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## Development and Implementation of an Autonomy Supportive Training Program among Youth Sport Coaches

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Studying perceived autonomy support, a basic tenet of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), provides some understanding as to how coaches can more positively influence youth athletes to enjoy and persist in youth sport. Borrowing insights from success in physical education and coaching-oriented interventions, the purpose of this paper was to highlight positive aspects and challenges of an innovative youth sport autonomy supportive training program for coaches. Positives included the initial training session and the use of an online training component. Challenges were the structure of the season, other coaches, and possibly the age of the athletes. Future training programs in youth sport coaching should increase in duration, provide specific examples of how to implement autonomy supportive coaching behaviors, as well as address solutions to the time constraints of the youth sport setting.

**Keywords:** coaching baseball, best practices

According to the National Council of Youth Sports, involvement in youth sport has increased steadily in the last decade, with approximately 60 million athletes participating annually (National Council of Youth Sports, 2008). There are several benefits to youth sport participation including development of fundamental motor skills, an appreciation for physical fitness and health, having a sense of belonging (Seefeldt, Ewing, & Walk, 1992), and a persistence in sport later in life (Curtis, McTeer, & White, 1999). Unfortunately, as many as 70% of these participants will drop out of youth sport by age 13 (Woods, 2007) with many of them citing coaching practices and lack of enjoyment as frequent reasons for dropping out of youth sport (Butcher, Lindner, & Johns, 2002; Seefeldt, et al., 1992). To experience the positive benefits of youth sport participation throughout the lifespan, athletes must be motivated to continue throughout childhood and adolescence. Much research in the physical education and sport contexts has focused on the idea of autonomy support, as it directly relates to how a coach structures the environment, or climate, in which the athletes participate. The utility of autonomy supportive interventions has been recently documented in a large-scale European project which uses youth sport as an avenue for encouraging adolescent physical activity (Tessier, et al., 2013). Additional support for interventions among youth sport coaches indicate the impact that

positive coaching behaviors can have on athlete involvement and satisfaction, regardless of number of wins accrued (Smith & Smoll, 1997). Further, a recent review of autonomy supportive coaching studies indicates the positive effects of using such behaviors among coaches (Occhino, Mallett, Rynne, & Carlisle, 2014).

According to Reeve and Jang (2006), autonomy support refers to “the interpersonal behaviors one person provides to involve and nurture another person’s internally-located, volitional intentions to act” (p. 210). This includes the use of five different behavior classes: (1) nurturing inner motivational resources, (2) using noncontrolling language, (3) providing rationales, (4) displaying patience, and (5) responding to students’ negative affect (Perlman & Webster, 2011). From the perspective of youth sport coaching, *nurturing inner motivational resources* involves allowing athletes to set goals and provide feedback toward those goals, allowing athletes more choice in practice and game situations, as well as providing skills that are challenging, yet modifiable by an athlete. *Relying on noncontrolling language* involves providing feedback to athletes that is positive or neutral and related to the task, skill, or drill that is executed. The most important aspect of this behavior is that words such as “try” are used when suggesting a different technique for skill execution. Words such as “should” or “need to” suggest a sense of

control over the athlete. *Providing explanatory rationales* includes providing athletes an explanation as to why a task, skill, drill, or position assignment is important. This also extends to game-play strategies. This behavior can be coupled with noncontrolling language, especially when giving corrective feedback. Doing so will provide the athlete with the information needed to correct skill execution along with understanding the reasons why such a change is important. Finally, *acknowledging and accepting negative affect* involves the coach responding to athlete criticism and negative tone with a positive attitude. This is typically coupled with providing rationales and can help an athlete to understand that the coach respects their opinion regardless of its valence. For example, a coach can explain the importance of consistent and accurate batting drills, even if the athlete provides resistance. First, the coach could explain to the athlete that they understand the frustration related to repeating such drills, but then explain that successful repetition can help the athlete respond appropriately in game situations. In education settings, previous studies have supported associations between perceived autonomy support and outcomes such as students' interest, enjoyment, cognitive activity, maintenance of behavior change, and motivation for participation in physical education (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Ntoumanis, 2005; Shen, 2010). Other investigators have found this relationship to be evident in terms of motivation for participation in physical education, attitudes, psychomotor skill, and intentions to be physically active in the future (Langdon, Webster, Monsma, & Hall, 2014; Perlman, 2013). In nonsport settings, autonomy supportive behaviors seem to increase enjoyment and productivity within an activity.

