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Although sport psychology scholars often refer to John Lawther’s publication of the *Psychology of Coaching* as an important historical event, little detail of Lawther’s many contributions to the field of sport psychology have been discussed within the literature. Thus, the present paper describes Lawther’s various contributions to the field of sport psychology. Specifically, Lawther’s activities related to the publications of the *Psychology of Coaching* and *Sport Psychology*, presentations at the first, second, and third International Congress of Sport Psychology, as well as his leadership role in promoting the application of sport psychology during the late 1960s and early 1970s are delineated.

*Keywords:* History, John D. Lawther, Coaching, Applied Sport Psychology
The field of sport psychology has an extensive past dating back to the early 1890s (Weinberg & Gould, 2015). In the establishment of the discipline, scholarly investigations were primarily rooted in the utilization of experimental laboratory procedures to evaluate athlete’s psychomotor skills (e.g., Scripture, 1894). For example, psychologists and physical educators were involved in the determination of the unique expertise which athletes possessed in such skills as vision, coordination, and reaction time (e.g., Dorcus, 1923; Fullerton, 1921; Miles, 1931). One individual who exemplified this approach in sport psychology was Coleman Griffith, the director of the Research in Athletics Laboratory at the University of Illinois from 1925 to 1932 (Gould & Pick, 1995). Many of the experiments that Griffith and his students carried out were associated with motor learning principles (Landers, 1995). However, in addition to scientific studies conducted in the laboratory, Griffith consulted with the Chicago Cubs baseball team and completed observations of coaches and athletes in naturalistic settings which led to writing the Psychology of Coaching (Green, 2003). As Griffith matriculated to various higher education administrative positions (Green, 2003), physical educators continued to advance the scientific knowledge base during the 1940s through the 1960s (Gould & Voelker, 2014). For example, university faculty trained students to concentrate on the development of the scientific discipline. Consequently, scholars initiated research agendas aimed at the advancement of knowledge (Gould & Voelker, 2014). The sport psychology scholarship generated was associated with the discipline of motor behavior and focused on assessing cognitive performance measures in laboratory settings (Landers, 1995). For instance, topics studied by researchers included anxiety, feedback, mental practice,
motivation, and the effects of practice in relation to motor skill performance. Those that explored these subjects were often scholars whose disciplinary area of research focused on motor behavior topics (Landers, 1995). Because motor learning included various psychological elements, some professionals explained how cognitions used in the process of learning motor skills could be utilized to improve athletic performance (e.g., Henry, 1947).

As the disciplinary knowledge base expanded, scholars realized that there was a need to provide coaches with updated scientific information. John D. Lawther, a basketball coach and professor of physical education had the expertise to author the text, *Psychology of Coaching* (Lawther, 1951) which incorporated the latest research and demonstrated how psychology could be applied to sport.

Sport psychology professionals have viewed Lawther’s (1951) *Psychology of Coaching* as a prominent historical development (Lowe & Walsh, 1978; Terry, 2011; Weinberg & Gould, 2015). While this publication was viewed as influential, few details about Lawther’s work leading up to and subsequent to publishing this text have been documented.

Although Lawther did not completely transition away from motor learning, he recognized important psychological information that needed to be provided to coaches and athletes. Therefore, Lawther, through course work and scholarly writings began to provide information that was increasingly became more focused on applied and social psychology of sport issues. Thus, he helped transition sport psychology from a predominantly motor behavior based discipline to one which increasingly became more focused on the application of psychology to sport. As Williams and Straub (2010) noted, Lawther’s scholarly work led professionals to have greater interest in the psychology of coaching because they wanted to learn how to better handle
athlete’s personality and emotions, motivation levels, and also enhance the cohesion of their
teams.

In addition to his writings and his course work which included applied psychology of
coaching material, Lawther and his colleagues through the Commission/Taskforce on Sport
Psychology further transitioned sport psychology from motor learning by providing information
to coaches and physical education professionals about how psychology could be utilized (Sports
Psychology Task Force, 1969). Furthermore, Lawther encouraged the development of specific
graduate level sport psychology course work (Lawther, 1968; Link & McKinney, 1989).

