

## Coping with a Negative Coach Experience at a National Training Camp

Laura G. Farres, Canada

Laura G. Farres recently completed her Ph.D. in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Laura specializes in the area of psychopedagogy and the psychology of performance. She applies her knowledge and skills to exercise, health and sport contexts through her private consulting practice, Mind in Motion Consulting. Currently, she is authoring a beginning runner's journal for Greystone Books.

E-mail: [LGFarres@telus.com](mailto:LGFarres@telus.com)

### Abstract

Centralized training camps are occurring with more frequency at the national level in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Despite the emerging role of centralized training camps in athlete and team preparation, our understanding of the experience of athletes at these types of camps is limited. The purpose of this paper was to present a detailed account of how one female national athlete of a team sport experienced the activity of a six-week centralized training camp. More specifically, the questions examined the process of the experience for this athlete, the strategies she used to cope with some difficult coaching challenges at the camp, and the meaning emerging from her experience.

As a prelude to a larger, more comprehensive study, this paper presents the profile of one participant who experienced the activity of a six-week centralized training camp. The participant's story focuses on the day-to-day realities of her experience at the camp and the meaning she made from that experience. The profile begins with a background narrative of the participant's life history in sport. The underlying goal in presenting this profile is to present a contextually rich description so readers can make connections between their own experiences and that of the participant, and to hopefully stimulate more positive experiences for athletes at training camps, especially with respect to coach – athlete communication.

### Nathalie

At the time of these interviews, Nathalie was 28 years old and had been involved with the national team for eight years. Previously, she had attended numerous training camps, however only two of them had extended longer than one month. She worked full-time for a company that organizes an annual sporting event catering to both recreation and elite athletes. She took a leave of absence from the position to attend the centralized training camp in this study.

### Life History in Sport

Nathalie first started playing her sport when she was five years old but in the beginning it was not her number one sport:

*I grew up always drawn to sport in some way shape or form. I started with [different] teams when I was in kindergarten. Even though I was playing a bunch of different sports throughout grade school, squash was always my number one sport.*

Nathalie described her early self as, quite shy and quiet. I enjoyed small groups and I don't think I exuded a lot of confidence at that point. If you took a picture of me at that point, you would probably see me with my head down and rounded shoulders.

Nathalie was very successful at squash and competed at the national level and made the junior national team. She really enjoyed the individual nature and competitiveness of the sport and she developed some solid friendships from the experience. She also indicated that her squash coach had a positive impact on her even though he wanted her to choose squash as her main sport:

*He taught me a lot as far as individual strengths. He was positive. He probably would have been a lot stronger with me if he knew that squash was my number one sport. He was always disappointed in the fact that I played other sports as well, but I think in his heart, he knew that I was never going to be squash player. I just enjoyed other sports too much to focus on one. I wouldn't have enjoyed it.*

Nathalie competed in a number of team sports during her elementary and high school years but "none emerged as any more important than the other." It wasn't until grade 12 that the sport she now plays started to emerge as an important one:

*In the summer before my grade 12 year, a younger team that was a far better team than mine asked me to come and try out. I thought this is the big time. Even though this team was younger they were a lot better and in a stronger league. I made the team and my skills developed and I decided I really quite enjoyed it. I kept improving with the sport and ended up being an MVP at a provincial competition and we also won the provincial championships.*

It was at the provincial championship where Nathalie first became aware of the provincial program, "I asked the coach about the provincial team jackets I saw around. What team are those girls from? He said those are provincial team girls. And I'm like well how do you try out?" The coach told Nathalie the times of the provincial trials; she went and tried out for the Under 18 provincial team. Nathalie made the provincial team that year, which she credited to the provincial coach taking a chance on her athleticism rather than her skill in the sport, "I guess the coach saw a green player in an athletic body and chose me for the team." It was that summer with the provincial team when Nathalie was identified by the national team coach at the Western Canada Games competition and asked to attend a camp, "I guess I kind of flourished that summer." She decided to attend her first national team camp even though she still considered squash her number one sport.

