different ages within the academy, and/or at different stages within the season such as playoffs. Coach 2 stated:

I think the context changes as the players become older and you know now the winning becomes a big part of it and.... I can show you power points that we have where, by the time the players get to 18 years old it becomes about winning and team selection the winning, how to get a result, where-as I think at the younger age groups, you know youth development is more of a laboratory.

While context may have an influence on the immediate focus on the importance of winning, it was stated by several participants that overall the emphasis was not on winning as the main priority but on the overall development of the player. It was also stated that the process of winning was more important than winning as an outcome, especially at younger ages in the academy. Coach 2 again stated:

listen we are trying to win games, we are trying to be successful on the field but that is not the expressed purpose of what we are doing. We are trying to get players who in five to six years will have a chance to be professional footballers.

Participants warned against overstating the importance of winning due to some of the negative potential outcomes. They identified these as missing key development opportunities and creating un-necessary, or excessive anxiety in the players, which would negatively impact performance. This was highlighted best by Coach 2 who said:

I think you have to be really careful if you emphasize the winning in every game because the reality is that it's not going to happen. I think when you over-emphasize that with young players they can forget about the other things that you've worked on in terms of your training, in terms of your development.

A second theme identified within context was the role of the coach and different coaching styles at the different age groups. Coach 2 illustrates this "I think that comes down to which coaches you have working with what groups, and what their strengths are, and what their personalities are, and what their level of experience is, and patience is and, those are all important decisions I think that the director has to make." The coaches emphasized that the coach had to match the needs of the age group and be a good fit in terms of their communication style, their patience, and what was being taught. Age appropriateness was identified as essential, for instance, "Think about cognitively, an 11-year-old can't necessarily understand things the same way that the older players can. So, I think that has an effect on what you are teaching right." [Coach 3]

A third theme identified within context was the transition into the professional team environment. The unique nature of the professional team academy is that the players are being trained for the express purpose of making it to the professional team, which is very much a results-based environment. Coaches all spoke to the need to prepare players for the demands and environment that they would enter as professionals. Two quotes highlighted following illustrate the theme: Coach 1 stated "if a player goes

and plays for the reserves and they are on a win bonus, context automatically changes. Environment changes” and Coach 2 said:

knowing that, listen they are not first team guys yet, but for them to get there and for them to play at a high-level environment they are going to have to be able to deal with that stuff. So, context, I think context is critical, absolutely.

Strategies Used to Create the Motivational Climate

Analysis of the interviews led to the identification of several strategies that were commonly used amongst the coaches within the study. These strategies seemed to be deliberately tended to in order to create the desired environmental influence on the athletes.

Communication. Communication was identified as a major theme within strategies used in creating the desired climate. It crossed into many areas of the coach’s discourse and seemed to be the dominant strategy used to influence the environment. Communication was a key component of the coach-athlete relationship. It formed the basis of trust through informal and open dialogue about soccer and about the player’s life outside of soccer. It was seen as two-way in nature, where athletes could lead the communication. Coach 2 commented that “the coaches really need to start to develop these relationships with the players where they feel comfortable coming to speak to them”

Player input was solicited often through the asking of questions, both in a soccer and non-soccer setting. Player presentations and player input into team tactics and strategy were present which could aid in the education of the players as well as in the buy

in from the players. This was reflected in the following statement by Coach 1, “We have the players present quite a lot in terms of the group. We ask them questions in groups and we say ok... discuss”

Also, communication amongst players was encouraged through the limiting of technology such as cell phones during team events. This fostered dialogue and thus relationships amongst the players. Coach 1 felt that the players would recognize this benefit through the statement “but there is also a realization within that... that you know what, I don’t need that phone all the time, I can have these human interactions and they are actually quite good”

Player Advancement. Player advancement was identified as a deliberate strategy in creating a climate that was highly motivating to the academy players. There was movement up for players who were rewarded for performing well or movement up to challenge a player who may be lacking a challenge within their own age group. The movement of players into higher-level programs outside the club, such as youth national teams, was also supported. The coaches felt that these merit-based opportunities enhanced player motivation and served as a potential motivator as something that was possible to all players. Coach 1 “so the message to the rest of the group is, you perform well and you ‘ll be moved on. You know, you have the right attitude, you excel in training, you work hard, there is opportunity.”