This paradigm shift toward teaching and applying sport psychology was a major
advancement. For instance, during Lawther’s era a difference of opinion existed on what sport
psychology professionals should emphasize (Schwank, 1970). One approach focused entirely on
development of the sport psychology knowledge base (Krane & Whaley, 2010). In contrast,
Lawther and his colleagues (e.g., Bruce Ogilvie, Reuben Frost, and Walter Schwank) favored an
applied approach which disseminated sport psychology knowledge to coaches (Schwank, 1970).
These differing views were noted in the work of Krane and Whaley (2010). These researchers
interviewed leading sport psychology professionals who attended graduate school in the 1970s
and 1980s. A common theme found was that a main focus of their sport psychology graduate
education was viewed as, “just developing our knowledge base.” (p. 363)

Contrary to the approach of encouraging sport psychology professionals to focus only on
developing knowledge, an applied approach stressed by Lawther and his colleagues gained
acceptance by Dorothy Harris (Straub, 1987). Harris became employed at Pennsylvania State
University in 1966 a year after John Lawther retired. As she began to develop sport psychology
graduate education in the early 1970s, she placed elements of applied sport psychology into the
curriculum and within the conferences she organized (Harris, 1972; “Psychologist to Speak, 1970”; Harris, 1975). Harris’s acceptance of a practical approach highlighted by Lawther and his colleagues was particularly important in the development of applied sport psychology since Pennsylvania State University became a leading institution which provided sport psychology graduate education during this time period (Salmela, 1981). Additionally, Lawther’s former student Robert Singer as well as Pennsylvania State University professors Dorothy Harris and Michael Mahoney were members of a sport psychology committee that led the implementation of a formalized sport psychology program within the United States Olympic Committee (Singer, 1989; Smith, 1978).

Given that Lawther influenced a conceptual change in the approach to the sport psychology profession, the purpose of the present manuscript is to provide details of how his work impacted the development of the field. Specifically, this paper highlights Lawther’s influence on gaining acceptance for the sport psychology discipline, the transition of motor learning to sport psychology, and the development of applied sport psychology in the United States. Lawther’s work is significant because it attempted to translate knowledge for those interested in becoming effective coaches. In addition, Lawther’s efforts can inform professionals about the importance of appreciating the need for the applied and scientific aspects of sport psychology. Additionally, learning about Lawther’s work can provide a more detailed depiction of how and why applied sport psychology developed in North America.

In order to examine Lawther’s contributions to sport psychology, historical methodology was utilized. Historical research methods seek to understand events and to develop a precise depiction of these occurrences grounded on extant evidence (Seifried, 2010). Five phases for this type of research have been suggested (Seifried, 2010). These steps include selecting a
subject and determining what questions to pursue, locating primary and secondary information necessary to conduct the study and thirdly historical criticism of the documentation collected. The fourth and fifth steps of historical research are to evaluate and understand the evidence discovered and to provide a conclusion in a significant and coherent manner (Seifried, 2010).

In following the steps that Seifried (2010) advocated, this paper highlights the specific contributions of John Lawther to the field of sport psychology and explains how these contributions impacted the development of the field. Secondly, in order to conduct a detailed descriptive and analytical analysis of Lawther’s contributions, each box of the John D. Lawther papers at Pennsylvania State University was investigated for primary source information related to Lawther’s sport psychology work. Additionally, primary source material from the American Alliance of Health Physical Education Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) Archives at Springfield College was analyzed to determine John Lawther’s role in the formation of the Commission/Task Force on Sport Psychology. The primary source information located was utilized to form the basis of the present paper. Additionally, computerized literature searches were completed to locate John Lawther’s specific sport psychology work. Specific databases utilized included HathiTrust, Google Scholar, Sport Discus and WorldCat. Thirdly, the primary source evidence located was thought to be of strong caliber and supported the historical narrative developed. The fourth step in the present research consisted of developing common themes to identify specific contributions which impacted the field of sport psychology. Reflection on the occurrence of events throughout Lawther’s career led to structuring the current manuscript in thematic sections. These segments highlighted Lawther’s influence on gaining acceptance for the field of applied sport psychology, the transition of the field of sport psychology from motor learning, teaching sport psychology principles, and knowledge translation. Finally, the last step
in the current research was to present an appropriate conclusion based on the description of the
correspondence and impact of Lawther’s sport psychology work.

Who was John Lawther?

John Lawther was born in Carroll County, Ohio in 1899 and attended Minerva High School
graduating in 1915. He then matriculated to Westminster College in Pennsylvania where he
majored in chemistry and ancient languages (Lawther, 1951a). As a college varsity athlete,
Lawther participated in four sports including baseball, basketball, football, and track (“For
Westminster Banquet Speaker”, 1962). After graduation, Lawther played professional football
as a member of the 1920 Patrician Football club in Youngstown, Ohio (Lawther, 1951a).
Concurrently, while playing football, Lawther was a teacher and coach at Hubbard High School
during the 1919-1920 school year. He then taught at New Wilmington High School for one year
and proceeded to serve as principal from 1922 to 1925. This was followed by the completion of
a master’s degree in educational psychology from Columbia University in 1926 (Lawther,
1951a).

While employed as a principal and high school athletic coach, Lawther also taught part-time
at Westminster College. In 1926, he began full-time employment at Westminster College as an
assistant professor of psychology and education (Lawther, 1951a). Simultaneously, he initiated
his collegiate coaching career as head basketball coach and assistant football coach at
Westminster College. Shortly thereafter, he was promoted to head football coach. Additionally,
from 1934 to 1936, Lawther was the chair of the Westminster College department of psychology
and education (Lawther, 1951a).

