

1 Running head: INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

2 **Conflict among athletes and their coaches: What is the theory and research so far?**

3

4 **Abstract**

5 Although social and personal relationships are vital for productivity, health and wellbeing,  
6 conflict is inevitable and is likely to cause upset and hurt feelings as well as anxiety and  
7 distrust (e.g., Jowett, 2003). Despite the potentially central role of interpersonal conflict in  
8 sport, researchers have yet to pay concerted attention to exploring the nature of conflict, its  
9 antecedents and consequences. Following a thorough literature search 80 research papers  
10 were identified, of which only a small number (6) studied interpersonal conflict directly, most  
11 captured dysfunctional interpersonal processes such as breakdown of communication. The  
12 current review aims to provide a critical summary of the existing literature around the  
13 psychological construct of interpersonal conflict, including its antecedents, management  
14 strategies and outcomes within the context of coach-athlete relationships as well as other  
15 relational contexts in sport. Based on the relevant literature, a framework of interpersonal  
16 conflict is proposed, which includes a specific focus on a key dyad within sport coaching –  
17 namely the coach-athlete dyad. Future research directions and potential practical implications  
18 for sport psychology consultants, coach educators, coaches and athletes as well as other  
19 stakeholders are discussed.

20

21 *Keywords:* conflict; framework; relationship; interdependency; communication;  
22 coach-athlete

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**25 Conflict among athletes and their coaches: What is the theory and research so far?**

26 In high level sports where the stakes are high, outcomes unpredictable, and emotions  
27 heightened, effective communication and appropriate behaviour may become challenging and  
28 conflict can be provoked. Sport offers potential for conflict that can transpire as parental  
29 over- or under-involvement in their child/athlete's participation, administrators' excessive  
30 expectations of coaches, disagreements about team selection, power struggles between  
31 teammates or athletes and their coaches, disagreements about training procedures (e.g.,  
32 workload, goals, techniques) or even coaches' interferences in athletes' personal life (e.g.,  
33 lifestyle, significant others).

34 Despite its prevalence, it is surprising how little we know about interpersonal conflict  
35 within sport. Sport psychology has paid considerable attention to understanding the  
36 interpersonal dynamics between coaches and athletes or members through theoretical models  
37 involving coach and athlete leadership (e.g., Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Fransen,  
38 Vanbeselaere, De Cuyper, Vande Broek, & Boen, 2014), coaches' behaviours (Mageau &  
39 Vallerand, 2003; Smoll & Smith, 1989), coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Felton, 2014),  
40 communication/relationship strategies (Rhind & Jowett, 2010), collective efficacy (Short,  
41 Sullivan, & Feltz, 2005), and team cohesion (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985).  
42 Nonetheless, there is dearth of research that explores interpersonal conflict among coaches,  
43 athletes and teammates. Subsequently, this scoping review aims to examine the extant  
44 literature with two central aims: a) to forward a definition of interpersonal conflict in sport  
45 and b) to propose a conceptual framework of interpersonal conflict in sport relationships  
46 primarily developed between coaches and athletes and team members. The intention of this  
47 article is to build momentum that would drive advancements in interpersonal conflict theory  
48 and research.

**49 Methods**

50 Based on the novelty of the topic a scoping review was carried out investigating the  
51 status quo of research on interpersonal conflict in sport relationships. This approach was  
52 considered appropriate as it enabled the researchers to include studies focusing on  
53 interpersonal conflict in-depth, but also scientific papers that broadly covered the area of  
54 inquiry (Arksey, & O'Malley, 2005). Moreover, qualitative, quantitative and theoretically  
55 driven approaches could be integrated in the review process. Firstly, a systematic search of  
56 scientific papers and book chapters was carried out using the following databases: Web of  
57 Science, ScienceDirect, SportDiscuss, PsychInfo, PsycArticles, OvidSP, PubMed, ProQuest,  
58 SPONET, and Scopus; results generated a total of 6201 hits. All references were examined  
59 and key references extracted. These were used to identify further relevant articles. To be  
60 considered for inclusion, scientific papers had to demonstrate a number of general criteria: 1)  
61 relevance to the research inquiry, 2) publication in peer reviewed journals, conference  
62 proceedings or book chapters, and 3) written in English or German language according to the  
63 native languages of the main researchers. A first examination led to the exclusion of 6020  
64 references, including double positive and inaccessible sources. The remaining 180 articles  
65 underwent a more thorough review where sound methodological standards, clear reasoning  
66 for the conducted research, relevance to the current investigation and coverage of diverse  
67 participant perspectives (athletes, coaches, external agents) were considered. Moreover, four  
68 papers and one conference presentation were added after the original review process due to  
69 later publication dates. A final sample of 80 articles was included in the review, these are  
70 marked with an asterisk (\*) in the reference list. Despite the rather large number, only six of  
71 these articles directly focused on conflict experiences (1x interpersonal conflict, 5 x intra-  
72 team conflicts). An additional four examined intra-team communication, and another three  
73 covered conflict management and team building. Within the remaining 67 papers conflict was

74 mentioned peripherally. In the final stage, a theoretically driven thematic analysis (Dixon-  
75 Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005) of the literature was conducted.  
76 Subsequently, four areas of interest were identified: 1) a definition of interpersonal conflict in  
77 sport relationships (e.g., coach-athlete, peer relationships), 2) determinants of interpersonal  
78 conflict (e.g., personality, relationship quality), 3) prevention and management (e.g.,  
79 communication, problem-solving), and 4) conflict consequences (e.g., well-being,  
80 performance).

## 81 **Results**

82 Based on the thematic analysis of the identified papers, a definition of interpersonal  
83 conflict and an exploratory conceptual framework for understanding interpersonal conflict in  
84 sport relationships are proposed (Figure 1). The identified literature focuses heavily on the  
85 coach-athlete relationship, but also draws on research findings on peer conflict. Therefore,  
86 the term 'sport relationships' refers directly to those core relationships between coaches and  
87 athletes as well as team members throughout this paper.

88 The framework as displayed in Figure 1 integrates main areas of interpersonal conflict  
89 and can be split in three different sections: 1) determinants, such as intrapersonal,  
90 interpersonal and external factors; 2) cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes  
91 associated with conflict (including initial reactions and management behaviours); and 3)  
92 intrapersonal, interpersonal and performance consequences. Hence, it accounts not only for  
93 factors related to the individual conflict parties, but also interpersonal relationship  
94 characteristics, external circumstances and sport performance which may influence  
95 interpersonal interactions.

