Introduction

If you ask athletes to describe their sport experiences, they often mention important coaches they have encountered along their timeline of participation. More so than most other individuals, the coach stands in a significant role within athletic competition. They are often referred to as leaders and shapers of young people whose coaching role extends well beyond the playing venue to one that intricately intertwines with life. Coaches are often credited with not just making better athletes, but making better people. Because coaches work intimately with children and youth who are at critical stages of development in their lives (Fraser-Thomas and Côté 2006; Côté and Fraser-Thomas 2007), they possess a unique opportunity to have a strong influence on young people.

The United Nations system and its Member States recognized the potential for these positive coach-related experiences to extend beyond merely a performance-related sports setting (United Nations 2003; for resolutions, see also www.un.org/wcm/content/site/sport/home). The field of Sport for Development and Peace (herein stated as SDP) emerged based on the growing understanding and reinforcement from supporting public resolutions from the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (2008) that sport programs are powerful vehicles for achieving broader goals, particularly in advancing development and peace agendas (United Nations 2003). The field has come to prominence within social policy agendas, university programming, sports management, web-based platforms (see www.sportanddev.org), and research outlets including the Journal of Sport for Development (Richards et al. 2013) to further evidence that SDP is a recognized sector aligned with broader development and peace goals.

The role of sport aimed at social progress is further highlighted in the recent United Nations Declaration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as an ‘important enabler of sustainable development’ (see UNOSDP n.d.) with great potential to address challenges outlined in each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an integral part of the post-2015 Development Agenda (IOC 2015). At the field level, hundreds of programs1 are leveraging the inherent opportunities presented through participation in sport for humanitarian responses, reconciliation and peacebuilding, rehabilitation and inclusion of persons with disabilities, civic engagement, advocacy and social change, awareness raising and education, and economic
development (see UNESCO 2016 for country-specific applications). Despite strong advocacy for SDP, there is a critical need to examine the role of coaches who are on the frontlines of implementation to achieve important program outcomes.

The capacity for a coach to help navigate children and youth through the societal challenges being addressed by SDP programs is incalculable. Given their direct access to large numbers of children and youth and their potential to make positive impacts on their lives, coaches are in the unique position to facilitate the program objectives aimed at promoting a development agenda. This chapter seeks to utilize existing critical literature in SfPD to provide an understanding of the role of coaches in sport-based social interventions, their function within such programs, and their impact on achieving program objectives. The author provides reflexive accounts of long-term fieldwork, research, and programming in former conflict settings to further the understanding of the varied roles of coaches as part of community-based research and the subsequent design and implementation of SDP programs as a vector for reintegration and social inclusion of young survivors of war.

Coaches and sport for development and peace programs

When athletes reflect upon past sport experiences they often describe influential coaches as leaders, educators, advisors, and guides who develop sports skills, provide mentorship, and help navigate young athletes through life. Conversely, others speak of the deleterious effect of coaches on their sporting experiences; coaches who subsequently ignore the massive impact they have on athlete’s lives for the sake of their own individual agenda. Participation in sports may provide a healthy outlet for children, but the hyper-competitive environment of organized sports puts children’s minds and bodies at risk of physical and emotional stress (Moses 2015). By placing excessive demands on young athletes, coaches can push their young players toward feelings of stress and performance anxiety, a general sense of unhappiness, a push to other alternative and athlete-organized sports and games, and early exit from sports altogether (Coakley 2008).

Concurrent to their central role of developing athletic skills and tactics within their sports, coaches may also contribute to the positive development of participants as human beings and citizens, teams as cohesive units, and broader community goals by mobilizing communities in shared social spaces around a team (ICCE 2012). Therefore, it is easy to comprehend the potential of sport to meet international development objectives and any tensions that may exist under the guidance of quality coaches.