In 1936, Lawther was hired to coach the men’s basketball team and serve as an instructor in
the Department of Health and Physical Education at Pennsylvania State University. Throughout
these years Lawther was extremely busy (Lawther, 1947). Not only did he have coaching and
teaching responsibilities, he was also an advisor for approximately 40 students per year. He also
supervised numerous theses and dissertations, and provided college and university service
(Lawther, 1947; Lawther, 1949). Although the master’s theses and dissertations that Lawther’s
students completed during this time period were related to the teaching of health and physical
education, Lawther co-authored *Successful Teaching in Physical Education* (e.g., Davis &
Lawther, 1941; Davis & Lawther, 1948) which gave him the opportunity to provide information
on psychology applied to physical education and athletics. For example, in this text, Davis and
Lawther discussed topics such as a coach paying attention to the mental preparation of athletes in
football and basketball. Additionally, Davis and Lawther (1948) noted the importance of using
relaxation techniques to help athletes perform optimally in athletics. Perhaps writing about this
information inspired Lawther to contemplate authoring a complete text on the psychology of
coaching.

Lawther retired from coaching at the end of the 1948-1949 collegiate basketball season to
focus on teaching, writing, and administration (Lawther, 1949). He believed that because of
numerous faculty member responsibilities the time needed to commit to coaching was not
available. Thus, Lawther served as a professor of physical education from 1949 to 1952, before
promotion to assistant dean in the Fall of 1952. During the time between 1949 and 1952,
Lawther wrote and published the text, *Psychology of Coaching* (Lawther, 1951c).

Lawther continued as a professor and administrator for the College of Health and Physical
Education at Pennsylvania State University until his retirement in 1965 (“Lawther Announces
Retirement”, 1965). Subsequent to his retirement, Lawther served in visiting professor positions
at various universities until 1971.
 Throughout Lawther’s career he was dedicated to the advancement of coaching, physical education, and sport psychology knowledge. Specifically, he helped disseminate and gain acceptance for the psychology of coaching knowledge through his role as president of the Division of Men’s Athletics (now known as the National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE]) and through chairing a national committee focused on the professional preparation of athletic coaches (Lawther, 1960a). He was also committed to advancing the field of applied sport psychology through his efforts as a committee member on the Commission of Sport Psychology/Sport Psychology Task Force (Merrick, 1969). This task force, affiliated with the American Alliance of Health Physical Education and Recreation (AAHPER), was focused on defining sport psychology and the dissemination of psychological knowledge to coaches and physical education professionals (DMA, 1969). This work led to the organization of groups of professionals with interest in the application of sport psychology. The DMA Sport Psychology Task Force which Lawther helped to develop eventually was re-organized as the Sport Psychology Academy under the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE).

 Lawther also disseminated his knowledge of sport psychology as a professor at Pennsylvania State University. Students training to be physical education and coaching professionals received the benefit of having a trailblazer in sport psychology. Specifically, Lawther provided psychology of coaching information in the PE 460 course titled, *Methods and Principles of Athletic Coaching*. This course was based on the information from Lawther’s book, *Psychology of Coaching* (Lawther, n.d.). After his retirement from Pennsylvania State University at the end of the 1965 Spring semester, Lawther continued to provide sport psychology knowledge to university students and faculty at various universities. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Lawther’s teaching interests became more focused on the development of sport psychology
curriculum. Thus, Lawther contributed to leading the way in North America from the shift of
only offering motor behavior course work and specialization to the development of separate
graduate level curricula in sport psychology. In particular, Lawther was influential in the
development of sport psychology at the University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) (Link
& McKinney, 1989). Doris McKinney, a former professor with the Department of Physical
Education at UNCG stated: “After his retirement from Penn State he came here to help get the
learning and sports psychology program off the ground. I had the opportunity to work very

As an early scholar in sport psychology, Lawther through his, teaching, research, and service
in a similar manner to Coleman Griffith was ahead of his time in promoting the science and
application of sport psychology. In fact, Lawther stated, “There are physical educators who
maintain that physical education deals only with motor activities – and vigorous one’s at that.
And yet many a famous coach of athletics finds it necessary and worth-while to teach his
player’s how to relax.” (Davis & Lawther, 1948, p. 450). Thus, by noting the similarities
between Griffith and Lawther’s work it is apparent that they differed in their approach from
other colleagues who were more focused on only coaching the physical aspects of sport
performance. Therefore, both Griffith and Lawther were ahead of their time by writing and
lecturing about how psychological knowledge could be applied to athletics. In fact, they both
wrote books titled the Psychology of Coaching which provided coaches with information about
the mental aspects of sport performance. Lawther’s work advanced the work of Griffith since he
was able to incorporate research into his text that had been completed during the 1930s and
1940s.
Thus, undoubtedly, Lawther’s coaching, teaching, and writing background and work with the Sport Psychology Taskforce provided him the opportunity to advance practical sport psychology application. Specifically, his writings and teaching in sport psychology included the development of the concepts of psychological skills for athletes and the psychology of coaching. Through dissemination of applied sport psychology concepts, Lawther helped the field of sport psychology gain acceptance and thus transition from motor learning to application of psychology for coaches and athletes.