*Nathalie described her first national team camp experience as follows:*

*I absolutely loathed [the camp]. I hated every minute of it. Training twice a day and the coach was a tyrant and I didn't know quite how to take him. It was tough training coming from my youth player [back-*

*ground] and not knowing really what to expect...so I wasn't physically nor probably mentally prepared for what a training camp would bring. I came from a really fun, positive experience with the provincial girls and then you get thrown into [that]...You just count down the days....I didn't really know anybody at that time. Everybody is interested in making the team so it's a very individual experience. You might be competing with that person for a spot not that I was competing with anyone at that point. I just wanted my own bed. It's not a warm experience and I don't think the coaches really helped that either.*

Nathalie was not selected for the team; however, she continued to balance her involvement in both sports, but the challenge became increasingly difficult. She really started to feel the pressure to choose:

*The National coach said if you want to become a player on this team you have to commit solely to this sport and I was like okay but I didn't quit squash. Squash people were saying you have to move to Calgary in order to compete at our high performance center in order to move on. All these people were tugging me in different directions.*

Trying to balance both sports, Nathalie found herself going from one event to the next, “I had just competed and won at the nationals for squash and then I was on a plane back home to go to Florida for a national team camp.” Nathalie did not feel prepared for the camp physically so again her camp experience was not that positive, “It was a miserable experience at the training camp.” However, this time she made the

team and traveled to a competition in Central America. That experience was equally as challenging for Nathalie, “It was just horrendous. A lot of people got sick, including me.” As the pressure to choose between the two sports became increasingly more difficult to manage, Nathalie responded to the pressure in a way she described as “surprising”, “I decided to go away for a year. I was having so many tugs between the two sports I thought, I'm just not going to do either.” This decision ended up being fairly significant for Nathalie because during her trip, she had a cycling accident, badly injuring her knee, “I ended up ripping my knee open...They stitched me up...with dirt and gravel still in my knee. Eventually, I received the infection causing gangrene...and I almost lost my leg.” In essence the injury actually helped Nathalie make the decision between her two sports, “I just made the decision at that point that squash was perhaps not the most fun and probably harder on my injured knee so I just slid into [the sport I play today] without much of a decision.”

Nathalie also played her sport at a Canadian University. The first two years she described as “a real blast”, but her subsequent years were more challenging. Her university coach and some of her teammates asked her to take on more of a leadership role to combat some of the other not so positive personalities on the team. The challenge was difficult and the added responsibility came with resistance from a few of the other players. Nathalie recalled one particular instance that highlighted the resistance to her leadership role, “It was the first time I was ever told while playing to fuck off...and I was mortified. I never swear at people. I just couldn't believe it.” The experience ultimately contributed to Nathalie as a person, “Somebody handed me the role, saying we want you to take more of a leadership role. I thought, okay I'll try and

work on it and I did...I think [through that] the playing personality came on and the leader in me came out that wasn't there before.”

Nathalie's cycling accident also made her re-evaluate the effort she was putting into her academic opportunities and challenge her confidence in the area:

*I wasn't really confident in myself as far as school was concerned before I went away and had that little accident. After I came back I realized that I had been sort of cheating myself as far as not really putting effort into school. So once I started to do that my confidence gained. I'd gotten into university just doing what I needed to do and then in university I'm like, if I get sixty percent I'll be okay. Whereas when I came back anything under eighty percent was so unsatisfactory...I think my first two years at university I was just not into school or even my sport but just into having fun and going drinking with friends.*

Nathalie experienced a number of successes in her sport while balancing her national team and community involvement with her university team. She won a couple of national university competitions with her team and she attended the world university games with the Canadian team and won athlete of the year for her university in the same year. On the world games team, she met a woman who is still one of her closest friends today. She described close friendships with teammates as something that is quite unique for her even though she has lots of fun and really enjoys her teammates:

*In sport, I wouldn't consider a lot of my teammates good friends. It's like high school, you are there because*

*that's what brings you together, not necessarily because you are drawn to each other but there was something between Megan and I that clicked...It was just wonderful to get to know her and she developed into one of my closest friends today.*

The University games, themselves, she described as unique and similar to an "Olympic-type event" with a number of different sports and countries in attendance.” Two elements defined that experience for Nathalie. First, she began what was soon to become a long trail of injuries, “I tore my quad...you will find out later that's a bit of a running theme. I'm constantly injured.” Second, she had some challenges with the national team coach, “For whatever reason the head coach didn't like my style. She would choose me for all these teams but would then kind of be hard on me. I don't know if it was her intention to make me stronger but I didn't need the strengthening.”

