

Coaching Masters Athletes in Colombia

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The purpose of this article is to describe the evolution and influence of Masters Player-Coaches (MPCs) in the Asociación de Futbolistas Adultos Mayores del Tolima (in English: Masters Athletes' Football Association of Tolima in Colombia, South America), a football league for men aged 60–70+ years. Historical forces shape a cultural backdrop that pervades football (soccer) and coaching and provides an understanding of how MPCs perceive themselves. After exploring the evolution and influence of the league, the authors uncover a peer-coaching approach in Asociación de Futbolistas Adultos Mayores del Tolima, described by the MPCs as *Compañero Orientador*. The authors link the importance of formally acknowledging the MPCs with their influence in fighting ageism, community building, and promoting lifelong sport. Further, MPCs provide high-quality Masters sport experiences, and their recognition supports a formal sporting structure in applying for local government grants to support the growing Masters context in Colombia.

Keywords: coach development, Masters coach, Masters football, Masters Player-Coach, peer coaching, South America

In general, Masters athletes (MAs) are 35 years old and older, actively involved in sport, registered in formalized leagues and events, and train for competition, often with a coach (Young & Callary, 2017). Research conducted in English-speaking (e.g., Canada, United States, Australia, United Kingdom) countries has shown that up to 70% of serious-minded MAs report having a coach, while also noting that MAs believe they would be more active if they had better access to coaching (Medic, Starkes, Young, Weir, & Gajnorio, 2005). Masters sport is a fast-growing phenomenon in many countries, including Colombia (Villafrades & De La Paz, 2011). However, little is known about the Masters context, especially in older adults (60+), or how it is coached in South America in general or in Latin American countries like Colombia. The purpose of this article is to describe the evolution and influence of Masters Player-Coaches (MPCs) in the Asociación de Futbolistas Adultos Mayores del Tolima (ASOFAMTOL; in English: Masters Athletes' Football Association of Tolima), a football league for men aged 60–70+ years, to uncover the peer-coaching approach within the cultural context of Masters football (soccer) in Colombia.

The MAs are a heterogeneous group of athletes with different needs than youth or high-performance athletes (Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015, 2017, 2018). Masters coaches (MCs) help MAs improve skills, manage their training routines, plan and prepare MAs for competitions, hold athletes accountable for working hard, and validate their commitment to sport (Callary, Young, & Rathwell, in press). Their approach to coaching requires sensitivity to differentiate how to give feedback, to whom, and when, as MAs' mature and self-directed learning interests mean that they do not all wish to be communicated with in the same ways (Callary et al., 2015). The MAs have specific psychosocial coaching needs, experience, and knowledge (Callary et al., 2015, 2017; Ferrari, Bloom, Gilbert, & Caron, 2016; MacLellan, Callary, & Young, 2017, 2019; Rathwell, Callary, & Young, 2015; Stevenson, 2002; Young, Callary, & Niedre, 2014). Indeed, the MC is often a peer to MAs, sharing

responsibilities and empowering MAs to contribute to leadership roles in collaborative ways (Callary, Currie, & Young, 2020). Limited research has also shown that some coaches are also athletes who compete alongside their MAs (Callary et al., 2015). Masters swimmers in Callary et al.'s (2015) study respected their coaches who swam because of their competitive abilities. They found their coaches to be motivational because they could take a peer's perspective on MAs' training and provide authentic feedback (Callary et al., 2015).

The MCs generally want more information about how to coach adults but face challenges finding such sources (Belalcazar & Callary, 2017; Callary et al., 2018). An international online review of Masters-specific resources and education for coaches reveals that there exists very little: there are websites from Masters leagues and organizations that provide information on events and results, some information on the physiology of aging bodies, and very little on the psychology and sociology of coaching MAs (Belalcazar & Callary, 2017). The scant information found are from English-speaking, Northern Zone¹ cultures such as Canada, United States, Australia, United Kingdom, and New Zealand. The research regarding the Masters context does not shine light on the needs and cultural context that shape Masters sport in Latin America.