**Gaining Acceptance: Lawther’s Contributions to the Discipline of Sport Psychology**

One way in which Lawther gained respect and acceptance for sport psychology was to influence the development of the discipline. Students completed theses and dissertations under his supervision and thus advanced the sport psychology knowledge base (e.g., Grimm, 1968; Peters, 1969; Rivenes, 1967; Schilke, 1968). Additionally, his students such as Robert Singer (Singer, 1989) went on to teach sport psychology, develop sport psychology graduate programs, add to the sport psychology knowledge base, and apply sport psychology with coaches and athletes.

Although much of the research while Lawther was a professor at Pennsylvania State University was completed by graduate students under his supervision, Lawther also completed his own research related to the psychology of athletics. Always being astute to the practical application of psychology, Lawther brought a practical athletic problem to the laboratory. Specifically, Lawther conducted studies on the reaction time and emotional reaction of athletes (Smaltz, 1930).
Lawther was interested in examining the reaction time of taller athletes because during that time period a popular perception was that taller athletes were considered not quick enough to be successful basketball players ("Big Athletes Alert, Speedy as Small Men", 1931). However, Lawther surmised otherwise and decided to field a basketball team at Westminster College with an average height of six feet, two inches. Based on the success that he observed on the basketball court Lawther examined the reaction time of 94 basketball and football players and non-athletes. Specifically, he compared variations in reaction time between men over six feet and men under six feet tall. The main assessment utilized was how many taps were made during a thirty second interval. Results revealed no differences between the reaction time of the taller men and shorter men. Also, Lawther found that football backfield athletes had a quicker reaction time than lineman and that forwards reacted faster than guards or centers (Smaltz, 1930).

In addition to assessing the reaction time of athletes in the psychological laboratory, Lawther recognized that emotional calmness was important for athletic success. Thus, he determined if athletes were likely to demonstrate less emotional stress than non-athletes. In order to measure an athlete’s emotional response to stimuli, Lawther assessed psychogalvanic skin response (Smaltz, 1930). To conduct this research, 68 participants were asked a series of questions written to elicit emotional responses. Lawther found that varsity athletes were better able to control their response to the stimuli than non-athletes. Additionally, Lawther concluded that forwards in basketball and those playing in the backfield in football had higher psychogalvanic skin responses than lineman and basketball centers and guards (Smaltz, 1930). It is interesting to note that this research which examined an athlete’s psychophysiological response can be considered an early precursor to the more contemporary study of biofeedback in sport.
Throughout his career Lawther remained committed to promoting and gaining acceptance for the sport psychology discipline (Sports Psychology Task Force, 1969). Lawther was ahead of his time because many in the field of sport psychology during the 1960s believed that sport psychology should only focus on theory and development of the knowledge base (Krane & Whaley, 2010). Lawther also believed in the importance of applying knowledge to advance practice. Thus, not only did Lawther believe in the importance of promoting the application of psychological principles to athletic situations he believed and was involved in the development of the theoretical and scientific aspects of the discipline. For instance, a prime emphasis within physical education during the 1960s was the advancement of the scientific aspects of physical education. The Big Ten Body of Knowledge Project was developed during this time period to promote the sport science discipline (Zeigler & McCristal, 1967). While planning for the 1964 conference, the leadership decided to host a meeting focused on the scientific knowledge within the discipline of physical education (Zeigler & McCristal, 1967). Seven individuals were selected to contribute keynote presentations. John Lawther and Coleman Griffith were both chosen to provide keynote addresses. Lawther was invited to provide a presentation on motor learning, while Coleman Griffith was asked to discuss sport and culture (Zeigler & McCristal, 1967).