Nathalie's experience with the national team continued with more training camps of both a short and long duration. Nathalie's perspective on training camps was fairly consistent throughout:

*I never really found training camps that much fun until later. I used to hate getting letters in the mail, thinking oh I've been invited to this camp. Oh my god, here we go again. It's very regimented and I'm more of a relaxed person. That military sort of schedule is not for everybody.*

She did remember one training camp that was quite enjoyable. They were preparing to qualify for the world competition:

*We were in [one city] for quite some time. We got to choose our room-*

*mates. We were living in apartment style residences for about a month. It was the most freedom we'd ever had and probably the happiest the team has ever been as far as flexibility. Once you'd done your training you'd go off and into your own lives. Everyone was located in the same area but you could still have the freedom to do whatever -- lounge, make your own dinners. That was a fun experience.*

The team qualified for the world competition the following year and that fall Nathalie's mother was diagnosed with cancer. So the next year was extremely challenging for Nathalie as she tried to spend as much time with her mother as possible and still train with the national team as they were preparing. The whole experience started to make Nathalie examine her values and what was important in life:

*A lot of the national team preparation was in the [city where I lived] but the team would travel to Europe and Asia. I didn't travel with them. When the team was here I would be doing three hours of chemotherapy with my mom and then going to national team training after. I would listen to people saying this sport is life and death and I was just like, give me a break. No it's not...That kind of changed my perspective on sport and what was really important.*

Nathalie attended the world competition which she described as "such a bad experience because we underachieved." When she returned she made some choices based on her mother's illness and also her own needs. She quit her old community team and started a new team, which provided her with a chance to play locally and minimize travel

time to and from practice. Nathalie was a bit disappointed with some of her friends at this time and their reaction to her choices:

*I was sort of disenchanted with the world I would say, especially with people from my sport who claimed to be your good friends. They didn't really ask or maybe think to ask what I was going through. Some had bitter feelings because I left the community team, but I didn't see driving two ways for 45 minutes as being paramount to my life. I thought it was a waste of time. Time I'd rather be spending with my mom.*

Over the next year Nathalie balanced her involvement with the national team with looking after her mother:

*My mom and I just hung out and I looked after her except when I was away with the national team. I spent my entire days being with her and I would have done the exact same thing for 10 years if I could have had that opportunity. Sport was not important. I didn't need it...She passed away that October.*

During that same period, a new coach was named to the national team and Nathalie described his involvement as "breathing new breath into [the experience]. It was just more fun...Maybe I bought into it a lot more...Maybe I wasn't seeing other stuff and how he was treating other people. I certainly enjoyed the experience."

After her mother passed away, Nathalie experienced a number of injuries related to her knee. She acknowledged the mental impact that her mother's death had had on her focus and the role that played in her injuries during that period:

*I was still focusing on my mother's death and I think when you're a slight fraction behind mentally, physically your body can't really keep up and that's when all my injuries occurred...I injured my knee that spring and then went out with [the national team] in the summer and blew out my ACL (anterior cruciate ligament); a near complete tear. I then saw a surgeon and he said to just rehabilitate it. In October I ended up completely tearing it. I had surgery in December and then hurried back from that and fractured my knee. So that was the beginning of the whole knee saga. I think it's how he demands his players to train...Eventually it takes its toll. On me it certainly did. But it was a fun experience nonetheless.*

Nathalie coped with the injuries and developed both awareness and skills in dealing with these types of situations. Her process involved normalizing injuries by viewing them as "just a part of an athlete's life" and seeing the "small amount of depression" that comes with them as a natural part of the process. She was also aware of how people's identities can play an important role in how injuries are dealt with:

*For a lot of people they define themselves by their sport. I'm Suzie Smith and I'm a rugby player. I don't consider myself one of those people. I think you can have a healthier perspective if you do not define yourself by what you do. So I just say well this is something I have to deal with. I just take one injury at a time. I'm very short-term goal oriented. I set my goal for that day or that week and then accomplish it, feel good about it and move on. I wouldn't be*

*disappointed if at week one I can't walk because that's too depressing. You just take off little bites.*

Nathalie's role on the national team was also beginning to change. Her teammates viewed her, as did the coach, as one of the leaders or veterans on the team. As the team struggled with issues surrounding the coach, Nathalie was asked to lead some of the discussions. Her university leadership experience played a role in her ability to take on this challenge as did her life experiences:

*I was more comfortable with myself as compared to with my university team and I was able to be that role and not be timid or quiet. Plus I'd been through a different experience than probably most of the players so I was less disturbed by what was going on because in the big picture it didn't really mean that much.*

Nathalie's rash of injuries continued and she ended up missing the next world competition qualifier because of a deep bone bruise that can be "career ending for many athletes." At this point she took the advice of the doctor, taking time off, modifying her training, and thinking less with heart and more with her head:

*I started doing what activities I could. I would be on the stationary bike for two hours at times just doing what I could to strengthen it. Four months from the camp, the doctor said continue to listen to your body, but try and play...I totally changed my training because he said the impact activities are the most damaging. So I did a lot of biking and didn't do running. I don't think the National coach fancied that.*

This is Nathalie's experience of the six-week training camp.