### 96 **Developing a Definition of Interpersonal Conflict within Sport Relationships**

97 Despite the extensive research concerning conflict within both organisational and social  
98 psychology, the concept of conflict remains unclear, complicated, and controversial. Barki

99 and Hartwick (2004), scholars in organisational/management psychology, explained that not  
100 only the lack of a clear conceptualisation of the construct of conflict but also the lack of its  
101 operationalization has made it extremely challenging to compare results of different studies  
102 and has prevented the development of knowledge within the conflict domain. For example,  
103 interpersonal conflict has been described in terms of where it occurs (e.g., organizational  
104 conflict; Rahim, 2002), its various dimensions (e.g., moral conflict; Duquin & Schroeder-  
105 Braun, 1996), or orientations (e.g., task, relationship; Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Amason  
106 (1996) distinguished conflict by its outcomes (functional vs. dysfunctional) and its underlying  
107 processes (cognitive vs. affective). Further, Barki and Hartwick (2004) focused on conflict  
108 parties when differentiating between intrapersonal, interpersonal, intra-group and intergroup  
109 conflict. Finally, conflict as a psychological concept has been confounded with such terms as  
110 abuse, mistreatment, and aggression (e.g., Duquin & Schroeder-Braun, 1996). Thus, conflict  
111 requires a definition that describes what this concept represents and what it does not.  
112 Accordingly, it needs to be acknowledged that conflict is more than a mere (cognitive)  
113 disagreement between people, but it also involves strong emotional reactions (e.g.,  
114 frustration) and interfering behaviours (e.g., confrontation, social isolation) (e.g., Paradis,  
115 Carron, & Martin, 2014a).

116 **Drawing from the sports literature.** Within the sport literature, only a few empirical  
117 studies have directly examined the concept of conflict. In one of them, Mellalieu et al. (2013)  
118 investigated interpersonal conflict at the highest level of competition including European  
119 Championships, World Cups and Olympic Games. Findings revealed that conflict was  
120 experienced by nearly 75% of participants ( $N = 90$ ) who occupied roles as coaches, athletes,  
121 managers and external agents. They described conflict as short-lived and occurring only a  
122 few times during major events, however, long-term conflict was also reported among  
123 participants of all groups. Mellalieu et al.'s (2013) study offered a first insight into conflict in

124 sport and while they highlighted its negative content and outcomes, they also explained that  
125 not all participants experienced conflict during competitions.

126 A more in-depth description of the nature and content of conflict was offered by Holt,  
127 Knight, and Zukiwski (2012) and Paradis et al. (2014a, 2014b) who focused on athletes'  
128 perceptions of intra-team conflict. Drawing on the work of Barki and Hartwick (2004),  
129 Paradis et al. (2014a) defined conflict based on the co-occurrence of its three dimensions:  
130 cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. The interviewed athletes described cognitive  
131 conflict as a disagreement about goals, strategies, opinions or a "clash of personalities" and  
132 considered it to be the "heart of conflict" (Paradis et al., 2014a, p. 12). The affective  
133 dimension was seen as a tense atmosphere with negative emotions, that fosters the potential  
134 for conflict escalation. Lastly, behavioural expressions of conflict included verbal or physical  
135 responses, like blaming, fighting or negative body language. Furthermore, task and relational  
136 types of conflict cut across the three dimensions of conflict mentioned earlier. Here,  
137 relationship conflict was associated with negative relations outside the sport, long-term  
138 isolation of athletes, severe interference of one's behaviour and a spread of negative emotions  
139 within the team. Overall, the participants of this study emphasized the negative nature of  
140 conflict. Correspondingly, Partridge and Knapp (2015) described that intra-team conflict was  
141 manifested in direct or indirect victimization (e.g., aggressive behaviours, isolation, rumours,  
142 dirty looks) of individuals and was based on experienced disagreements or disputes. They  
143 suggested that conflict would negatively influence individual well-being, team cohesion and  
144 therefore also performance. This assumption is in line with Leo, Gonzalez-Ponce, Sanchez-  
145 Miguel, Ivarsson, and Garcia-Calvo's (2015) findings who viewed conflict as a negative  
146 interference of one individual's interests by another party and proposed that both, relationship  
147 and task conflict, led to a decrease in collective efficacy within female football teams.  
148 Collectively, these findings are consistent with a study conducted by Holt et al. (2012). They

149 explained that social (interpersonal or relationship) conflict was a dysfunctional process  
150 which was potentially harder to solve. On the other hand, they pointed out that task conflict,  
151 which addressed practice, competition or playing time, could be functional at times as it  
152 reminded athletes that developing skills and improving performance were central to their  
153 programme and subsequently development.

154       **Defining interpersonal conflict.** Considering the coverage of interpersonal conflict  
155 within sport psychology (albeit limited) as well as diversity and complexity of conflict within  
156 the wider psychology literature (e.g., Barki & Hartwick, 2004; Paletz, Miron-Spektor, & Lin,  
157 2014), we decided to integrate the various components of conflict discussed earlier and draw  
158 a definition of interpersonal conflict in sport relationships. Proposing a definition of  
159 interpersonal conflict is important because it provides the boundary conditions of the concept  
160 under scrutiny. In this paper, we define interpersonal conflict as a situation in which  
161 relationship partners perceive a disagreement about, for example, values, needs, opinions or  
162 objectives that is manifested through negative cognitive, affective and behavioural reactions.  
163 Moreover, interpersonal conflict is influenced by the social and cultural context within which  
164 it occurs, including individuals' characteristics, personality, age and gender. It is noteworthy  
165 that the definition does not imply a static conceptualization of conflict; conflict is described  
166 as a situation and this reflects a dynamic process that may last over a prolonged period of  
167 time (episode) and can re-occur several times (frequency). The nature of interpersonal  
168 conflict is presented as the core of the proposed conceptual framework.

169       An essential requirement of conflict is a *perceived* disagreement between individuals  
170 which is reflected in cognitive processes based on a negative interdependence of conflict  
171 parties (Deutsch, 1969), for instance, when one's goal achievement is potentially impeded by  
172 the other's behaviour. This cognitive dimension of conflict involves, but is not limited to  
173 disagreements about personal objectives, mismatching values, opposing needs and interests

174 or limited resources and is expressed by spontaneous conflict behaviours. Moreover,  
175 individuals are likely to experience initial negative emotions, such as anger and aggression  
176 (hard emotions; associated with power and selfishness) or disappointment and sadness (soft  
177 emotions; pro-social, associated with vulnerability; Sanford, 2007). Finally, individuals may  
178 perceive the intensity of conflict differently (more or less severe), depending on their  
179 personality, culturally determined role expectations or collectivistic-/ individualistic-  
180 orientation (Paletz et al., 2014). However, it remains to be explored how individual  
181 perceptions, characteristics, and social interaction shape conflict experiences within sport.