Arthur Daniels, excited that Lawther accepted an invitation to speak at the conference, suggested Lawther discuss topics such as motivation, intelligence, maturation, practice, and speed and accuracy (Daniels, 1964). Daniels also believed that because Lawther’s background was related to the psychology of sport, he would be interested to know that Coleman Griffith was scheduled to present at the conference directly after him (Daniels, 1964).
The following year, in 1965, Lawther continued to help gain respect for the field of sport psychology by accepting an invitation to speak at the first International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) World Congress held in Rome, Italy. Working collaboratively with Ferruccio Antonelli, the organizer of the ISSP congress, Arthur Slater-Hammel invited prestigious individuals to present at the congress (Slater-Hammel, 1964). Specifically, Slater-Hamel (1964) wrote to Lawther, “In view of your knowledge of the psychology of sports and coaching, it occurs to me that you might be interested in presenting a paper to the Congress. The Congress, in turn will be the better for your presence and contribution.” Lawther, already in Madrid Spain during the Spring 1965 semester (Lawther, 1965a), traveled to Rome to present, *The Learning Process at the High Skill Level* (ISSP, 1965). Along with presenting at the first ISSP congress, Lawther frequently presented sport psychology knowledge at national and international conferences during the 1960s and early 1970s (e.g., Lawther, 1966; Lawther, 1968a; Lawther, 1970; Lawther, 1972b; Lawther 1973a). Specifically, see Table 1 for a list of Lawther’s sport psychology related presentations at national and international conferences.

**A Transition from Motor Learning to Sport Psychology: Lawther’s Contributions toward the Development and Dissemination of Sport Psychology Knowledge**

One way in which Lawther chose to educate coaches about psychological knowledge was through scholarly writings. Clearly, Lawther recognized a need to help coaches understand and communicate better. As much research was being completed which was applicable to coaching and because Lawther had been a high level coach and professor, he was an individual that surely received respect for his knowledge. Thus, the influential books that allowed Lawther to translate psychological knowledge were the *Psychology of Coaching* (Lawther, 1951) and *Sport Psychology* (Lawther, 1972). In addition, Lawther planned to write the text, *Psychology of*
Winning, to directly provide athletes information about the mental aspects of training for athletics.

**Preparing the Psychology of Coaching Manuscript**

Subsequent to Lawther’s retirement from coaching, he began to compose the *Psychology of Coaching* manuscript. The historical record is not clear on who initiated the idea to write the *Psychology of Coaching*. However, previous editions of *Successful Teaching in Physical Education* were part of the Prentice-Hall Books on Sports and Health series edited by Elmer D. Mitchell. As editor for both the *Research Quarterly* and the *Journal of Health and Physical Education* from 1929 to 1943, Mitchell was certainly aware of the scientific literature produced in physical education (Reznik & Stevenson, 1980). Thus, it is plausible that Mitchell thought a need existed to offer an updated psychology of athletics text and therefore recruited Lawther to write the *Psychology of Coaching*.

Regardless of who initiated the idea to write the book, almost a year after retirement from coaching, Lawther received a review of the preliminary manuscript (Jones, 1950). He was encouraged to reference Coleman Griffith’s work and to include more information supported by psychological research. Lawther made the recommended changes by citing the work of Coleman Griffith and by including 157 references from scholarly journals (Lawther, 1951c).

**The Publication and Reaction to the Psychology of Coaching**

The publication of the *Psychology of Coaching* made an immediate impact. The editor, Don Jones expressed his pleasure by observing that sales of the book were excellent and that the text received positive reviews (Jones, 1952a). Jones, also noted that the book sold over 2,000 copies in the first five months (Jones, 1952b). Certainly, the book sales were influenced by those that
adopted the book for college courses (Jones, 1952a). In fact, Jones (1952a) expressed to Lawther, “I think your book will stimulate many colleges to offer a course of this type.”

Many coaches and professors positively reviewed the *Psychology of Coaching* (Riina, 1959). Also, numerous letters of congratulations were received (e.g., Meredith, 1952; Nixon, 1952). Undoubtedly, Lawther’s *Psychology of Coaching* contributed to his recognition as a leader in sport psychology and motor learning research (Van Dalen, Mitchell, & Bennett, 1953).

Other universities began to invite Lawther to lecture on the psychology of coaching. Specifically, Lawther lectured at the University of Michigan summer workshop for coaches (Leibee, 1952). He was also a keynote speaker for the *Psychology of Athletics and Current Athletic Problems* conference hosted at the University of Kansas (“Coaches on Panel”, 1954, p. 16).

The *Psychology of Coaching* was not only influential in North America, but internationally as well. In 1958, Lawther learned that *Psychology of Coaching* would be translated to Japanese (Riina, 1958). Additionally, plans were also under way for Lawther to author a second edition of the *Psychology of Coaching* (Riina, 1959).

**Publication of Sport Psychology**

Lawther’s *Sport Psychology* (Lawther, 1972) book incorporated changes that occurred in the discipline throughout the previous two decades. A comparison of the differences between the *Psychology of Coaching* text and *Sport Psychology*, give a sense of how sport psychology changed. Specifically, *Sport Psychology* incorporated more sport and physical education research that was published in physical education journals than the *Psychology of Coaching*. Also, *Sport Psychology* was more distinct from the field of motor learning as many topics were related to the social psychology of sport such as personality, motivation, emotion and
psychosocial aspects of sport. However, in the *Psychology of Coaching* many of the topics were motor behavior related. The changes observed in Lawther’s texts are consistent with Weinberg and Gould’s (2015) depiction of the development of the field. Specifically, these time periods were viewed as when growth in research occurred. Also, Weinberg and Gould (2015) noted that during this time sport psychology began to become more distinct from motor learning.

