

**Exploring the ‘Intangible Player Characteristics’ that Junior Hockey Scouts Consider
when Evaluating Draft-Eligible Prospects**

by

Ryan Wayne Guenter

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Abstract

The overarching purpose of this study was to systematically explore and identify the ‘intangible player characteristics’ (beyond physical, technical, and tactical abilities) that scouts consider when determining the draft-suitability of eligible ‘minor hockey’ players in a Canadian major junior hockey league. More specifically, the study addressed three primary research questions: (1) “what are the ‘intangible player characteristics’ that junior hockey scouts consider when evaluating draft-eligible prospects?”, (2) “why are these ‘intangible player characteristics’ deemed important in the evaluation process?”, and (3) “how do junior hockey scouts gather and use intangible player characteristics in making their final decisions about the draft-suitability of draft-eligible players?” To address these questions, 16 scouts (who had a minimum of 5 years scouting experience in the league: M experience = 16.56 years, SD = 10.15), participated in semi-structured interviews. Qualitative description was used, a pragmatic and applied methodology that is intended to generate ‘straight’ answers to questions of relevance for a specific group (Holt et al., 2018; Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to an inductive content analysis procedure that produced six major themes that were labelled, (a) playing ability, (b) organizational culture, (c) desirable intangibles that enhance draft status, (d) undesirable intangibles that diminish draft status, (e) the ‘list’, and (f) the investigative process. All scouts began their evaluation processes by observing players in competition and determining whether draft prospects had sufficient physical, technical, and tactical abilities to play in the league. Organizational culture acted as a guide for teams that determined which intangible characteristics were considered and given the most weight in the evaluation process. Within this context, scouts considered the harder to measure intangible characteristics that were deemed to either enhance or diminish the draft status of a player. Intangible characteristics that enhanced the draft status of players were captured by four primary

sub-themes labelled compete, character, leadership/team player, and passion (i.e., love of the game). Intangible characteristics that diminished the draft status of players were also captured by four primary sub-themes: lack of enhancers, (poor) body language, selfish tendencies, and (poor) parental behavior. Intangible characteristics were used to develop 'the list' that ranked the draft status of players; intangible characteristics were often used by teams to break ties when a number of players had similar rankings in terms of their physical, technical, and tactical abilities. Some diminishing intangibles were deemed so serious that teams decided not to draft the player at all, regardless of playing ability. Overall, participants referred to scouting as an on-going investigative process that could last an entire season where information regarding player intangibles was collected from a variety of sources. The results of the study add to the existing talent-identification literature in sport, and indicate that selection to higher levels of competitive sport in youth hockey is determined by many factors that go beyond the physical, technical, and tactical abilities of players. Applied-practice implications for scouts, hockey organizations, coaches, athletes, and athletes' parents are discussed.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Ryan Guenter. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval on August 23rd, 2017, from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board: project name “Exploring the ‘Intangible Player Characteristics’ that Junior Hockey Scouts Consider when Evaluating Draft-Eligible Prospects” (Pro00075392).

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Preface	iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review	1
Chapter 2: Method	12
Methodological approach	12
Context	13
Participants	13
Data collection	14
Data analysis	15
Member reflection interviews	16
Methodological rigor	17
Chapter 3: Results	20
Playing ability	23
Culture	24
Desirable intangibles that enhance draft status	26
Compete.....	26
Character.....	27
Leadership/team player	30
Passion.....	31
Undesirable intangibles that diminish draft status	32
Lack of enhancers.....	32
Body language	33
Selfish.....	34
Parental behavior	36
The List	37
The investigative process	41
Chapter 4: Discussion	45
Practical implications	61
Limitations and future directions	63
Conclusion	65

Bibliography..... 68
Appendix A – Interview guide..... 80
Appendix B – Member reflection one-page summary and graphic. 84

List of Tables

Table	Description	Page
1	Data matrix of scout responses	21
2	Sources of information used by scouts to evaluate draft prospects	43

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

“The scouts snickered. They looked at the time again. To this day, the 5.28 second 40-yard dash time is one of the slowest for quarterbacks in the history of the NFL [National Football League] combine. His 24.5-inch vertical leap didn’t have them lining up at his door either. He had been a good, but not an outstanding college quarterback, and as far as statistics went, he was far from a sure thing. The New England Patriots used the 199th pick in the NFL draft to select him in the 6th round of the 2000 NFL draft” (O’Sullivan, 2017).

The previous quote provides one person’s account of a scene at the National Football League (NFL) ‘combine’ in 2000 where Tom Brady—a University of Michigan graduate—had gone through his physical testing at the end of his college football career and was being evaluated for the upcoming NFL draft. The ‘combine’ generally provides the final opportunity for teams to gain information about the physical (and psychological) characteristics of players who are ‘draft eligible’ before they enter the draft and are selected (or passed over) on the basis of whether teams believe the players have the potential to contribute to an organization at the next level of competition. In the case of Tom Brady, after being selected as the 199th overall pick in the 2000 NFL draft, he went on to lead the Patriots to eight Super Bowl appearances—winning the Most Valuable Player (MVP) award in four of those appearances—and becoming one of only two players in NFL history to win five Super Bowls (and the only player to do so at the quarterback position). Given that Brady went on to arguably become the greatest quarterback in NFL history, one wonders how such a player could be overlooked 198 times by teams during the draft. This issue foreshadows the inherent challenges associated with successful talent identification in sport (see Koz, Fraser-Thomas, & Baker, 2012; Spamer, 2009), and reinforces the difficulties faced by

individuals who are tasked with making judgments about the future likelihood that draft-eligible players will go on to help teams be competitive on the field, on the ice, on the court, or on the ball diamond at the next level of competition.

The draft is a designated process within a Talent Identification (TiD) system that requires teams to operate under a standard set of rules regulating which players are eligible and available for selection to teams within a specific league. Although the process varies across sports, all draft systems are designed with the intention of equitably allocating the playing/signing ‘rights’ of athletes (who are eligible to play immediately or in the future) to teams who compete in a respective league (Koz et al., 2012). Teams finishing lower in a league during the preceding season are generally given higher (i.e., earlier) opportunities to select (i.e., draft) the player/s of their choosing, while teams finishing higher in the league during the preceding season are generally given lower (i.e., later) opportunities to select the player/s of their choosing. In doing so, the underlying logic of the draft process is to create some level of competitive parity across teams within a league whereby priority access to securing higher-end talent is given to less competitive (i.e., less successful) teams, and these teams can then potentially benefit in the future when their higher-end (i.e., supposedly more talented) draft picks can contribute to the competitive success of their respective teams.

The previous story of Tom Brady, and the fact that such a successful player was overlooked so many times by numerous teams in a draft (including the Patriots who eventually selected him) is certainly not unique in sport. For example, in professional hockey, the Detroit Red Wings selected two European players after the 2nd round of the 1989 National Hockey League (NHL) entry draft—Nicklas Lidstrom (3rd round; 53rd overall) and Sergei Federov (4th round; 74th overall). The two players went on to play a combined total of 2,812 games in the

NHL, winning a combined total of seven Stanley Cups between them (four for Lidstrom and three for Federov), and both were inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2015 shortly after the completion of their playing careers. In light of these circumstances, the question must again be asked: how and why can such successful players be overlooked so many times in the same draft by organizations who often pour millions of dollars into the pro-scouting process (see Schuckers & Argeris, 2015)? Stated differently, what attributes do these players possess or not possess that make them more or less attractive to teams in the draft process?

A wide variety of physical, technical, tactical, and psychological characteristics have been considered in the TiD literature in sport (see Abbott & Collins, 2004; Baker, Schorer, Cogley, Schimmer, & Wattie, 2009; Calder & Durbach, 2015; Elferink-Gemser, Huijgen, Lemmink, & Visscher, 2012; Larkin & O'Connor, 2017; Vaeyans, Lenoir, Williams, & Phillippaerts, 2008; Van Yperen, 2009). Physical attributes including speed, endurance, balance, strength, agility, and motor ability have been considered (Nieuwenhuis, Spamer, & Van Rossum, 2002; Spamer, 2009; Woods, Joyce, & Robertson, 2015), as have kinanthropometric characteristics surrounding body shape/size/proportion, body composition, and physical maturation (see Nieuwenhuis et al. 2002; Spamer, 2009). Technical and tactical proficiencies including ball/stick handling skills, passing skills, receiving skills, possession/hitting/blocking/scoring statistics by position, and passing/shooting accuracy have also been considered (see Nieuwenhuis et al., 2002; Woods et al., 2015), as have numerous psychosocial characteristics including coping styles, goal commitment, coachability, availability and implementation of social support, resilience, intelligence, and perceptual/tactical decision-making skills (see Holt & Dunn, 2004; Larkin & O'Connor, 2017; Mills, Butt, Maynard, & Harwood, 2012; Van Yperen, 2009; Williams, 2000). Clearly, the assessment of a single athlete-characteristic would almost

certainly be a naïve (and unsuccessful) approach to identifying draft prospects who are expected to succeed at the next level of competition, therefore ‘holistic’ approaches to TiD that consider physical, technical, tactical and psychological characteristics of athletes are generally advocated (e.g., Larkin & O’Connor, 2017; Reilly, Williams, Nevill, & Franks, 2000; Vaeyans et al., 2008; Williams & Reilly, 2000).

Many of the aforementioned physical characteristics that have been considered in the TiD process in sport can be measured with objective tests. Similarly, objective test procedures can be used to assess different technical skills within sports (e.g., Falk, Lidor, Lander, & Lang, 2004). As such, normative standards can be developed around these test scores within teams and sports that can then be used to assist in the decision-making process regarding the prediction of whether or not an athlete is considered to have the necessary physical and/or technical capabilities to successfully meet the demands of his/her sport at the next (higher) level of competition. Although objective testing of tactical skills, game sense, and/or game intelligence is more challenging, these attributes can still be assessed by experienced observers (e.g., coaches and scouts) who have sufficient levels of tacit knowledge and contextual intelligence (Sternberg, 2000) within a specific sport context to make informed decisions about an athlete’s playing capabilities (see Falk et al., 2004). Lastly, psychological (self-report) measures can be used to assess various psychological and motivational characteristics of athletes in the TiD process. While TiD theorists in sport “recommend that practitioners make use of psychological profiling for talent development purposes” (Rees et al., 2016, p. 1045), others have cast doubt upon the ability of psychological measures to successfully “predict an athlete’s [future] performance potential...[and to] discriminate between athletes of different skill levels” (Anshel & Lidor, 2012, p. 257).