### 182 **Determinants of Conflict: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal and External Factors**

183 As presented in the first part of Figure 1, conflict may be caused and further  
184 influenced by both *intrapersonal factors*, such as personality, worldviews, self-esteem,  
185 motivation, competence, as well as skills, experiences and qualifications (e.g., Greenleaf,  
186 Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; Jowett, Lafreniere, & Vallerand, 2012), and by *interpersonal*  
187 *factors*, such as incompatibility, poor communication and relationship quality, or ineffective  
188 motivational climate and leadership (e.g., D'Arripe-Longueville, Fournier, & Dubois, 1998;  
189 Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). These determinants can function independently in a co-existing  
190 manner, but also interact with each other. For example, a less desirable personality  
191 characteristic such as neuroticism (i.e., emotionally unstable, continuously worried) and an  
192 anxious attachment style (i.e., excessively dependent, possessive) may contribute to the  
193 experience of conflict or disagreement. These personality characteristics may also be coupled  
194 with low levels of trust, both uni- and multi-directional, exacerbating the conflict  
195 experienced. Alongside personal and interpersonal determinants, also *external factors*,  
196 including situational circumstances, social and social-cultural differences (e.g., language,  
197 customs) can cause conflict.

#### 198 **Intrapersonal factors.**



199           **Stable intrapersonal factors.** Interpersonal factors can be grouped into stable (traits)  
200 and situational (states) attributes. For example, one of these stable intrapersonal factors which  
201 are related to perceptions of interpersonal conflict is gender; it has been found that male  
202 athletes engage in more conflict behaviour and conflict communication with their peers than  
203 females (Sullivan, 2004; Weiss & Smith, 2002). Another example of stable intrapersonal  
204 factors included personality traits of dyadic partners. Research indicated that personality may  
205 be linked to interpersonal conflict in sport relationships (Holt et al., 2012; Magnusen, 2010).  
206 Based on the Big 5 personality model (Costa & McCrea, 1992; Digman, 1990) Jackson,  
207 Dimmock, Gucciardi, and Grove (2010, 2011) conducted two studies investigating the  
208 relationship quality of athlete-athlete and coach-athlete dyads, respectively. Results indicated  
209 that dissimilarities between partners regarding extraversion and openness were associated  
210 with more unstable, dysfunctional and incompatible relationships all of which were likely to  
211 facilitate conflict. Yang, Jowett, and Chan (in press) also found that neuroticism was  
212 associated with less than optimal coach-athlete relationships.

213           Finally, findings highlight that an individual's attachment style can determine  
214 relationship quality and the experience of conflict (Davis & Jowett, 2014; Felton & Jowett,  
215 2013c). Thus, secure attached athletes reported only minor conflicts with their coaches as  
216 they are more likely to have developed better social and interpersonal skills (e.g., effective  
217 communication) (Davis & Jowett, 2014). Similarly, avoidant attached athletes perceived little  
218 conflict with their coaches, which might be caused by a tendency to avoid close interactions  
219 or close bonds with others. It may be interesting to see whether similar patterns are found for  
220 other sport relationships, such as athlete-athlete dyads or within teams.

221           **Situational intrapersonal factors.** When considering interactions between coaches  
222 and athletes as well as between athlete-peers less stable intrapersonal factors (states) also  
223 need to be taken into account. One of these is passion which is defined within sport as a

224 “strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which  
225 they invest time or energy” (Vallerand & Miquelon, 2007, p. 250). Passion is generally  
226 categorized into obsessive (internal forces, lack of control) and harmonious (personal  
227 endorsement, personal choice) passion, which have been found to relate differently to the  
228 experience of interpersonal conflict in sport. Accordingly, Jowett, Lafreniere, and Vallerand  
229 (2012) stated that athletes’ and coaches’ obsessive passion was positively associated with  
230 perceived interpersonal conflict in coach-athletes dyads, and further, a coach’s obsessive  
231 passion was predictive of lower personal satisfaction and higher perceptions of athletes’  
232 conflict. However, this finding was not replicated within sport teams. Accordingly, the  
233 findings by Paradis et al. (2014b) did not show a significant association between obsessive  
234 passion and team conflict, while harmonious passion was inversely related to team conflict.  
235 The role of passion differs regarding the experience of conflict within the relationship quality  
236 developed among teammates and coaches-athlete dyads. These differences may be due to  
237 diverse expectations and relationship characteristics. However, research on athlete-athlete  
238 relationships is scarce and therefore no certain conclusions can be drawn.

239         Recently, efficacy beliefs have received empirical research within the context of  
240 sport. Jackson and his colleagues introduced the notion of tripartite efficacy; a set of  
241 psychological efficacy beliefs that include self-efficacy, others-efficacy and relation-inferred  
242 self-efficacy (RISE) that have been found to determine relationship quality in sport dyads  
243 (Jackson, Grove, & Beauchamp, 2010; Jackson, Gucciardi, & Dimmock, 2011; Jackson,  
244 Knapp, & Beauchamp, 2008). Specifically, a partner’s low perception of an athlete’s/coach’s  
245 self-efficacy was stated as a factor for relationship termination in both, athlete-athlete and  
246 coach-athlete dyads, whereas a partner’s higher ratings were connected to a greater  
247 relationship satisfaction when actor-partner interdependence models were conducted (Jackson  
248 et al., 2011). Investigating tripartite efficacy profiles via cluster analyses of coach-athlete

249 dyads, they further observed a link between unfulfilled tripartite profiles of athletes and  
250 higher perceived interpersonal conflict with their coaches; in opposition, fulfilled profiles  
251 related to higher relationship commitment and satisfaction. Overall, perceived confidence and  
252 competence of a dyad member seemed to play a major role in maintaining an effective  
253 relationship. This conclusion has been supported by several studies investigating athletes'  
254 perceptions on good and bad coaching behaviours (e.g., Becker, 2009; Gearity, 2012; Gearity  
255 & Murray, 2011). Specifically, conflict seemed to occur due to perceived incompetence  
256 (Greenleaf et al., 2001; Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003),  
257 disagreements upon one's training schedule and workload (Greenleaf et al., 2001; Jowett,  
258 2003) or handling of injuries (Greenleaf et al., 2001; Shrier, Safai, & Charland, 2014).  
259 Considering the task-orientated purpose of a coach-athlete relationship where performance  
260 improvement is central (Jowett & Shanmugam, in press), these findings seem very plausible  
261 as athletes' performance success and wellbeing are to a degree dependent on their interactions  
262 with their coaches and the coaches' instructions, knowledge and experience. Subsequently,  
263 when investigating interpersonal conflict in sport, research that aims to explore specific  
264 intrapersonal factors, such as personality, competence or efficacy beliefs, is warranted.