Our understanding of coaches is complicated by the varying roles in which they are engaged within the existing scope of SDP programs. Beyond the title of coach, they are also referred to as mentors, instructors, and facilitators. And, coaches are referred to as ‘trainers’ within an organization that adopts a train-the-trainer approach where coaches receive training and mentoring from experienced facilitators who build the capacity of coaches to deliver the program content themselves. The term ‘coach’ is used often by existing sports organizations seeking to further address a development agenda resembling what Coalter (2009) refers to as Sport-Plus programs. Meanwhile, a program aimed at increasing youth employment opportunities uses ‘mentors’ to enable the transferability of market-driven skills from a sport context to the workplace (Plus-Sport). The former combines the traditional coaching role with the facilitation of additional activities that meet the development aspect of their program while the latter uses sport, and subsequently the mentors, to motivate participants within a program designed to build their personal resources (Coalter 2009).

SDP programs, and the organizations sponsoring them, rely heavily upon coaches to facilitate activities in order to meet their aims. Coaches’ backgrounds and experience vary
drastically across the spectrum of SDP programming. Coaches from similar background experiences as program participants work as ‘credible messengers’ to deliver program content. Local implementing coaches understand the unique challenges the children and youth face within their communities, create positive relationships around sport, and further enhance the participant’s receptivity to positive program messages (Baptiste et al. 2006). Using credible messengers within a SDP program returns resources and opportunity to communities whose lack of those two key elements feeds into higher rates of pervasive development issues. To further their role, programs should enlist their knowledge of local customs and cultures to strengthen the connection between these practices and program content. Regardless of the designated title, a coach’s guidance as an external support is critical for positive growth (Petipas et al. 2005).

**Research on coaches in sport for development programs**

Coaching and coaching education is an increasingly important area of sports science. Looking at sport as a global institution, there is extensive quantitative and qualitative research on the role of coaches and their impact on athletes and sports programs. Rangeon et al. (2012) reported coach development as the lead topic of research with a strong focus on coach education, learning, and related developmental issues. The shift in focus from coaching behaviors as noted in previous similar analysis research (Gilbert and Trudel 2004: 91) to addressing coach development issues signaling a shift from ‘developmental questions rather than mere behavioral observations’, demonstrates a deeper quest for understanding dynamic processes for coach learning and development. Even with this expansive body of knowledge on coaches, and widespread calls to build a stronger SDP evidence base (Nicholls et al. 2011; Giles and Lynch 2012), there is only slight advancement toward understanding the impact of coaches within the SDP field despite the acknowledgment of their important role in achieving program outcomes and recent outlets dedicated to sharing this knowledge.

In an interesting study, Whitely and her colleagues (2013) explored South African SDP programs from the broad perspective of study participants instead of one particular program or organization. Through focus group discussions with coaches from a range of (Sport-Plus) programs, the authors sought to understand the realities of the sport settings, the experiences of coaches and young people in these underserved communities. This also included unpacking the necessary approaches needed when designing, implementing, and evaluating sport for development programs. Findings reflected positively on the coaches’ belief that sport served as a significant tool for promoting positive development despite facing significant barriers that affect youth participation and desired program outcomes. Despite their beliefs, a lack of resources such as facilities, equipment, and funding present challenges to creating the safe, developmental spaces they desired, while a lack of transport and sport offerings within their communities impacted the accessibility to programs. From a development perspective, their findings suggested the effectiveness of the ‘inclusion of an inside-up indigenous approach’ (Whitley et al. 2013: 10) to understand and address community needs through local sports programs. When SDP programs adopt a top-down, outside-in, deficit-based approach (Giles and Lynch 2012), coaches and participants are vanquished to passive roles rather than active participants in identifying community needs and shaping programs, determining solutions, and providing input toward long-term, sustainable change. Coaches experiencing these tensions will struggle to see the value in their role thus reducing their program ‘buy-in’ and affecting the desired outcomes.

The voices of these coaches reflect their ability to provide unique insights into the strengths and challenges of a SDP program that may otherwise go unnoticed. Here, coaches move from
being passive subjects whose interactions are studied through mere observations or quantitative surveys (Levermore 2011) to that of a critical voice highlighting program strengths and challenges therefore providing important contributions to overall program improvement. The field will continue to benefit from further research that not only observes and critiques coaching behaviors, but solicits their thoughts to provide further understanding of positive aspects and challenges to their experiences to advance the quality of SDP programming.