Modeling. Modeling was also present as a strategy used in the creation of the environment. This ranged from highlighting or immersing teams in higher-level soccer

settings such as European tours to play high-level youth, to spotlighting top world performers as role models. Coach 1 said,

we have to always think what's going on in Germany, what's going on in Spain, and what's the standard there? And that's why, because there is always a standard that we can achieve, attain, that's beyond what we can offer. And that's the reality of our soccer here.

Coaches reported that their academies also used the success stories of graduated academy players from their own club to inspire the appropriate abilities and behaviours from current academy players. These modeling strategies demonstrated not only what was possible for the player to attain, but demonstrated the appropriate habits required to learn in order to be successful. Coach 2 said:

So, the guys that we have had in our academy that have signed pro contracts, two of them have been team MVPs and have surpassed 10,000 home grown minutes already and every single one of those three players has had a similar characteristic when it comes to the competing side and the discipline side on the field. I think it's important to tie those players into, certainly the older players as they are coming through and say ok here's how these guys do it. This is why they are doing what they are doing right now. I think that connection is important to make.

Selection / De-selection of Players. Appropriate selection and de-selection of players was identified as another useful strategy employed by the academies that

enhanced motivational climate. It was clear that including the right type of players and people to make up the academies was deliberately attended to. Coach 2 stated:

...and we try to do a really good job of scouting players, if we had players who have self-destructive tendencies they would have a hard time getting into the process in the first place. So, we will always, always, we will always select a player who has the right frame of mind and attitude who might be a little less talented than a talented player who can be self-destructive

Coaches reported that player selection was focused on 'selecting as young as possible' in order to have a longer period of time to not only groom the habits and behaviours of the players, but to catch the players before many unwanted characteristics were instilled.

Coach 5 illustrated this when they described a player and their timing "he said he never trained hard, he'd walk around, he'd disrespect the coach, he wouldn't listen, and he would just dribble everybody. And it was a ticking time bomb really. I think if we got him a year later it would have been too late."

De-selection came into play in extreme cases with players who were deemed wrong for the environment and who were unwilling to demonstrate the necessary changes to their attitude to be a positive influence on the climate. Coach discussions highlighted that all attempts were made to help with the growth of the player, but there was a point where players would be removed from the program if they were deemed to have a negative influence. Coach 3 said:

So, we've got rid of a few, probably I'd say three over the last few months that were just not on board. A poison, upset, moody, and then gathered others to do the same and the minute we got rid of them the teams blossomed.

Coach 3 also stated that de-selection in the right circumstances had a positive influence on the motivational climate and in the productivity of the program.

It opened up the team, people just were more relaxed, and there was a fun... there was a fun element to that dressing room again. He was a dark cloud in the dressing room, and we got rid of it, and the teams been better since. They've played better and they've travelled better. Their whole aura is better, because of that one. And they haven't lost since he's left.

Communication with Parents. Coaches identified that parents influence the motivational climate and that communication with them was as a necessary strategy in helping create the desired climate. This was identified as a major challenge as well and will be discussed further in the challenges section. There was an indication that comprehensive plans on dealing with the parents were not present within the academy setting but it was generally agreed upon that dialogue with the parents must occur as stated by Coach 2, "I have to talk to the parent, the coach must talk to the parent, there is an open-door policy if there is a problem,"

Challenges to Creating the Desired Motivational Climate

Analysis of the interviews led to the identification of several key challenges that could influence the creation of the optimal motivational climate within the academy settings.