Clearly there is a vast amount of potential information that can be used by decision-makers who determine which athletes are selected (or not selected) to be given an opportunity to move on to the next level of competition in sports that employ a draft process. As such, the draft process involves making decisions about selection and/or deselection of athletes. Recent research conducted by Neely, Dunn, McHugh, and Holt (2016) that examined the selection/deselection processes employed by 22 head coaches of different provincial-level youth sport teams in Canada noted that the coaches were generally confident (i.e., had a high degree of certainty) in the correctness of their decisions to select those players who they deemed as being the best (or most skilled/talented) future contributors on their teams. However, decisions regarding the final selections of the so-called ‘fringe players’ (i.e., those who are the last selected on a team) were much more difficult for coaches and involved a high degree of uncertainty. In fact, coaches reported that the decisions regarding the selection or deselection of fringe players were often based on ‘instincts’ or ‘intuition’ around what Neely et al. termed “intangible characteristics” (p. 148). These intangible characteristics were not explored in detail by Neely et al. but included the personality of players, the degree to which coaches thought the players would accept the roles they would be given on the teams, and the extent to which coaches thought players would ‘fit in’ with the other players who had been selected for the squad. Summing up the difficulty of this selection/deselection decision-making process, Neely et al. (p. 148) quoted the head coach of a provincial-select hockey team who stated,

You have all the information in front of you and you make a decision and sometimes the decision isn’t black and white...I think there’s always an element of ‘am I making the right decision?’ I think for the most part you feel it’s the right decision, but I think there’s always an element of uncertainty, which makes it tough.

Although an over-reliance on intuition or ‘gut feeling’ to make final selection/deselection decisions about players in a draft process would likely not be considered ‘best practice’, the important role that intuition can play in decision-making processes has been emphasized in the judgement and decision-making (JDM) literature. Betsch (2008) specifically argued that intuition “can yield highly accurate judgments and decisions if the prior sample of experiences [of the decision-maker] is representative for the current task” (p. 6). Thus, Betsch’s comment highlights the idea that successful intuitively-driven decision making in sport requires decision-makers to have sufficient levels of tacit knowledge or contextual intelligence that allows them to detect the so-called ‘intangibles’ in athletes and make informed judgements/predictions about the role these characteristics will play in determining an athlete’s future likelihood of achieving success at the next level of competition (see Neely et al., 2016).

References are frequently made in sport-media outlets to the important ‘intangible characteristics’ of athletes that supposedly make these athletes attractive draft-prospects in professional sport (Malloy, 2011). For example, in a newspaper article titled ‘*Best NHL draft picks have a certain intangible*’ that was written after the 2013 NHL entry draft, the assistant General Manager of the Winnipeg Jets—Craig Heisinger—was quoted as saying, that the criteria upon which a player is viewed as a viable draft prospect “comes down to things like effort and compete and will. Hockey sense. The outline is the vision, the size, the skating, the strength. The rest of it [the intangibles] is what makes up a hockey player” (Lawless, 2013). An online newspaper article written shortly after the 2012 NFL draft about Robert Griffin III—a Baylor University football player who was drafted second overall and who went on to become the starting quarterback for the Washington Redskins—described him as “A fast runner and polished passer. Griffin could be a game-changer. Smart player with intangibles through the roof”

(Wilner, 2012).

A number of studies within the TiD sport literature have shed light on some of the so-called ‘intangible characteristics’ that evaluators deem important when assessing the suitability of prospective players for their teams/programs (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Kavekar & Ford, 2010; Solomon & Rhea, 2008). For example, Solomon and Rhea (2008) conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 head coaches of various NCAA Division 1 intercollegiate sport teams to identify the characteristics of athletes that coaches consider when evaluating athletes’ current ability levels and the likelihood that athletes will go on to successfully contribute to their programs. Results of an inductive/deductive thematic analysis generated six superordinate themes, of which the largest theme (i.e., the theme that contained the highest frequency [42%] of all raw data quotes provided by the coaches) was labeled ‘personality’ and included subthemes that reflected athletes’ work ethic (e.g., competitiveness), team qualities (e.g., role acceptance), mental strategies (e.g., ability to handle pressure), coachability (e.g., willingness to listen/learn), character (e.g., integrity, trust, and honesty), and confidence. Solomon and Rhea concluded that while “it is logical that coaches rely on visible physical aspects when scouting and evaluating athletes” (p. 263), researchers and practitioners must “note the significance of the [harder-to-see] personality factors and determine methods for identifying those qualities” (p. 264) in the scouting/evaluation process.

Kavekar and Ford (2010) conducted a study with 27 head coaches (16 female) of NCAA Division 1 intercollegiate softball teams to evaluate the importance of various criteria the coaches used when considering the likely potential that recruits would contribute to their programs in the future. When asked to identify the intangible characteristics that describe a top recruit beyond athletic ability the coaches identified a variety of characteristics they considered

important including (but not limited to) being a team player, possessing a strong work ethic, mental toughness, character and values, determination, loyalty, game sense, confidence and leadership.

Larkin and O'Connor (2017) recently conducted a study with technical directors ($n = 8$) and head coaches ($n = 12$) involved with the selection, recruitment, and evaluation of players who competed at the highest level of U-13 age-group representative soccer in Australia. The technical directors and coaches rated technical skills (i.e., first touch, 1 v 1, and striking the ball) as the three most important evaluation/selection criteria in the assessment of young players, followed by coachability, decision-making and positive attitude as the next three highest-ranking criteria. Research by Holt and Dunn (2004) conducted with international youth soccer players in Canada ($n = 20$), professional youth soccer players in England ($n = 20$), and six English professional youth-academy coaches resulted in the creation of a grounded theory of psychosocial competencies that were deemed important to success in elite youth soccer. Coaches cited the importance of athletes taking responsibility for their own development and conforming to behavioral expectations of the club, a willingness of athletes to make sacrifices (with respect to time spent with family and friends), and a clear demonstration of commitment by athletes to stay motivated and determined as essential determinants of success. Collectively, the research evidence obtained from studies that have asked coaches to identify, describe, and/or rate the evaluation criteria they use to make decisions about whether to select, retain, recruit, or deselect athletes (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Kavekar & Ford, 2010; Neely et al., 2016; Solomon & Rhea, 2008) reinforces the position of Solomon (2008) that coaches and selectors should not only consider the physical and/or performance characteristics of athletes, but also the “intangible, psychological qualities” of the performers (p. 522).

If selection/deselection decisions are indeed being made by coaches and selectors on the basis of intuition and intangible characteristics that athletes possess (Neely et al., 2016), it would seem prudent to systematically assess these intangible characteristics to help evaluators better identify and articulate what these characteristics are. Such information could be used to educate prospective athletes (and those who train them) about the importance of attending to and developing these characteristics that may one day enhance their chances of being evaluated positively in future selection processes. This point was emphasized by Holt and Dunn (2004) in their study of talent development among professional youth soccer academy players, noting that athletes must understand “the need to meet coaches’ standards and behavioural expectations” (p. 216) if they are to enhance their prospects of being selected (or given a contract) to play at the next level of competition. In other words, the chances of athletes being selected to compete at the next level of competition are likely to be enhanced if athletes are both aware and capable of meeting the standards that correspond to the criteria by which they are evaluated.

Although technical directors, general managers, and coaches have responsibilities for identifying and selecting players, in most sport leagues that employ a draft system (and also in many sports/leagues around the world that do not rely on draft systems), the primary responsibility for identifying and making decisions on selecting (or not selecting) draft-eligible players often lies with the scouting staff (see Malloy, 2011; Morris, 2000; Williams, 2000). Scouts are employed by teams to watch draft-eligible players or ‘draft prospects’ throughout the course of a season (or seasons) in various geographic locations to identify those players who are deemed worthy of drafting and who are expected to be capable of contributing to the organization at the next level of competition (Malloy, 2011). As such, scouts can be regarded as the TiD content experts in many sports upon whose opinions and advice draft-decisions are

based (Malloy, 2011).

Despite the essential role that scouts play in the TiD process, no research has systematically examined the decision-making criteria that scouts use to evaluate players—a point underscored by Tingling (2017) who recently noted that little is known about the degree to which scouts (in the NHL) rely upon analytic (i.e., statistically-based) information or subjective/intuitively-based information in the decision-making process to select (or not select) players in the draft. Instead, most TiD research that has focused on the desirable attributes of players/recruits has primarily focused on the views of coaches (e.g., Larkin & O'Connor, 2017; Neely et al., 2016; Solomon, 2008). This arguably presents an important gap in the extant literature because coaches rarely, if ever, have the same amount of time to extensively evaluate the potential of an incoming recruit or draft-prospect in comparison to scouts who spend their entire year making player evaluations (Malloy, 2011). To this end, the purpose of this study was to systematically identify the evaluative criteria that scouts use to make selection/deselection decisions about draft-eligible players. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to systematically explore and identify the 'intangible player characteristics' (beyond physical, technical, and tactical abilities) that scouts consider when determining the draft-suitability of eligible 'minor hockey' players in a Canadian major junior hockey league. The primary questions of interest in this study are (1) "*what* are the 'intangible player characteristics' that junior hockey scouts consider when evaluating draft-eligible prospects?", (2) "*why* are these 'intangible player characteristics' deemed important in the evaluation process?", and (3) "*how* do junior hockey scouts gather and use intangible player characteristics in making their final decisions about the draft-suitability of draft-eligible players?" Obtaining such information will not only provide scouts (both within and across sports) with insight into how their peers evaluate

draft prospects but will also shed more light upon the intangible player characteristics (Malloy, 2011; Neely et al., 2016; Solomon, 2008) that are considered by evaluators when making selection/deselection decisions on athletes, thereby enhancing the TiD knowledge base in high-performance youth sport.