265       **Interpersonal factors.** Whereas intrapersonal factors are likely to impact the quality  
266 of the interaction between people, the level of interdependence, relationship quality,  
267 communication, group unity, and co-operation may also affect the experience of conflicts  
268 (Figure 1).

269       **Interpersonal relationships.** Within sport, the coach-athlete relationship has attracted  
270 a concerted research effort. Jowett's 3+1Cs model (Jowett & Shanmugam, in press) provided  
271 the impetus needed when Wylleman (2000) described the concept of the coach-athlete  
272 relationship as an "uncharted territory". The model is concerned with coaches' and athletes'  
273 affective closeness (e.g., mutual trust, respect), cognitive commitment (e.g., thoughts of

274 maintaining a close relationship over time) and behavioural complementarity (e.g., co-  
275 operative acts of interactions), as well as co-orientation (e.g., perceptual agreement). Within  
276 this literature, it has been postulated that low levels of closeness, complementarity,  
277 commitment and co-orientation can have a negative impact on the quality of the coach-athlete  
278 relationship and potentially lead to a regressive spiral of recurrent interpersonal conflict that  
279 could even cause relationship termination (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Jowett (2003)  
280 described the characteristics by which an athlete experienced conflict relative to her coach as  
281 follows: (a) low (intensity) and negative (quality) closeness and reflecting in feeling  
282 unattached, distant, distressed, frustrated and even rejected; (b) non-complementary  
283 transactions that were manifested in power struggles and opposed behaviours; (c) lack of  
284 commitment or willingness to maintain a close bond with each other over the foreseeable  
285 time leading to the termination of the relationship; and finally (d) dis-orientation or lack of  
286 agreement was said to be leading to disputes, contested views, and disagreements. In  
287 conclusion, interpersonal conflict may be associated with either one or all dimensions of  
288 relationship quality (closeness, complementarity, commitment, co-orientation) as they are  
289 capable of dis-stabilising the symmetry and evenness (stability and harmony) that  
290 characterise effective and successful relationships (Jowett, 2005). Empirical research has  
291 substantiated these initial assumptions by linking closeness, commitment, and  
292 complementarity with interpersonal conflict (Jowett, 2009). Interestingly though, it has also  
293 been noted that the more interdependent relationships are, the more likely conflict will occur  
294 (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Therefore, relationship characteristics are not only determinants to  
295 relationship quality, but they are rather also defined by interpersonal processes,  
296 environmental factors, and intrapersonal factors and hence, cannot be discussed in isolation.

297       **Communication.** Communication, for example, is an essential process at all stages of  
298 relationship development and maintenance as it provides the members with information about

299 one another and fosters closeness, commitment, and complementarity; thus the simple  
300 process of getting to know the other person, her or his needs and expectations are central to  
301 effective and successful interactions (LaVoi, 2007). Communication also plays a major role  
302 in developing and maintaining an effective coach-athlete relationship (Rhind & Jowett,  
303 2010). For instance, Trzaskoma-Bicsérdy, Bognár, Révész, and Géczi (2007) explained that  
304 while all coach-athlete dyads may encounter difficulties at some point in their collaboration  
305 and athletes might feel unsupported, misunderstood or isolated, these issues can be solved by  
306 openly discussing their differences. Hence, the role of communication is instrumental in  
307 preventing, processing and resolving conflict (Rhind & Jowett, 2010).

308 Failing to communicate effectively, in contrast, has been suggested as one of the main  
309 characteristics of poor coaching (Gearity & Murray, 2011; Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1991).  
310 Interestingly, that does not only concern the coach-athlete relationship, but also unsatisfying  
311 communication patterns within coaching teams and sport organisations which are directly or  
312 indirectly affecting individuals perceptions and coach-athlete interactions (e.g., D'Arripe-  
313 Longueville, et al., 1998; Kristiansen, Tomten, Hanstad, & Roberts, 2012).

314 Investigating the occurrence of conflict in major competitions, Mellalieu et al. (2013)  
315 reported a breakdown of interaction and communication as the most common determinant to  
316 conflict as it was mentioned by over 50% of the study's participants. Similarly, several  
317 studies have cited a lack of communication as underlying factor of perceived struggles or  
318 conflicts between coach-athlete/ athlete-athlete dyads or within coaching teams and sport  
319 organisations. (e.g., Culver & Trudel, 2000; Hanton et al., 2005; Jowett & Frost, 2007;  
320 Kerwin, Doherty, & Harman, 2011). However, these investigations have so far failed to  
321 provide any specific information on in-/effective communication patterns.

322 On another level, communication may also serve as a manifestation of power relations  
323 within relationships and therefore lead to interpersonal conflict. D'Arripe-Longueville et al.,

324 (1998) and Purdy, Potrac, and Jones (2008) described how coaches used a communication  
325 style which was characterized as loud, distant, and angry and included negative strategies  
326 such as bossing athletes around and blaming. Additionally, Purdy et al. (2008) emphasized  
327 that conflict escalation may be promoted by coaches who are ignorant, deliberately withhold  
328 information and restrict communication. Lastly, hostile and inadequate reactions in critical  
329 situations during practice or after unsuccessful competitions may also be the mere expression  
330 of conflict (e.g., Purdy et al., 2008; Sagar & Jowett, 2012).

331 Sullivan and Feltz (2003) developed a questionnaire to assess typical communication  
332 patterns in sport teams; it contained four dimensions, two of which measured negative  
333 conflict and positive conflict. Negative conflict captures the expression of agitation or anger  
334 as well as its emotional, personal and confrontational nature, whereas positive conflict  
335 captures constructive and integrative ways of dealing with disruption. A number of studies  
336 have used this assessment tool in studies that examined group dynamic variables such as role  
337 ambiguity, cohesion and leadership (Cunningham & Eys, 2007; Smith, Arthur, Hardy,  
338 Callow, & Williams, 2013).