Contact Time. A common challenge noted by several participants was the lack of contact hours with the players and the lack of non-soccer time with the athletes. Players within the academies were only present during the on-field portions of the actual training sessions throughout the week. Coaches felt that lack of time with the players outside of on-field interactions inhibited spending more informal, or non-soccer specific time with the athletes, thus hindering the opportunity for personal communication and relationship building. Coach 1 said in reference to this point:

Time. Contact hours with the players. You know were like McDonalds, its fast food soccer. They come to the training, they get out of the car, they run onto the field, the training ends, somebody else comes onto the field, they're off.

Parents. It was unanimously agreed upon that parental involvement played a significant role in the creation of the environment for the players, and that it was also a challenge trying to identify the best way to work with parents within this process. Coaches recognized that the players spend more time with their parents than with their coaches, other than within a residency set up, and therefore the messaging from parents to player plays a big part of shaping the motivation of the player. Coach 3 stated "It's when the players hit their first challenge of not playing well, not getting selected for the team, not getting called into a national team camp, is when, and we call them dinner time

conversations with the parents.” While coaches felt they could influence the messaging towards the player during training sessions and in other involvements they had with the players they could not control the messaging received by the players from parents during their time together; highlighted well by Coach 3 when they said– “What we can’t control is what is said at the dinner table. What we can’t control is the ride home, the ride to, post-game, pre-game, we can’t control any of that.”

Working with parents was identified as a challenge due to the lack of man-hours, or resources, to spend the appropriate time with them, as well as was the lack of a specific plan in how to best involve the parents in a way that was deliberately beneficial to the environment.

Consistency within the Club Staff. A lack of consistency amongst club staff was seen as a challenge to creating the desired motivational climate throughout the club. Coach 4 said “I think the first and foremost is the, for lack of a better word, let’s call it the connectedness to, the connectedness between the levels, the tiers.” This could take the form of a dramatically different approach by some head staff within the club, i.e. reserve team coach, or simply through the lack of experience of young coaches within the youth structure who didn’t have the necessary experience or training in effectively impacting the climate in a positive way as echoed in Coach 3’s statement:

we have hired young coaches that we want to educate that are open minded and with that comes the challenge of having to mentor have to deal with inexperience when it comes to how they interact with players or parents, or their own motivation, their own development process so I think making sure

that we have the right people involved in the process from a coaching standpoint and staffing standpoint is one of the biggest challenges.

Player Movement within the Club. Player movement within the club was identified as a challenge to the environment despite it being stated as a key part of motivational climate as well as a specific strategy employed by coaches. While recognized as a potential motivator it was discussed by the coaches as something that could also work against player motivation and the overall group dynamics. Coach 4: “You know that guy’s demotivated by the fact that one of his teammates went up because they think he’s the wrong guy.” This challenge is examined specifically in the discussion section.

Mentality of Player entering the Academy. A final challenge identified within this study was the fact that players entered the club from outside environments and may have been involved in environments that had contradictory messages or the player themselves have habits or attitudes that were not congruent with the desired climate within the club. It can take time to have an influence on the mindset of these athletes, and in that time period they may have a negative impact on the created climate. It was identified that the majority of players entering the academy setting are the top players in their respective former teams only to arrive and be the average player within the academy system. Specific issues identified ranged from inflated ego-involvement to lack of perceived competence within the new, more challenging environment. Coach 4: “Typically you are getting

the best players from the youth clubs, and being the best player breeds this selfish attitude often because everybody else is there to serve them.”

Table 1. **Results Table**

Research Questions	Themes	Sub-Themes
Coaches' beliefs about motivational climate	Developing the Autonomous player	On-field decision making Personal development
	Connectedness	Relationship with the coach Relationships between the players Connectedness to the club
	Opportunity for player advancement	Individualized process Provide challenge / growth Incentive All players important
	Failure as part of the process	Its ok to fail Failure must be built into the process
	Context may have an influence on the climate	The relative importance of winning Coaching styles and role of coach at different ages Transition into professional teams
Specific strategies being used to create the desired climate	Communication within the group	Two-way communication between player and coach Player presentations Seeking player input Encourage communication between players
	Player Advancement	Movement of players within club Support movement of players to National Teams