Also, congruent with Weinberg and Gould’s (2015) portrayal, Lawther’s coverage of current applied sport psychology topics such as goal setting, imagery, self-talk, relaxation, and concentration were evident in the *Sport Psychology* text. Indeed, these topics may have piqued the interest of students and faculty who utilized this textbook for sport psychology courses. In fact, Lowe and Walsh (1978, p. 68) stated: “John Lawther now the elder statesman of sport psychology published *Sport Psychology* in 1972 and this paperback text invited the establishment of undergraduate courses in sport psychology.”

**A Plan to Write the *Psychology of Winning***

Another area in which Lawther was ahead of his time was in discussing how psychology could help athletes mentally prepare for competition. Specifically, during the 1950s Lawther had aspirations of translating knowledge of mental preparation for athletics through a book tentatively titled, *Psychology of Winning* (Lawther, 1955). During this time period few individuals were discussing mental preparation as most of the scholarly focus was related to motor learning or the social psychology of sport (Landers, 1995). However, Lawther submitted an outline and sample chapter on psychological preparation for athletics for review to a publisher (Lawther, 1955).² He intended to provide information about how athletes could prepare mentally through learning concepts such as “mental toughness”; “getting set”; “concentration”, “mental
rehearsal”, and “thinking” (Lawther, 1955). Clearly, the proposed text was an applied sport psychology book focused on assisting athletes’ mental preparation.

Lawther was also interested in obtaining opinions about the *Psychology of Winning* from a prestigious Pennsylvania State University faculty book club. Lawther was given positive feedback and believed that this response indicated that the book appealed to a large audience (Lawther, 1955ca.).

Overall, the editor, Don Jones, was pleased, but nevertheless believed the chapter could be re-written to have more appeal to a general audience (Jones, 1955). Jones thought the proposed text should focus on the psychology of performance rather than only sport. His suggestions were a foreshadowing of the future of sport psychology. In contemporary sport psychology consultants utilize sport psychology techniques in other settings with clients from, the military, business, and the performing arts (Murphy, 2012).

Although certainly plausible that Lawther may have been interested in applying psychology to general performance situations, no historical record of Lawther’s response to Jones was located. Even though Lawther did not complete the *Psychology of Winning*, his ideas from the chapter outlines were expanded upon in the book, *Sport Psychology* (Lawther, 1972a). It is interesting to note that Lawther’s focus on the cognitive aspects of sport psychology for performance enhancement foreshadowed the changes in the field of sport psychology that would occur three decades later.

**Important Groundwork in Applied Sport Psychology:**

**Lawther’s Work with the DMA**

In providing coaches and administrators with useful knowledge, Lawther served on the executive board of the Division of Men’s Athletics (DMA) of AAHPER and was also the
chairman of the DMA in 1961. A central focus of the DMA was to provide knowledge to coaches and athletic administrators in order to help them improve their expertise (Cherry & Lawther, 1963). For example, the DMA with Lawther’s assistance published a position statement titled, *Athletics in Education: A Platform Statement* (DMA, 1962) which included information on cultivating a positive athletic environment.

The development of the platform statement focused on the importance of developing an enjoyable environment is an example of how Lawther was ahead of his time. In fact, this statement seems to have been a significant idea that created a paradigm shift in thinking about how psychological aspects of the sport environment should be structured. Certainly, professionals over the next four decades continued to advance these ideas discussed in the early 1960s. Specifically, the topic of motivational climate continues to be investigated in contemporary applied sport psychology research (e.g., Duda, 2013).

Lawther also encouraged coaches to provide a positive environment with an article describing a coaches’ role in promoting a positive environment (Lawther, 1965b). Providing information about the role of the coach in encouraging a developmental atmosphere for athletics was related to Lawther’s work as Chair of the Steering Committee for Professional Preparation, Men’s Athletic Division. This committee provided suggestions about how coaches, athletic trainers, and athletic administrators could best be prepared (Lawther, 1960b).

**Organization of the National Sport Psychology Conference**

As discussed throughout the paper, Lawther believed in a practical approach to sport psychology so that coaches could be provided with helpful information. He was ahead of his time through his work in forming the Commission on Sport Psychology/Sport Psychology Task Force which was focused on the application of sport psychology knowledge (Schwank, 1970).
This was in contrast to the main sport psychology organization in North America at the time, the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (NASPSPA) which was committed to developing the knowledge base in sport psychology and not focused on developing the applied aspects of the field (Silva, 1989). Although, Lawther and his colleagues developed an organizational structure for the application of sport psychology in the late 1960s, it was not until the mid-1980s that the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) was founded after NASPSPA membership decided to not address applied sport psychology issues (Silva, 1989).