Within youth sport coaching, initial research has revealed the positive influence that autonomy support can have on youth athletes' overall motivation, self-perception, and self-esteem when properly used by an experienced coach (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009). Recent research in the area of autonomy support has focused specifically on change-oriented feedback (also known as negative feedback). Mouratidis, Lens, and Vansteenkiste (2010) found similar outcomes, even if feedback given shows the athlete that they are not completely competent. Other research has expanded upon this idea, revealing that coaches' use of autonomy supportive change-oriented feedback predicted positive outcomes in athletes, including higher levels of self-determined motivation, well-being, self-esteem, and satisfaction of basic needs (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013). Considered together, autonomy supportive behaviors have been shown to have positive outcomes across athletes in various sport environments including gymnasts (Gagné, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003), youth soccer and cricket players (Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004), youth swimmers (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009), in addition to elite athletes (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012).

Indeed, there is ample evidence that exists suggesting both coaches and athletes would benefit from increasing the autonomy supportive behaviors of coaches

(Occhino et al., 2014). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to highlight positive aspects and challenges of a youth sport autonomy supportive coaching training program. The practical guidelines that follow stem from a 12-week training program that was conducted by the authors and the feedback that the participants shared posttraining.

## Protocol

Two volunteer coaches agreed to participate in the autonomy support training program. Sampling of these individuals was purposeful in that the researchers wanted to determine how feasible such a program would be with novice coaches. Drawing from a youth sport baseball program in a rural parks and recreation department, both coaches were 28 years of age and their teams consisted of 7–8 year-old athletes. Both participants had no prior experience in coaching youth sport, but previously participated in sport as athletes. They were both matched with one or two experienced coaches, which was beyond the control of the researchers. Baseball was used as the sport of choice for several reasons including accessibility, regional popularity, and variation in motor skills.

## Description of the Training Program

The autonomy supportive training program for coaches closely followed interventions designed by Reeve and colleagues (Cheon, Reeve, & Moon, 2012; Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004) and included both knowledge and skill-based aspects. Participants were given a formal in-person workshop to gain knowledge about autonomy supportive coaching in addition to several online self-study assignments, which required the coaches to apply the knowledge gained to actual practice plans. The work of Reeve and colleagues (2004) has mostly occurred in general education settings, with more recent involvement in physical education. This work included classroom-based intervention tasks among student teachers as well as full-time teachers and their secondary level students. At the time the current training program was being planned and carried out, there was little-to-no research on such programs in coaching, particularly at the youth sport level. Only one major project was known to be occurring in youth sport with athletes similar in age to those participating in the program the participants were coaching in (see Duda, 2013). At that time, no data on effectiveness had been published.

The initial workshop and subsequent interactions with coaches were led by the principal investigator, who was very familiar with the research on autonomy support in teaching/coaching. Stebbings, Taylor, and Spray (2011) have indicated that autonomy supportive coaching would be better implemented when coaches themselves have their basic psychological needs met. This suggestion was considered throughout the training program, whereby the principal investigator was sensitive to supporting these needs within the participants. Training was delivered throughout the baseball season, which lasted 12 weeks. The training program was organized in four phases.

### Phase I: Baseline data collection.

During the first week of the season, participants were audio-recorded during a one-hour and 15 min practice session. Autonomy supportive behaviors were evaluated using a rating system developed by Reeve and colleagues (2004) by two independent raters and used in a previous physical education study (Cheon, et al., 2012). The rating scale used by the researchers included only four behavior classes of autonomy support described above, in accordance with what was evaluated in the Cheon et al. (2012) study. The researchers decided to use this rating scale and the extant physical education literature because at the time the training program was carried out, no published studies were found that used measures to observe the autonomy supportive behaviors of youth sport coaches. In accordance with the schedule of the season, the first three weeks were devoted to practice only, and each team worked with their coaches in two practice sessions per week. Once the season started, some weeks had one practice, while others had none.