339 *Team processes.* Apart from relationship and communication that may be responsible  
340 for the onset of conflict, team processes form another set of dimensions that may be  
341 significant sources of interpersonal conflict. Research has shown that a less task- and more  
342 ego-involving climate is correlated with negative perceptions of peer relations, less perceived  
343 acceptance within a team and increased perceived conflict between team members (e.g.,  
344 Ommundsen, Roberts, Lemyre, & Miller, 2005; Smith, Balaguer, & Duda, 2006). Moreover,  
345 while strong relations between coaches and athletes have been found to associate positively  
346 with team cohesion and collective efficacy (e.g., Hampson & Jowett, 2014; Jowett &  
347 Chaundy, 2004), poor relations between coaches and athletes have been found to facilitate  
348 intra-team rivalry and power struggles (e.g., D'Arripe-Longueville et al., 1998; Holt et al.,

2012; Kristiansen et al., 2012). Those may lead to jealousy or strong attitudes among team members resulting in even more conflict (Partridge & Knapp, 2015). Furthermore, Hardy, Eys, and Carron (2005) found that high task-cohesion may lead to conflict or even a breakdown of friendships due to a performance-oriented, competitive team climate. In another study, Paradis, Carron, and Martin (2014b) showed that both task and social conflict were negatively related to all dimensions of team cohesion. However, due to the correlational research design no conclusions about causal effects were made. Overall, it would seem that more interpersonal conflict is caused by loose interpersonal social and task connections and equally, interpersonal conflict may also be the reason for lower cohesion due to, for example, disagreements and discrepant goals. Role ambiguity between team members has also been found to cause interpersonal conflict, especially if athletes and coaches do not appreciate, understand and carry out their role responsibilities (Benson, Eys, Surya, Dawson, & Schneider, 2013). It is important to note here that often the athlete leader is seen to be responsible for solving conflicts among team members or to mediate between coaching staff and athletes (Fransen et al., 2014).

**Leadership and power.** One condition for the above point to work is that it requires the coach and athlete leader to relate and cooperate effectively. Dysfunctional relationships between coaches and their captains, on the other hand, have been found to lead to miscommunication and lacking information flow between the coaching staff and team, causing further trouble for team members (Dupuis, Bloom, & Loughhead, 2006).

Considering coach leadership in the discussion of role expectations, it has been suggested that autocratic behaviours potentially impair the coach-athlete relationship as well as athletes' well-being by not satisfying psychological needs, such as relatedness, autonomy and competence (Felton & Jowett, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Further, research has also highlighted that behaviours such as being overly controlling likely lead to resistance which in

374 turn is associated with conflict and distress (Potrac & Jones, 2009; Scanlan et al., 1991).  
375 Moreover, an indecisive coach may cause conflict with athletes, especially when facing  
376 critical situations under high pressure (Hanton et al., 2005). Furthermore, a lack of supportive  
377 behaviours has been mentioned to foster conflict within coach-athlete dyads (e.g., Hanton et  
378 al., 2005; Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Another source of conflict is represented  
379 by power abuse of coaches or power struggles between coaches and athletes. Power abuse  
380 might occur in very different forms, such as punishment after mistakes or defeat (Sager &  
381 Jowett, 2012), when undermining athletes' experiences, opinions and needs (Jowett, 2003),  
382 controlling the private life of athletes, harassment (Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997), as well as  
383 emotional or physical abuse (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). These negative coaching behaviours  
384 may furthermore lead directly to conflict (e.g., Stirling & Kerr, 2008; Tamminen et al., 2013)  
385 or to negative responses by the athletes (e.g., Stirling & Kerr, 2008, 2009) who are facing  
386 these conflicting situations (Duquin & Schroeder-Braun, 1996).

387       **External factors.** Besides antecedents that reside within or between relationship  
388 members, there are also antecedents that are external to them and can influence the onset of  
389 interpersonal conflict. These variables may be located in the wider situational and  
390 environmental circumstances surrounding the relationship members; they may be situational,  
391 (e.g., practice location) or permanent (e.g., culture or ethnical background) (see Figure 1).  
392 There has been evidence to indicate that discrimination, inequality and stereotypical thinking  
393 exists in semi-professional soccer players, among fans, opponents and teammates, as well as  
394 coaches (e.g., Jowett & Frost, 2007; Khomutova, 2015). Such discriminatory behaviours  
395 (e.g., prejudice, unfairness, favouritism) are less tolerable and may lead to conflict if players  
396 do not perceive them somewhat with a sense of humour or ignorance to prevent escalated  
397 trouble (Jones, 2002). Also gender may lead to very similar experiences within sports;  
398 female sport participants are often associated with stereotypes of homophobia, lack of



399 acceptance or lack of perceived competence (e.g., LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Mazerolle,  
400 Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Shaw & Allen, 2009). Correspondingly, female coaches have  
401 described their work as being inhibited by higher positioned male coaches, not accepted by  
402 male athletes and disesteemed due to stereotypical and sexual assumptions. Similarly, female  
403 athletes have been found to be treated in inferior manners to male athletes and therefore  
404 experience conflict during mixed practices or competitions (Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997).

405         Moreover, a number of studies recently have investigated organisational stressors  
406 within sports. These studies revealed that such stressors are linked to interpersonal conflict  
407 with team management/ headquarters of the organization, support networks, administrators,  
408 or judges (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Fletcher, Hanton, Mellalieu, & Neil, 2012; Hanton,  
409 Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005). In line, old-fashioned systems within clubs or national  
410 associations might restrict the flexibility to build up athlete-centred, flexible practice  
411 environments and effective coach-athlete relationships (D'Arripe-Longueville et al., 2001;  
412 Kristiansen et al., 2012). Additionally, parents have been reported to engage in direct conflict  
413 with coaches, with other athletes or with their own athlete-children - preventing them from  
414 forming a close relationship with coaches (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Lauer, Gould,  
415 Roman, & Pierce, 2010; Scanlan et al., 1991; Weiss & Fretwell, 2005) or stirring intra-team  
416 conflict (Partridge & Knapp, 2015).