**Critical reflections from post-conflict settings**

**Background**

Practitioners and scholars have recently recognized the importance of sport and play for children and youths’ resilience in geographies of war, conflict and disaster (Thorpe 2016), refugees in flight and resettlement (Jeanes et al. 2015; see also RCOA 2010), and the internally displaced as part of post-disaster interventions (Henley 2005; Valenti et al. 2012). Furthermore, field-based research continues to enhance the understanding of the uses of sport as a component of reintegration programming for former child soldiers (Dyck 2011, Ravizza 2012; 2016).

The following reflexive account of SDP experiences is a product of this author’s long-term engagement in research, fieldwork, and programming in Northern Uganda during times of conflict and within the post-conflict setting. Since the height of the conflict in 2004, we sought to understand the uses of sport within various environments with an initial focus on rehabilitation and reintegration programs for children formerly associated with the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Outcomes from the extensive fieldwork and research yielded a grassroots programmatic effort to utilize sport as a means to resolve incidences of low-level conflict to build more inclusive post-conflict communities (Ravizza et al. 2012). In each phase, coaches played a critical role on multiple levels to enhance our understanding of the applications of sport in this complex humanitarian crisis.

**Introduction and context**

The long-running conflict between the LRA and Government (of Uganda) Forces created a large-scale humanitarian disaster including displacement of millions of citizens into internally displaced (IDP) camps. This forced coalescence of large groups of diverse citizens under harsh conditions contributed to issues of alcoholism and drug abuse, domestic and sexual violence, poor security, and lack of educational and economic opportunities. Additionally, thousands of children and youth were abducted by the LRA and forced into a wide range of non-combative and combative roles causing significant threats to their psychological and emotional well-being. Sexual violence and the forced marriage of young girls to rebel group members proved to be a pervasive threat to their physical and emotional safety (McKay and Mazurana 2004). During the conflict, governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worked in tandem to support the reintegration efforts of young abductees by creating amnesty protocols and holistic programs to foster an innocuous return to their communities.

In 2004, I began a post-doctoral internship in Uganda in cooperation with the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and a large international SDP organization that operated in several locations within the country and throughout the immediate region. I worked closely between field offices to monitor and evaluate, and report challenges that created disconnects between program facilitation and outcomes. This meant traveling to program locations, and observing and conversing with program coaches. Throughout this formative year,
I documented a substantial number of challenges these coaches experienced that made their role difficult while also noting factors they described that enhanced programming outcomes. These experiences crystallized my decisions to pursue further fieldwork on the uses of sport as part of psycho-social programming for children and youth experiencing violence, particularly in areas of conflict.

Upon near completion of this post-doctoral experience, the director of the Gulu Support the Children Organization interim care center for former child soldiers – a transit point for recently returned children prior to family re-unification and community reintegration – requested me to work cohesively with center staff to integrate sports into their holistic reintegration program. The aims here were to capitalize on the inherent opportunities of sports to apply socially acceptable and structured patterns of behaviors for children coming from a social context in which violence was normalized to reinforce the value and strategies of non-violent conflict resolution. The staff prioritized this key theme given the significant stigma faced by former child soldiers as unconditional threats to peace in the very fragile communities to which they sought to return (Wessells 2006). I worked cohesively with center social workers who led the daily sport activities of football (soccer) for boys, netball for girls, and volleyball (mixed teams) to create localized opportunities for sport to meet the programming objectives. Social workers (with me as an active observer) facilitated activities by managing the equipment set-up and organizing and verbally supporting the participants while occasionally playing alongside them. Afterwards, we led group talk activities that centered on issues of non-violent resolution to low-level interpersonal conflicts using the sport context as the medium of discussion. Through their daily notations and central evaluation system, social workers noted a few incidences of conflict among returnees and, if applicable, the strategies they used to resolve these conflicts.

This case highlighted the expanded role of mental health professionals whose main tasks in the reintegration program intersected with facilitating sport programming as an appealing means to promote prosocial behaviors. Their involvement expanded the concept of ‘the coach’ by using sport as a psycho-social component within existing programming. Their involvement promoted expansive thought regarding the potential effectiveness of sport as part of the holistic reintegration program for the children and youth receiving services at the center.