### **Nathalie's Profile**

I was coming off a serious injury so a lot of my preparation was ensuring that I was physically ready for the camp. I was attending physiotherapy [a lot]. As far as work was concerned, I had to arrange my job. I took a leave of absence. They are fairly understanding. One of the bosses used to compete with the track and field national team. I also had to arrange the household and then the care of my grandmother.

I really didn't know personally how my body was going to hold up because of the [type of] injury that I had. I had a lot of doubts about how it would hold up with two to three training sessions a day. Leading into the training camp, the coach had basically said 'all I want you to do is get yourself ready to play. I don't care if you train once a day', but, I didn't really find that reassuring. It conflicted with how I feel about always going out there to prove yourself.

I was having problems sleeping before the camp, and I had injured my knee competing at provincial tournament the day before. So, I was pretty anxious as far as that was concerned because I wasn't really sure how my knee would hold up. But I was looking forward to seeing people, and the fitness testing on the first day doesn't really bother me. It's like cramming for an exam - once you're there, you're there. You come in with all you've got. You just go out and run, it doesn't really faze me that much.

In the morning, we all get up as a team. Everybody's woken up at a certain hour. It was pretty early, like 7 o'clock in the morning. Breakfast is served at 7:30 and I hate eating breakfast that early in the morning. We then start training right after. So, 45

minutes after ingesting your food, you're supposed to be out there warming up, and I prefer a couple of hours in between eating. At any rate, you start to walk towards the practice facility at 8, then get ready to play.

We finished the first training session and then we had a sport psychologist come in. I was very hopeful because I think it's an essential thing at a higher level to have that type of mental training fulfilled. I didn't really learn anything from them actually. There were a couple of sessions where I thought, yeah there's some quality stuff there, but it was mostly theory based and, I figured, if you were taking a university course it would be very valuable, but we had very little time and they were not practical enough. That was a big disappointment.

Then we would go on to lunch. I would spend a lot of time at physiotherapy. Then we would get ready for the next training session that afternoon. Dinner would be right after our training session. The evenings would usually be free, although the coach would often stick a meeting in there somewhere. They could be either individual meetings, where the coaches would tell you where you stood, or there could be team meetings. Physiotherapy was always there for those who needed it, so there wasn't a huge amount of down time even though the coach claimed there was.

The coach treated training as more of a 9 to 5 job, but some of the players joked that it was a 5 to 9 job. Also, on Tuesdays and Thursdays there were 3 sessions a day. So, in the middle of the day, another technical session was squished in. It would be a light session, but it would still add up, you know, you're still there pounding your body somewhat.

The training sessions, in hindsight, were a waste of time, but at the time, I would have bought into anything. I was there for the team. A lot of the sessions were very technical, but not really game specific. They weren't necessarily physically taxing, although I found them to be because every time I would move quickly or reach out, I would re-injure myself. But they weren't extraordinarily difficult. Sometimes I think we just did training for the sake of doing training. Tuesdays and Thursdays were harder days because they were fitness days.

The first two days of any camp are always high anxiety. I find it's a huge melting pot to start, but as time goes on, players tend to separate themselves. I don't compare myself to other players. I'm just very self-focused on what my body is saying. Of course, I read cues from the coaches, but I think everybody does that. I don't sit there wondering who the four cuts will be, I assume that I'm going to be one of those cuts, and then try and fight to prove myself. After the first two days of training camp, I was really concerned about my knee, and the doctors had told me to listen to what my body was saying. It's a big shock to get thrown into a camp situation where you're training 2 to 3 times a day, and I found it especially difficult.

For me, physiotherapy at the camp was a bit frustrating. I found that there wasn't a lot of hands-on treatment. Instead, I was hooked up to a machine - it's very much a routine that way. So I felt very constrained by the situation. I found it difficult and an enormous waste of time because the time that might have been spent stretching, resting, or sleeping was constantly soaked up by physiotherapy twice a day. I mean, it was a fun atmosphere because people would hang around and talk and the physiotherapist was very nice. I spent a lot of time with her.