Chapter 2: Method

Methodological Approach

Qualitative description (QD) was used—a methodology intended to generate ‘straight’ answers to questions of relevance for a specific group (Holt et al., 2018; Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). Qualitative Description is a pragmatic and applied methodology that uses a low-inference approach, and focuses on identifying participants’ knowledge about, and perceptions of, a particular phenomenon or experience (Neergard, Olesen, Andersen & Sondergaard, 2009). It is especially useful for answering questions that are relevant to practitioners (Holt et al., 2018; Sandelowski, 2000, 2010) who, in the current study, were individuals involved with scouting and drafting junior hockey players. Typically, results of QD studies involve the presentation of findings in “everyday language” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336) that is similar to the participants’ own language. Hence, QD was an appropriate methodological selection because it provided a framework for identifying and describing participants’ perceptions of ‘intangible player characteristics’ that are considered when determining the draft-suitability of eligible ‘minor hockey’ players.

The results of QD research often depend on the perceptions and inclinations of the researcher (Neergard et al., 2009). It is therefore important to provide some background regarding the researcher and his experience as a junior hockey scout. The researcher who conducted this study is a former dual-sport collegiate athlete (baseball and hockey) who, at the age of 32 years, was appointed as a regional scout (i.e., within a specific city and surrounding geographic area) for a team in the Western Hockey League (WHL). In the year of conducting this research, and following 8 years of fulfilling the role of regional scout, the researcher was appointed to the position of ‘head scout’ within the organization—a full-time professional

position that involves overseeing and coordinating all scouting for the team across four western Canadian provinces (and selected U.S. states) and ultimately identifying/selecting prospects that the team will consider at the annual WHL entry draft.

Context. The WHL is one of three member leagues (along with the Ontario Hockey League [OHL] and Quebec Major Junior Hockey League [QMJHL]) within the Canadian Hockey League (CHL). The CHL is the largest developmental junior hockey league in the world and is considered to be the primary feeder system to the NHL, supplying more players to the NHL than any other league in the world. As such, the three leagues within the CHL contain many of the best junior hockey players (aged 16-20 years of age) in the world. Because the CHL is broken down into three geographically-based regions across Canada, the WHL drafts and enlists players from four western provinces in Canada (i.e., British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) as well as players from 20 states in the USA. Each team in the WHL is also permitted to have two non-North American players on their rosters; these players are selected through the CHL 'Import Draft.' The WHL currently has 22 member-clubs with 17 based in western Canada (six in British Columbia, five in Alberta, five in Saskatchewan, and one in Manitoba) and five located in the U.S. Pacific Northwest. As evidence of the very high caliber of players who compete in the WHL, the recent 2017 NHL draft saw 33 WHL players drafted by NHL teams, seven of whom were drafted in the first round—the highest number of prospects provided by any league in the world in the first round of the NHL draft (Western Hockey League, 2017).

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit individuals who possess the requisite knowledge and experience that would best enable the researcher to answer the research questions under

investigation (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). To be eligible for inclusion, participants had to be current or former scouts within the WHL and have a minimum of 5 years scouting experience in the league. Initially, an *a priori* sample size of 15-20 participants was sought to reach an ‘expanded scope of confidence’ or adequate level of data saturation (see Francis et al., 2010; Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, 2016; Thorne 2016). In total, 16 scouts who met the criteria agreed to take part in the research. All 16 participants were male and were associated with ten different WHL organizations; participants held positions ranging from area scouts to team General Managers. Collectively, the participants had 265 years of scouting experience (M experience = 16.56, SD = 10.15), watched approximately 4880 hockey games per year, and had attended a total of 171 WHL drafts (M drafts = 10.69 years, SD = 7.09).

All scouts voluntarily participated in the study. As a result of the researcher’s prior and on-going involvement as a scout within the league, all participants were known (on a personal and/or professional level) to the researcher. These relationships facilitated the ability of the researcher to access the population of interest because members of the hockey scouting community typically have a shared bond and/or common interest as a direct result of their shared experiences in the scouting business (see Malloy, 2011). Consequently, some level of trust and rapport was already established between the investigator and participants prior to the interviews.

Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face audio-recorded semi-structured interviews in locations that were convenient for each scout (e.g., homes, hotel rooms, private locations at hockey arenas). Following interview-structure guidelines provided by Rubin and Rubin (2012), the interview (see Appendix A) started with a brief demographic section, followed by introductory, main, and summary questions. On average, interviews lasted 42.5 minutes (SD =

9.12).

Prior to conducting interviews with the participants, a pilot interview was conducted with a fellow student who was a new WHL scout with less than 5 years of scouting experience, and was otherwise not involved in this study. The pilot interview acted as a ‘test run’ for the interview guide and helped refine the researcher’s interview skills as they related to the content therein (Markula & Silk, 2011). Although the content of questions did not change after the pilot interview, the order was modified to enhance the logical flow of the interview (around the ‘what, why, and how’ aspects of the interview guide). The researcher had taken a graduate class in qualitative research methods, conducted multiple personnel interviews in a corporate setting for 5 years (prior to attending graduate school), and conducts interviews with coaches, parents, and/or players on a regular basis throughout the year as part of his scouting responsibilities.

Data Analysis

Audio files were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. Transcripts were checked by the researcher against the audio files to ensure transcription accuracy. Each participant (i.e., scout) was assigned an identification tag (i.e., S1 = scout 1; S2 = scout 2, etc.) and any information within the transcripts that could identify a scout (or his organization) was removed to ensure anonymity. Data analysis commenced as soon as the first interview was transcribed. Simultaneous data collection and data analysis continued in an iterative manner until the researcher deemed that little, if any, new information was emerging from subsequent interviews (i.e., the point at which the investigator deemed an adequate level of data saturation had been attained: Thorne, 2016).

Inductive thematic analysis was employed to examine the data. The first step of this analysis involved the researcher familiarizing himself with the data (i.e., by listening to the

audio-taped interviews, reading, and re-reading the interview transcripts). Next, the researcher inductively generated initial small ‘meaning units’ of information (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) by grouping participant quotes around similar underlying aspects (i.e., themes) of the participants’ responses. After organizing data into these smaller meaning units, the search for larger (i.e., more encompassing) themes began. For example, three smaller meaning units included aspects of scouts’ responses that identified players who had a ‘positive influence on teammates,’ who put the ‘team’s needs ahead of their own personal needs,’ and who took ‘personal responsibility for their own actions both on and off the ice.’ These meaning units were subsequently combined into a larger theme that reflected aspects of leadership and being a team player. Labels were then assigned to these larger themes (e.g., “leadership/team player”) and corresponding rules of inclusion for each theme were generated. After labelling the themes, connections were drawn back to the three primary research questions (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout the analysis process, information was organized using graphical displays and data matrices to help increase the reading, comprehension, and construction of appropriate themes from within the data (see Verdinelli & Scagnolli, 2013).

Member Reflection Interviews

Upon completion of the analysis, participants were asked to engage in member reflection interviews in order to provide additional insights through further dialogue with the researcher (see Smith & McGannon, 2017). To complete member reflections, all 16 scouts who had been interviewed were sent an email that contained a 1-page written summary of the key findings along with a 1-page graphical representation of the first iteration of the main themes (and processes) that had been identified (see Appendix B). Participants were invited to discuss whether they could see their own experiences, views, evaluation criteria, and/or beliefs in the

results and to offer this feedback in a follow-up phone interview. Six participants responded and agreed to engage in follow-up member-reflection phone interviews. There was no interview guide for the member reflection interviews. Rather, an unstructured approach was used whereby participants were asked to comment upon the results that had been sent to them in the email (see Appendix B) and to elaborate upon the extent to which the results captured their own individual experiences as junior hockey scouts. Participants were also asked to elaborate upon the role that the organizational culture of their respective clubs had upon the identification, assessment, and weighting of intangible characteristics in the player-evaluation process.

Member reflection interviews were audio recorded ($M = 10.75$ minutes, $SD = 5.47$) and transcribed by the same transcription service. All scouts who took part in the member reflection interviews indicated that there were no surprises or areas of contention in the results and suggested that the results provided a thorough portrayal of their views and experiences of how intangible player characteristics played a role in the evaluation of draft-eligible players. Although no new themes emerged from the data, the member reflections helped refine the organization of the results, and a number of quotes from these interviews were also included in the Results section to further develop (and saturate) certain themes.

Methodological Rigor

The methodology of QD has, at times, been criticized as lacking rigor (see Neergard et al., 2009), therefore a number of techniques were adopted to enhance methodological rigor. The pilot interview helped inform the interview guide, and along with interviewer training, helped develop the interviewer's skills. From the commencement of the project, the researcher made efforts to reflexively acknowledge his preconceptions and potential biases as they related to the project by maintaining a reflexive journal (see Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Hays, Wood,

Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016). This was important given that the researcher was somewhat of an insider, having been a scout himself. Consequently, the researcher continually reflected upon any preconceived views he had surrounding the research questions and interpretation of responses.

During the analysis, the researcher consulted a ‘critical friend’ (Stieha, 2014). The critical friend was the researcher’s graduate supervisor—a person who held a PhD and had been publishing research in the field of sport psychology for over in 25 years (including papers surrounding player selection/deselection in youth sport). The critical friend was also a Chartered Professional Coach and had previously conducted interviews with draft-prospects for teams in the NHL. Regular meetings with the critical friend were intended to help challenge, critique, and solidify themes that emerged from the results. Several meetings (each lasting over 2 hours in duration) were spent discussing the consolidation of ideas and how the data could be best represented in coherent and manageable themes.

The final technique used to enhance methodological rigor was a peer debriefing activity (see Hays et al., 2016) whereby a content expert—who had no prior involvement in the study—was asked to examine/critique the results of the thematic analysis through a face-to-face audio-recorded interview. The content expert was an Assistant General Manager of an NHL team and was recognized within the professional hockey community as a person who has had considerable success in drafting players who have gone on to help his teams be successful. The content expert was also chosen because he had been quoted in the media as a person who considers intangible player characteristics when acquiring or drafting players. What is noteworthy about the content expert’s path to becoming an NHL executive is that he began his career as an equipment manager which gave him the opportunity to, in his own words, “understand the game from the ice up, not from the boardroom down.” Prior to the interview, the content expert received the

same 1-page summary of the results and graphical display (see Appendix B) that had been provided to the scouts who had participated in the member-reflection interviews. What followed was an unstructured audio-recorded interview that lasted 1 hr 6 mins. The interview was transcribed by the same third-party transcription service that had been used earlier in the study and select responses (i.e., quotes) from the content expert were included within the Results section.