### Phase II: Formal, In-Person Workshop.

During week three of the season, the coaches attended a 1.5 hr instructional workshop. The workshop included the introduction of a specific definition of autonomy supportive coaching along with a detailed overview of autonomy supportive instructional behaviors. These included nurturing inner motivational resources, relying on noncontrolling language, providing explanatory rationales, and acknowledging and accepting negative affect (Reeve, 2009; Reeve, et al., 2004). To support the definitions introduced in the introduction, Table 1 contains a definition of each behavior class and how it could be applied in coaching baseball with 7 and 8 year olds.

A majority of the instruction in this initial workshop was informational in nature, with some time spent in discussion about how autonomy supportive behaviors can be applied in the baseball-coaching context. Additional instruction included examples of how autonomy supportive instructional behaviors can be incorporated into practices as well as evidence-based support on the benefits of supporting athletes' autonomy. A discussion of the feasibility of applying these instructional strategies in coaching also took place.

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### Phase III: Practice Plans.

Starting with week 5, coaches were familiarized with a private website that provided online self-study materials regarding autonomy supportive coaching, which was integrated into weekly practice plans. Coaches were asked to provide a weekly practice plan to the researchers, which allowed participants to incorporate specific autonomy supportive behaviors to be used in practices. The format of the website was consistent across behaviors. Pages included more specific information provided on each

behavior, including research evidence of its importance, further examples of what the behavior looked like, as well as guiding questions for coaches to use while designing their practice plans.

In week 5, the focus was on providing a mastery-oriented practice environment. Using the framework outlined by Boyce (2009) and grounded in achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1989), principles of providing mastery-oriented class structures were adapted from the physical education classroom to coaching. Although this framework does not explicitly use the autonomy supportive coaching theoretical framework, the mastery-oriented class structure presented has been recognized in previous physical education and sport studies (Chatzisarantis, Hein, & Hagger, 2012; Ferrer-Caja & Weiss, 2000). In fact, recent work in a large-scale youth sport program in Europe encourages the use of mastery-oriented climates in concert with autonomy support (Tessier, et al., 2013). The framework presented for this aspect of the training focused on six areas of instruction, making the acronym TARGET: (T)asks, (A)uthority, (R)ecognition, (G)rouping, (E)valuation, and (T)ime (Boyce, 2009). This included providing tasks that were challenging to all athletes, allowing athletes to have choices and leadership roles, recognizing skill work based on improvement, grouping athletes in cooperative situations, evaluating athletes on task mastery, and allowing athletes more time to work on specific skills or strategies when needed. As seen in these brief descriptions, there were many facets of the TARGET framework that the researchers found to be in agreement with the autonomy supportive behaviors. In essence, it is very similar to workshops and learning materials created by Smoll and Smith (2009) to train coaches in how to cultivate a more positive team environment through the mastery-oriented approach. The researchers chose to focus on the TARGET principles because of their complimentary nature to the autonomy supportive behaviors and their clear focus on instruction only. In the weeks following, separate practice plans were requested that focused on nurturing inner motivational resources (week 6), relying on noncontrolling language (week 7), providing explanatory rationales (week 8), acknowledging and accepting negative affect (week 9).

After receiving the weekly practice plans, the principal investigator provided verbal and written feedback to improve the autonomy supportive nature of practices. This included suggestions for better implementation, corrections to examples provided if they were incorrect, and general feedback of what was or was not working in previous practices. For example, if a coach planned to correct an athlete's skill execution, s/he would be required to write out specifically what he would say to the athlete. If the phrasing was not autonomy supportive, the principal investigator would provide further suggestions. All practice plans were submitted via cloud-based software (Google Drive), which allowed the principal investigator to provide immediate feedback to the coach.

#### Phase IV: Follow-Up.

Because of the varied nature of the season schedule, a second round of observations was recorded at or around the last practice session of the season. This ranged from week 10 to week 12. As with the first round of recordings, two independent raters determined overall quality of autonomy supportive behavior use. During this time, a focus group with the participants was also conducted to better understand how the training program may have helped them develop their autonomy supportive coaching skills.