The coaches brought a stationary bike to the practice for me. I had sort of demanded that I needed the equipment. I spent a lot of time warming up on the bike, and if I wasn't involved in practice, I would bike the whole practice and then watch what was going on in practice. But I got the sense, at that point, that the coaches saw the bike as a weakness. For the physiotherapist and myself, it was a long-term way of helping me heal. The coaches saw it in terms of my incapability to heal short term, which wasn't really the case. I was just trying to cover my bases so that I could last for the long term. As it turned out, they did see as a weakness, which made me practice a bit differently, and which probably led to more injuries.

In my individual meeting, the head coach suddenly changed his original position of, 'I don't care if you only practice once a day, I just want you to be able to play, you're a valuable member of this team' to 'you may not even make this team', at least that's what he led me to believe. He didn't think that I was going to last the whole time and, eventually, he wanted to see me training two and three times a day. So his thinking changed drastically, so I thought well, that's fine, I'll go out and practice two to three times a day and hopefully my body will hold up. I knew I could do it; it just wouldn't be the most logical thing to do to my body. Some of the players recognized that and were upset. I don't think I was in the group that was going to be cut; I really thought that I had something to add. And the coach denies that that's basically what he was telling me. But I'm very introspective and I try to read, maybe to a fault, into what they're trying to say and that's how I saw it.

After Friday evening, we were basically free until Sunday afternoon. So that's a good mental break, which I think is necessary. You would work hard all week, achieve

small goals, have something to look forward to, and then start the cycle again. One weekend, I came back home, another weekend I went away with my friend and a couple of girls from the team. I think it's important to get away from that atmosphere because then you're not trapped in the same environment all the time with nothing to do. It was unfortunate that some of the players would be stuck there, but I would leave my car for some of them.

Each week, it was the same routine. You just had to take each day at a time. It was very regimented. You would wake up, eat, play, come back, eat, play, and come back. There would be meetings in between, physiotherapy in between, obviously personal hygiene involved in between. But I found that, being at physiotherapy as much as I was, there wasn't a huge amount of personal time although I would try to get involved in a book or something.

I pulled my hamstring over the weekend and that started the second week for me. That was sort of the beginning of the end. It's unfortunate because if you just take a few days off as opposed to trying to work through things, it's healthier down the line. But I don't think the coaches think too highly of players who are sitting out. And if you're not complaining about it, they assume that you're okay so you're sent into the drill. That was really frustrating for me.

After the second week, the coach did a round of cuts on Sunday. Certain players weren't affected, and didn't concern themselves with it, but a good majority were worried. Often, those who worry shouldn't be worried. I wasn't too fearful of getting cut because the head coach and I had another individual meeting and he said at this point, 'Well, I see you as part of my team.' So he'd bounced from what he had

said the second time to a more positive perspective.

At this point, I was just really concerned about the hamstring because it was not getting any better. What should have been a week to two week long injury was lengthening. So I found that really frustrating; the physiotherapist and I would specifically agree together that certain sessions would be taken off and then, in the middle of the session, I would be handed a yellow pinnie and be expected to go and perform. So there was a lack of communication among all the staff members, which really made it frustrating for me. I just found the injury really frustrating. It was something that needed time and I was not given that time.

A few days later, the team was scheduled to travel to a city close by to play two exhibition games against Italy. We stayed at a very nice hotel. We had roommates at that point. You're more into a competition phase so you train once a day, sometimes twice, but it's more recovery-based, not trying to gain fitness but just maintain what you have.

The days on which we played evening games were very long, and drawn out, days. We would get to sleep in a bit longer, breakfast was a bit later, but it was usually chock-a-block packed with meetings. Sometimes we would have a meeting in the morning, and a meeting in the afternoon, and eat three times before going out to play. It was a bit much, but it was very routine-like. For earlier games, we would wake up earlier and usually get a couple of meals in before, say, a noon game. But we would cram in meetings. There would be a team meeting on what the other team looked like and how we were going to play against them, and then we would break off into individual positional meetings.

For the first game, I was sitting on the bench so I got a good view of what went on. I thought the team played fairly well at times. The second game didn't look as good as the first game. I knew I wasn't going to be playing at all. I was just a little bit embarrassed deep down just sitting there. He cleaned the bench throughout the two games. I think everybody got an opportunity to play and then there was me, sitting there, realizing that I wasn't even on the list. I just wanted so badly to be out there helping out. So I was embarrassed and frustrated knowing that I could not physically perform. We had just come to the conclusion that I wasn't going to be ready.

