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## The Application of the Sport Commitment Model to Strength and Conditioning

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## The Application of the Sport Commitment Model to Strength and Conditioning

### Abstract

Since strength and conditioning has become accepted as a necessity for individuals to succeed in athletics, strength and conditioning professionals have been asking the same question. What can be done to get athletes to commit to a strength training program? Whether in-season or out of season, strength and conditioning professionals attempt to assist athletes in committing to a program using a variety of motivational strategies. The Sport Commitment Model (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993) is a theoretical model which can help strength coaches understand the varying commitment levels of the athletes. Specifically, the Sport Commitment Model suggests both antecedents and consequences of commitment. The varying levels of commitment are caused by the athletes' motivation or desire to participate in the training sessions. Athlete's motivation can take two forms, they either want to be part of the training sessions or feel as though they are forced to be part of the training sessions. Weiss and Weiss (2003) would label these types of commitment as attraction based or entrapment based, respectively.

THE APPLICATION OF THE SPORT COMMITMENT MODEL  
TO STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING

A Research Project  
Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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This Study by: Nicholas Ryan Troupe

Entitled: The Application of The Sport Commitment Model to Strength and Conditioning

Has been approved as meeting the research project requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| INTRODUCTION.....  | 1    |
| CHAPTER 1. SPORT COMMITMENT MODEL.....                   | 3    |
| Determinants of Sport Commitment.....                    | 6    |
| Sport Enjoyment.....                                     | 7    |
| Involvement Alternatives.....                            | 8    |
| Personal Investment.....                                 | 9    |
| Social Constraints.....                                  | 10   |
| Involvement Opportunities.....                           | 11   |
| Social Support.....                                      | 12   |
| Application to Exercise.....                             | 13   |
| Conclusion.....  | 16   |
| CHAPTER 2. APPLICATION TO STRENGTH AND CONIDTIONING..... | 17   |
| Sport Enjoyment.....                                     | 18   |
| Involvement Alternatives.....                            | 20   |
| Personal Investment.....                                 | 21   |
| Social Constraints.....                                  | 22   |
| Involvement Opportunities.....                           | 23   |
| Social Support.....                                      | 24   |
| Conclusion.....  | 26   |
| REFERENCES.....  | 28   |

## **The Application of The Sport Commitment Model to Strength and Conditioning**

Since strength and conditioning has become accepted as a necessity for individuals to succeed in athletics, strength and conditioning professionals have been asking the same question. What can be done to get athletes to commit to a strength training program? Whether in-season or out of season, strength and conditioning professionals attempt to assist athletes in committing to a program using a variety of motivational strategies. The Sport Commitment Model (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993) is a theoretical model which can help strength coaches understand the varying commitment levels of the athletes. Specifically, the Sport Commitment Model suggests both antecedents and consequences of commitment. The varying levels of commitment are caused by the athletes' motivation or desire to participate in the training sessions. Athlete's motivation can take two forms, they either want to be part of the training sessions or feel as though they are forced to be part of the training sessions. Weiss and Weiss (2003) would label these types of commitment as attraction based or entrapment based, respectively.

There has been little research investigating athletes' levels of commitment to strength and conditioning, however, there has been some research examining individuals' commitment to exercise (Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis, & Griouios, 2002; Wilson, Rodgers, Carpenter, Hall, Hardy, & Fraser, 2004).

Conclusions can be drawn from the research that examined commitment to

exercise and applied to strength and conditioning because many of the activities performed during exercise training sessions are strength or endurance type exercises. Specifically, two research studies (Alexandris et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2004) examined a person's commitment to exercise in general. The study by Alexandris et al. (2002) investigated the Sport Commitment Model in relation to an individual's commitment to exercise in a health club setting. The Wilson et al. (2004) study applied The Sport Commitment Model to college students and examined the relationship between commitment and exercise behavior.

In order to understand the application of the Sport Commitment Model to strength and conditioning, the construction of the Sport Commitment Model as well as finding from the testing of this model to a specific sport or team will be examined. General conclusions will also be drawn from the current sport research and applied to strength and conditioning. Specifically, the model's application in the strength and conditioning setting will be based on the two previously mentioned exercise studies. The rationale behind using these two studies as the basis for applying the Sport Commitment Model to strength and conditioning is that they are dealing with exercise commitment and not commitment to a specific sport.