Colombian Culture Backdrop in Sport, Coaching, and Coach Education

Before describing the evolution and influence of the peer-coaching approach taken by MPCs in ASOFAMTOL, it is important to provide the reader with an understanding of the historical roots of Colombian culture to make sense of the uniqueness of the MPCs' coaching approach. Colombia has a patriarchal and hierarchical history of leadership and power with the military ruling on three occasions throughout its history, which includes the war of Independence (July 20, 1810, in which self-government established The Republic of Colombia); the 1,000-day war (October 1899–November 1902 between the Liberal government and the National Party followed by conflict against the ruling Conservative party); and The Colombian Conflict (started in 1964, and 50+ years of civil

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war ensued). This history has created a militaristic society with a culture of *machismo*, which is a term used in Latin American social research to describe discriminatory cultural practices, such as sexism and male dominance (Oxford, 2019). Apart from discriminating against women, *machismo* has also created a pecking order among men wherein those in lower positions of power (e.g., older, poorer) are subservient to those in higher positions of power (Rinke, 2007; Velez, 2002). Ageism in Colombia, or negative attitude toward older people, has created the unconscious bias to disregard older adults in Latin American society because they are seen as obsolete, occupying lower status, and not contributing to the economy (Ramírez & Palacios-Espinosa, 2016; Ureña, 2005).

This cultural backdrop is important to understanding the ways that people behave in community activities, including sport. Football is rooted deeply within Colombia's cultural fabric. Throughout history, it has been used both as a tool for diffusion of war and as a vehicle for war (Dutt, 2013; Rinke, 2007). For example, in 1948, *El Dorado*, the golden era of football, was used to counteract *La Violencia*, a portion of the civil war induced by the Liberal and Conservative party conflict (Dutt, 2013). Years later, during what came to be known as Narcosoccer in 1979, contraband and war were tightly related to professional football teams in the country (Dutt, 2013).

Football is currently the most popular sport in Colombia. The team sport is played by millions of Colombians, and many think of football players as boys and young men (Oxford, 2019; Oxford & McLachlan, 2017; Rinke, 2007; Velez, 2002). However, football in Colombia is not only played by young people. The growth in numbers of MAs is increasing and is evident in Colombia, particularly in the city of Ibagué, located in the department of Tolima. Ibagué is nationally recognized as a city where citizens can play football from the age of five to well above 70 (Rivera, 2018; Secretaría de Apoyo a la Gestión, 2017). The Masters league in Ibagué has been rapidly growing as an organization but is underfunded compared with youth leagues and requires better support and structure, including coach education (Rivera, 2018; Secretaría de Apoyo a la Gestión, 2017).

Colombia does not have a legal regulatory framework for coaching as a professional practice (Lozada, Cortina, Padilla, & Moreno, 2018). Coaching is yet to be accepted as a profession; however, there have been positive steps forward. The Asociación Red Colombiana de Facultades de Deporte, Educación Física y Recreación (ARCOFADER; in English: Colombian Network Association of Faculties of Sport, Physical Education and Recreation), established in 2004, is nationally recognized as the leading association for coach accreditation. The ARCOFADER is formed by institutions of higher education, including faculties, departments, and programs, that, in partnerships with sport federations (including the Colombian Football Federation), are dedicated to academic training at the undergraduate and graduate levels in sport, physical education, recreation, and disciplinary fields that are related to sport practices officially authorized by the Colombian State (Asociación Red Colombiana de Facultades de Deporte, Educación Física y Recreación, n.d.). For coaching high-performance football leagues, there are minimum coaching qualifications, but these requirements do not apply for recreational pathways (Lozada et al., 2018). There are also other organizations for ongoing learning that provide programs for coaching children and youth in the recreational pathway, but these are not affiliated with the Colombian Football Federation (e.g., Instituto Colombiano de Aprendizaje Tolima, 2020).

In Colombia, coaches are *directores técnicos*, literally translated as experts in technical knowledge of the sport (Lozada et al.,

2018; Maestre, Garcés de los Fayos, Ortín, & Hidalgo, 2018). This expert-driven, top-down approach to sport leadership is in stark contrast to research findings within Masters sport in the Northern Zone in which coaches facilitate shared power through building strong coach–athlete relationships (e.g., Callary et al., 2017; Currie, Young, & Callary, 2020; MacLellan et al., 2019). Sharing power to nurture an MA's development as an equal and peer is at odds with the patriarchal culture of Colombian football *directores técnicos*. There is a discrepancy between what we know about effective Masters coaching strategies and what is the culturally accepted norm of coaches in Colombia. The purpose of this article is to describe the evolution and influence of MPCs in ASOFAMTOL, a football league for men aged 60–70+ years, to uncover the peer-coaching approach within the cultural context of Masters football in Colombia.