417         Lastly, situational circumstances may refer to disagreements about issues that directly  
418 concern both the coach and the athlete, such as training and competition schedules,  
419 expectations, values or interpersonal differences especially as these can be developed  
420 following a significant change of events within or outside the relationship (e.g., Gould,  
421 Greenleaf, Guinen, & Chung, 2002; Greenleaf et al., 2001; Jowett, 2003; Kristiansen et al.,  
422 2012). Winning an Olympic medal, for example, can be followed by a chain of negative  
423 changes, such as disagreements about goals, pursuing conflicting personal ambitions, media

424 distractions or reports or being influenced by externals, such as agents (Jowett, 2003).  
425 Speaking of major competitions, it might be the case that personal or local/club coaches  
426 cannot support their athletes during competitions but are instead replaced by the national or  
427 another coach. In this case conflict can be caused due to non-established relationships,  
428 contrasting instructions from coaching staff or a lack of communication within the coaching  
429 team (e.g., Jowett, 2008; Kristiansen et al., 2012). Additionally, team selection processes may  
430 lead to conflicts between athletes and the coaching staff or even the sport organisation  
431 (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Gould et al., 2002; Kerwin, Doherty, & Harman, 2011) and thus  
432 how team selection is being communicated may be paramount to relationship development.

433 In sum, the extant literature seems to indicate that interpersonal conflict can be caused  
434 by intrapersonal, interpersonal and external factors, such as expectations, misunderstandings,  
435 or even bad intentions. This review highlights that understanding the determinants of  
436 interpersonal conflict in sport would help identify and facilitate conflict management and  
437 resolution strategies based on the causes of it. While more focused research efforts are  
438 required to examine the antecedents of interpersonal conflict in sport more directly, the next  
439 section discusses strategies that have been found to be employed in an attempt to manage and  
440 resolve conflict.

#### 441 **Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution**

442 Considering that individuals usually engage in relationships for a purpose it is likely  
443 that they will try to protect it from harm or even termination (Carron & Brawley, 2012).  
444 Conflict, however, represents a risk to any relationship if not dealt with constructively.  
445 Therefore, relationship partners may want to prevent situations in which conflict can erupt,  
446 for example by using relationship maintenance strategies, such as setting common goals,  
447 mutual assurance, open communication, or making use of constructive problem-solving  
448 strategies after disagreements (Rhind & Jowett, 2010, 2011). Accordingly, the process of

449 stopping the onset of conflict is called *conflict prevention*; it can include general relationship  
450 maintenance strategies as well as behaviours focusing specifically on potential  
451 disagreements. Slightly more controversial is the categorization of conflict behaviours that  
452 are shown after the onset of conflict. Thus, *conflict styles* describe individuals' preferences to  
453 engage in certain conflict management and/or resolution behaviours (e.g., collaborative,  
454 competitive or avoidant behaviours; Volkema & Bergmann, 1995). *Conflict management*,  
455 furthermore, refers to the use of effective behavioural strategies to reduce dysfunctional  
456 conflict and to facilitate constructive conflict (e.g., information sharing, goal setting, role  
457 clarification). In contrast to *conflict resolution* strategies (e.g., negotiation, bargaining,  
458 mediation), conflict management does not necessarily aim to diminish or terminate conflict  
459 (Rahim, 2002). Generally, it can be expected that relationship partners will engage in conflict  
460 management and/or resolution strategies, after conflict prevention has failed. Within a  
461 feedback-loop the nature of a conflict, described by content (cognitions, emotions,  
462 behaviours), duration and intensity, will influence and be influenced by these conflict  
463 behaviours (see Figure 1).

464       **Conflict prevention.** As stated before, conflict prevention is not only dependent on  
465 intra- and interpersonal characteristics, but also on the potentially identified disagreement.  
466 Hence, conflict parties may engage in self-reflection processes and gather further information  
467 about potential topics of disagreement, develop sound communication skills, avoid  
468 conflicting situations or accept inequitable attitudes (D'Arripe-Longuevill et al., 1998;  
469 Gearity & Murray, 2011; Langan, Blake, & Lonsdale, 2013; Stirling, 2013). However, first  
470 and foremost, all involved parties need to be willing to engage in constructive behaviours in  
471 order to maintain the relationship. With the COMPASS Model (Rhind & Jowett, 2010, 2011)  
472 a theoretical framework integrating behaviours that aim to maintain and enhance the coach-  
473 athlete relationships was developed. Listed are reactive and proactive strategies concerning

474 conflict management, openness, motivation, prevention, assurance, support and social  
475 networks (Rhind & Jowett, 2011, 2012). Interestingly, the majority of strategies target the  
476 prevention of conflict, for example by being honest, giving constructive feedback and setting  
477 common goals (Jowett & Shanmugam, in press). Other strategies include coaches employing  
478 an open-door policy, showing interest in the athlete as a person and establishing rapport (e.g.,  
479 Becker, 2009; Bennie & O'Connor, 2012). Besides imparting maintenance strategies, Jowett  
480 and Carpenter (2004) further indicated the establishment of rules within coach-athlete dyads  
481 in order to prevent interpersonal conflict. These rules may cover certain role expectations of  
482 coaches and athletes. Within the framework of complementarity in the coach-athlete  
483 relationship, Yang and Jowett (2013) explained that athletes and coaches assume distinct  
484 roles, where athletes usually have submissive roles reflected in the expectation to execute  
485 instructions and consider advice whereas coaches usually assume dominant roles reflected in  
486 the expectation to be in charge and provide instruction and feedback. Yang and Jowett (2013)  
487 made it clear that these behaviours represent role expectations which aim to provide structure  
488 and organisation (Jowett & Carpenter, 2004); they are not synonymous to controlling  
489 behaviours as understood within the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).  
490 Consequently, while great coaches should aim to fulfil basic psychological needs they also  
491 should recognize and meet athletes' needs for structure and guidance (cf. Ryan & Deci, 2000;  
492 Becker, 2009). Accordingly, pursuing a balance between facilitating an athlete's  
493 independence and connection, without making him or her feel left alone and helpless or  
494 making him or her controlled by the coach, within a well-defined coaching structure,  
495 provides one of the many challenges of great coaching.