Chapter 3: Results

Data obtained from the 16 participant interviews generated a total of 260 single-spaced typed pages of raw data. Data were inductively analyzed to create themes, which were then organized around the three overarching research questions that framed the thesis: (1) “*what* are the ‘intangible player characteristics’ that junior hockey scouts consider when evaluating draft-eligible prospects?”, (2) “*why* are these ‘intangible player characteristics’ deemed important in the evaluation process?”, and (3) “*how* do junior hockey scouts gather and use intangible player characteristics in making their final decisions about the draft-suitability of draft-eligible players?” Six major themes were generated from the analysis and were labelled, (a) *playing ability*, (b) *organizational culture*, (c) *desirable intangibles that enhance draft status*, (d) *undesirable intangibles that diminish draft status*, (e) *the ‘list’*, and (f) *the investigative process*. Table 1 contains a data matrix that identifies which scouts provided responses within each of the themes following their initial interview. The Results section presents the themes in the aforementioned order to best reflect the underlying process around which draft-eligible prospects were evaluated and the way in which intangible characteristics were considered throughout this process.

Table 1*Data Matrix of Scout Responses*

Scout	Intangible Player Characteristics											The list	I.P. ^a
	Playing ability	Team culture	Enhancing Characteristics				Diminishing Characteristics						
			Compete	Character	Leadership/ team player	Passion	Lack of enhancers	Body language	Selfish	Parental behavior			
1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
3	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X				X
5	X		X		X	X	X	X				X	X
6	X		X	X	X	X	X						
7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
8	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
9	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
10	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
13	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
14	X	X	X	X	X		X	X					X
15	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
16	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Total	16	11	15	14	16	10	16	14	11	11	12	13	

^a I.P. = Investigative process.

Although the focus of the research was on intangible player characteristics, every scout noted that before intangibles were considered, prospects had to demonstrate that they had the physical, technical, and/or tactical abilities to play at the next level of competition (i.e., in the WHL). As such, potential draft-eligible prospects had to demonstrate that they possessed adequate *playing ability* to warrant further evaluation (at which time intangibles were considered). After determining that a prospect had the necessary playing ability, scouts used the *organizational culture* of their respective clubs to help identify, assess, and weigh the intangible characteristics of players in the evaluation process. Organizational culture helped determine *why* intangible player characteristics formed an important component of the evaluation process, and also provided information with respect to *what* intangible characteristics were deemed most important to the scouts when evaluating the ‘person behind the player.’

Intangible characteristics answered the ‘*what*’ research question, and were divided into two clear (and opposing) themes: desirable intangibles that *enhanced the draft status* of players (which included four primary sub-themes labelled *compete*, *character*, *leadership/team player*, and *passion*) and undesirable intangibles that *diminished the draft status* of players (which included four primary sub-themes labelled *lack of enhancers*, *body language*, *selfish tendencies*, and *parental behavior*). All attributes of draft prospects were then considered as teams compiled *the list* which was a document created by each team that rank-ordered the draft-status of each prospect (with the number-1 ranked player being the most desirable draft-prospect for each respective club). The list for each team is the culmination of the entire scouting staff’s efforts for the year and contains the names of anywhere from 100 to 300 players (out of the thousands of draft eligible players that the organization will have scouted in any given year). When discussing *the list*, scouts predominantly spoke about *how* intangible characteristics were used to determine

the draft-status of different players for their respective organizations.

The final theme that was generated from the thematic analysis was labelled the *investigative process*. This theme summarized scouts' descriptions of the entire process that was used to evaluate draft prospects throughout the season, and largely captured *how* scouts gathered information about intangible player characteristics (i.e., the sources of information that scouts used to evaluate players).

Playing Ability

All 16 participants spoke about the importance of assessing the playing ability of draft prospects by watching players in competitive game situations and looking for what was described by S15 as “obvious characteristics” of a player. As S15 said, “we look at the obvious stuff. Skating, goal scoring, puck handling, those are the physical [characteristics of] play. Like those are the tangible assets of a hockey player: the obvious stuff.” Skating ability is an obvious characteristic needed to play at a high level. In fact, all participants noted ‘skating ability’ as a physical characteristic that they closely evaluated throughout a season. If players were deemed to be proficient skaters, then scouts assessed other physical abilities. As S7 explained:

First thing I try to assess is their ability to skate, and if they can skate then I start looking at their ability with the puck, then their ability with the puck while they're skating, and then try to focus in on their ability to make quick decisions, whether it be anticipation or plays with a puck to try and figure out what their hockey sense is.

Another attribute that scouts viewed as a relatively obvious characteristic was ‘hockey sense.’

For example, S12 said,

If he's the kinda guy the coach always wants on the ice, and for good reason, then those are the guys that I think have game sense. Just being in the right spots, right

holes, and being able to move properly within those areas.

Once players had been adjudged to possess the necessary playing abilities to compete at the next level of competition, scouts turned their attention to the intangible characteristics of draft prospects. As such, potential draft-eligible prospects had to demonstrate that they possessed adequate playing ability to warrant further evaluation (at which time intangibles were considered).

Culture

Throughout the interview and data analysis processes, it became apparent that scouts used existing organizational culture, team identity, and team dynamics as important guides when evaluating the draft-suitability of players. Scouts attempted to predict how incoming players might fit into, or disrupt, the established organizational culture or social dynamic of their team. S3 said, “If there’s things on that player that I don’t foresee as being positive or something that would skew our team or change the environment that we have within our organization, then I will avoid that player at all costs.” S8 spoke about the importance of having a scouting staff where all members of the staff had a similar understanding of the enhancing intangible characteristics that fit with his organization’s culture:

I think all teams do a very good job of evaluating players. I don’t think there’s a lotta secrets but I think there is an advantage. Some teams have more success than others I think by what they perceive to be intangibles.

A similar sentiment was expressed by S9 who argued, “that’s why I think it’s important [for all members of the scouting staff] to identify what you want your team to look like and does this player fit into that group.” The overarching role of culture as it related to the impact and consideration that was given to intangibles by an organization was summarized by S1 during his

member reflection interview when he said, “the culture of a club kinda dictates where you go with those things [i.e., intangibles] and how much emphasis you put on them, and you know, which ones you find most important.”

The importance of selecting players that fit with the culture or identity or current social dynamic of the team/organization was summed up by S12 who recounted a story where his organization had deliberately overlooked some diminishing intangibles of a highly talented/skilled player, but later acknowledged the error of this strategy:

This kid’s got unbelievable skill and skating, you know he leaves a little bit to be desired over here [i.e., character flaws] but I think that once we get him into our organization, once we get him around our good people and once we get him into you know, doing things our way, he’ll straighten that part out but he will flourish with the other parts. *We found that it doesn’t really work that way* [emphasis added].”

During his member reflection interview, S12 further expanded upon the dangers of drafting players who did not fit well within a team’s culture or social climate: “With respect to your culture, it doesn’t take much more than one or two mistakes if you will--by bringing in the wrong people--that suddenly your culture is at risk.”

The content expert added that other members of the organization (i.e., coaching staff, skill development personnel, and executive staff) are also impacted by the type of person that is drafted. He noted that he and his scouting staff discussed the potential impact a draft prospect might have upon the people within the organization with whom the player would interact on a daily or weekly basis, and how this discussion impacted the final draft status of the player on the list:

Sometimes you’ve got to determine the separation between the organization and the

scouts. Like, the scouts want the best player, but then once the scouts pick ‘em, they’re done with them, and then the organization is stuck with ‘em!

Desirable Intangibles That Enhance Draft Status

It became apparent that scouts considered a number of intangible characteristics that either *enhanced* or *diminished* the scouts’ evaluation of a player. Intangible characteristics that enhanced the draft status of players in the eyes of WHL scouts were captured by four primary sub-themes labelled *compete*, *character*, *leadership/team player*, and *passion*.

Compete. Within the vernacular of the WHL scouting community, the term ‘*compete*’ describes a player’s work ethic, effort, and/or determination to do things that are required to win or get better every day. Of the enhancing intangibles, *compete* was a prominent theme identified by 15 scouts. As seen in the following quote from S1, some organizations even appeared to place more importance on *compete* over certain physical skills and offensive output (i.e., goals scored and assists made):

Like we have guys on our team that their *compete* level is exceptional and maybe 20 of their points are just from that *compete* level, but I’d rather have that guy that scores 30 points less than have the other guy without the *passion* and the *heart* that scores 30 points more.

Scouts also mentioned that a player’s *compete* level could be inferred from the smallest details, as noted by S4 who stated,

Some people might think it’s meaningless but when he skated as hard back to the bench [to leave the ice for a line change at the end of a shift] as if he was chasing a loose puck and it was just that hustle and that--but that’s the way that he played, he played so hard all the time you know.

The compete of a player on the ice was also seen as a potential indicator of the willingness of the player to put forth the necessary effort to improve other areas of his game. For example, S11 said, “You can have all the skill you want in the world, but if you don’t wanna work at it, pretty soon it’s gonna catch up to ya.” S14 felt that compete was an essential intangible for players and a critical characteristic for any team to be successful (i.e., to win) in the sport: “If you don’t have compete in hockey, you ain’t gonna win for one thing. If you don’t have the heart to play hockey, you’re not gonna win.”

Character. Character was cited by 14 scouts as an important enhancing intangible and several participants provided different definitions of what character meant to them. The term character was used by scouts to capture a variety of attributes that reflected an array of social, psychological, emotional, behavioral, and moral characteristics that describe who the “player is as a person” (S10) rather than the ‘hockey player.’ Regardless of how scouts defined character, it was regarded as a highly valued intangible for players to possess, as noted by S7: “I place as much importance on character as I do the physical attributes.” S7 further commented,

Character means different things to different people or different scouts. You know for me its leadership, for me its selflessness, for me it’s the ability to do things with the team in mind, and you know off-ice and on-ice leadership to me is the most important thing.