Methods

This article is part of a larger study in which MPCs from ASOFAMTOL engaged in professional development to further formalize the league's structure for the purposes of improved quality sport experiences and to qualify for government funding opportunities.

Participants

The ASOFAMTOL is a league of male adult football players in Ibagué, Colombia. It is composed of three age categories, 60–64, 65–69, and 70+ years old, with a total of 24 teams. All age categories follow the 2015/2016 Fédération Internationale de Football Association game rules (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2015) with the agreement of allowing multiple substitutions and return substitutions. We needed, first, to determine who identified as a coach and/or the leader of each team within ASOFAMTOL to know who to recruit. Systematically, this was done by observing the first games of the season and taking notes of which players appeared to coach the team. Once we had a list of names, the first author spoke to the President of ASOFAMTOL to ask him who he thought were the coaches of the team and showed him the list that we had created. Based on this conversation, the list was expanded. The first author then distributed recruitment texts to each of the identified coaches at a preseason ASOFAMTOL board meeting and at coach/player socials. In the recruitment texts, the coaches were asked to invite any other individuals who were or had the intention of coaching with ASOFAMTOL teams. Participants were recruited from all age categories. As a result, there were 23 participants in the study (see Table 1). Pseudonyms are provided for all names.

Data Collection

Data were collected from (a) document analysis from the association's 2015–2017 Statutes book; (b) individual interviews conducted with 15 participants, including the current secretary, the current president, and the past president (2014–2017), lasting between 35 and 55 min each; and (c) a focus group lasting 2 hr with 20 participants. Of the 23 participants, 12 participants took part in both individual interviews and the focus group, eight participants took part in only the focus group, and one participant took part in only the interview. The interviews focused on how the participants coached their teams. We wanted to determine a term with which the participants could all identify and then describe what that meant to them. Thus, we asked them about their role in ASOFAMTOL. The focus group allowed the group as a whole to

Table 1 Participants

Pseudonym	Age group	Interview	Focus group
Juan ^a	60–64	✓	—
Alejandro ^b	60–64	✓	✓
Fabian	60–64	✓	✓
Jose	60–64	✓	✓
Diego	60–64	—	✓
Dario	60–64	—	✓
Sergio	60–64	—	✓
Andres	65–69	✓	—
Carlos	65–69	✓	✓
Francisco	65–69	✓	✓
Manuel	65–69	✓	✓
David	65–69	✓	✓
Daniel	65–69	✓	✓
Marco	65–69	—	✓
Teddy	65–69	—	✓
Monico	65–69	—	✓
Edison	70+	✓	✓
Santiago	70+	✓	✓
Pablo	70+	✓	✓
Sebastian	70+	✓	✓
Ericson	70+	—	✓
Sandro	70+	—	✓
Lucas	Current secretary	✓	—

^aPast president. ^bCurrent president.

compare their roles to that of the traditional role of a coach (*director técnico*) and identify a term that encapsulated their approach.

Data Analysis

From the Statutes book and transcriptions of the interviews, using Braun and Clark's (2006) six steps to thematic analysis, we read and re-read the book and transcripts, coded them, and grouped the codes into themes. Data were inductively analyzed and grouped into three higher order themes: (a) evolution and influence of ASOFAMTOL, (b) who are the coaches, and (c) what is the coaches' influence. Furthermore, regarding the theme "who are the coaches," we examined the data from the focus group in which we compiled all responses into bullets according to "Traditional coach" and "Coach in ASOFAMTOL." We then combined bullets that overlapped. We then compared bullets across both coach categories to see where they were similar and how, creating a name for each grouping. Finally, we identified bullets that were mentioned in one coach category but not in the other and created group names for them (see Table 2). We developed 13 themes in total, of which seven themes were shared by both "Traditional coach" and "Coach in ASOFAMTOL" (understanding players' abilities for team performance on the field; reading players; communication: ability to receive feedback, instruction, and giving feedback; and coach characteristic: knowledgeable and committed), three were only perceived as roles for "Coach in ASOFAMTOL" (coach characteristic: peer, looking out for athletes' health and well-being, and managerial responsibilities), and three were only perceived as "Traditional coach" (self-reflection, formally educated in coaching, and authoritative power position).