496         The establishment of high-quality relationships between a coach and each individual  
497 athlete in the team and the creation of an atmosphere of trust, respect and honesty is also  
498 likely to influence team dynamics positively and will facilitate bonding processes among

499 team members (e.g., role modelling, communication and conflict culture); therefore, building  
500 a strong, common network in which individuals can rely on each other should be a priority  
501 (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). Efforts here should be directed at establishing trust and respect,  
502 facilitate open, positive communication, setting a common ground for team members and  
503 fostering team cohesion (Copeland & Wida, 1996; Evans, Slater, Turner, & Barker, 2013;  
504 Hardy & Grace, 1997; Smith, 2001). Close relationships among team members may  
505 encourage individual players to emphasize a more task involving team climate, including  
506 mutual support and encouragement also in difficult situations (Smith & Smoll, 1997) and  
507 therefore also enable team members to discuss problems openly as well as engaging in co-  
508 operative, effective conflict resolving strategies (Holt et al., 2012). Moreover, high quality  
509 relationships are also a core element of team resilience; communication, for example, forms  
510 an essential ingredient in building and maintaining a group structure which is likely to ensure  
511 stability and organisation during times of crisis, such as conflict (Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar,  
512 2013). Accordingly, a well-established group identity may prevent conflict due to lower ego-  
513 involvement and salient collectivistic thought processes. It might also enable group members  
514 to focus on task issues instead of targeting personal relationships directly. Taken together,  
515 based on the reviewed literature we recommend to create high-quality relationships between  
516 coaches and athletes, just as between peers by relying on stable communication, mutual care,  
517 trust, respect, reliability and common expectations in order to prevent conflict.

518       **Conflict management and conflict resolution.** Despite coaches' and athletes' best  
519 efforts to prevent conflict there may be times where conflict occurs and its management  
520 becomes paramount. In fact, it has been acknowledged that conflict is inevitable in  
521 relationships and the more interdependent the relationships the higher is the likelihood of  
522 experiencing issues within a relationship (e.g., Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Without clearly  
523 differentiating between management and resolution, several effective and ineffective conflict

524 strategies have been mentioned in the literature. Importantly, the effectiveness of employed  
525 strategies may highly depend on situational circumstances and conflict partners'  
526 characteristics, thus, whereas some approaches can be clearly positive or negative, some may  
527 not be categorized that easily (Mellalieu et al., 2013). Investigating conflict during major  
528 competitions, Mellalieu et al. (2013) assessed conflict solving strategies which were  
529 employed by sport participants ( $N = 90$ ; e.g., athletes, coaches, staff members). While no  
530 participants stated the use of forcing or overpowering behaviours, most participants tried to  
531 resolve the conflict either on their own or by looking for help (47%), while others noted  
532 attempts to withdraw from conflict (29%). This empirical data finds support in several  
533 qualitative studies in which athletes were reported to avoid or withdraw from conflicts with  
534 team members or coaches and to seek social support in people outside of their sport (e.g.,  
535 Gearity & Murray, 2011; Tamminen et al., 2013). When confronted with low quality  
536 coaching or even abusive behaviours athletes reported furthermore to ignore or accept  
537 conflicts with coaches (e.g., Gearity & Murray, 2011; Stirling, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2008).

538         Important requirements for all these conflict management/ resolution strategies are the  
539 ability to recognize and address conflict in early stages in order to prevent an escalation due  
540 to a summation of emotions and negative behaviours (Holt et al., 2012) and to communicate  
541 effectively (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; LaVoi, 2007; Zimmermann, 2009). This includes  
542 creating open channels of communication, listening skilfully, just as being able to deliver  
543 messages successfully. Most effective conflict strategies are targeting the conflict issue (e.g.,  
544 practice schedule, lack of communication, etc.) in a collaborative fashion requiring the  
545 willingness of both conflict partners to collaborate. It has been proposed that conflict  
546 discussions should preferably take place in structured meetings and with the help of a neutral  
547 mediator (Holt et al., 2012; Rovio, Eskola, Kozub, Duda, & Lintunen, 2009). Here, it is  
548 noteworthy that athletes seem to prefer senior players, the captain or sport psychologist to

549 mediate meetings which concern relational conflicts, whereas the head coach would only be  
550 consulted in case of performance conflicts (Holt, Black, Tamminen, Fox, & Mandigo, 2008;  
551 Holt et al., 2012). Different methods and tools have been suggested within the sports  
552 literature, these include team building interventions in order to improve communication and  
553 build a perception of togetherness, modified performance profiling with an emphasis on  
554 relationship quality, as well as team and social skills, win/win strategies in which conflict  
555 partners are asked to find a common ground and formulate solutions which enable both to  
556 achieve their individual goals, or structured approaches aimed at developing a range of  
557 alternative solutions to a problem or broadening individuals' perspectives by sharing  
558 information (Hardy & Crace, 1997; Holt et al., 2012; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Zimmerman,  
559 2009). Besides addressing conflict directly, also seeking social support and gaining  
560 perspective about the issue in question have been mentioned within the sport literature  
561 (Mellalieu et al., 2013; Rhind & Jowett, 2010; Tamminen et al., 2013).

562       Finally, approaches targeting emotional intelligence or mindfulness of individuals  
563 have been put forward recently. These generally aim to improve individuals' self-/other-  
564 awareness, tolerance, understanding, and psychological flexibility (Chan & Mallett, 2011;  
565 Hayes, 2004; Moore, 2009) and may therefore facilitate conflict management. Perceiving and  
566 understanding one's own and the partner's emotions correctly may further enhance  
567 interpersonal interaction as it enables conflict partners to consciously regulate emotional  
568 responses to disagreements. Individuals may, for example, purposefully show soft emotions  
569 in order to down-regulate their conflict partner to prevent negative emotional contagion and  
570 conflict escalation (e.g., Overall, Simpson, & Struthers, 2013; Sandford, 2012).

571       Nevertheless, athletes and coaches have also been found to engage in *negative conflict*  
572 *management and resolution strategies*. Accordingly, athletes seem to employ more win-loss  
573 approaches and aggressive behaviours compared to non-athletes which were explained by the

574 competitive nature of sport. Besides showing aggressive behavioural tendencies, relational  
575 approaches have also been found to be ineffective or even increase interpersonal conflict  
576 (Holt et al., 2012; Kerwin et al., 2011). Relational strategies are usually targeting an  
577 individual directly (e.g., intelligence, skill level, etc.) rather than aiming at the actual  
578 problem, hence, causing feelings of personal affront or threat which in turn lead to reactant  
579 behaviours of the conflict partner (Holt et al., 2012; Miron & Brehm, 2006). Moreover,  
580 coaches seem to abuse their power position in terms of physical/emotional punishment, when  
581 ignoring athletes' needs or when not integrating them in decision-making processes (e.g.,  
582 Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2009; D'Arripe-Longueville et al., 1998).

### 583 **Consequences of Interpersonal Conflict**

584 Finally, conflict can lead to consequences which may relate to intrapersonal (e.g.  
585 well-being), interpersonal (e.g. termination, cohesion) as well as performance (e.g.  
586 competition result) factors and can either be positive, negative or neutral (see Figure 1).