Leading up to this, one of the girl's mothers was very sick and was in a coma. There was a huge discussion between myself and the coach and this player. They were recommending that she should stay another day and a half and fly out at that point to go see her mother. I found that really disappointing - that they were choosing the sport ahead of her mother's illness. I basically approached the coaches and said she needs to go home. They didn't know if her mother was going to make it through the night. She went home. The last week before we came into the city to play Italy her mom passed away and she was able to be there. After the whole Italy series, half the team, or so, went to her mom's service. My heart just went out to her. I thought it was really important that she had been there and that I had taken up the cause for her with the coaches and really stood firm on what I thought she should do. She had been fearful of asking for what she really wanted of the coaches, which is sad. I think sometimes we get very consumed and we think that this is our life, and our whole world, and that's just not the case. You have opportunities throughout your life to play a sport. You only have one opportunity to be with your mom on her deathbed.

After the games, we would have an opportunity to sit around and talk with the people we knew in the stands. We would then board a bus and always eat a meal right away. Sometimes the coach would say some words but otherwise we would just start the routine again. The next day, typically, was a recovery day, getting on a stationary bike and just spinning for a while.

We travelled back to Kingston for a few days. It was the same sort of training sessions. We were back in the training phase. We weren't staying at the dorms anymore; we were staying at a hotel. The coach still had two more players to cut so certain players were on edge. The final cuts were made after three or four days, right before the team went down to Boston. One of the cuts, I would say, was a surprise and the other was a self-cut due to injury. The team went down to Boston right after that.

I think the world competition seemed so far off, even though every day we'd wake up and signs would be posted on the physiotherapist's door saying how many days left to go until the world championship. I was still injured. I could sense that the coaches were growing a little bit, not impatient, but all of a sudden they were telling me one thing which was, 'you're playing your role and we appreciate what you do behind the scenes, even if you don't play a minute, you bring so much to this team blah, blah, blah.' And then a week and a half down the line they were telling me that things had changed and they needed me to play that day in order to see where I was. It was just very confusing and mixed up. I was riding this roller coaster and, based on what they were saying, I would change the way I performed in training. Not the performance itself, but how I would go out there and exert myself.

In Boston, we had two international games. We stayed in the same hotel for both of the games. We still had a roommate. Hotel eating is different from dorm eating because everything is buffet style and you can have as much as you want. You don't have to control your meal and make sure you have the right amount of items. The training wasn't too crazy, but I just kept re-tearing and re-tearing [my hamstring]. I just shouldn't have been training. It just kept getting worse and worse. And what should have been a two week long injury turned into a seven week long injury.

The first game against China was a fairly good one. I think those were a couple of our best games against the Americans and the Chinese. The US game was phenomenal. I would have liked to have been involved as a player, but it was still great to be there. Then things kind of went downhill from there.

I think some of the players were growing restless from sitting on the bench. I think the coach almost looked to me to try and calm them a bit, but I was experiencing the same feelings as before sitting on that bench. I was embarrassed that I was not healthy and frustrated that I couldn't go out there and fill the role. At this point right after the games, he was saying, 'We need to see you. We need to see if you can play.' This was a drastic change from the last time he talked to me, but one of the players had become injured and it just changed the picture a bit, which I understood. He had a job to do and I was a pawn just like the rest.

So the next day we travelled back to Montreal from Boston by bus and flew out to Calgary. That was a horrendous day. Our National Organization is trying to save money so instead of flying us directly there, we took the milk run back to Calgary. That day really took a lot out of the players. The

coaches saw it as a day of rest. The players didn't. Travel days are just big waiting days; they drag on and they take a lot out of you. To pass the time you end up socializing with people that you're comfortable with. People go on Starbucks runs if you're at an airport or read magazines together. You just try and spend the time as enjoyably as possible.

We were at a very nice hotel about an hour out of Calgary. We were heading into a new series, coming off a high point, and we hoped to keep building. So we trained. There was a bit more media exposure. Our first game was really terrible so the coach hit the roof. He could barely talk to us. I think he was very disappointed with what the team had just done and that just affected the mood of the entire team. He had a tendency to get extremely angry at times. In situations like this, I find that female players really play off of somebody; especially somebody's who's in a power position. So I felt that the players were very aware of the coach's moods and emotions and he was really upset. He said not to hang onto things from games, but there he was really hanging on to something.