The Evolution and Influence of ASOFAMTOL

In 2005, ASOFAMTOL held its first tournament with six teams competing, which sparked interest in the formation of a league. ASOFAMTOL's past president shared that at first, family, friends, and the community were not fully supportive of the vision of the league, highlighting the risks of being involved in sport in old age. Despite the criticisms, in 2007, ASOFAMTOL was officially established and recognized as a nonprofit sport association ([Asociación de Futbolistas Adultos Mayores del Tolima, 2015](#)). The current secretary specified that as of January 2020, ASOFAMTOL had 24 teams with 570+ players who take part in weekly organized games as part of two annual tournaments that are mostly self-funded but also supported in part by the Instituto Municipal para el Deporte y la Recreación de Ibagué (in English: Municipal Institute of Sport and Recreation of Ibagué). The ASOFAMTOL upholds strong values, including attitude guidelines that all members should follow, written within their 2015–2017 Statutes book:

Be Happy. Do not scream. Do not humiliate. Do not indispose. Screaming is a sign of weakness. Humiliation is a lack of nobility. Slander is a sign of humiliation and envy. Aggression is a sign of insecurity. Build happiness around you. Be inclusive, humble and sincere, equitable, supportive and loyal. ([Asociación de Futbolistas Adultos Mayores del Tolima, 2015](#), p. 61)

The ASOFAMTOL's values strive to create an environment that promotes and supports the development of members, positive community empowerment, collective identities, social networks, well-being, health, and lifelong learning ([Lawson, 2005](#)).

Although there are no formalized coaching positions in the league, certain players have stepped up to promote these values and lead their teams. This adapted structure of coaching has increased the caliber of the game and Masters sport exposure. Unfortunately, the informal coaching structure has also led to a lack of recognition and funding support from government agencies because the ASOFAMTOL teams do not fit the traditional (youth and high performance) sport system structure. Nonetheless, the adapted structure in which players coach their teams was used as a model for other departments of Colombia to create and adapt their own Masters football associations. Both the secretary and others interviewed said that in recent years, ASOFAMTOL teams have traveled to compete against other departments' teams.

Saturdays are game days for ASOFAMTOL, and there are three periods per game: the first two periods are played on the field and the third is their social gathering where the team comes together to celebrate the win or loss. It is a time to share food and drink, chat, listen to music, watch other games, and enjoy each other's company. On any given Saturday, there are 12 games played, in total, with five 2-hr time slots across two fields in one location and two 2-hr time slots on an additional field located across the city. Both locations have concession stands open for food and drink services, but the main grounds have the festive ambiance of many ASOFAMTOL teams celebrating the day. The current president describes Saturdays as vibrant: music plays all day long, families and friends attend the games, informal food vendors walk through the crowds, and many teams even cook onsite.

Athletes look forward to Saturday game days, preparing throughout the week by engaging in individual practices and

Table 2 Traditional Coach and Coach in ASOFAMTOL Description of Higher Order Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Traditional coach	Coach in ASOFAMTOL
Understanding players' abilities for team performance on the field	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identifies team dynamics to know where players thrive on the field in relation to others as well as their shortcomingsIdentifies strengths in players to choose players' positions on the fieldMaking changes to on-field players (subbing) that benefit the team performance without input from others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">When building team rosters or accepting someone new to the team, they evaluate the player's ability and performance as well as their values and the person as a whole. It is better for team cohesion for a player to be a "good person," than being great on the field but a "bad teammate/person." The coach evaluates player performance on and off field.When creating the lineups, coaches must take in consideration how to keep the field balanced depending on the rivals while also making sure that older players are supported by younger ones.Establishes order of play, formations, lineups, subs, etc.Gives pregame talks that psychologically encourage teammates to value their performance at their age, to give them confidence they can beat their opponent, and guide them to be gracious winners and losersEncourages discussion of conflict to maintain ASOFAMTOL as a recreational environment with healthy, fair competition, keeping morale highCreating partnerships, shadowing, and mentorship strategy between players to help them learn and perform well
Reading players	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Knowing who to choose for playing time based on their focus and mood (positive mood, which contributes to overall unity and morale)Recognizing personal and team qualities like player responsibility, confidence, and trustworthiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Able to receive feedback from supporting team leaders, the bench, in-field players, and, at times, even the spectatorsAble to transmit knowledge, is respected and trusted
Communication: Ability to receive feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ability to receive feedback that may come from players, other coaches in the league, or even from outside of their team, like the audienceListens to what others say	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assertive communicators who are proactive when challenging situations present themselves in the gamesConscious of speaking calmly and fairly because they acknowledge that their teammates do not appreciate being talked down to or bossed aroundMaintains friendly style of feedback even if errors are made, transmitting confidence, trust, and respect to the players at all times to value them as individuals and keep high moraleProvides direction to teammates on how to do things and why, to improve play but also maintain team synergy, integration, and sense of belonging
Communication: Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Able to transmit their knowledge to players by instructing them on useful information and things for them to learn and implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Knowledgeable on the game and its rules, has experience playing throughout their life, knows when and how to make changesRecognized as the representative of the team, the strategist, tactic creator, coordinator, and guide
Communication: Giving feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Analyzes and provides feedback for personal and team developmentAbility to provide fair and informed feedback to players	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Responsible to keep commitments that involve the players and the team as a whole, important for them to keep true to their wordPunctual, organized, and responsibleA shoulder to lean onA friend to all (liked and trusted)May not play themselves to give others playing timeAn active participant in ASOFAMTOL activitiesAt times, may be a strong financial contributor or delegated by the owner of the team as someone who is trusted and likedReminds team that opponents are friends as well and without everyone's involvement ASOFAMTOL would not exist
Coach characteristic: Knowledgeable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Person who is knowledgeable of the sport, knows how to play, knows how and when to put in players, and knows the rules of the game	
Coach characteristic: Committed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A formal role on the team that must be fulfilled (it is their job to be there)	
Coach characteristic: Peer		