## CHAPTER 1

### SPORT COMMITMENT MODEL

The Sport Commitment Model, which will be explained in detail in this section, was created with the purpose of examining the motivational drive of recreational to elite athletes in organized athletics (Scanlan et al., 1993). The model examined reasons athletes committed specifically to their sport. For example, what keeps a football player from quitting during a tough practice. The Sport Commitment Model has never been used to look at athletes' commitment levels in relation to the off-season and pre-season training that goes into an athlete's preparation for participation in athletics. Examining what previous research has discovered and applying those principles to the strength and conditioning setting is something that has not yet been done. This information would be very useful for strength coaches to better understand how to improve the commitment of the athletes to the off-season and pre-season training programs. Before the model can be applied to the strength and conditioning setting, an understanding of the development of the model is needed.

Before the development of the Sport Commitment Model, Scanlan and colleagues had to address three important issues in regards to the construct of commitment (Scanlan et al., 1993). First, a clear definition of commitment was needed. The definition of commitment has taken on the role of a general psychological state, which means that an athlete has made a conscious decision to be a part of something (Scanlan et al., 1993). The actual definition used explains



the idea of commitment being one of a persistence of an action even when faced with adverse situations. An example of this would be a football player playing in a game rather than being with family after a loved one passes away.

Secondly, an exhaustive review of literature occurred in order to identify relevant constructs of sport commitment (Scanlan et al., 1993). Even though a wide range of commitment literature was used in trying to identify elements of commitment, Rusbult's Investment Model provided Scanlan and colleagues (Scanlan et al., 1993) a foundation for the Sport Commitment Model. From the literature, the elements of commitment that were agreed upon for the initial testing of the Sport Commitment Model included: sport enjoyment, involvement alternatives, personal investment, social constraints, and involvement opportunities (Scanlan et al., 1993).

The final issue that needed to be addressed in the creation of the Sport Commitment Model was clarifying the nature of commitment of the athlete. With the review of commitment literature Scanlan and colleagues identified three possible ways an athlete could be committed. The athlete can either "want to" be committed, feel as though they "have to" be committed, or a combination of "wanting to and having to". Scanlan and colleagues felt as though all athletes would fit into one of the three classifications. Although some research (see Weiss & Weiss, 2003) has examined these distinctions, this review will focus on the general construct of commitment.

In the following section a brief example of how each of the determinants affect the Sport Commitment Model will be discussed. An example of how sport enjoyment positively affects a person's commitment to a sport would be an individual who stops participation if there is a lack of attraction to the activity. An involvement alternative, which negatively affects the commitment levels, is another activity that an individual would much rather participate in. A specific example of this would be a young boy playing baseball rather than going to his piano lesson. A person's personal investment whether it is time, money, or other resources, has been shown to positively effect a person's commitment to an activity. The pressure that a person feels that is put on them by others to continue participation is labeled as social constraints. Involvement opportunities have been thought of as the potential perks or benefits that could arise from a continued participation in an activity that the athlete would not ordinarily have.

The sixth determinant, social support, was added later by Carpenter (cited in Scanlan, Russell, Beals, & Scanlan, 2003). Social support is the support that the athlete perceives they are receiving from family and friends (Scanlan, Russell, Beals, et al., 2003). The validity of this sixth determinant was examined in two studies, Project on Elite Athlete Commitment I (PEAK I) (Scanlan, Russell, Wilson, & Scanlan, 2003) and Project on Elite Athlete Commitment II (PEAK II) (Scanlan, Russell, Beals, et al., 2003). In addition to the initial testing of social support, the findings from these two studies support previously reported results in other studies that examine the determinants of Sport Commitment Model.

Specifically, sport enjoyment and involvement opportunities emerged as the strongest predictors of commitment, consistent with previous research findings. Another finding significant to this study was that by rewording involvement alternatives to other priorities made the construct easier to understand. Also, it allowed for some of the older players to comment on other aspects of their lives, like family matters, that affect the amount of time that they are able to commit to the All Blacks rugby team. The findings from these studies, as well as validating the social support construct as an important construct in determining commitment of athletes added a great deal of information to the body of literature dealing with the Sport Commitment Model.