**From reintegration to peaceful play**

Research on the uses of sport for reintegration and long-term social inclusion of former child soldiers is limited. To contribute to the evidence base, we began long-term field research with the support of the Government of Uganda (GoU) and funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission in Uganda. The aims of our research were to assess factors of sport to facilitate social reintegration of former child soldiers (boys and girls). The original field survey sample comprised of 442 children and youth from two (subsequently divided into four) conflict-affected districts to include nearly 100 former child soldiers. Our research in Northern Uganda indicated high participation rates of girls and boys, who did so mainly at schools revealing a gap in community-based programs. Former abductees were less likely to participate in sports than their non-abducted peers since they were less likely to return to school, needed to generate an income, and faced increased levels of social stigma. Boys and girls reported that borderline violence in sports was not acceptable and negotiation was a preferred method of resolving conflict in sport (Ravizza 2010; 2012). Local officials, community members, and my team determined that further investigations were necessary to understand more acute applications of sport that could support post-conflict recovery and development efforts.
Following this phase, our research included in-depth follow-up interviews with former child soldiers, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with community-based sport coaches, school-based sport teachers, and members of the district communities. Each provided the team with valuable insights into the uses of sport as a means to achieve development objectives aligned with the government’s Peace and Recovery Development Plan (GoU 2007), its connections to the reintegration process, and its value as a source of social inclusion. The outcomes of this phase yielded support for a community-based program using coaches within existing community and school-based sport programs as a means to socially support children and youth marginalized as a result of the conflict. The regional peacebuilding agenda utilized sports as a means to resolve conflicts of low-intensity that remained prevalent following the cessation of hostilities (Pham et al. 2007).

To begin this process, the regional District Sports Officers referred coaches and sport teachers to our research team for involvement in a series of participatory research workshops to learn about their localized attitude toward resolving conflict through sport. Because the initial research took place in their districts, I had already established a rapport with many of them. References at this phase were based on service to their respective communities, knowledge of community needs, and positive social status within their communities in addition to their success as a community-based coach. The inclusion of sport teachers was critical given our original research revealed school as a main sport venue, because the majority of schools remained operational during the conflict (Ravizza 2010). To ensure inclusiveness and to address issues across gender and disability, the participation of female coaches and coaches working with disabled athletes was emphasized. Some coaches played dual roles like school-based sport teachers who also coached as part of a district-wide volleyball association. While sport teachers received training in issues on key topics such as child protection through localized, school-based programs, many of the participant coaches had received varying levels of training on such topics through their local district and/or through specialized NGO-initiated workshops. Each coach participated in intensive workshops aimed at our understanding of acts of conflict in sport and ways to resolve those acts based on localized acceptable practices. Each workshop began with small-group qualitative research exercises called Free Listing (Weller and Romney 1988) to rapidly identify conflict-related behaviors in sports and strategies for resolution. For example, participants were posed a question in their native language in order to generate a list of responses for analysis. The initial list was based on the question: What causes conflict to happen among children in sport? Interviewers probed for multiple responses followed by a short description of each cause. Once the responses were recorded, a second question was posed in order to generate another list of responses. The second list of responses was derived from the question: How are conflicts in sports resolved? to explore the routine ways in which coaches and participants resolved conflict that occurred during sport activities. The most interesting, and perhaps unintentional, outcome of this phase was constructed by a group of coaches that centered on the topic of revenge. Here, a player engages in delayed retaliation by seeking out a specific time to do harm to another player. Labeled in the Acholi Luo dialect as *Gin Marac,* this behavior is the result of a past incident – often a direct result of the larger conflict – that caused harm to the player exacting revenge. For instance, a young male football (soccer) player encountered another who committed an act of violence against his family during the conflict. This was not at all uncommon given the large number of children and youth abducted into the LRA who perpetrated acts of violence against communities (Annan et al. 2006). Coaches described how a player is overtaken by emotion and anger, which resorts in marking the opposing player until an opportunity is presented to do them physical harm. This level of conflict illustrated...
an acute, often latent, effect of the long-standing conflict on both formerly abducted and non-abducted children and youth as recognized by coaches. These actions posed unconditional threats to community peace through acts of violence during sports that can reduce a well-adjusted former child soldier to retaliate as a situational response, recreating the very hostile behaviors that were otherwise overcome (Wessells 2006; Ravizza 2012).