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Theme	Traditional coach	Coach in ASOFAMTOL
Looking out for athletes' health and well-being		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks out for teammates' well-being and health by observing their in-game performance but also keeps in touch outside of game times to check in on the players to see how they are doing and feeling • Creates a network and sense of social support to take care of one another • Encourages, suggests activities for training prior to game days • Sets meetings an hour before games to prepare by stretching and hydrating • Supports players to critically reflect on how they are performing efficiently in the game, balancing playing time, and caring for health issues
Managerial responsibilities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative tasks of representing teams at meetings, making sure all players have paid dues, keeps IDs on game days, ensuring all teammates are dressed in appropriate uniforms to prevent sanctions, and ensuring that everyone has transportation to and from the game • Communicates important dates and information to teammates
Self-reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to self-evaluate (self-reflect on role) based on personal and team performance • Looks at errors made in games to understand, correct, and improve and keep positive team dynamics 	
Formally educated in coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds a degree related to sport and/or coach education certification and accreditation • Has prerequisites for the job requirements 	
Authoritative power position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfills higher level role compared with the rest of the team • Separate from players 	

Note. ASOFAMTOL = Asociación de Futbolistas Adultos Mayores del Tolima.

workouts. Regardless of the age category, all coaching involves game-day training and competition, and sometimes coaching also entails helping MAs with preparation of workouts during the week, but this support is not a coaching requirement, and many players exercise their autonomy to practice on their own time. Although Saturday games are played by the older men, the “event” involves people of all ages and especially athletes’ families. Saturdays are a time to be together and show support for one another with the byproduct of exposing younger generations to role models of healthy active aging. “I feel proud to hear my grandchildren say that their favorite football player is no longer Ronaldo or Messi, it is Grandpa! Because they get to watch me play every weekend” (Past President). These events naturally draw an audience because in Colombia, football is embedded in society, rooted deep inside the culture as an activity that brings people together (Dutt, 2013).

Who Are the Coaches in ASOFAMTOL

The league and team formation has always included passionate leaders, but, as Edison (70-year-old category) explained, they have not needed certified coaches to lead each team the way that youth teams do. Nonetheless, with the expansion of the league, the majority of team leaders note the importance of developing as coaches to increase the quality of the league and improve their chance for funding and recognition within the city’s allocation of sport funding and resourcing:

Our association is legally recognized by the state, we have growing engagement and participation. Now, if we were only

able to have recognized coaches and a way to disseminate who we are and the amazing things we are doing as a Masters Football Association, I bet we would finally be seen and perhaps even supported by funding government bodies. (Current President)

In another interview, Pablo (70-year-old category), expressed his frustration at witnessing how ASOFAMTOL is overlooked. He indicated feeling that they were not taken seriously and that government agencies would provide only sporadic and minimum support: “We have been supported a few times with enough money to provide our Tolima representative team with a set of uniforms. In another instance, funds were allocated for renting a small bus to travel to another department for our national finals.” He stated that all other travel, food, and board expenses were covered via fundraising or out of their own pockets. He continued,

That seems to be the extent of the support. We are not helped [financially] with refereeing, on-field medical support, coach development, let alone proper fields to play on. Every time we have tried to find a way to purchase our own fields, we have faced broken promises, continuous let downs and vast amounts of red tape.