Challenges face in creating the optimal motivational climate	Modelling	Modelling higher level programs i.e. Europe Modelling successful academy graduates
	Selection / De-selection	Select the right players / people Select young to allow time for development De-select when necessary to eliminate bad character
	Communication with parents	Some dialogue / meetings but incomplete plan
	Contact time with the athletes	Lack of contact time Lack of communication time either side of training session timeframe
	Parents / Parental involvement	Lack of control over parental messaging to players Lack of resources / time to work with parents
	Consistency within club staff	Between all levels within the club Educating new / young coaches
	Player movement within the club	Can be a de-motivator 1) players left behind 2) coming back to age group Impact on social dynamics
	Mentality of player coming into the club	Previous environment Attitude / perceived ability

Chapter 5 - Discussion

There has been extensive research done over the past thirty years looking at motivation in achievement settings (Harwood et al., 2015) leading to the development of achievement goal theory which incorporates the concept of motivational climate (Smith et al., 2009) and aligns with key concepts from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Literature in the area identified a lack of in-depth information about real world contexts and a need to examine motivational climate from the perspective of the coach as well as in elite sport settings (Harwood et al., 2015; Hodge, 2014). This case study adds to the literature by bringing forward information from coaches about their beliefs about motivational climate and the strategies involved in achieving it. It also extends the literature by addressing implementation challenges.

The findings from this case study underline the complex nature of motivational climate in elite youth soccer clubs, specifically highlighting the participants beliefs about the importance of developing the autonomous player, creating connectedness, providing opportunity for player advancement, recognizing failure as part of the process, and understanding that context may have an influence. When discussing specific strategies used to create motivational climate these specific themes were identified: communication within the group, player advancement, modelling, selection/de-selection, communication with parents. Stated challenges to creating the desired climate included: contact time with the athletes, parental involvement, consistency with club staff, player movement within the club, and mentality of the incoming player.

A discussion of the specific themes in relation to the context of existing literature and theory is provided below.

Autonomy Support and Mastery Motivational Climate

Consistent with Hodge (2014) thematic analysis showed that all of the coaches wanted to act in an autonomy supportive manner. Being autonomy supportive can be described as taking the perspective of the athlete, providing the athlete the opportunity for self-initiation, and minimizing controlling behaviours (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

When viewed from a self-determination theory perspective autonomy support has been shown to aid in the fulfillment of the individuals basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and thus lead to motivation that is more self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

There was consensus across those interviewed that a major aim of their player development environment was to help produce autonomous players who could think, act, and communicate of their own volition, and who were active participants in setting the direction of the program and of their own personal development. Consistent with previous research (Taylor & Bruner, 2012) it is believed that youth soccer players who are provided a sense of autonomy from their coach may have an advantage over others in areas such as leadership and personal responsibility. This is supported by coaches within elite English youth soccer academies who attempted to create a player-driven environment in order to foster personal-responsibility within the athletes (Mills et al., 2014).

A study looking at persistence and drop out in adolescent sport found that autonomy and relatedness fulfillment were significant predictors of persistence in sport (García Calvo, Cervelló, Jiménez, Iglesias, & Moreno Murcia, 2010). The authors of this study highlighted the possibility of a young player entering the academy set up as young

as eight of nine years old, thus spending as much as ten years as a developmental athlete in these settings. The importance of considering the conditions that lead to lasting involvement in sport was suggested. The strategy of providing autonomy as well as the desire to support relatedness were seen as emerging themes from the coaches in this study.