Testing of the Sport Commitment Model relies on the six determining factors of commitment. With most studies examining the validity of the Sport Commitment Model, questionnaires are administered. The questions are asked in a manner that explores an individual's level of commitment pertaining to one of the six constructs that have been identified. Using a Likert scale, researchers are able to identify which constructs affect the commitment level of individuals. Also, the questionnaire allows for the assessment of degree and the direction (positive or negative) in which each of the constructs effect the commitment levels.

#### Determinants of Sport Commitment

In the following section each of the constructs of the Sport Commitment Model, as identified by Scanlan and colleagues (1993), will be discussed. The role

in which each of these constructs plays in determining the commitment level will also be identified in the following sections.

### Sport Enjoyment

According to Scanlan and colleagues (1993), sport enjoyment is a positive response to the sport experience that is a reflection of a generalization of feelings such as pleasure, liking, or fun. An example of this would be an athlete playing a sport simply because they have a good time during their participation. By using this variable as part of the Sport Commitment Model, the focus is on the affective experiences of athletes. Research has shown that athletes who enjoy their sport tend to be more motivated and more committed (Carpenter, Scanlan, Simons, Lobel, 1993; Raedeke, 1997; Carpenter, & Coleman, 1998; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons et al. 1993; Scanlan, Russell, Beals et al., 2003). This has been shown to be an important factor in the motivation of youth and elite athletes alike. Youth athletes have stated on a more frequent basis that fun or enjoyment is an important determinant of their continued participation (Scanlan et al., 1993). Elite athletes have also stated that sport enjoyment plays a role in their desire to exert effort as well as their continued commitment to their sport (Scanlan, Russell, Beals, et al., 2003; Scanlan, Russell, Wilson, et al., 2003). Furthermore, athletes reporting sport enjoyment as a major factor in their sport participation were classified as having a “want to” commitment. The “want to” commitment is important to the sport enjoyment construct since the athlete is not feeling as though they have to participate, but rather are choosing to participate.

In the creation of the Sport Commitment Model, high levels of sport enjoyment have been associated with increased sport commitment (Scanlan, et al., 1993). Sport enjoyment has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of an athletes continued involvement (Carpenter, Scanlan, Simons, & Lobel, 1993). Sport enjoyment has also been examined when predicting whether discontinuation of sport participation is due to lack of commitment or athlete burnout (Raedeke, 1997; Schmidt, & Stein, 1991). The term burnout is implying that athletes are emotionally and physically exhausted from over exertion of their body and mind. It was found that athletes who feel as though they have to continue involvement are more likely to experience higher levels of burnout (Raedeke, 1997). Therefore, it is important to keep enjoyment levels of the athletes high in order to help prevent burnout and increase athlete commitment.

### Involvement Alternatives

One reason the commitment levels of athletes may vary is because of involvement alternatives. Involvement alternatives can be defined as the attractiveness of the most preferred alternative to the continuation of the current activity (Scanlan et al., 1993). The attractiveness of a more desirable activity will lessen the commitment of the individual to the activity they are currently involved with. The involvement alternatives require athletes to weigh the choice of continued participation in a sport to the choice of more enjoyable activities. For example, possible alternatives to sport participation could be participating in other school functions such as school drama productions, or simply being with friends.

In a study that examined athletes at the elite level, Scanlan et al. (2003) reworded the involvement alternatives to other priorities. The other priorities could have been parents, siblings, spouses, children, friends, or another job. This was done because with elite athletes there are times when the alternative to participating in their primary sport may not be more attractive, but rather more important. For example, for some athletes attending a child's school function is more important than watching game film of an opponent. The decision to not watch game film does not necessarily make the athlete less committed to their sport, rather something else in their life is more important to them.

#### Personal Investment

Research has shown that athletes who place more resources such as time, money, and energy into their sport participation are typically more committed to their sport (Carpenter, Scanlan, Simons et al., 1993; Scanlan et al., 1993; Scanlan, Russell, Beals, et al., 2003; Schmidt, & Stein, 1991; Weiss, Kimmel, & Smith, 2001). Scanlan and colleagues (Scanlan et al., 1993) defined personal investment, as the personal resources that individuals put into an activity that cannot be retrieved if they stop participating. With athletics, time is one resource that seems to be consumed rapidly. Depending upon the level of competition, athletes could be asked to give up many hours per week in youth sports for practice and games. This number could rise to 40 plus hours in elite level athletics. Rules have been put in place with college athletes regarding the amount of time that they are allowed to participate in their respective sport. If athletes were to commit large

amounts of time during their youth and later in life decided to quit participating in that sport, the time invested would never be regained.