These quotes indicate that without a sound team leadership structure in the league, ASOFAMTOL has suffered from lack of funding and space. The participants expressed that properly trained coaches who take leadership roles within the league add prestige to the league, which translates to better recognition by the city for funding and space. This begs the question of why there have not been

trained coaches as part of the structure of ASOFAMTOL. When we asked them, many initially did not identify as a coach (*director técnico*). However, in interviews of their actions within their teams, we noted that in our North American perspective, they appeared to coach (e.g., provide direction, guidance, feedback to the players; Callary et al., *in press*).

In general, we determined that these individuals are coaches in terms of the types of activities that they say they do compared with the types of activities they say traditional coaches do (see Table 2). For example, they strive to understand and work with their athletes' abilities in how they influence the team performance on the field. They make substitutions. They evaluate and read their players, strive to keep morale high, and strategize effective formations. They noted that communication was important both in their roles and in the roles of traditional coaches, highlighting their need to receive feedback from a variety of sources, provide instruction by transmitting knowledge effectively, and give feedback based on analyses to improve player and team development. Both styles of coaches were described as having characteristics such as being knowledgeable of the sport, its rules, and tactical strategies as well as being committed, providing guidance, and having responsibility for the team.

Despite these common roles, the participants discussed nuanced differences between traditional coaches and MCs. For example, although they recognized that both types of coaches need to understand players' abilities for team performance on the field, in ASOFAMTOL, they form their team rosters according to players they know to be "good persons" on and off the field (not only dependent on sport-specific abilities). Furthermore, although they indicated that both traditional coaches and MCs need to communicate well, the participants also said that MCs' communication style with their peers needs to be calm, fair, and friendly, even when errors are made. This would demonstrate that they are supportive and transmit confidence to their teammate to promote high morale. Most notably, traditional coaches were identified as being committed because they had a formal role to fill, whereas in ASOFAMTOL, commitment was informal and a more authentic and self-directed requirement.

As the participants described their roles and characteristics, there were ideas that did not connect to how they described traditional coaches. They saw themselves as a peer, acting as a friend to all, encouraging fair behavior toward their fellow opponents. They looked out for their teammates' health and well-being by encouraging personal practices prior to game days, they planned sessions before games for stretching and hydration, and they encouraged critical reflection for players to value the balance between health and playing time. Finally, they took on managerial responsibilities that included keeping IDs on game days, making sure everyone has transportation to and from games, ensuring teammates have paid their fees and are in proper uniform to avoid sanctions, and communicating important dates and information to teammates.

The participants also identified traditional coaching characteristics and roles that they did not mention in their own roles. They felt that traditional coaches are formally educated with degrees and other accreditations that pertain to coaching, which they do not have. Traditional coaches also needed to self-evaluate and reflect on performance outcomes, whereas they did not. Finally, but importantly, connected to their cultural context, they felt that traditional coaches have an authoritative power position over their players, thus traditional coaches are seen as separate from players. These few differences were impactful enough that despite the commonalities, the participants could not accept the term *director técnico* to describe what they do.

We wanted to know what word would encompass their definition of an MC in Colombia. In the interviews, several participants were unsure what they would call themselves, some brought up the idea of being a peer, a leader, an advisor, and a facilitator. In the focus group, this was revisited, and the group together suggested the word *Compañero Orientador*, literally translated as "peer advisor-facilitator." Jose (60-year-old category) described it as follows:

It means a lot more than being a *director técnico*. A *técnico* directs a team; we do that too, but we are also peers that provide a shoulder to lean on, a friend that helps to integrate teammates, a trusted person the team can count on. We offer informed suggestions from our knowledgeable experiences, providing psychological support and direction, we are responsible for team managerial tasks, we care for players' needs, health and wellbeing. We encourage teammates to be dedicated to the sport and value their level of play.