Another view of character was provided by S9 who said, “We use the word character. And sometimes it’s over used, but that to me is the big intangible, and the easiest way to describe it is ‘who you are in the dark’ or who you are when nobody’s watching.” In his member reflection interview, S1 reinforced the importance of character as an enhancing intangible when he spoke about the character displayed in the current team roster that had been built over a number of

years: “ideally, when you look up and down your line-up, say three years after a draft, or four years after a draft, you wanna see that character in all the guys that made your club.”

Several scouts stated that the character of a player was determined by whether or not the player was viewed as a ‘good, well rounded person.’ For example, S10 said,

You wanna make sure that if you’re bringing a player into the organization that he’s going to be a very positive ambassador for your team, representing your team in the community in which the team plays in, but you know, the league and whatnot, so I believe you’re drafting *more than just hockey players* [emphasis added].

One scout (S1) made it clear that the scouting staff within his organization was willing to pass on highly skilled or productive players (i.e., in terms of the points/goals/assists collected during games) if the staff collectively felt something was amiss in terms of the player’s character,

One of our focuses has always been, we want good people in our organization, so we’ve had opportunities to take players that are very skilled, or you know are going to give you 60 or 70 points [a season], or whatever, and we’ve passed them up in the draft because we know that their character is not great.

Included in the idea of being a person with good character was the academic performance of players in school. For example, S12 said, “I want kids that are good students, right, or you know that are, work hard at school too. So I mean I think that we’re just looking for well-rounded individuals now.” S9 reinforced the importance of looking for well-rounded individuals with good character when he stated, “Number 1 is your performance as an athlete, but number 2, it’s your performance as a citizen and your ability to be a good ambassador or role model for that organization.” Some scouts even suggested that they attempted to predict whether or not a player

had the potential to develop into a ‘better person’ if the player was to join their organization. For example, S1 said, “Like our organization, they, our GM [i.e., General Manager] is adamant that every kid that comes [into] our organization has a good experience and leaves a better person” and S15 added, “We’re not just in the business of building hockey players, we’re developing young men. We’re turning boys into men from their 17 to 20-year-old time, so when they leave us we want them to be ambassadors of our brand.” If a scout did not believe that a draft-prospect had the potential—as evidenced by his current character—to develop into a better person, citizen, or ambassador of the organization, the player’s draft status was diminished.

The content expert provided a slightly different opinion regarding the ‘person beyond the player.’ Early in the interview, the content expert said that his experience as an equipment manager,

makes you understand what makes good players and one of the most important things about good players is being a good person, but... in the changing environment that is today’s player, I don’t think you can singlehandedly dismiss the kid that you don’t think is perfect.

The content expert elaborated, stating that “in today’s world of hockey, and in general, you have to take kids with less than quality intangibles, because they’re good players and if you don’t take ‘em somebody else (i.e., another team) is going to.” These comments might be explained by the differences in scouting junior players for the NHL level (as opposed to scouting minor hockey players for the junior level) where teams might be willing to overlook certain intangibles if they have an opportunity to take a highly talented player. While the content expert did recognize the importance of enhancing intangibles, he also noted that the final decision may not always be as straightforward as the results suggest: “You need to have guys with the intangibles that support

your team and create your culture and build the foundation of your team, but you also have to take the odd dick [i.e., a person with poor character] because he's the best player."

Leadership/team player. All 16 participants specifically mentioned the importance of draft prospects bringing potential leadership qualities to their organization, where 'leadership' reflected the ability of the player to positively influence teammates, to put the team's needs ahead of personal goals, to act as a role model for younger players, and to act responsibly (with a high degree of maturity) on and off the ice. At the minor hockey level (i.e., at the Bantam age-group that includes 13 and 14 year olds), leaders of teams are normally recognized through the allocation of letters that are assigned to two or three 'alternate captains' who wear the letter 'A' on the upper left side of their jersey, and the overall team captain who is assigned the letter 'C' on his jersey. S4 stated,

That's one of the first things that I look for when I'm scouting games, is 'who is the captain, who is the assistants? And who is not?' If it's one of the top [i.e., most skilled] players in the team and they're not wearing a letter, I question why and that will be one of the questions that I ask the coach.

Scouts reported that they assessed leadership qualities of players by closely monitoring on-ice interactions between the draft-prospect and his teammates and coaches, and also certain overt behaviors that are displayed at games. For example, S5 said, "Leadership, how they handle situations on the ice, how they handle their teammates, how they handle their coaches, yeah for sure. Like, I'll report on that stuff anytime I see it, absolutely."

S15 provided some specific behavioral examples of what he viewed as indicators of good leadership:

I was thinking of this one player, just straight out leadership abilities you could see at

14 [years of age], being the last guy off the ice because he's high-fiving and celebrating every teammate as they go off the ice and being the guy that helps put the pucks away after warm-up.

Scouts noted that draft-prospects who were evaluated as having good leadership potential placed the needs of their team ahead of their own personal needs. S10 specifically noted that he sought players who "Put the interests of the team ahead of the individual. I'm a firm believer that if the team has success, the individual players will likely succeed as well." S8 further reinforced the importance of being a good team player when he stated,

You have to be a team guy, you have to play for the ultimate goal and that's having success as a team. You have to be a good teammate, you have to be able to participate in a team environment.

Scouts did not only speak to the importance of draft prospects putting their team first, but they also noted the importance of players having the ability to fit in and function effectively with their teammates. As noted by S13, "The ability to function within a team atmosphere, to function with all different kinds of characters... And if you can't be a team player, I don't think you can be a success at a team sport."

Passion. Ten of the 16 scouts specifically identified 'passion' and a genuine 'love of the game' as a desirable intangible characteristic that they attempted to evaluate when they observed players. Scouts felt that passion was an important characteristic that enabled players to persevere and overcome challenges in a sport that often takes players away from their families at a relatively young age (i.e., 16 years) and where the competitive demands of the sport become increasingly taxing as players advance to higher levels of competition (e.g., from minor hockey to junior hockey to professional hockey). S7 explained, "Well, number one would be passion,

because I think without that passion and love of the game, it's a very difficult game to play as you move up to higher levels.”

Passion was also seen as something that players could use to have a positive impact upon the organization and/or team environment. S1 stated,

If a guy is passionate about the game, it translates into all parts of his game...and it kind of creates an atmosphere in the dressing room and in the organization. Like, to me, that passion and drive is something that just trickles down to everybody and makes your whole team better.

Similarly, S12 noted that the best players to draft are the ones who are, “engaged, passionate, you know, bring people up rather than push people down, those kinda guys.”

Collectively, scouts mentioned a variety of intangible characteristics that they viewed as being reflective of discernable attributes that enhanced the draft status of prospects. Conversely, scouts also mentioned a number of intangible characteristics that diminished the draft status of players.

Undesirable Intangibles That Diminish Draft Status

Diminishing intangibles were regarded as those intangible characteristics that made scouts leery of drafting a player. The diminishing-intangibles theme contains four lower-order themes that were labelled, *lack of enhancers*, *body language*, *selfish tendencies*, and *parental behavior*.

Lack of enhancers. Although scouts clearly coveted enhancing intangibles, they were likely to take particular note of players who lacked many of those positive characteristics. For example, S13 felt that a player lacking compete was unlikely to be successful, “If you don’t compete, you can’t play. If you don’t have the ability to learn new skills to improve to get to the next level, you can’t play.”

S7 described how a lack of character lowered his ranking of a prospective player regardless of how skilled the player was: “I rank my players lower based on if I know of some character flaws, then I would rate the player lower on my list regardless of skill.” S13 also added that a player with character flaws, or a lack of leadership, warranted further discussion with his organization’s scouting staff:

I mean, if there’s a definite character issue in terms of a kid has a problem or could potentially have a problem or makes really poor life choices or is a negative influence on those around him, yeah those need to come up and they’re talked about.

Players lacking the ability to interact effectively on a social level with teammates, or lacking the ability to be a good teammate, were also considered as diminishing intangibles, and S12 suggested that lacking these positive qualities was something that usually did not change in a player: “I mean I can work with kids on their stick handling but if a kid doesn’t know how to be a teammate, I’m not sure you can teach it.” Another diminishing intangible, selfish behavior (described below), was seen by S16 as directly opposed to the enhancing intangible of being a team player: “Well I think they need to be a team player, like a person that isn’t selfish.” Finally, when reviewing the results during the member reflection process, S5 reinforced the idea that “the lack of enhancing intangibles would decrease the draft status of a player, and I think that’s always been the case for anywhere I’ve been” (referring to different organizations he had worked for).

Body language. Body language (most often referred to as ‘bad’ body language) captures the overt behaviors or interactions that players directed toward themselves or towards other players, coaches, and officials during competition. These negative behaviors or interactions were often seen by scouts as highlighting a character deficit in players. Almost exclusively, players’

body language was assessed when players were on the ice in game situations. S2 stated:

I'll try and watch a lot of on ice stuff, I'll see do they bang their stick after they make a bad play or are they swearing or just constantly, you know, just doing a lot of little things like that? Just body language tells you a lot.

S3 noted that instances of bad body language could be an indicator of larger issues that existed with a player: "You know, usually bad body language indicates that there's something amiss."

S9 reinforced the importance he placed on body language during the scouting process:

You have to look for visual cues, the body language, the interaction, how players react after a missed shot or not getting a pass. And you can see it plain as day, and with kids it's very easy to see sometimes because of their emotional maturity, but that's a red flag.

Selfish. Another undesirable diminishing intangible that was cited by the majority of scouts centered upon the degree to which players were viewed as exhibiting 'selfish behaviors.' Players at every level of competition are motivated by the desire to score goals, accumulate assists, and achieve a degree of offensive production (from a statistical perspective) given their belief that more offensive points not only enhances their team's chances of victory, but also enhances their draft status in the eyes of scouts, coaches, and general managers. However, as noted by S8, scouts took a very poor view when a player's desire to seek offensive points came at the expense of being a team player:

It's kind of a greedy game in some respects. You want the puck, you wanna score, you wanna be the guy that scores the winning goal. But there's a lotta jealousy and sometimes players don't make smart plays or make plays that are not team oriented.

Scouts also took note of 'chiselers' – a term used for players who shout their number to the

referee after a goal has been scored in an effort to accumulate more points, even when they did not actually contribute to the play (and were therefore not deserving of the points). For example, S2 said:

So, stats aren't everything because again, you know, I think when it comes to goals and assists you can – I've seen in the past where kids are chiseling points and stuff like that. And to me when I see stuff like that, that points to a character flaw.