### Participant Feedback From the Training Program

After processing the data from the rating scale used at the beginning and end of the training program, no significant difference in the use of autonomy supportive behaviors was observed. However, feedback collected from a posttraining focus group session became valuable to the research team, allowing for improvement of subsequent training programs. The focus group was conducted in the office of the principal investigator. The participants were invited to speak freely about the positive and negative aspects of the training program without the use of structured questions. The principal investigator was careful to ask probing questions to the participants to gain more information. The focus group session was recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were then shared with the participants to ensure their views were properly represented. The researchers then analyzed the transcriptions for themes and reported those themes back to the participants for corroboration. Throughout the focus group session, the participants spoke about the initial training session, online study materials, and matters for concern with the autonomy support training program. What follows is a description of the participants' feedback regarding their experience in the training program, organized by areas of success and areas for improvement.

#### Areas of Success

The initial session was an introduction to autonomy support, including definitions as well as contextual examples of behaviors in a baseball setting. The coaches indicated that the information was helpful, yet coaches were not flooded with too much information. Coach 1 said "It was dense information but I didn't feel overwhelmed. And I liked having the ...single sheet of paper with notes, bullet points that I could refer to and sort of keep that initial session fresh." It seems that an initial face-to-face session with the coaches was helpful. It allowed the coaches to ask questions and get prompt responses regarding basic information such as definitions of autonomy support and contextual coaching behaviors.

The format of the website self-study materials and practice plan schedule also seemed to work well. Coach 2 specifically commented on the easy to follow format, stating "I knew there was going to be information at the

top, a document at the bottom downloaded." Each week, a separate topic was broken down, as Coach 2 reiterates:

Each breakdown of the topic was – told you exactly what you needed to focus on for that week. There was a little overlap, but that's because the concepts are overlapping, but it tended to break it down by differences in, kind of, what we went over last week compared to this week and I thought it was very useful.

Participants also commented that the training program became easier as the weeks progressed, mostly because they understood the protocol and knew what was expected each week. Coach 2 said, "I think it also– when you get the structure of how the practice is actually gonna go, and what you're gonna be teaching them and how it's gonna be broken down, you can use that to, incorporate your plans a lot easier, and it takes less time to do that." Both participants indicated that they spent no more than 20–25 min on topics each week, which was a reasonable amount of time in their opinion, given their other responsibilities.

#### Areas for Improvement

While it is clear that the coaches enjoyed the training as a whole, they felt that it was lacking in multimedia examples. As such, it was suggested from both coaches that videos or audio clips be incorporated, which illustrate how autonomy supportive behaviors can be used by coaches. Coach 1 suggested:

I would imagine that there might be some coaches, if they were heavily ingrained in one style of coaching, they might go 'No, you can't do that' and then a video clip would show 'It could be done that way'.

Both participants also suggested that improper examples be included with proper examples in the online training materials for each autonomy supportive behavior class to help with designing better practice plans.

The coaches also suggested adding in another topic for study that addressed preconceived notions of proper coaching. In terms of general implementation issues, both participants commented on the fact that autonomy supportive coaching behaviors tended to go against how they were coached as youth athletes. For example, Coach 1 stated:

I found it difficult, I think because I was not coached in that way. And so I think I went in thinking with a mindset of how you coach –my thought of how you coach was how I was coached. And so, it was kind of going against the grain to what I knew or what I thought I knew. I thought the idea of telling a player, 'you might want to try this' as opposed to 'I know where – you should be over there.' I found that difficult at first, but I found it more enjoyable and easier to do as the season went on.

Regarding experience-related implementation issues, there were two topics that emerged from the training program. The first was the coaches' experience. Participants were novice coaches who were learning how to coach in addition to trying to use the autonomy supportive behaviors they learned. The second was the age and experience of the athletes. This was best indicated by Coach 2, who said, "Learning how to coach was definitely a thing, especially with the age group and their skill level and you really have to kind of break down how you're gonna coach and then use those concepts."