In his interview, Jose also emphasized that the third period is a unique moment for them to work with their athletes:

[A]s a coach, the third period is an essential time because it gives us a relaxed atmosphere to speak to our players, provide feedback on their game, give suggestions to improve their play, hear what they have to say and come up with pointers for the next match.

Thus, this was seen as a strategic time to work with their team and not simply a social activity.

A *Compañero Orientador* was described as having gained their knowledge for this role from: (a) being a player who has experienced different teams and sport-age categories throughout their life, (b) suggestions and contributions received from sportmates, and (c) information observed, experienced, learned, and/or remembered from formal coaches who put them through physical, tactical, and mental practices for the purpose of performance improvement. In his interview, the current president expressed his thoughts that "*directores técnicos* don't exist in our Masters Football league," followed by his explanation of *Compañeros Orientadores*:

We have set individuals that take initiative to care for player IDs, making sure administrative fees are paid, that people are warmed-up, that substitutions are made and that during the game, the pregame strategies are being carried out. But they are not coaches, because they have no formal training on the subject, and they don't boss around the team.

We liken this term to the English translation of "Masters Coach," as stated by Callary et al. (2017): "[C]oaches working with MAs are tasked with facilitating learning, enhancing performance and quality of experience, specifically for an adult cohort" (p. 2). MCs engage in bidirectional dialog for fluid and supportive communication and share power with the athlete for a balanced interchange; they are social peers, which leads to less authoritative coaching and promotes an encouraging climate; and they are well liked and trusted by their athletes due to their approach to coaching and positive personal characteristics (Callary, Currie, & Young, 2020; MacLellan et al., 2019). However, because all of the MCs at ASOFAMTOL are also players, we liken their term most closely to the English translation: MPC. Therefore, in the remainder of this article, we refer to MPCs as the English translation to *Compañeros Orientadores*.

The Influence of MPCs on Fighting Ageism, Community Building, and Lifelong Sport

The MPCs' influence results in both direct and indirect contributions toward fighting ageist stereotypes, community building, and lifelong sport participation. Colombians' passion for football is a key element of national identity, rooted deeply in daily life (Rinke, 2007; Velez, 2002), and football generally plays out and produces *machismo* ageist cultural norms.

Soccer actualizes sociocultural processes that, when put into practice, become part of daily life and accepted thinking. It contributes to an idea of masculinity based on incorporated powers—fluids (sweat, blood and testosterone) and potencies (strength, speed, weightlessness, etc.)—perpetuating the illusion of belonging to a community (the team), and, by extension, the nation and the sense of being a “real man,” a Colombian. (Velez, 2002, p. 1)

In essence, a “real man” is a young, able-bodied athlete who is accepted into the community because this profile is equated with community contribution. The members of ASOFAMTOL and, in particular, the MPCs as older men who are leaders in their community are disturbing the assumption that a “real man” is gauged by ageist measurements, such as testosterone levels and strength. Indeed, acknowledging and fighting the ageist view that older people have a degraded physical appearance that reflects a degraded mental state, ASOFAMTOL’s motto is:

A bitter spirit makes us much older than the wrinkles on our face. [But by staying involved in Masters sport as we age] there are those who, well into their 60s and sporting their football uniform, continue to mesmerise a whole country with their fantastic footwork and skill. (Asociación de Futbolistas Adultos Mayores del Tolima, 2015)

One of the MPCs explained:

Many, if not most, of the older adults in Colombia are affected by negative circumstances causing them to lose their drive to have fun. They lose their meaning for life, the desire to participate and share with others, losing joy. These people feel the burdens for themselves and for their families. We say that these older adults have not only had their faces wrinkled by age, but also their spirits, making them bitter.

Despite many of ASOFAMTOL’s members experiencing family, social, and economic challenges, the motto suggests that ASOFAMTOL members who are actively involved in sport retain joy, enthusiasm, and inclusivity and may even be icons of national pride.

Thus, the MPCs as leaders of ASOFAMTOL contribute to community building in older age, going against ageist norms and *machismo* culture that they themselves likely grew up with. The MPCs lead the way in enabling personal and social development, which humanizes them beyond the definition of *director técnico* and shows their embeddedness in all aspects of the sport, the community, and the player’s lives. Positive community development factors include collective identities, health, social networks, lifelong learning, and well-being (Lawson, 2005). As expressed by the current president in his interview:

[The MPCs] are important in disseminating adult sport as a means of recreation and participation for future generations to learn, by demonstrating to them that despite our age we

continue to practice sport! The most important thing is [for the MPCs] to continue to be role models for community participation in adult sport, uniting people in solidarity, mutual help and improved quality of life through football.