It was a little different for me. I sat there and watched that game and having basically said, leading into it, that I couldn't be ready for it. I would, however, no matter what, try for the next game. But physically I just couldn't for that game. I was slowly getting better and if I went out and played I would have dinged it right there. So it was different not having played in the game at the time and wishing that I could have done something other than cheerleading. I was just so focused on wanting to get better.

After that game we had a day off, but it just didn't feel like a day off because we were constantly wondering what the head coach was thinking, what was going through his

mind. Now the practice before the second game, he'd mentioned to me that the coaches were looking at playing me in a different position and I kind of laughed at him. He told me the reasons why he thought it would be good for me and I still didn't believe him.

On the day of the game, the first thing that he did was bring me into his room. I thought he wanted to talk about this position. Eventually he did, but he had brought me into the room to have an absolute go at me. He just tore into me, swear words, blah, blah, blah. He was extremely upset with the team and he wanted some player to bring his emotions out on. He was really upset with one player in particular and angry because the team had performed so badly the game before. He said if we didn't perform well this game, we would be in a lot of trouble with him. He also said we wouldn't enjoy ourselves for the rest of the world tournament. So he was basically threatening me. He said that he was thinking of putting me in a new position. Also that his blood pressure was really high and that he was under a lot of stress. I thought oh gees sorry, what can I do? He was concerned that the players weren't thinking about the game. I thought the majority of players were focused on this game.

So game day arrived. There was lots of fan support and the game was televised. Just before half time the coach said, 'You're going in at this position.' So I ended up playing that about half of the game. It was exciting. We ended up winning and I contributed to the scoring. I felt a huge amount of relief, not for myself, or that I contributed to the point total, or that I got into the game, but because the team performed well and we weren't going to get it from him. I just didn't want the team to suffer because he was basically threatening

the whole team through me. This was something that I couldn't tell the team about. I think I told one or two players, just because I was shocked at how he had just behaved with me. But I took the attitude that he picked the right player of all the players to get angry at because I had really nothing to lose. I hadn't been playing. I just took it because I could probably handle it more than the vast majority of players. They would get extremely angry and or extremely emotional. I was just fairly indifferent. I felt badly for the team and I felt badly about his blood pressure, but there was really nothing I could do.

It was an amazing feeling, to get in the game, play at about seventy-five percent and know that I could still improve and that I hadn't suffered any major setbacks. That was really good. So, we moved on and ended this whole situation on a high note instead of a low note.

Although I don't think that I got the best attention for my injury, I really enjoyed talking with the physiotherapist. I thought she was a supportive individual. I really spent a lot of time with a couple of players. One got cut due to injury, so I missed her. Two others were probably two of my closest friends on the team. I got along with basically everybody on the team. I also enjoyed spending time with my roommate.

When I came back from the camp, I didn't really want to talk to anybody about it. I just didn't want to hear people's opinions. There was still a lot of bitterness involved. A few weeks later, a bunch of players were decarded from the program and I think that was the final slap in the face. I was one of the players. For no reason some of the players got cut and then a couple of weeks after that the coach got fired. You go through different emotions.

I think as time went by and the bitterness dissolved somewhat, I realized that it was kind of an accomplishment. But right now I can name so many things that were going on. For example, the coach's personal perspective on selections often doesn't go beyond a certain group of players. So you end up with a familiar name, a familiar body and just reselecting those same players over the years. I think he kept choosing certain players hoping to make them skilled players and on the international scene, you just can't do that. You can have players that are natural athletes, but you still need players who are made for the game. After the competition, the head coach was quoted as saying that he had learned a great deal, but that we were just not a skilled team. He had chosen us - the group of players that he thought was the best - then all of a sudden he went against the players for not being skilled enough.

Also, the way he treated players and the way he communicated, or didn't communicate, to certain players left a lot of disparity between the players. You end up just fighting for yourself because the person next to you is getting treated very well whereas you're getting a strip torn off of you for no real reason. So I think that took a toll on players. In the end, I could see how some players, because they were treated poorly, ended up comparing themselves to other players and saying well I produced this, this and this even though I was injured. I wouldn't really do this during the camp, but I was doing it after. So I can understand how certain players throughout the whole training camp were doing that. You need a unified force, everybody for each other as opposed to everybody for themselves. I saw that as being a problem. The coach treated some players very poorly. I also think the sport psychologist didn't work for the team. I thought the concept was excellent, but I

think it needed to be more practical than theoretical. It ended up being just another thing that added into people's days. The players just didn't believe in it.