The amount of money that is invested in a specific activity is something that could be a possible factor in a person's level of commitment to an activity. With youth athletes, the cost of equipment, league fees, and travel cost could be a factor that would make a parent strongly encourage their child to continue with participation in that activity. With elite level athletes, the money that has been spent throughout their lives to get to the elite level is seen as a monetary commitment. With athletes investing large amounts of resources while participating in sports a simple reminder of what they could be losing if they stop participating could increase the commitment of the athlete.

### Social Constraints

When participating in sports, athletes may feel encouraged or pressured by others. Social constraints are the social expectations or obligations that a person experiences to continue participation in an activity (Scanlan et al., 1993). This obligatory feeling arises from the pressures that athletes perceive they are receiving from others to continue with the activity. When athletes perceive strong social constraints, they believe they are disappointing others if they discontinue participation in an activity.

Scanlan et al. (2003) examined the social constraints construct by looking at how the obligatory feeling effects commitment of elite level athletes. The findings from the PEAK II study showed that elite athletes have no sense of

obligation to participate in their sport. These athletes reported that they did not feel as though they were pressured by external sources to continue with participation in their sport.

### Involvement Opportunities

Participating in sports gives athletes many opportunities, such as peer interaction and travel. The Sport Commitment Model uses the involvement opportunities construct to examine how athletes perceive benefits they would not otherwise have if they did not participate in their current sport. Specifically, these opportunities could be mastery of an activity or skill, chance to be with peers, or the idea that participation in this activity is the only way to stay fit (Scanlan et al., 2003). It should also be known that with this construct, it is the expectation of a specific outcome or event that is being focused on, not necessarily the event actually occurring. An example of this would be an athlete who does not get much playing time, but remains a member of the team because of the anticipated success and fun that the team may experience during the season.

Research supports that this anticipation of opportunities is a strong predictor of an athlete's commitment (Carpenter & Coleman, 1998; Carpenter & Scanlan, 1998; Carpenter, Scanlan, Simons, et al. 1993; Scanlan, Simons, Carpenter, Schmidt, et al., 1993; Scanlan et al. 2003). Scanlan et al. (1993) and Carpenter et al. (1993) both show that involvement opportunities are one of the strongest predictors of sport commitment in athletes. The study showed that with elite athletes, some of the opportunities they received were based solely on the fact



that they participated in athletics. Some of the opportunities that they reported receiving were other employment opportunities, the ability to travel around the world, and special recognition as an elite athlete (Scanlan, Russell, Beals, et al., 2003; Scanlan, Russell, Wilson, et al., 2003).

### Social Support

The social support construct was added to the model by Carpenter (as cited in Scanlan, Russell, Beals, et al., 2003) in order to examine the effects that support and encouragement has on the commitment level of athletes. The definition provided by Carpenter is “the support and encouragement the athlete perceives significant others provide for their involvement in sport” (as cited by Scanlan, Russell, Beals, et al., 2003, p. 379) In the PEAK II study, Scanlan and colleagues (2003) examined how social support affects the commitment level of the All Blacks rugby team. Specifically the study examined perceptions of encouragement and support the athletes received for playing rugby. Findings revealed that 14 of the 15 participants of the study reported experiencing support from their parents, spouse, or other family members. The way in which the players were shown support did not matter as much as whom support was shown by. It was reported in the PEAK study that it did not matter to the athletes how they were being shown the support (phone call, letter, conversation), but rather who was showing the support. Family members and peers were mentioned by a majority of the players as the people who show the most support. Overall, the

social support construct showed that for 93% of the All Blacks, team this construct increased the commitment level of the team to their sport.