Several MPCs spoke about the struggle against ageism and the work they have to do to empower their teammates to re-establish self-confidence. Jose (60-year-old category) explained the challenge he faces as an MPC:

It is hard for a team to do well if they are convinced that they are old and cannot, should not be playing. They have no energy or willingness to play. As a MCP, I give them a pep-talk, sometimes individually, sometimes as a group. I tell them to not let their spirits be down, because we are not old, we are capable. Being competitive, running after a ball, and being socially involved, brings us courage, happiness, energy and releases stress, all of which in the long run helps our health and reduces aging problems.

Edison (70-year-old category) pointed out the importance of reminding his teammates about their abilities:

I am responsible and enjoy supporting my teammates to get out of the mindset that they are “too old for this,” such a detrimental way of thinking that makes you deteriorate quicker than your age. I help to create a positive and healthy mindset that prepares players for matches. I keep an eye out for those that may be going through tough times, checking-in on them mid-week and again prior to the game, to give them appropriate words of encouragement and taking care of their mental and emotional health.

Although these MPCs look forward to participating and having a good time, they are also competitive. Francisco (65-year-old category) said, “We aim to have a good time, strengthen friendships through these learning experiences, and ultimately, to win.” The MPCs work alongside their team members to support personal development, improve performance, and prepare the teams to finish at the top of the rankings at the end of each tournament.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to describe the evolution and influence of MPCs in the ASOFAMTOL to uncover the peer-coaching approach within the cultural context of Masters football in Colombia. A peer-coaching approach relates to Callary et al.’s (2015, 2017, 2020) perspectives of the unique coaching approaches that MCs utilize in Northern Zone cultures. However, this approach was also affected by sociocultural norms of hierarchy, ageism, and *machismo* in Colombia. In turn, this led to an individualized coaching title for ASOFAMTOL MPCs, *Compañeros Orientadores*, that at once disrupts culturally held perceptions of *directores técnicos* while also providing a more formalized understanding of the coaching role in the Masters football league for the purposes of better structured leadership.

We acknowledge the messy complexity of what it means to be a coach in a Masters context in Colombia. We note that the MPCs did not identify with the term *director técnico* due to the power dynamic the term carries, which contradicts how they coach within their Masters sport context in a South American country that has struggled with hierarchical power dynamics. The term coach is traditionally not adopted within ASOFAMTOL because the term

carries connotations of the person being certified and/or formally trained in this role for youth and high-performance athletes as well as holding a formal position on the team that is separated from, and authoritative over, the players. Instead, the MPCs engaged in peer coaching, which included the delegation and sharing of responsibilities, taking input from everyone, building relationships, orchestrating plays, and playing. Furthermore, the MPCs have a role that embeds ASOFAMTOL's values into the way these older adults play the sport and, in turn, how they influence and interact as a community. These values include being fair, communicating respectfully, creating a supportive network that others can rely on, and being role models of healthy active aging (Asociación de Futbolistas Adultos Mayores del Tolima, 2015). The hesitation of the MPCs to call themselves coaches (to formally accept their positions) makes it hard for the league to be considered legitimate, as a defined direction and leadership is required for funding structures.

We note that the Masters sport context is extremely heterogeneous not only in terms of the MAs' prior experiences, knowledge, and abilities (Rathwell et al., 2015) but also in terms of the cultural context of sport intertwined with the cultural expectations of older people that potentially play out differently across different cultures. For this reason, the assumption that the term "coach" holds the same meaning and performs the same functions across all settings is false, and it is important to understand coaching and coaching approaches relevant within specific contextual settings. There is also much to learn from understanding the different roles, expectations, contributions, and meanings of the coach across different performance contexts (e.g., Masters sport) and cultural contexts (e.g., Colombia). Given the large concentration of MAs and the continued growth and quality of Masters sport participation in ASOFAMTOL, we need to know more about what these MPCs need to learn to be effective. Future research should consider the lack of coach education in Southern Zone countries like Colombia.

Note

¹Northern Zone countries include those in North America, Northern and Western Europe, and the Pacific Rim. Southern Zone countries include those in South America, Africa, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific Islands (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

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