The desire for a positive relationship between coach and player, as well as amongst the players was identified as a theme and termed connectedness within this study. This sense of connectedness was further extended to the sense of belonging of the player to the club as a whole, including the club logo, the first team, and the physical surroundings of the club. This sense of personal connectedness could be viewed as relatedness as described within self-determination theory; referring to a connection with others and the quality of the interpersonal relationships within the group (Keegan, 2014). All of the coaches felt that quality relationships were necessary both between the athlete and the coaching staff and between the athletes themselves. Coaches indicated that relationships between coach and athlete were best when they were based in trust, when communication was two-directional, when the athlete felt that the coach was open and approachable and when there was deemed to be a genuine regard for the athlete as an individual rather than simply as a soccer player. This is consistent with the findings of Taylor (2012) who stated that a player's perception of their rapport with the coach was positively associated with the fulfillment of the athlete's basic psychological needs. Taylor suggested that trust, approachability, and caring demonstrated by the coach could create a foundation for positive youth development in elite soccer through the satisfaction of the athlete's psychological needs.

Coaches highlighted that player-to-player relationships were ideal when they were identified as trusting, positive, relaxed, enjoyable, and cooperative. There was an emphasis from the coaches on the collective, on selflessness and on service to others rather than to oneself. The coaches clearly identified that the connectedness amongst players was an important component of the motivational environment. Similarly, a study that focused on motivational climate and team cohesion stated that the best way to enhance cohesion was to promote a task-involving motivational climate, that emphasized effort, mastery and personal improvement, ahead of an ego-involving climate that focused on social comparisons, and normative ability (García-Calvo et al., 2014).

From the analysis of the interviews many of the beliefs and strategies employed by the coaches were consistent with a task-oriented motivational climate (Boyd et al., 2014). Amongst these themes were communication, challenging players through movement into higher age groups, failure as part of the process for development and players were not punished for mistakes, rather that failure was even built into the process to increase the challenge on the players.

Many of the beliefs of the coaches in this study were consistent with the views of coaches in a study of elite youth soccer academies in England (Mills et al., 2014). Among these included promoting togetherness and ensuring that players felt part of the group, providing opportunity to gain experience at higher levels, and providing effective communication.

Complexity of Motivational Climate

Analysis showed that though the coaches preferred to create a mastery-oriented environment, some of the realities of the competitive youth soccer academy environment

made this challenging and produced situations consistent with ego-involving motivational climates.

Ego motivational climates and mastery motivational climates are not mutually exclusive (Breiger, Cumming, Smith, & Smoll, 2015), and it has been stated that it is possible for elements of both climates to be present simultaneously. It is also possible for different athletes to perceive different motivational climates within the same team and with the same coach (Keegan, 2014). This complex nature of creating a motivational climate is demonstrated within some of the identified challenges that emerged from this study.

The main objective of the professional soccer club's youth academy is to produce players to play for the first team (Mitchell et al., 2014) and despite the coach's desire to create a mastery-oriented climate, this process naturally focuses on the most talented and able players within the system. This emphasis on the top players is consistent with an ego-oriented motivational climate (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002).

It was identified by the coaches that the advancement of a player within the club could have different effects on the social environment of the group or on individual players motivation, performance, and well-being, depending on their interpretation of the situation. Past research suggests that these differences can be explained by the overall perceived motivational climate and by the specific goal involvement of the individual (Boyd et al., 2014). For example, if the overall motivational climate was perceived as mastery-oriented then there was potential for players to see the success of others as a motivator and be encouraged by seeing their teammates successfully stepping to the next level. However if it was perceived as ego-oriented climate there was a potential for a

player's sense of competence to be thwarted when they saw the advancement of a teammate ahead of themselves because an ego-involved individual views competence in a normative comparison and may become motivationally fragile when they doubt their own competence (Spray, 2006).

There was discussion of competition between players, especially as the player moved up into the older age groups and closer to the first team. It was however specifically stated that the competition was a natural part of the academy structure and that the desire was for the competition to be healthy and cooperative rather than negative and divisive. This was the desired outcome from the perspective of the coaches.