587 **Intrapersonal consequences.** Interpersonal conflict is likely to influence the manner  
588 to which coaches and athletes think, feel and behave. Mellalieu et al. (2013), investigating  
589 conflict at major sport events, found that most responses to conflict were perceived negative  
590 (65-70%;  $N = 90$ ), whereas only few were perceived positive or neutral (5-29%). Negative  
591 cognitive effects included worry, confusion, or even panic; positive cognitions related to  
592 increased focus and task clarity. Affective responses covered, for example, frustration,  
593 feeling upset, disappointment, but also feeling more positive and confident; behavioural  
594 consequences were associated with withdrawal and defensive behaviours, as well as  
595 increased motivation and problem solving.

596 Additionally, multiple studies suggest a negative connection between interpersonal  
597 conflict and satisfaction (e.g., Paradis et al., 2014b; Sullivan & Gee, 2007). Further, conflict  
598 between coaches and youth athletes may lead to decreased self-description concerning



599 physiological abilities and overall performance (Jowett & Cramer, 2010). Athletes may also  
600 start to question their identity, skills, lose self-confidence or face emotional break downs after  
601 severe disputes. Further, it has been mentioned that conflict between peers can lead to  
602 athletes' isolation (Paradis et al., 2014a; Tamminen et al, 2013), increased competitive  
603 anxiety and other negative affective responses (Partridge & Knapp, 2015). Gould et al. (2002)  
604 further stated that Olympic coaches perceived conflicts about team selection processes before  
605 major competitions and an athlete's involvement in conflict during major competition as  
606 inhibiting their own coaching effectiveness. Taken together, poor-quality relationships and  
607 interpersonal conflict can increase stress levels in athletes and coaches (e.g. Fletcher et al.,  
608 2012; Hanton et al., 2005; Olusoga, Butt, Hays, & Maynard, 2009) and even lead to quitting  
609 the sport (Olusoga, Butt, Maynard, & Hays, 2010; Stirling, 2013). Conflict may as well have  
610 severe health-related consequences. In interaction with other factors, such as a high  
611 workload, conflict has shown to increase symptoms of athlete burnout and promote  
612 maladaptive eating habits (e.g., Shanmugam, Jowett, & Meyer, 2013, 2014; Smith,  
613 Gustafsson, & Hassmén, 2010; Tabei, Fletcher, & Goodger, 2012). However, it is important  
614 to keep in mind that multiple variables account for the development of psychological  
615 disorders, such as self-esteem, depressive symptoms, perfectionism and attachment  
616 (Shanmugam et al., 2013, 2014; Stirling & Kerr, 2008).

617         In contrast, interpersonal conflict may also facilitate personal growth and skill  
618 development, therefore lead to positive outcomes (Tamminen et al., 2013). Thus, athletes  
619 reported becoming more aware of their strengths, gaining perspective about their sport and  
620 viewing adversity as an ongoing journey. Additionally, athletes seemed to improve their  
621 social interactions, were more often willing to help and showed more appreciation for  
622 significant others. Overall, it is particularly important to consider positive aspects of conflict  
623 in order to challenge the negative connotation of the concept just as to develop a more

624 effective approach to conflict management. For future studies we suggest to take research on  
625 resilience into consideration as the important role of social support and high quality  
626 relationships in buffering effects on negative stress responses and increasing individuals'  
627 resilience to adversity has been documented recently (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014).

628         **Interpersonal consequences.** Conflict may also have interpersonal or relational  
629 consequences, such as relationship deterioration (e.g., disliking), relationship termination,  
630 formation of cliques, low team cohesion, deselection, favouritism, quitting a specific  
631 team/club and even dropping out of the sport (e.g., Antonini-Phillippe & Seiler, 2006;  
632 Kristiansen et al. 2012; Paradis et al., 2014a; Sullivan & Feltz, 2001; Tamminen et al., 2013).  
633 On the other hand, effective conflict solving strategies may positively influence relationships  
634 and cohesion as common goals can be worked out and information about one another is  
635 shared, leading to a better understanding of each other (e.g., Sullivan & Feltz, 2001).

636         **Performance consequences.** Finally, performance also seems to be affected by  
637 conflict; Mellalieu et al. (2013) found a moderate negative influence of interpersonal conflict  
638 on individual and team performance during major competitions. As pointed out previously,  
639 data was collected from a variety of sport participants, including coaches, managers and other  
640 staff members besides athletes. It therefore is possible that the negative effect of conflict on  
641 performance was alleviated by non-athlete participants and would have been greater when  
642 analysing athletes' data only. This assumption is supported by reports of adolescent athletes  
643 who reported a decrease in performance after intra-team conflict (Patridge & Knapp, 2015) as  
644 well as by high-profile athletes who were asked to identify factors influencing their  
645 performance at major competitions. Interviewees who previously failed in those major events  
646 mentioned the perceived negative impact of issues with coaches, team members and the  
647 support network more often than successful athletes (e.g., Gould et al., 2002; Greenleaf et al.,  
648 2001). Nevertheless, also positive outcomes of conflict can be found in the literature; for



674 perceived and described by athletes and coaches, how long does a single conflict episode last  
675 and why last some conflict episodes longer than others?); (c) conflict prevention and  
676 management (e.g., which behaviours do coaches and athletes show to resolve conflict and  
677 how do they differ from each other?); (d) conflict outcomes (e.g., how do coaches and  
678 athletes cope with conflict personally and what consequences does conflict have for their  
679 relationship and performance?). Additionally, research that focuses on testing interventions  
680 that aim to prevent and/or manage conflict is warranted. It is also essential to develop  
681 psychometric tools that are valid and reliable measures of different aspects of interpersonal  
682 conflict. The generated findings of this future research are likely to be more focussed as well  
683 as more consistent and less controversial since researchers have a conceptual and operational  
684 map to guide them.

685         In summary, a preliminary framework of interpersonal conflict in sport relationships  
686 was proposed in an attempt to generate research that is both systematic and focused. Guided  
687 by relevant, albeit limited, research surrounding the concept of interpersonal conflict within  
688 sport, the content and nature of conflict was discussed as well as its determinants and  
689 consequences. In addition, approaches to prevent and manage interpersonal conflict were  
690 discussed and were integrated into the proposed framework. Research in this area has  
691 practical applications including developing effective and healthy coaching environments  
692 where conflict is contained and managed well.

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**Figure Caption**

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Figure 1. A comprehensive framework of interpersonal conflict in sport relationships.