Coach 1 concurred, stating,

Yeah. I think, this being my first time coaching, I think I was working with that and also the autonomy stuff. So as I got more used to coaching, I could think about this stuff more. So, I noticed throughout the season, it got a little easier to focus on those things and to implement the autonomy supportive things, as the season went on just because I was getting more used to coaching.

Coach 2 also questioned coaching strategies and whether they need to be modified for different age groups:

I wonder if, the strategy is gonna be different if you're doing different age groups or how well it works with different age groups because I think getting at them young is good because it helps to pique their interest. But there are some pitfalls. Obviously a seven year old's not gonna sit there and – sometimes they're not even listening to you. You can tell them whatever you want to and they're sitting there...

Based on this information, it is possible that implementation of autonomy supportive behaviors can be difficult when coaches are unsure that their athletes are attentive. Currently, there is a paucity of research supporting the use of autonomy supportive behaviors in different ways based on age. Early research in coaching suggests that novice and expert coaches plan practices in remarkably different ways, with novices spending less time on gathering information on their athletes, working through all potential scenarios, and planning more for whole skill instruction rather than breaking the skill down into manageable components (Jones, Housner, & Kornspan, 1995). Further, Ford, Yates, and Williams (2010) suggest that coaches do not provide differentiated instruction by age group, meaning that coaching behaviors are not modified based on how old the athlete may be. Taken together, the research would indicate that the phenomenon experienced by the coaches in this training program were not unique.

The structure of the baseball season also provided a challenge when implementing the training program. After the first three weeks of the season, practice time was limited. Participants felt the pressure of trying to incorporate the training materials to practices, considering there were several weeks throughout the season where only games were played and teams had limited time to

practice in between competitions. Coach 1 elaborates on this issue by saying:

I think that was one of the hardest things about implementing – the time restriction was one of the hardest things about implementing the concepts because you're thinking, "Go, go, go." And anywhere where you lose two or three minutes—two or three minutes here, two or three minutes there, that adds up to a significant chunk of practice.

Arguably the biggest challenge to the participants, who were assistant coaches, was working with head coaches who already possessed strong controlling behaviors. Several observations of these coaches in addition to focus group comments suggest a disconnection between the autonomy supportive behaviors the participants were trying to implement and how their head coaches responded. Coach 1 worked with a head coach who was willing to allow him to implement some of the strategies, but a lack of understanding led to unsuccessful implementation:

The other major factor was the other coach – he was not exposed to any of this, other than what I would sort of relay to him and so I would go to him before practice and say, "Hey, I thought we would – I thought we could do this, this, and this, and we could do it in this way so that this, – so that we focus on this." And we'd get out there and he would say, "Yeah, sounds good." And we'd get out there, and it would just not be that. It would be the opposite of what we talked about or it would not be what we talked about at all. And part of it was probably because it was just the two us, and so it was hectic and you revert back to what you're comfortable with. I think a large part of it was that he wasn't exposed to any of these ideas. So I just had to relay what I thought we should do that practice in—in a couple of minutes before practice. And he was also sort of the opposite of these concepts.

Given his experience with his own team and observing other coaches, Coach 2 noticed that coaches from other teams were so intense that he was thankful that he was learning about autonomy supportive coaching:

There's – there's one team – their coach was just so intense, and it was just, like, the exact opposite of what we were doing. And I just saw the opposite spectrum and was glad that I was learning what I was learning. Because I don't think that's very positive for the kids. Just to give you an example, there was a kid who ended up dropping his shoulder and he was just fanning at the ball and he struck out, like, two or three times in a row. And so I tried to pull him aside and have an individual practice moment. I think you had to be able to instruct during games because you only had a handful of practices throughout the season. And you would see the same

thing game to game with no chance to – to work on it. So I think you had to.

## Recommendations for Future Training Programs in Autonomy Supportive Coaching

After processing the participants' feedback, there are several areas to consider if such a program were to be repeated. First, face-to-face sessions were possible with this small group, but larger groups may have more barriers with schedule conflicts. Some coaches will not be able to attend at given times and it is difficult to schedule a session where all coaches are able to attend. With regards to future trainings, a way to address this issue is to have an online component in which any coach can complete the training when it is most convenient for him or her. This would include having the materials posted online and allowing coaches to move through the materials asynchronously. Short quizzes or reflections could be used to assess knowledge gained from the online session. However, it is important to juxtapose this added convenience with the potential for an online initial session's lack of in-person contact, which could limit the effectiveness of the session. Weighing online or face-to-face option relies heavily on the number of participants in the training program and time available by those delivering the program.