A theme that emerged from the study was that context could have an impact on the motivational climate and this seemed mainly based around age and stage of the player. Coaches reported a greater emphasis on winning as an outcome goal at the older age groups. This seemed in-line with the greater emphasis on player competition for spots and on player advancement into the professional teams, reserve and first team, of the club. It may be appropriate to say then that the motivational climates within the club academy structure could have a higher ego-orientation at the older ages, a natural element of the professional team academy system, and less ego-orientation at the young ages. However, the coaches emphasized task-orientation at all ages within the club.

While the increased ego-involvement at the older stages of the academy should be something to take note of due to its potential negative outcomes, it may not be as important as the presence of a high task-orientation at the older age groups. Previous research has found that elite soccer players in the United Kingdom had significantly higher levels of task-orientation compared to non-elite players where there were no

significant differences in the ego-orientation between the two groups (Kavussanu et al., 2011). This points to the need to create a task-involving motivational climate in order to create players who value the elements of personal mastery needed to become a top-level performer as well as the psychological resilience required to face and overcome the challenges and obstacles that will undoubtedly be faced along the journey to becoming a professional player.

Parental Motivational Climate

Evident from this study was the unanimous acknowledgement that the parents of the athletes were highly influential and important components of the athlete's involvement within the academy. This insight is consistent with motivational climate research which highlights the motivational influence of three key social agents; coaches, peers, and parents (Keegan et al., 2009) as encompassing the motivational climate surrounding the athlete. The importance of the parental influence is demonstrated in a study by Gershgoren (2011) which showed that a single parental feedback statement impacted the perceived motivational climate and the goal involvement of the individual in an athletic setting and concluded that the impact that parents could have on the motivation of the athlete could be substantial.

The coaches within this study all believed that parents should be considered within the process and that efforts were being made to provide some education and communication to the parents and all agreed that the parents should not simply be excluded from the process. It was indicated that no complete plan to approach parental involvement was in place and all stated that they believed they could do a better job.

Limitations

This study used qualitative data collection techniques including self-report and there are inherent limitations to these methods (Ryan, 2007) which challenge the trustworthiness or validity of the data. Due to the personal nature of questions, participants may have answered based on what they perceived the researcher wanted to hear or based on an image that they wanted to portray rather than how they actually operated with respect to the specific question asked. It is also possible that information provided was only the coaches' perceptions and from their perspective and it may not be reflective of the motivational climate when assessed using objective observation of the coach's behaviour nor represent the athlete's perceptions of the coach created motivational climate.

The concept of generalizability in qualitative research is transferability (Guba, Lincoln, 1985). The size of the sample was limited to individuals who were identified and volunteered to participate and the transferability of the findings will depend on the similarity between the context of the coaches in the study and the user of the data (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2011). This study specifically focused on elite coaches in professional development academies and thus may have limited transferability to other sport settings. In addition, the voluntary nature of the study means that the sample may not be representative of the population of elite youth soccer coaches in North America as a whole.

Participants with special knowledge of the subject matter and also coaching soccer at the elite youth level were purposively recruited for this study. Purposive sampling was used to identify initial potential participants. The researcher had a past

professional coaching encounter with the first participant and this individual was identified as someone with the appropriate expertise and experience to speak on this subject. Snowball sampling was then used to extend the reach of recruitment. These individuals were selected based on their reputation as leaders in the field of youth development in North America and as being knowledgeable about the influence that environment has on the development of the young soccer player. They were also selected due to their willingness to respond to researcher contact and to participate in the study. Thus, the views expressed by this group may not be fully reflective of the target population of elite development coaches as a whole.

There is a risk of researcher bias in qualitative studies due to the interpretive nature of the data analysis. The self is always present in qualitative research (Holloway & Biley, 2011) and the research is often influenced by the feelings and experiences of the researcher. In essence the researcher is an active participant in the process of data collection and analysis and therefore cannot truly separate themselves from the data (Sandelowski, 2000). Care was taken to recognize the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the researcher in this study and to not allow those experiences to skew the information presented.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that coaches that self-identify as interested in motivational climate have adopted many key constructs of self-determination theory. These expert coaches highlighted the importance of creating an autonomy supportive environment that fulfills the basic psychological needs of the athlete as outlined in self-determination theory. When comparing past research to the beliefs of the coaches in this study it seems