S4 showed his disdain for this type of behavior when he said, "is he a guy that goes and chisels for f***ing points?...Is he that guy? Is he that guy that goes to the ref and points to me [i.e. 'chisels'] for the assist?"

The previous quotes indicate that scouts equated selfish behavior with a lack of character, and such behavior reflected poorly upon the draft status of a player. This sentiment was summed up by S7 who said, "If you're a problem child or a selfish person, it doesn't fit into the game of hockey as far as I'm concerned and that's part of the character that you assess." Interestingly, during his member reflection interview, S16 indicated that some selfish behaviors might actually help a player's performance, although the scout's overall assessment of selfishness was that such behavior should generally be classified as a diminishing intangible that hurt a player's draft status:

There's been some pretty good f***ing players that were selfish. Like Wayne Gretzky [the top points scorer of all time in the NHL], I'm pretty sure was pretty selfish when it came to a lot things [as they related to scoring goals and amassing points during games] but at the end of the day it was that attitude that made him a great player. I guess it depends how you define selfish...a high high percentage of the time it would definitely be a diminishing intangible.

Parental behavior. The final diminishing intangible sub-theme that was derived from the data related to undesirable behaviors of players' parents. As noted by S10:

Parents have very limited realization that their personal behaviors that they demonstrate in the hockey rink can be very impactful on a scout's perception, because in some ways, when you're drafting a player, you're drafting the family.

S16 commented that the behavior of parents at the hockey rink, their lack of respect shown to others, and their lack of emotional control at games often reflected poorly upon their child who was being scouted:

I just don't understand when I go to a minor hockey rink, 'cause why as a parent would you be swearing at a probably a 20-something year-old referee or a maybe a teenager referee and swearing in the stands and yelling at [them], they're just kids. And if that's your level of emotional control, then that probably is gonna spill off into your kid.

S12 was adamant that his organization would outright avoid draft-prospects whose parents were deemed problematic:

Like, I'm not drafting a kid with a crazy parent. Like, I've dealt with that too much. I'm not gonna do it. So if there's a parent up in the stands that's just going crazy, he's negatively affecting his kid's brand or his son's brand.

The overall impact that negative or inappropriate parental behaviors had upon the evaluative process was summed up by S7 during his member reflection interview: "when you see poor parental behavior -- that probably rubs you the wrong way. And consciously or not, you tend to walk away from the kid, or factor it in [as a diminishing intangible], rightly or wrongly."

Despite his earlier comments regarding the fact that sometimes teams take players who

lack good character, the content expert also noted that certain diminishing intangibles could give so much cause for concern—“sometimes its parents, sometimes it’s work ethic, sometimes their ‘give a f**k meter’ is so low”—that players whose technical, tactical, and physical abilities warranted first-round draft status were assigned a “no draft” status and were overlooked entirely in the draft.

Whether the issue was undesirable parental behaviors, being a selfish player, or displaying bad body language, diminishing intangibles seriously hurt the draft status of players, and lead to what many scouts referred to as “red flags” (described below) that were closely considered at the final evaluation phase of a player’s draft-suitability.

The List

The weighting or degree of importance that scouts and organizations assigned to enhancing intangibles and diminishing intangibles in the final evaluation process of draft prospects was factored into the creation of the document known as *The List*. Twelve scouts specifically mentioned the list during their interviews, the role it played in determining a player’s draft status, and whether or not the player would be drafted at all.

Participants made it clear that both enhancing and diminishing intangibles played an important role in moving players up or down their list. As noted by S1, “There are guys that I think either eliminate themselves from a certain spot in the draft, or guys that will move up slightly because of that [intangible].” S11 shared his account of how diminishing intangibles could potentially drop a player down his organization’s list:

But yeah, there’s sometimes when he could be a first round pick but he’s dropped to seventh or eighth round because of his character, because of the way he acted, the way he played, the way he comes across, maybe what the coaches said about him, or

maybe his parents, they play a vital role in the position too.

A number of scouts went so far as to state that diminishing intangibles could outweigh many positive or enhancing characteristics in the evaluation process that determined the draft status of a player. S3 said:

There's a lot of those players that if I liked what they do in terms of how they play the game, in terms of their skill characteristics and I don't like some of the things that they do in terms of their intangibles, then that player will not end up on my list.

S4 added, "I think a guy with poor intangibles, you just don't draft at all, they don't even go in your draft list." S12 emphasized the negative impact of diminishing intangibles when he stated,

Well, they're definitely significant. I would say that they become more significant if they're negative intangibles. So if I'm hearing that a kid is, you know, got bad character or not a team guy, those are gonna sink a kid more than someone that I don't hear positive reviews about.

When comparing a group of players during draft preparation, participants reported that their respective organizations' scouting staffs discussed any 'red flags' that raised concerns about the suitability or draft-status of a player:

It's a discussion, you know; here's a very good player and we've got a decision to make on three or four players. And a negative point comes out on this player. If we can prove the negativity of that point we might not decide on that player and pick somebody that doesn't have that trait. (S13)

The term 'red flag' was used by scouts to describe almost any diminishing intangible that could negatively influence their perception of a draft-eligible player. Assigning red flags to a player was based upon the identification of a diminishing intangible or the lack of apparent enhancing

intangibles:

I can think back over the last several years where there's a guy who is really skilled and you know that they're probably going to put up 'X' amount of points, but I don't see the passion or drive from them. To me that's a big red flag, and that's something I wouldn't want personally in our organization. (S7)

Scouts noted that when red flags were identified, they required further investigation, but players were often initially given the benefit of the doubt. As stated by S12, "it's not something, it's not a one strike and you're done, but if I look and dig in all different levels and find the same thing about a kid again—not a good teammate, not competitive, out for himself—[we are not going to draft him]." As more red flags were identified around a specific player, scouts reported that this greatly increased the likelihood of a player's draft status being diminished. In fact, some teams even created a red flag list for certain players that they intentionally avoided drafting: "We have a red flag list that if there's something real big and that's going to drastically affect their draft status, they get put on the red flag list" (S12).

Red flags sometimes resulted in a scouting staff deciding to drop a player down their list to a draft position where they felt that the player would already have been selected by another team by the time they had the chance to select the player, as stated by S12:

And we always talk about that at draft day too, that we'll place a kid somewhere where we can't get him because someone will take him way before we will. That's just because we don't really want him. And we call it our gut feeling too. [If] Your gut feeling's not good on a kid, get him down the list.

During his member reflection interview, S5 reinforced the view that diminishing intangibles often outweighed desirable physical/technical attributes in draft prospects:

I know in instances in the past with teams I worked for, you know, there's been guys we've taken right off our list and it had nothing to do with his skill, like he could be one of the more skilled guys even in the draft, but there's just too many of those other issues, other red flags, you know, negative intangibles that just outweigh the positives.

Whether scouting staffs were deciding on the order of players on their respective lists prior to the draft, or whether they were making a decision at the draft table, intangibles often acted as a tie-breaker when the final decisions were being made. As stated by S1:

You consider two guys that are very similar, like with their point output, or their skillset, or whatever, but the one guy with the better intangibles is always going to be the guy that we pick at that one point. But the intangibles always win out if guys are close.

S10 also spoke specifically about the role of intangibles in the tie-breaking process:

You want to make sure that you're confident that you're going to select a draft player that has optimal opportunity for positive impact in your organization. So when you're watching players, the on-ice differences might be minimal as far as their ability to get from A to B quickly, to win puck battles, to be strong on possession. So then that's where the tie breakers, if you will, the intangibles, I think become critically important.

For some scouts, using intangibles as tie breakers for final draft decisions appeared to play the most important role in middle to late rounds of the draft after the so-called 'elite' or 'top end' players had been chosen. S5 said:

When you're in that draft and you're getting into the middle rounds and you're

looking at a lot of kids that are very similar, I think more often, well I don't know why you wouldn't, if you're picking a kid—kid A and kid B—and they possess pretty much identical skill and those common [i.e., obvious playing] characteristics that we've talked about, I think if you like one kid's leadership skills more than the other, that's probably the guy you're going with.

S10 noted that after the first two rounds had been completed and the most physically/technically talented players had been selected, his staff started to look for players that best fit his organization's needs:

After the first two rounds, the best players are gone. So who's the best player, defenseman or forward? You could say, well this guy's the best player because he scores more points, or he might be the best player in the position, but who's the best player for our organization?

In these examples, it appears that scouts prefer enhancing intangibles to decide a 'tie-breaker' (further dropping players with diminishing intangibles) which might imply they are choosing players who might be a better fit for the organization. In other words, if scouts are relying on intangibles for a final decision about a group of players with similar playing ability, then most organizations would rather select a player with enhancing intangibles than those with red flags or diminishing intangibles.

The Investigative Process

Participants referred to player evaluation as an on-going investigative process that lasts an entire season (or sometimes even longer). S4 said, "It's something that we're going to have to do a lot more investigation on throughout the year and figure out who is this kid." According to S10, the evaluation process was likened to "a forensic audit of a young man." During the

member reflection process, S3 added, “you know it’s important to do your investigative work, be it, you know, what you think is the most important thing for your own hockey club.”

It became apparent that scouts obtained information about draft prospects from a variety of sources that included on-ice observations of players at rinks, formal and informal interviews with players, coaches, and training staff, as well as questionnaire responses, and social media. As noted by S15, “You can get information as long as you have a pretty good source somewhere but you have to find your sources.” Table 2 summarizes the different sources of information that scouts used to build the most comprehensive picture of the players they were evaluating prior to making a final decision on their draft suitability. Table 2 also contains direct quotes from scouts around each source of information that was identified.