Almost fifteen years before the development of AAASP, The Commission on Sports Psychology/Sport Psychology Task Force began to address applied sport psychology issues in the late 1960s. Specifically, the DMA of AAHPER, chose Lawther, Reuben Frost (Springfield College), and Walter Schwank (University of Montana), to lead the Commission on Sport Psychology/Sport Psychology Task Force (Merrick, 1969). Subsequent to Lawther and his colleagues’ appointment to this taskforce, they organized a national conference.

The work of the Sport Psychology Task Force culminated with the Winning Edge National Sports Psychology Conference held from May 18 through May 20, 1973 at the State University of New York at Buffalo (State University of New York at Buffalo, 1973). This conference focused on how psychology could be practically applied to coaching and athletics (Schwank, 1974). Attendees had the opportunity to register for a two credit graduate course taught by Lawther titled, “Special Topics in HPER: Psychology in Sport” (State University of New York at Buffalo, 1973).

An Analysis of John Lawther’s Contributions to Sport Psychology
In analyzing Coleman Griffith’s contributions, Gould and Pick (1995) suggested that Griffith had little influence on contemporary sport psychology. In contrast, Lawther, a contemporary of Griffith’s had more influence on the development of the field. Lawther’s more direct influence, may have occurred because higher education was not ready for Griffith’s work in the 1920s and 1930s since physical education graduate programs were just beginning (Gould & Pick, 1995). Also, Lawther’s sport psychology work was completed after 1950, while Griffith was active in sport psychology during the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, Lawther appears to have had more direct influence on those that became leaders in the field of sport psychology during the 1970s and 1980s.

Lawther’s effect on the sport psychology profession can be seen in his provision of psychological knowledge to coaches. These efforts to provide knowledge translation of applied sport psychology concepts provide an important lesson. A lesson learned from Lawther’s legacy is to remember the value of both conducting rigorous research and then to also provide the results to those that can utilize the knowledge to help athletes improve sport performance. In similarity to Lawther, Gould and Pick (1995) believed an important lesson from Griffith’s legacy was the equal value placed on the significance of both research and practice within sport psychology.

The science to practice focus that Griffith, Lawther, and others concentrated on was a precursor to national efforts which occurred in the United States during the 1970s. Whereas Lawther supervised laboratory studies and focused on using knowledge gained to inform practice, Martens believed researchers should develop knowledge with alternative methodologies in naturalized settings (Martens, 1979).
Clearly, Lawther, like Martens valued the importance of research and practice. He was committed to disseminating research findings. This dedication was a precursor to the work of the National Association of Sport and Physical Education’s (NASPE) Sport Psychology Academy and the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP).

More recently, the process of knowledge translation has become an area of research within the sport science profession (Reade, Rodgers, & Spriggs, 2008). Specifically, knowledge translation is an attempt to take scientific information and aid those that may use this information in applied settings (Martin Ginis, 2012). During the late 1960s and early 1970s Lawther in conjunction with the Sport Psychology Task Force examined the best way to provide coaches with sport psychology information. This led to providing coaches with sport psychology knowledge at one of the first national sport psychology workshops.

Recent knowledge translation research supports having credible coaches provide information to other coaches (Reade, Rodgers, & Spriggs, 2008). For instance, past studies have suggested that most coaches learn information about coaching from other high level coaches (Reade, Rodgers, & Spriggs, 2008). Thus, Reade et al. suggested that coaches seek new knowledge from other coaches rather than learning this information from other sport science professionals.

Thus, based on recent research knowledge translation research, Lawther might have had an advantage in influencing other coaches and physical educators since he may have been viewed as credible since he was a successful collegiate basketball coach.

Clearly, Lawther’s work significantly impacted early knowledge translation because he had been a successful collegiate coach. Consequently, when he translated scientific knowledge he was viewed as credible. This is consistent with a principle of knowledge translation that Martin Ginis (2012, p. 193) has suggested, “Identify Credible Messengers”.
Conclusion

In a similar way to Coleman Griffith, Lawther’s work was ahead of his time. Lawther recognized the value of observing athletes in the field and providing recommendations on how performance could be improved (Lawther, 1951). In fact, Lawther (1951) stressed the importance of a psychologist having a sport background in order to provide accurate recommendations. Lawther (1951) understood the challenge for the field of applied sport psychology to gain acceptance and recounted a story of how a psychologist did not appear to help a professional sport organization improve. Specifically, he explained that a major league baseball owner hired a psychologist that was ineffective in aiding in the process of team selection. Lawther emphasized that sport psychology was in the beginning stages and this incident should not devalue the impact psychology has on athletic performance (Lawther, 1951). Interestingly, a few decades after Lawther discussed the issue of team selection, a major issue in sport psychology was the use of psychological testing for evaluation and team selection purposes. In fact, Landers (1995) discussed the controversy that ensued over the psychometric properties of a survey that leading professionals Ogilvie and Tutko utilized in their work with coaches in relation to team selection through the use of descriptive survey methodology.