### Application to Exercise

The following section will focus on the relevance of the Sport Commitment Model to exercise. The amount of research published investigating the Sport Commitment Model to an activity outside of the sport setting is limited to Alexandris et al (2002) and Wilson et al. (2004). These two studies applied the Sport Commitment Model to the exercise domain. The two studies play a significant role in the application of the Sport Commitment Model to strength and conditioning because strength and conditioning is an organized, sport specific exercise program. Although both studies are important, the Wilson et al. (2004) study is particularly significant to college strength coaches because the sample used was college students. The study by Wilson and colleagues (2004) will first be examined and then the study by Alexandris and colleagues (2002).

The purpose of the study by Wilson and colleagues (2004) was to examine the relationship between commitment and exercise using the Sport Commitment Model. Specifically, Wilson and colleagues (2004) examined the commitment and exercise behavior of college-aged women ( $N = 428$ ), who were involved in a group based exercise class that emphasized cardiovascular conditioning. The measurement tools used in this study were an Exercise Commitment Scale and the Godin Leisure Time Exercise Questionnaire (GLTEQ). The Exercise Commitment Scale measured the dimensions and determinants of exercise commitment, while the GLTEQ assessed the frequency of mild,

moderate, and strenuous exercise that was performed for at least 20 minutes per session during a typical week. Results revealed that personal investment was one of the strongest predictors of exercise commitment, which was consistent with the research that examined commitment to sport. The other determinants of the Sport Commitment Model that were tested (social constraints, social support, involvement alternatives) were also found to be significant predictors of commitment to exercise. It should be noted that for this study one of the strongest predictors of commitment from the sport literature, enjoyment, was not tested. This could be seen as a weakness of the study since the amount of enjoyment the participants experience during exercise is unknown. Also unique to this study, was that the testing sample consisted of only women. The findings from this study could be significant to strength coaches when dealing with female athletes because it could allow for the strength coach to better understand how to motivate the female athlete in a strength and conditioning setting. Additionally, if a strength coach can understand what motivates a female athlete to exercise, they can adjust the workout so that the female athlete will be more inclined to participate.

The previous study examined commitment and exercise behavior in a university setting. The approach taken by Alexandris and colleagues (2002) was applying the determinants of commitment to exercise in a health club setting. Findings from the study support that of previous Sport Commitment Model research in that involvement opportunities, personal investment, and enjoyment were significant predictors of commitment. Unlike the majority of the research published examining the Sport Commitment Model, involvement opportunities, not enjoyment was the strongest

predictor. That is, the members of the health club felt that if they were not committed they would miss out on potential opportunities to benefit physically, psychologically, and socially, from continually going to the health club. Additionally, the findings dealing with the personal investment construct is unique in this study because the study took place in a private health club where the members had to pay fees to belong to the club. Previous research shows that the more that an individual invests the stronger their commitment (Carpenter, Scanlan, Simons et al., 1993; Scanlan et al., 1993; Scanlan, Russell, Beals, et al., 2003; Schmidt, & Stein, 1991; Weiss, Kimmel, & Smith, 2001). With the individuals in this study having to pay membership fees to access the health club, as well as, finding time to use the membership the participants had to invest a large amount of resources. When examining the findings from the study in regards to enjoyment, they are consistent with that of previous research in the sport setting. The more enjoyable that the activity is the more likely individuals are to commit themselves to the activity. Areas that were mentioned in the Alexandris (2002) study that can increase enjoyment in the exercise setting included the environment inside the club, as well as, the staff and the member ability to build a relationship with the staff. These findings are consistent with that of the motivational research in the strength and conditioning setting (Cardinal & Melville, 1987; Dixon, 1979; Durbin, 1991; Rees & Blakey, 1983; Waters, 1993).

Even though the Alexandris study (Alexandris et al., 2002) and the Wilson study (Wilson et al., 2004) examined the applicability of the Sport Commitment Model to the exercise setting, the majority of the findings support that of the sport commitment

research. Because strength and conditioning is sport specific exercise, conclusions from these two studies examining exercise commitment can be applied to strength and conditioning. The more information that is available to strength professionals in regards to getting their athletes to commit to strength and conditioning programs, the better off the athlete, the strength coach, and the athletic teams will be.

### Conclusion

The Sport Commitment Model was created to examine the factors that contribute to an athletes continued participation to organized sports. With this theoretical model being relatively new, not all aspects of sport have been examined using the model. Alexandris et al. (2003) and Wilson et al. (2004) are the only published articles to date that apply the model to other areas outside of the organized sports arena. It is important that all things that encompass organized sport be examined when trying to discover ways to keep athletes committed to all facets of sport.