a task-oriented climate is believed to be most beneficial to the development of elite youth soccer players. Coaches need to be aware of the natural elements of ego-involvement in competitive sport and take steps to ensure that it is managed appropriately. Specific suggestions that emerged from this research include: supporting the athlete in taking the lead in their own development through communication and offering choice to the athlete where possible, fostering a trusting and supportive environment with quality relationships between coaches and athletes and a cohesion amongst the players, maximizing emphasis on effort, achieving ones best, cooperation, resilience, and failure as part of the process, minimizing the emphasis on comparison between players, results without effort, and failure as a negative outcome

Coaches highlighted the importance of creating a deliberate strategy for including the athlete's parents in the creation of the motivational climate, or at the bare minimum taking steps to mitigate the potential negative influence that contradictory messaging received from significant others could have on the athlete. Finally, the themes emerging from the voices of the coaches showed that consideration should be given to the fact that the creation of a motivational climate in a club setting was very complex and involved the influence of coaches, players, and significant others across a broad range of ages and programs within the club. It appears that a deliberate club wide strategy to create a consistent motivational climate would be useful in maximizing the development potential of the program.

Future Research

Based on the findings and lack of evidence in the literature future research in this area should look at the specific role of the parent on the motivational climate in elite

youth soccer settings. Future research should also examine how coaches in elite youth soccer clubs can minimize the negative influence of the natural elements of ego-involvement within a system that seeks to develop, identify, and select top individual performers for advancement within a team based developmental system. Finally, as recommended by Harwood (2015) there is a need for intervention research that examines the impact of coaching strategies on player perceptions, motivation and engagement. Comprehensive education, training, and intervention strategies aimed to provide coaches of elite youth soccer clubs the necessary tools to create the optimal motivational climate for player development and preparation for professional soccer is recommended.

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule

Introductions

Ice Breaker Discussion.

Thanks for agreeing to take part in this discussion. As you know I am interested in interviewing coaches that are building in strategies that create a motivating climate within their teams.

I thought we could start today by just talking about how you got here? Perhaps you could go over your coaching timeline, where did you start, where are you today

‘Motivational climate’ refers to the motivational environment, atmosphere, culture... within a team. It specifically relates to issues like individual/group motivation, the relationships between coaches and players, and the cohesion between players themselves, and overall team spirit.

Question 1: How do you see the concept of motivational climate? Can you outline your views on the motivational environment within your program?

Prompt: What are you thinking about when you think about this?

Prompt: talk about the overall culture in your club

Prompt: talk about the player coach relationships in your club

Prompt: talk about the relationship amongst the players that you want to create.

Probe: How does the topic of motivation fit into your coaching philosophy?

Probe: In your mind what are key components that you think are important to creating a motivation climate?

Segue: If there are key components and its important

Question 2: What strategies are you using to create a motivating climate?

Probes on each strategy Note down each strategy.

Behavioural probes (tell me how that works, tell me how you do that)

Probe for further strategies related to the components elucidated in

Question 1: You mentioned this..... [key component from above] – any strategies you use for that?

3. Does context change any of these strategies?

Probe: when you use it? how you use it?

4. What are some of the other challenges to applying these types of principals?

External? (things outside of your control)

Internal?

Prompt: when does this not work for you?

Each challenge is probed – describe how do you apply your beliefs about motivational climate in the face of that? What do you do to overcome that challenge?

Probe: When during a season, when during a practice, when during a broader agenda is this more challenging

5. What makes it easy to apply motivational climate principals in your coaching?
6. Let's wrap back to your timeline – how did you come to these ideas and the importance of them? How did you develop your concept of motivation climate?
7. Specific theoretical questions/probes what is missing? E.g. The literature shows autonomy as important but you didn't really highlight that – tell me about that.
8. You obviously brought up winning as a key external challenge how do you marry this with your philosophy around motivational climate.