Throughout the years of Lawther’s influence on the development of contemporary sport psychology, his enthusiasm for the field surely impacted his students (Berlin, 1972; Schott, 1950; Frost, 1969; Singer, 1989). As Lawther’s former students became leaders, they understood the significance of sport psychology. In fact, Robert J. Scannell, a former doctoral student of Lawther’s, made an influential decision in the development of contemporary sport psychology. Specifically, in 1969, he hired Dr. Dorothy V. Harris to develop a sport psychology graduate
program at Pennsylvania State University (Straub, 1987). Almost immediately, the sport psychology program provided students the opportunity to learn about applied sport psychology. In addition to one of Lawther’s former students hiring an individual to develop a sport psychology graduate program, a former colleague, Gene Wettstone, the gymnastics coach at Pennsylvania State University was influenced by Lawther’s writings (Wettstone, n.d.). Wettstone employed Joseph Massimo to serve as a team psychologist for the United States Men’s gymnastics team (Nau, 1972).

It seems likely that John Lawther’s efforts to advance sport psychology influenced Pennsylvania State University faculty and alumni to lead the national effort to develop sport psychology at the Olympic level in the United States. Formed in the late 1970s, Pennsylvania State University, alumni and John Lawther’s former student, Robert Singer, formed a national sport psychology committee. This committee consisting of two Pennsylvania State University faculty, Dorothy Harris and Michael Mahoney, and Rainer Martens from the University of Illinois formalized a sport psychology program with United States Olympic athletes and coaches. Professionals in the United States who could assist individual athletes and teams in psychological preparation for national and international athletic competition were organized. Undoubtedly, John Lawther’s efforts influenced the early development of applied sport psychology.
Table 1. Timeline of Events for John Lawther

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Lawther Graduates from Westminster College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Lawther begins working at Westminster College as Assistant Professor and Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Conducts studies on athletes as a professor at Westminster College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Published a book chapter titled, “Development of Motor Skills and Knowledge” in Charles E. Skinner’s text <em>Educational Psychology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Began coaching and teaching at Pennsylvania State College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Published <em>Successful Teaching of Physical Education</em> with Elwood C. Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Retired from coaching to focus on his work as a professor of physical education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Published the text <em>Psychology of Coaching</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Became administrator for the School of Physical Education at Pennsylvania State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Served as Keynote Speaker at University of Kansas conference on the Psychology of Athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Chairs committee on Professional Preparation of Coaches for AAHPER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Elected President of the DMA for AAHPER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Presented with Coleman Griffith at the Big Ten Body of Knowledge Conference at the University of Illinois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Present at the first ISSP World Congress of Sport Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Lawther retired from Pennsylvania State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Presented <em>Psychology of Teaching and Coaching</em> at the Second National Institute for Girls and Women in Sport conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Appointed as visiting professor at Indiana University for the 1966-1967 academic year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Lawther is a visiting professor at University of Montana and Brigham Young University and teaches courses on the psychology of sport at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Presented <em>A Graduate Course in Sport Psychology</em> at the National AAHPER conference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1968  Served as a member of scientific committee for the Second ISSSP and presented
Movement Individuation, Motor Pattern Learning, and Creativity at the Second ISSP
World Congress
1968  Appointed Visiting Professor at Springfield College
1968  Published the text The Learning of Physical Skills
1969  Appointed to the Commission on Sport Psychology/Sport Psychology Task Force
1969  Appointed Visiting Professor at University of North Carolina at Greensboro
1972  Published the text Sport Psychology
1972  Presented Sports Psychology at the Physiology and Psychology of Sport Conference of
the Eastern Association for Physical Education of College Women
1973  Organized the Winning Edge National Sports Psychology Conference
1973  Presented Skill Learning and its Hierchical Development at the 3rd ISSP World Congress
of Sport Psychology
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Endnotes


3. Originally this group was to be the Commission on Sports Psychology, however, the Division of Men’s Athletics of AAHPER asked the committee to operate as the Sports Psychology Task Force.

4. Throughout the 1970s over fifty students completed the master’s program in sport psychology as Pennsylvania State University came to be seen as one of the top graduate programs in sport psychology (Salmela, 1981).

5. In addition to providing applied sport psychology services to National team athletes while visiting the Pennsylvania State University campus for gymnastics competitions (Nau, 1972), Massimo spoke to Pennsylvania State University students about his role as a team psychologist to the United States Men’s Gymnastics team (“Psychologist to Speak”, 1970).