There were some implementation issues with using technology. Early in the training program, the participants ran into some trouble using the cloud-based software (Google Drive) that was used to turn in their practice plans. One of the participants did not know that his practice plans were not automatically online, which caused delays in feedback by the primary investigator. To circumvent the issue in the future, it is recommended to make sure the training program also includes specialized training in how to use the cloud-based software and/or allow for submission of practice plans via e-mail. Similarly, use of audio and visual representations to demonstrate autonomy supportive behaviors could enhance the understanding of the topic. The initial training took place in an environment that could support use of these mediums. In addition, posting such materials to the training website would be beneficial and easy to do.

In addition, there is much to be said about the influence of previous experience on current coaching methods. Lemyre, Trudel, and Durand-Bush (2007) found that novice coaches tend to rely more on their previous experiences as athletes. In the current training program, this was also found to be true, with both coaches noting that the use of autonomy supportive behaviors countered everything they experienced as athletes. For future training programs, it is suggested to include such a conversation at the initial training meeting, which would help to separate coaches from their previous experience and possibly allow them to see the training materials in a different light. Related to this, an added feature of the

training program could be added that weaves the ideas of autonomy support together with the basic concepts of effective coaching. In other words, an additional module to the training program could address the pertinent aspects of planning and executing practice sessions; that is, providing coaches with information on what type and how much feedback to give, structuring practices to engage athletes of different ages, along with instruction on how to break down a skill or strategy so that athletes will be successful in executing, rather than just teaching the entire skill as a whole.

Similar discussions in the initial meeting concerning how to simultaneously focus on autonomy supportive behaviors and other coaching duties may enhance the adoption of the behaviors. Supplemental online materials can be provided for beginning coaches to help support the adoption of the behaviors, perhaps making organizational tasks part of the individual practice plans. This would complement the training program, especially if the practice plans also include potential solutions for time constraint issues, such as using time more effectively in practice sessions and how to better express the autonomy supportive behaviors in game-play. Research on how youth sport coaches learn to coach would support this idea, especially with regard to novice coaches (Smith & Smoll, 1997).

Another suggestion for improving the training itself would be to include information on how different age groups perceive and react to autonomy support. This would help to alleviate the issue raised by the participants about whether the athletes on their teams were truly able to understand and feel supported through their coaching methods. The broad positive effects of participants in an autonomy supportive environment are well documented, but there is limited research which fully explains the process by which these positive benefits develop. This is an area of great need, as it would help researchers and coach educators determine ways to improve implementation of autonomy supportive behaviors among youth sport coaches, regardless of what age they coach.

Finally, it is suggested that future implementation of this training program should include all coaches from one team. In the current training program, the participants were coaching different teams and working with other coaches who were not familiar with the training program materials. This made it difficult for implementation of the autonomy supportive behaviors during practices, specifically with setting up stations to maximize athlete participation (from week 5's plan to incorporate a mastery-oriented practice environment).

## Conclusions

When examining the training program, several guidelines presented themselves that should be considered when teaching coaches how to increase autonomy supportive behaviors. One such guideline is the use of an initial face-to-face meeting. As indicated by the coaches, it was helpful in delivering basic information about autonomy

supportive coaching behaviors. Another successful part of the current training program was the online training component. It allowed the coaches to study autonomy supportive behaviors on a consistent basis throughout the season. It also allowed coaches to train on their own time.