Table 2*Sources of Information Used by Scouts to Evaluate Draft Prospects*

Source of information	Exemplar quote
On-ice observations of draft-prospect at the rink	S10 - “Once I’ve focused in on a player, I will then, and when I say focus in on a player I’m talkin’ about his on-ice performance, then I will set about to tryin’ to figure out who that player is as a person.”
Formal and informal interviews with coach (or coaches) of the draft-prospect	S11 - “a lot of times, you’re finding out more about the player through the coach’s eyes than you are where you’re doing direct with the players.”
Formal and informal interviews with draft prospect and/or family members	S13 – “The interview, just like anything is to get the understanding of how mature they are, how intelligent they are, and get them thinking about answering.”
Informal discussions with the draft-prospect’s team trainer (i.e., team athletic therapist or physiotherapist)	S1 - “And trainers are good because trainers will tell you exactly how that player has treated them or others. And yeah, I think how you treat a trainer tells you a lot about players, as long as it’s accurate.”
Responses to formal questionnaires sent to draft-prospects, their family, and their coaches.	S6 – “Our team does a league-approved questionnaire that we send the parents and the coaches just to get a ballpark idea if they’re interested in the Western League, how they are in school, stuff like that.
Social media	S3 - “Yeah, I think you can use a number of different ways, like social media is one thing you can gather a lot of information from just by following somebody on Twitter or Instagram or whatever other social media availability you have.”

The content-expert added one other source where scouts could potentially obtain important information about draft prospects: namely, watching ‘priority players’ in practice. When asked if anything was missing from the results, the content expert said, “no factor [i.e., in the results or sources of information in the study] put on practice, like how the player is when nobody is watching.” The content expert stated, “you can learn more about a player in one practice than you can learn about him in four or five games” and suggested that failing to watch players away from their on-ice game-day behaviors would be a mistake because “if you don’t do those things, and you only see the player for what he is on the ice when he has that game jersey on, I think you miss a lot of stuff.” The content expert went on to recall a story about how his observations of a player in practice helped solidify his overall evaluation and identification of an under-rated (undrafted) junior player who went on to have a successful career in the NHL. After watching the player collect a “Gordie Howe hat-trick” (i.e., a goal, an assist, and a fight) in a WHL game the night before, the content expert watched the player at practice the next day: “[The player] was out there blocking shots on the penalty kill with four or five games left in the season, with nothing at stake!” Shortly thereafter, the content expert signed the player to a minor league (professional) contract with an American Hockey League team, from where he eventually worked his way into the NHL.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The overarching purpose of this study was to systematically explore and identify the intangible player characteristics (beyond physical, technical, and tactical abilities) that scouts consider when determining the draft-suitability of minor hockey players in a Canadian major junior hockey league. More specifically, the study sought to address three primary research questions: (1) “*what* are the intangible player characteristics that junior hockey scouts consider when evaluating draft-eligible prospects?”, (2) “*why* are these intangible player characteristics deemed important in the evaluation process?”, and (3) “*how* do junior hockey scouts gather and use intangible player characteristics in making their final decisions about the draft-suitability of draft-eligible players?”

Enhancing intangibles were centered upon a player’s compete level, his character, his leadership, his ability to put the team first, and his passion for the game. Diminishing intangibles, which often raised ‘red flags’ that cautioned scouts about drafting a player (see Schroeder, 2010), reflected a lack of enhancing intangibles, poor body language, selfish behavior, and undesirable behaviors from a player’s parents. The importance of intangible characteristics came to the fore at the WHL draft where teams weighed the playing ability of draft prospects in conjunction with the enhancing and diminishing intangibles that had been identified throughout the evaluation process. In many instances, intangible characteristics were considered within the context of the organizational culture and existing social dynamics of the teams that the scouts represented. Scouts noted that teams wanted to draft players who were ‘good well-rounded citizens’ and who would best represent the team or ‘brand’ in a positive fashion.

At times, a lack of enhancing intangibles or the presence of certain diminishing intangibles outweighed the physical, technical, and tactical abilities of a draft prospect and lead

to some 'skilled players' being assigned a lower rank on teams' respective draft lists. Some scouts also noted that after the most elite players (i.e., those players who were deemed to have the highest physical, technical, and tactical abilities) had been selected in the earliest stages of the draft, the scouts' organizations often drafted the 'best person' over the more talented/skilled player (assuming that teams believed the athlete still had the necessary playing abilities to compete in the league). It is clear that the consideration of intangible player characteristics is given a prominent role in the talent identification process that major junior hockey teams use to determine the draft-status of their prospects each year. Overall, the results support the findings of previous research that has shown how evaluators who are in a position to select or deselect athletes from teams consider much more than just the physical, technical, and tactical abilities of players when attempting to predict the contributions that athletes might make at a higher level of competition (see Holt & Dunn, 2004; Kavekar & Ford, 2010; Neely et al., 2016; Solomon, 2008).

Prior to focusing their attention on intangible player characteristics during the evaluation process, scouts first sought to identify players who were adjudged to have the physical, technical, and tactical abilities to compete successfully in the league, with 'skating ability' being cited as the most important characteristic. As seen throughout the talent identification literature in sport, consideration of the physical, technical, and tactical abilities of athletes is almost always given a high degree of priority by selectors and evaluators (see Abbott & Collins, 2004; Baker et al., 2009; Calder & Durbach, 2015; Elferink-Gemser et al., 2012; Larkin & O'Connor, 2017; Huijgen, Elferink-Gemser, Lemmink, & Visscher, 2014; Vaeyans et al., 2008; Van Yperen, 2009).

There appeared to be agreement among participants that the evaluation of players'

physical, technical, and tactical skills (e.g., skating, puck skill, shot, hockey sense, goal scoring ability, playmaking ability) was a fairly straight-forward ‘objective’ task whereby a high degree of consensus would be reached by most experienced scouts if they independently assigned ranks or grades to players according to these attributes. Once scouts had identified the athletes they wanted to monitor over a season (while continuing to grade and rank their playing abilities), attention was turned to the less obvious or ‘harder to grade’ (i.e., intangible) characteristics that provided insight into the ‘the person behind the player’ to determine whether the athlete would be a good fit for a scout’s team/organization (cf. Kavekar & Ford, 2010; Larkin & O’Connor, 2017; Neely et al., 2016). To a large extent, the intangible characteristics that were considered by scouts were influenced by the organizational culture or social climate that either existed (or was sought) within their respective organizations.

In the organizational psychology literature, it has been documented that personnel selection is often viewed as “a means to further organizational strategic objectives” (Schmitt, Ingerick, & Wiechmann, 2003, p. 97)—which in the case of most, if not all, WHL teams is to put a winning product on the ice—and these strategic objectives are best accomplished when future members of the organization (i.e., players) have the competencies or skills to successfully fulfill the job requirements (i.e., compete in the WHL). However, it has also been recognized in the organizational psychology literature that accomplishing these strategic objectives is greatly enhanced when there is a good fit between the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the people who are recruited to work for the organization and those same values, beliefs, and attitudes that are held by the organization (see Garcia-Izquierdo, Vilela, & Moscoso, 2015). In other words, successful organizations attempt to select people whose values, work ethic, attitudes, and behaviors match with the “internal values, norm beliefs, underlying assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors” that are

espoused within the organization (Garcia-Izquierdo et al., 2015, p. 21). Thus, a clear organizational culture is often used to determine the types of people who are hired/selected (or not hired/selected) by specific organizations. It appears from the results of the current study that organizational culture or team climate (which includes the behavioral, attitudinal, and interpersonal standards that are expected of athletes by the organization) played an important role in determining which intangible characteristics were considered by scouts in the evaluation of draft prospects.

In his book, “Legacy”, James Kerr (2013) speaks at length about the role that team culture and team values play in the selection of players who earn the opportunity to compete for the All Blacks—New Zealand’s renowned national men’s rugby team. Kerr recounts instances of players who had all of the necessary physical, technical, and tactical abilities to successfully compete at the highest levels of international rugby, but who were not selected because their behaviors and/or attitudes simply did not fit with the established cultural expectations/standards of the team. As noted by Kerr, “The All Blacks place...emphasis on their fundamental and foundational [team] values, going so far as to select on character over talent” (p. 18).

The degree to which team culture or team climate are considered by selectors/coaches in the evaluation process of athletes is further highlighted in a quote from the head coach of an NCAA Division 1 volleyball team in a study conducted by Schroeder (2010) that examined coaches’ perceptions of the mechanisms and strategies by which team culture can be developed in team sport. The coach said:

There’s a guy who is going to be one of the top five recruits in the [sic] America next year. I’m not even going to call him. He’s an asshole. I saw him a couple of weeks ago yelling at his coach, and I thought I’m not bringing that in. And I don’t care how good he

is. I know there are other schools that are desperate for him. He may be great. He may be a turnaround kind of player for them, but I'm not willing to sacrifice what kind of environment we have here. (Schroeder, 2010, p. 77)

Given that 11 of the scouts who were interviewed in the current study referenced the existing culture or social climate of their respective organizations, it would appear that the overall effectiveness of scouting and selection/drafting will be predicated upon the degree to which scouts have a clear understanding of the existing (or desired) culture and team climate within their respective organizations. Such an approach would be in line with Schroeder's (2010) research where results indicated that head coaches of successful NCAA Division 1 programs had developed "very specific recruiting profiles and scouting techniques...to recruit players who embodied the team values" (p. 71)—where these team values were used to evaluate (a) the way recruits would interact with coaches and teammates on an interpersonal level, (b) the way recruits would add to the tactical performance-based needs of the team, and (c) the way recruits would demonstrate a commitment to the behavioral expectations of the team as they related to work ethic, discipline, attitude, and effort.

Many of the enhancing intangible player characteristics cited by the scouts (i.e., compete, character, leadership/team player, and passion) have been identified in previous research. For example, in their study of NCAA Division 1 softball coaches, Kavekar and Ford (2010) cited being a team player, possessing a strong work ethic, character, hustle, drive, and determination as "intangible characteristics [that] describe a top recruit" (p. 3). Australian youth soccer coaches and club technical directors who participated in a study by Larkin and O'Connor (2017) cited positive attitude (i.e., how players handle disappointment), being competitive (i.e., desire, hunger, and being strong willed), and character (i.e., disciplined, hard-working, and winning the

right way), as important player attributes that were sought in their top prospects. Similarly, in a study of 18 NCAA Division 1 head coaches from various intercollegiate sport programs, Solomon and Rhea (2008) cited work ethic (which included competitiveness), team qualities (including leadership and team chemistry), and character (including integrity, trust, and respect) among the “more difficult to ‘see’ personality factors” (p. 263) that coaches considered when assessing their recruits. It seems plausible that ‘intangibles’ provide coaches and evaluators with information that they use to predict how much further players are capable of progressing in their respective sports. If physical, technical, and tactical skills provide a snap-shot of the current playing capabilities of an athlete, it appears that intangibles are then used to determine the future ceiling or limits of a player’s potential. In other words, it appears that enhancing intangibles may be used as a predictive guide that elevates the ceiling of a player’s potential (in the eyes of evaluators), and diminishing intangibles may be used as a predictive guide that lowers the ceiling of a player’s potential.