In addition to the free listing exercises and workshop activities, coaches and sport teachers were interviewed by research team members to further establish their attitudes toward using sport in this context. Among these, coaches felt that former child soldiers were frequently the catalyst of verbal and physical conflict-related behaviors and should be ‘screened’ prior to participating in sport. They also struggled with conceding that youth have the capacity to resolve their own conflict – it can only occur through the intervention of an adult – reflecting their own desire to function in a deficits capacity. These findings were critical to reaching the program objectives and played out during the initial implementation phase within the conflict-affected region.

**Peaceful play ‘in the field’**

In a shift from empirical data to program conception, workshop participants confirmed their interpretations of conflict in sport and strategies for resolution. The use of local language was critical to avoid any interpretive pitfalls that may cause coaches to seek out suitable direct equivalent translations that may not be there (Lambert 2006). As a result, we created the Peaceful Play program (Ravizza et al. 2012) which described four varying levels of conflict in sport based on localized definitions and strategies for resolution.

Three other levels of conflict accompanied the aforementioned level of *Gin Marac* or seeking revenge. *Telle* described a disagreement involving two opposing views about a particular play or call after which a decision is made for immediate resolution. *Cero Lok*, depicted an extension of a disagreement that is beyond an immediate resolution and where further consultation is needed for the conflict to be resolved. Finally, coaches demonstrated how a player may physically retaliate against an opponent following unintentional strong physical contact or a verbal incident (*Kero/ Teko me Kom*). Since former child soldiers often experienced peer provocation, transfer strategies were discussed and described as opportunities to expand the potential of sport to create meaningful social change in their communities.

**From coaching to monitoring, evaluation, and learning**

As part of our monitoring, evaluation, and learning components (MEL), the field team conducted bi-weekly field visits to coaches and sports teachers at their respective sites. During these visits, a period of discussion ensued between the field team and coaches following each observational period. It was during this time that coaches further constructed their views of the conflicts that were occurring in sport and the potency of their strategies to resolve them. Our field visits revealed that under the guidance of sport teachers and coaches, children and youth utilized dialogue, referring to existing rules, and seeking outside assistance when appropriate to resolve conflicts consistent within their operant cultural belief systems. Coaches gradually shifted from their initial attitudes of children’s inability to resolve conflict by working directly with youth to resolve conflict independent of their intervention, thus capitalizing on their sense of agency and reflecting the coach–participant partnership for which we had aimed. One female coach spoke to how she began to ‘draw back’ from wanting to intervene thus allowing her participants to resolve their conflicts peacefully using the strategies she taught them. This enriched the idea of
the co-education of coaches and youth to further understand program content and its intersection with political and social constructs that influence outcomes (Hartmann and Kwauk 2011).

Through continued interaction and reflective thought, coaches no longer viewed former child soldiers as sources of conflict any differently than their non-abducted peers. This allowed them to demonstrate their readied abilities to resolve conflict peacefully. For instance, one male football coach articulated his adamant belief that former child soldiers provoked conflict and needed counseling prior to participation in sport from the outset. After several weeks of program monitoring, he reported no incidences of conflict in which former child soldiers engaged and cited examples of them seeking to resolve disagreements and arguments using program strategies.

The process of constructing the levels of conflict in sport and strategies for resolution with the community coaches yielded a deeper understanding of the ideals and potential for sport in this context not made possible had we attempted to create a program based solely on research outcomes and perceived needs of the community. This reflexive account of our previous fieldwork and research illuminates the capacity of coaches to play key informant roles in the construction and facilitation of programming based on community needs and localized customs. This supports the critiques of SDP programming by researchers who advocate for placing a strong consideration on ‘local practices, local knowledge, the sociocultural and political-economic contexts as well as the needs and desires of communities themselves’ (Hartmann and Kwauk 2011: 294). Therefore, the importance of understanding the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the coaches to further the understanding of sport as an opportunistic way to contribute to positive social change is necessary (Blom et al. 2015).