There were some challenges that presented themselves as well. As mentioned previously, the entire season only included four practices. Further, eight days were devoted to game play. Since game-play in this age group is highly instructional, it may have been more effective to include examples in the initial training and online self-study materials that involve autonomy supportive coaching in game play situations. It may also be helpful to add a component to the training program that highlights the use of the Teaching Games for Understanding model (TGfU). Several studies exist that help practitioners in sport implement the basics of the approach (see Butler, 2005; McNeill, Fry, Wright, Tan, & Rossi, 2008; Pagnano-Richardson & Henninger, 2008). These materials could be easily added to the online self-study materials. Although it would require a large shift in the culture of the youth sport program in rural area that this program took place, it is clear that such a methodology would allow for the same level of game-play currently experienced by athletes in the program while still providing quality instruction. The same could apply to other areas that have similar scheduling constraints. The researchers would also suggest lengthening the training program to include more than one season, which would allow for more time to adopt autonomy supportive behaviors in addition to learning more about the TGfU approach. In addition, the training program did not begin until three weeks into the season. At this point in the season, it may have been difficult to make changes to practice protocols, especially when considering that not all coaches from the same team were involved in the training program.

Even with these challenges, reflections from the coaches suggest that the training program has promise and that they would continue to use the autonomy-supportive behaviors learned in future coaching situations. In considering some of the successes of this program and the positive use of autonomy supportive behaviors in training programs elsewhere (Tessier, et al., 2013), it is clear that this approach can have a positive influence on coaching behaviors and potentially athlete performance and future participation.

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**Table 1 Differences Between Controlling and Autonomy Supportive Coaching Behaviors Specific to Baseball for 7–8 Year Olds**

<b>Controlling</b>	<b>Operational Definitions for Coaching</b>	<b>Autonomy-Supportive</b>	<b>Operational Definitions for Coaching</b>
<p>Relies on Extrinsic Sources of Motivation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers Incentives, Consequences</li> <li>• Utters Directives, Deadlines</li> <li>• Gives Assignments</li> <li>• Seeks Compliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Sarah, if you don’t catch the ball like I told you, I am going to bench you.”</li> </ul>	<p>Nurtures Inner Motivational Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tries to enhance interest, enjoyment, curiosity</li> <li>• Appeals to a sense of challenge</li> <li>• Creates opportunities for choice, initiative</li> <li>• Supports competence, confidence, relatedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When practicing throwing accuracy. . .</li> <li>• Jane, can you hit the target when throwing?”</li> <li>• Reducing the size of the target as players become more skilled.</li> </ul>
<p>Relies on Controlling Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is controlling, coercive, intrusive</li> <li>• Says: “should”, “must”, “have to”, or “got to”</li> <li>• Is pressuring, rigid, ego-involving, no nonsense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “You are playing right field because I am the coach and I said so.”</li> </ul>	<p>Relies on Informational Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is informational, flexible, responsive</li> <li>• Says: “you may” or “you might” want to. . .</li> <li>• Is noncontrolling, nonpressuring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching bunting</li> <li>• “You may want to stand in front of the batter’s box.”</li> <li>• Language used is not controlling@</li> </ul>
<p>Neglects to Provide Explanatory Rationales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does NOT say: “because”, “So”, or “The reason is. . .”</li> <li>• Neglects to identify the value, meaning, use, benefit, or importance of a task or request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Jimmy, get your elbow up.”</li> <li>• No reason or explanation is given</li> </ul>	<p>Provides Explanatory Rationales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Says: “because”, “So”, or “The reason is. . .”</li> <li>• Identifies/points out the value, meaning, use, benefit, or importance of a task or request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “John, you need to have a high elbow because it allows you to throw harder.”</li> </ul>
<p>Counters and Tries to Change Negative Affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counters students’ expressions of negative affect or signals of task/request resistance</li> <li>• Communicates that negative affect, resistance, or complaints are NOT ok, are unacceptable, or are something to be changed/fixe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Player expresses that she doesn’t want to hit in the leadoff spot. Coach’s response is. . .</li> <li>• “I don’t care where you want to hit. I am making the lineup.”</li> </ul>	<p>Acknowledges and Accepts Negative Affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listens openly, nondefensively, carefully, understandingly to students’ expressions of negative affect and to signals of task/request resistance</li> <li>• Accepts negative affect and resistance as OK; communicates that complaints are OK</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Player questions why a certain drill is being practiced. Coach responds positively and clearly indicates that this expression is ok, then explains to the player how the drill improves the abilities of players.</li> </ul>