## CHAPTER 2

### APPLICATION TO STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING

The purpose of The Sport Commitment Model is to examine factors contributing to the continued participation of athletes in sports. With much research being conducted in the sport environment, no actual research has been conducted with the Sport Commitment Model while looking at strength and conditioning. Even though no actual testing of this model has been performed in the area of strength and conditioning, conclusions can be drawn from previous research based on previous research in sport. Also, the research conducted using The Sport Commitment Model in the exercise setting will be used to draw conclusions about individual's commitment to exercise specifically. The following sections are applying the specific constructs of the model, defined in the previous section, to strength and conditioning. Because actual testing of this model has not been published in the arena of strength and conditioning, the author is inducing how practitioner's knowledge of strength and conditioning relates to the Sport Commitment Model. Additionally, application of the Sport Commitment Model to the strength and conditioning arena will be made by offering suggestions to gain commitment of athletes in this area of sport participation.

It is important to recognize the differences between sport and strength and conditioning to better understand why it is important to have athletes commit to a strength program. With major college athletics, especially those athletes with a scholarship, as well as professional athletics, the athletes are committed to their

sport by a contract. Collegiate athletes sign letters of intent to commit themselves to play athletics for whichever school they decide to attend. Therefore, they are committing themselves to that school's sport programs. The athletes, however, are not necessarily committing themselves to the strength and conditioning program. The athletes are coming to the school to play a particular sport, not lift weights. It is important that athletes understand that in order for them to be the best that they can be at their particular sport, they need to commit to the strength program. This is why it is important to look at the contributing factors of commitment to sport and apply them to strength and conditioning.

The reason why athletes should commit to a strength program is simple. If individual athletes want to be successful at their particular sport, they need to be stronger, quicker, and faster than their opposition. This is where the strength and conditioning coach aids in the athlete's preparation for success. Athletes are becoming bigger, stronger, and faster with every season. In order to keep up with the competition, athletes must spend time in a quality strength and conditioning program.

### Sports Enjoyment

Because strength and conditioning is often perceived as monotonous, strength coaches are faced with the challenge of making training more enjoyable to the athletes. Unless it is a mandatory part of the athletic practice schedule, athletes could skip out of strength training due to the lack of enjoyment that is often experienced with this type of exercise.

It has been suggested that strength coaches can make strength training more enjoyable in a variety of ways. One possible method is to increase an athlete's level of intrinsic motivation, which is performing an activity for its own sake (Cardinal & Melville, 1987). Strength coaches can also do this by giving their athletes some ownership in the workout programs (Cardinal & Melville, 1987). This can be achieved by having the athletes set goals for themselves within their workout (Ranieri, 2001). If athletes have a sense of ownership, they may take more pride in what they are doing and not see it as work, but rather another aspect of being a member of a team. This may make workouts more enjoyable to the athletes, especially when the goals are met. Additionally goals give the athlete something to train for and a sense of enjoyment when the goals are met.

Another possible method for increasing an athlete's level of enjoyment is to create an enjoyable atmosphere in the weight room (Cardinal & Melville, 1987; Dixon, 1979; Durbin, 1991; Rees & Blakey, 1983; Waters, 1993). An example of increasing the enjoyment in a weight room is to decorate the walls with accomplishment charts, motivational posters, or pictures of past athletic alumni. The charts, posters, and pictures would help to motivate the athletes as well as make the room more visually appealing to the athlete. A strength coach's demeanor also contributes to the atmosphere of the weight room. Strength coaches should maintain a warm, friendly attitude with their athletes. This shows that they care about the athletes and their success in the weight room (Connors, 1992).



However, it is important that the strength coach keeps a professional relationship with the athletes in order to maintain a working atmosphere.

An alternative means of increasing an athlete's level of enjoyment is with extrinsic rewards. If an athlete achieves certain performance goals in the weight room they, could earn various types of awards. Trophies, t-shirts, or plaques could be given out to athletes as a way to recognize them for lifting a certain amount of weight or completing a drill in a certain time (Whaley, 1988). This recognition could motivate the athlete to continue to work hard in the weight room, therefore making workouts seem more enjoyable.