Failing to also understand the conflict-related experiences of the coaches would be failing to recognize such implications on their social relationships and how that affects program delivery and outcomes. A coach who experienced violence, either directly or indirectly, at the hands of a former child soldier could easily harbor resentment toward them, seek to prevent their participation, reproduce conditions of marginalization within the group, and reinforce community stigma, therefore underscoring the very message coaches are intended to impart through a SDP program. It is important to note the coaches’ undeniable desire to maximize their role as members of the (sporting) community to contribute within their capacity to build more inclusive communities as a larger investment in regional peace and security. This investment is likely to pay off when coaches see the potential and receive the support necessary to pursue such opportunities to contribute to the overall stability of the region.

Conclusions

There is a strong societal belief that sport-based approaches can contribute to international development and peacebuilding objectives. However, this becomes untenable without careful consideration of the coaches tasked in the involvement of meeting such objectives. Our understanding of the role of the coach within the SDP field is complicated by their varying experiences within a wide range of programming. What we do know is they play a critical role in achieving the desired prosocial outcomes and effects. Yet, even with this knowledge, their role is often supplanted as a localized resource to support program planning, implementation, and critical feedback. This chapter provided only a glimpse into the role of coaches in SDP programs supported with findings and reflections from fieldwork, research, and program development in one localized context. It will take the field to convene as a community of learners to provide more detailed examples through research and practical experiences that can broaden our contextual understanding of coaches and how best to utilize them as an important resource partner. Future research should involve well-thought descriptions of the role of coaches in SDP
programs, pose critical questions that support theoretical and practical applications, and provide systematic examination of and alongside coaches within their programmatic contexts.

The challenges faced by coaches who are involved in SDP programs are multiple, complex, and varied across ethnic cultures, gender, and communities. In order to meet these challenges, we must develop partnerships that build the evidence base and test locally driven and feasible sport interventions. We have a lot to learn from local people, how they respond to adversity, conflict, health-risk behaviors, and other societal issues. Coaches can enlighten us to a number of local processes that must not be displaced, but built upon to create sustainable, localized sport interventions that can further confirm the role of sport in meeting an international development agenda. And, most importantly, in providing the systems of support for the children and youth to thrive within the communities in which the coaches live and support.

Notes

1 At this writing, the Platform registers 957 organizations listed as one of the following: NGO/non-profit (690), business corporations (83), university/research (40), international organizations (37), government agencies (12) and sport clubs/federations (95). The Platform does not recognize some programs sponsored by country governments such as the Global Sports Mentoring Program, a main component of the Empowering Women and Girls through Sports Initiative, under the Sports Diplomacy Division in the United States Department of State.

2 For the purpose of this chapter, the author completed a systematic review of SDP programs in order to identify the key word (coach) or a suitable substitute. A list of potential synonyms to the key word was generated. Any terms found through the review not matching those previously generated were added to the list. The review started with programs listed on the International Platform as ‘Non-Profit Organization/Charity/NGO/INGO’. Program weblinks and search engines provided opportunity to review for coach or coach-related terminology in program literature. Programs not listed on the website, but either known to the author, represented within International Working Groups, or mentioned in SDP literature, were also included in this review because some programs have not made the official connection to the Platform, and many grassroots programs have limited internet capacities to support an online presence.

3 Annan, Blattman and Horton (2006) in their Survey of War-Affected Youth (SWAY 1) estimated 66,000 children and youth were abducted by the LRA for periods of a couple of days to over ten years resulting in an inability to account for those unreturned. Accessed at: http://chrisblattman.com/projects/sway/

4 Sport teachers is a localized term describing those employed by schools to run daily sporting activities. Some activities take place during the school day, while some take place after school. Sport teachers are often accompanied by a ‘sport prefect’ or student assistant during activity time.

References


Thorpe, H. (2016). ‘Look at what we can do with all the broken stuff!’ Youth agency and sporting creativity in sites of war, conflict and disaster. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health*, 8(5), 554–570.