Also, I didn't think that the practices prepared us well for the international game. There was a lot of wasted time doing, and redoing, drills because a lot of us couldn't do them. If you are not skilled enough to do something so simplistic then initially the problem is selection phase. There are always opponents in your face and we never really practiced that way.

I found the coach's communication with me, and how his impression or opinion would change day-to-day, very difficult. I didn't know what was going on from one day to the next. And I understand he's got a job to do and we are all pawns, in a sense, but you believe what they say and then all of a sudden it changes. Your attitude or what you put into your sessions changes as well. Communication ebbs and flows and my relationship with the head coach dictated how I went on to train. I found also the lack of communication between and among the staff members, the physiotherapist and myself really poor. I think that hurt me as well. The physiotherapist and I would agree on one thing, like I wouldn't take part in a certain training session. This is my rest. She would apparently talk to a coach and then during training another coach would hand me a pinnie for a drill. By that time, with my personality, it's too late. If someone hands me a pinnie, I think well, suck it up and start performing.

At training camp, I found the experience with the groups of people very good. I tended to just get to know a few people really well. In Kingston, we were living in our own rooms so we tended to socialize with the people that were close with us.

Then, when we were on trips, we had roommates so we would end up socializing with them. But I enjoyed spending time with everybody. So it wasn't the players that I had a negative experience with. I really liked all the players.

Three and a half weeks is a long selection phase. It takes away from a lot of team preparation because the team doesn't really start forming as a group until a month into the six-week preparation. I think, because the team wasn't formed early on, we ended up essentially with two and half weeks when every player was there. I understand that mental toughness and battling, but I think it takes away from coming together as a group when you're just fighting as an individual to make the team. Also the preparation against Italy was good, but because it was the easiest set of games that we saw the entire time, I think that got us - the staff and the players – salivating, and thinking that we had something special here. But on the measuring stick it was way down there. So I think perhaps we, the players and the coaching staff, started to take things for granted.

I take away some of the good friendships. I guess for me, I had a bit of a unique perspective, more so than any other player because I got to watch a bunch of players and how they reacted. I got to know their practice personalities more so than they know themselves just because being injured and riding the bike during practices, I was always there at the side. So I found that quite interesting, seeing the different personalities of the different players. I got to analyze that quite a bit.

It's different to be on the side at practice, having no role, having no choice about it. And you can't really do anything about it either because it just takes time. When

you're pretty much slotted in as a starter and then on some games not even being on the roster, it's a different role. You keep things in perspective. You still need to do a job and your job is to perhaps be captain of the bench or whatever, and you try and help out in that regard. There's just nothing much you can do about it. You just sum it up to really bad luck and I've had a lot of bad luck. So you can't get angry about it. Sure there were times when it really upset me but I didn't tell other players about that. I would just keep it to myself because they had their own worries and it was just something that I had to deal with.

If I could go back, I wouldn't tear my hamstring. Perhaps even before camp, ideally, I would stop my job a month early and prepare my body better instead of sitting in a chair for 12 plus hours a day. Preparing my body might have helped the in-camp experience. Because I was coming off an injury, I was even more behind the eight ball. One teammate would always tell me, 'you don't really have to prove anything'. Maybe I should have just held off, but that's a very difficult thing for me to do.

I definitely feel that communication is incredibly important. And I think there's nothing wrong with telling an individual or a team that they are awful. But I think you have to also say you're a good player and I chose you because of this and this and this, and this is what you can bring to the team, this is how I see you improving, and this is what I need you to do to improve so as to get yourself out of this awful category. The coach didn't really bring out the best in players. He tended to try and bring out the best in a select few and rip down others. So if, in any way, I could try and prevent that so that there was more of a unified force versus a solitary force, it would help. The coach was constantly changing his thought pattern

within short periods of time. He had said, three months before, that it was going to be different, that he was going to be more positive. I think, sometimes, that he was, but just not all the time.

I think it will be a better experience as time goes by. I think what makes it so much

harder is thinking about how close you were and how just a few little details could have made the experience a lot better. I think that's what you end up focusing on. It's a difficult pill to swallow. It doesn't paint the picture a different colour. It just makes a bad situation not much better.