#### Involvement Alternatives

Strength coaches are put in situations where they want to stress the importance of strength training to athletes; yet, they need to realize that athletes may not always share the same viewpoint. Theoretically, athletes may find doing other, more enjoyable, activities as being more attractive (Scanlan et al., 1993). For example, being with friends or participating in other athletic activities may seem more attractive than engaging in strength and conditioning sessions. This could be because it may be less time consuming, not as physically demanding, or simply more enjoyable.

If athletes are choosing not to participate in strength and conditioning programs, a strength coach could implement a reward system to make training more attractive. By rewarding continued attendance to training sessions with t-shirts and praise, athletes could perceive the alternatives as less attractive than

strength training. One problem that surfaced with the PEAK studies (Scanlan, Russell, Beals et al., 2003; Scanlan, Russell, Wilson et al., 2003) was that there were instances where the alternative activity was not more attractive, but rather more important. For instance, an athlete may feel as though missing a training session to study for a test would be more important because of wanting a good grade for the class. Another possible scenario would be an athlete misses training sessions because of a family matter. Perhaps these were not more attractive alternatives, but rather, more important in terms of what the outcomes would be. Strength coaches would need to deal with each situation as they occur because some scenarios could be considered excusable or out of the control of the athlete.

#### Personal Investment

Strength and conditioning specialists invest large amounts of time in creating programs and working with athletes on a daily basis. In turn, athletes are investing large amounts of time and energy when performing these workouts. According to research (Alexandris et al., 2002; Scanlan et al., 1993), the more people invest in an activity, the more likely they will continue with participation. If athletes have committed to strength training since they were in high school, the likelihood for their continued commitment to strength training is high. Because they have invested much of their time, money, and energy, many would perceive that they had a invalid reason if they quit. As a strength coach, this could be used as a means of motivation with athletes. An example of this would be if a high school football player were to invest large amounts of time and energy getting

stronger over the winter and spring months, and suddenly stopped training over the summer. This break would cause the athlete to lose everything they had worked for in the fall and spring. Placing this idea of loss into an athletes head, and continually reminding them they will be taking steps backwards, could help motivate them to stay committed to a strength program.

With college athletes, the amount of time that student-athletes have to commit to a strength program can vary. Depending on the size of the institution, Division III to Division I, certain guidelines are put in place to ensure the best possible situation for the student-athlete to succeed. As previously mentioned, there is a certain amount of time allowed for the athletes to participate in their particular sport. This time allotment includes practice, meeting, and the time that they are able to spend in the weight room. It is important as a strength coach to stress the importance of the strength and conditioning program to the various sport coaches, and lobby for an adequate amount of time to work with their athletes. If a strength coach is able to get the coaches to buy into idea of the importance of strength training, it is easier to get the athletes to give up their time and train hard in the weight room.

### Social Constraints

The social constraints determinant has been shown to be one of the strongest factors in an athlete's commitment to a sport. The construct deals with the obligatory feelings that an athlete may have for continuing participation. As a strength and conditioning coach, this obligation to continue with training can take

multiple forms. One way that a strength coach can stress to the athletes the importance of strength training is that athletes owe it to their teammates.

Specifically, if their teammates are at the scheduled sessions trying to improve themselves, all athletes should be there too. By not engaging in strength training, the athletes are also letting down the coaches. The coaches have invested a lot in trying to get that specific athlete to come to their respective school. By the athletes not working to improve themselves and improve the team, they are letting the coaches down.

The strength coach is also able to instill the idea that the athlete who is skipping out, is not fulfilling their obligation to the strength and conditioning staff. Like the other coaches, the strength coaches are investing a great deal of time and energy trying to improve the abilities of the athletes. Essentially the strength and conditioning staff is committing themselves to getting the athlete better; in turn, the athlete needs to commit to the training program. If the strength staff has a good relationship with the athletes, the athletes will not want to disappoint the staff.

### Involvement Opportunities

The construct of involvement opportunities can be used in a variety of ways by a strength and conditioning coach to motivate their athletes. The weight room can be an opportunity for the athletes to socialize (Cardinal & Melville, 1987), a chance for the athlete to improve their chance for more playing time, or even just an opportunity to become better at performing a certain lift. Athletes will perceive

opportunities they feel are offered to them through their participation in a strength program.

One potential opportunity athletes may perceive in the weight room is socialization. If the athlete views the weight room as a place of socialization, this can work for and against the strength coach. The strength coach should take advantage of the social aspect and use it in a way that facilitates encouragement and motivation of other athletes. Athletes encouraging and teaching each other can facilitate closeness with the athletes, which can transfer over to the playing field. However, this encouragement and teaching can also cause the athletes to lose focus of what they are doing, which can result in an injury. It is also important that the socialization is not interfering with the teaching points that the strength coach is trying to convey to the athletes. An example of this would be if athletes are talking during a teaching time in the weight room. Athletes can also view the weight room workouts as an opportunity to improve their chances for playing time. This opportunity in the weight room gives them a chance to gain/lose weight, increase strength, speed, flexibility, and explosiveness. The time spent in the weight room is seen as a valuable opportunity towards reaching their goal of getting playing time. With the opportunity of playing time at stake, the athlete's level of commitment to the strength program will increase.

### Social Support

According to the PEAK II study (Scanlan et al., 2003), if athletes experienced encouragement and support from friends and family, they had higher

levels of commitment to that activity. One way a strength and conditioning coach can take advantage of the social support need of their athletes is by creating lifting teams or platform groups. By creating the lifting groups, the athletes will have encouragement from their teammates that could increase their commitment to the lifting program. The means for creating these groups is up to the individual strength coach. One possibility is to mix the groups up with a varying degree of ability in each group to help motivate the less skilled lifters. Another suggestion is to put older more experienced lifters in a group with some of the younger athletes to facilitate the learning among the younger athletes.

Equally as important to what the strength coach does to create social support in the weight room is the support that the athlete gets from family members. This variable is something that is out of the control of the strength coach but does play a large role in the commitment of the athlete to a strength and conditioning program. If an athlete's family support is not high, the strength coach could have to work at filling this void for the athlete to keep the athletes commitment level high.

As was previously mentioned, no research has been published that applies The Sport Commitment Model to strength and conditioning. With youth and elite athletes there is a greater demand for peak performance on a regular basis and it is important for the athlete to be in top physical condition year round. The importance of strength and conditioning is overlooked at times by athletes, thus finding ways to get athletes to commit to strength training is important. This was

an attempt to apply a relatively new psychological model to a specific area of sport. It is my hope that efforts to expand this area of sport commitment research will continue so strength and conditioning professionals can better prepare athletes for participation in their sport.

### Conclusions

The five determinants that have been examined have been linked to the overall commitment of athletes in sport. With sport enjoyment, involvement opportunities, and social constraints being the greatest predictors of an athlete's commitment, successful coaches need to consider these constructs in order to keep their athletes involved in their sport. The involvement alternatives construct has been shown to be the only construct out of the five to have a negative effect on an athlete's commitment. Keeping the athlete focused and away from possible alternative activities is something that each coach will have to deal with as the situations present themselves. Using the other four determinants in some form to keep the athletes committed is something that the coach will have to tailor to the needs of each individual athlete.

A strength and conditioning coach is able to interact with athletes in a manner that is different from most other coaches. The strength coach is able to use the commitment of an athlete to a specific sport as a means for them to be committed to a strength program. A strength coach, as a means for motivating athletes to want to participate in a strength program, can use the Sport Commitment Model. An athlete investing time and energy in the weight room is

something that they feel is necessary in order for them to have a chance of getting playing time later on, which is described by involvement opportunities. By using the social aspect of the weight room to motivate athletes to come in and work is something else that the strength coach is able to do. By keeping the mood of the weight room to their liking and creating a warm, friendly environment, the strength coach is increasing the amount of enjoyment that the athlete is having in that setting. The increased level of enjoyment, along with the elevated social climate, gives the athletes a positive outlook of time spent in the weight room, which will in turn increase the commitment of the athlete.

There has been little research actually performed with the Sport Commitment Model and exercise, and none in the strength and conditioning setting. Some additional testing of the model in the exercise setting, along with testing in the strength and conditioning setting would benefit strength coaches when trying to improve the commitment levels of athletes to their strength programs. Additionally, looking at what factors are of the model play into the commitment of starters verse non-starters, as well as senior verse freshman athletes, would benefit strength coaches in terms of dealing with athletes specific needs.



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