On the basis of the literature reviewed in the previous paragraph, it could be argued that all of the major themes that described enhancing intangibles in the current study (i.e., compete, character, leadership/team player, and passion) have been identified to varying degrees in previous research. However, an important finding that comes from the current study—and specifically noted by one of the participants—is that labels that are assigned by evaluators (and researchers) to capture intangible player characteristics often mean different things to different people. As noted by S7, “Character means different things to different people or different scouts.” In the current study, character was clearly considered to be an important enhancing intangible given that 14 of the 16 participants specifically cited this attribute. In this study, character reflected attributes that were based around an array of social, psychological, emotional,

behavioral, and moral characteristics that primarily described ‘the person behind the hockey player’ whereas character was defined by Larkin and O’Connor (2017, p. 5) as representing a player who was “disciplined; [a] hard worker; [and who] wants to win in the right way.”

Character was defined by Solomon and Rhea (2008) as embodying five attributes: integrity, courage, trust, honesty, and respect—all of which appear to fit more closely with concept of character that is often presented as an outcome of positive youth development (see Lerner et al., 2011). Despite the lack of consistency regarding the definition of character across studies, the current study adds to the literature by providing an outline of a variety of overt player behaviors that scouts associate with ‘good’ character in minor hockey. That being said, the inconsistency of terminology and labelling has important implications for theorists, researchers, and practitioners who are interested in identifying desirable intangible characteristics of potential recruits.

From a theoretical perspective, it has long been recognized that conceptual and empirical confusion is often caused (and measurement problems are created) when researchers or theorists (within and across studies) use the same label in reference to different constructs/characteristics, or different labels in reference to the same constructs/characteristics (see Marsh, 1994). It is difficult, if not impossible, to successfully advance the systematic study of any psychological construct or phenomenon—in this case, intangible player characteristics—if different researchers use the same label or terminology to describe different constructs. The dangers of this issue become magnified when researchers attempt to develop self-report or observer-report instruments that are intended to measure the same constructs, but in reality, the underlying operational definitions of the constructs (and corresponding item content) are quite different, and therefore result in the creation of instruments that actually measure different constructs (Marsh, 1994) despite having similar construct labels.

From an applied perspective, if the members of a scouting staff within an organization have been directed by their head coach or general manager to identify players with ‘good character’, but there is no clear or collective understanding of what this term means, there is likely to be little consensus or reliability in the judgements of the scouts, coaches, and/or general managers when assessing the character of a player. This lack of consensus would almost certainly have a deleterious effect upon the success of talent-identification and draft processes within an organization, and may lead to the selection of players who do not fit with the desired culture or team dynamic that is sought by an organization. As noted by Lazlo Block, Senior Vice President of people operations for Google Corporation—the successful internet company that has a corporate culture founded around people who are passionate, adaptable, and who crave knowledge (Hammel & Kleiner, 2015)—if an organization is going to hire the ‘right’ people upon whom a company’s success will depend, “Before you start recruiting, decide what attributes you want and define as a group what great looks like” (Feloni, 2015, p. 7). To advance the knowledge base around intangible player characteristics in sport, it would be prudent if researchers and practitioners attempted to develop clear operational definitions and construct labels that have the same meaning and reflect the same characteristics to all people across studies/contexts.

Given that the current study was conducted in a team sport setting, it does not seem surprising that the scouts identified ‘leadership’ and ‘being a team player’ as desirable intangible characteristics that enhance the draft-status of players. Players displaying leadership qualities were generally described by scouts as those who were deemed to be psychologically/emotionally mature role models (both on and off the ice) and who had the ability to positively influence their teammates. It seems possible that the scouts may be referring to players who have comparatively

high levels of emotional intelligence within their peer group—where emotional intelligence represents the players’ ability to monitor their “own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to [effectively] use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). Similar qualities around leadership, team-first behaviors, and emotional maturity have been identified in previous studies examining desirable intangible player characteristics that are sought by coaches when evaluating and selecting players for their teams (see Kavekar & Ford, 2017; Solomon, 2008; Solomon & Rhea, 2008).

The scouts in the current study believed that an essential component of a successful team was having players in their squad who put the needs of the team ahead of their own personal needs; this team-first attitude—or being a good ‘team player’—has been identified as a specific player attribute that coaches in British soccer academies felt was required to reach the professional level of the sport (see Mills et al., 2012), and has even been associated with superior performance in NFL players (see Whiting & Maynes, 2016). Research at the highest levels of international team sport supports this view that successful (and resilient) teams contain players who are willing to do almost anything for their team, regardless of the personal cost, if the action is believed to help the team achieve its goals (see Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2015). It would be interesting to determine whether scouts, coaches, and selectors would place a similar level of importance upon leadership and team-first intangibles if the athletes in question were being selected for individual sports (e.g., golf, tennis, track, and wrestling) where athletes more typically compete on their own, and at times, compete against other athletes within their own clubs and organizations. Clearly more research is required to investigate the intangible characteristics that are considered by scouts, coaches, and evaluators in the evaluation process surrounding the selection of individual-sport athletes to higher levels of competition (where there

often appears to be a much heavier reliance on objective performance-based measures for selection purposes: see Allen, Vandenberg, Pyne, & Hopkins, 2015).

Having a genuine passion, enthusiasm, and love for the game of hockey was the final intangible characteristic junior hockey scouts frequently cited as an important attribute that enhanced the draft status of eligible prospects. Passion, or a love of the game, has been identified as an important intangible athlete characteristic that is valued by coaches and selectors in various sport settings (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Larkin & O'Connor, 2017; Solomon, 2008; Solomon & Rhea, 2008). Indeed, one of the scouts in this study specifically commented that he felt passion was essential for players to succeed at the next level of competition because the demands of the sport (e.g., in terms of time, effort, travel, training, social-expectations, speed of the game, and physicality) only grow larger as the individual advances to the next level of competition (i.e., the WHL). These increasing demands at higher levels of any competitive sport can create heightened levels of stress which in turn can lead to elevated levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion for some athletes (see Cresswell & Eklund, 2006).

Previous research with adolescent swimmers (Raedeke, 1997) showed that athletes who competed for internally-driven attraction-related reasons (e.g., enjoyment and love of their sport) tended to have lower burnout scores than athletes who competed for more extrinsically-imposed reasons (e.g., to avoid a loss of identity). Thus, passion (or a love of the game) can provide the motivation and internal drive that gives athletes the necessary energy—whether it be physical, psychological, or emotional—for continuous “engagement in highly demanding activities” (Vallerand et al, 2008, p. 387) and to remain committed (see Holt & Dunn, 2004) with a high work ethic (Solomon & Rhea, 2008) in the pursuit of athletic excellence. Although self-report measures of passion (e.g., Verner-Filion, Vallerand, Amiot, & Mocanu, 2017) and intrinsic

motivation (e.g., Saw, Main, Robertson, & Gastin, 2017) have been used frequently in the sport psychology literature, it would appear from the interviews that many scouts believed they could identify a player's passion and love of the game based upon observations of the player's overt behaviors in and around the hockey rink, as well as from information gleaned through interviews with coaches/trainers and questionnaire responses. To examine the efficacy of this belief, future research may wish to determine whether scouts' subjective assessments of players' passion and intrinsic motivation (i.e., love of the game) correspond with players' responses on established self-report instruments that are designed to measure these constructs.

A unique aspect of the current study that differs from previous research that has specifically examined intangible characteristics of players who are being considered for selection to higher levels of competition (i.e., Kavekar & Ford, 2010; Larkin & O'Connor, 2017; Solomon, 2008; Solomon & Rhea, 2008) is the emergence of themes that reflect 'diminishing intangibles' (i.e., intangible characteristics that diminish the draft-status of prospects). This finding represents an important contribution to the extant literature because asking evaluators/selectors to identify characteristics that hurt a player's chances of being drafted or selected appears to produce information that can differ from the information obtained following questions that focus solely upon the identification of intangible characteristics that enhance a player's draft status. As a case in point, no participants in this study mentioned anything about parental behaviors when asked to discuss intangible characteristics that enhance a player's draft-status, yet 11 of the 16 participants specifically mentioned poor parenting behavior as something that *diminished* the draft status of a player.

It became apparent that for many scouts and their respective organizations, the identification of certain diminishing intangibles (often referred to as 'red flags' [see Schroeder,

2010]) frequently outweighed the presence of certain enhancing intangibles that resulted in a reduction of the draft-status of many players. Thus, diminishing intangibles do not simply represent the absence of enhancing intangibles—although such an absence (i.e., a lack of passion, a lack of character, a lack of compete, a lack of leadership and not being a team player) did play an important role in the evaluation process—but also appear to contribute in their own unique way to the overall evaluation process. Given the prominent role that diminishing intangibles appear to play in the evaluation of draft prospects in this study, future research that is designed to shed light upon the decision-making criteria that coaches, scouts, and evaluators use to select and deselect athletes at various levels of competition should consider whether questions are focused upon enhancing-intangibles, diminishing-intangibles, or both.

The primary sub-themes contained within the diminishing-intangibles theme were labelled lack of enhancers, (poor) body language, selfish behavior, and (poor) parental behavior. All 16 scouts noted that a general lack of enhancing intangibles diminished a player's draft status; this finding appears to reinforce the degree to which scouts look for enhancing intangibles during the evaluation process. An absence of enhancing intangibles clearly raised concerns for many scouts regarding the ability of players to fulfill the needs of their organizations as much as the presence of specific diminishing intangibles (such as poor body language, selfish behavior, and poor parental behavior).

Poor body language was cited by 14 scouts as a diminishing intangible. Applied sport psychologists have long recognized the importance of teaching athletes to be aware of their body language and how/why body language can convey wanted or unwanted information to teammates, opponents, and/or coaches (see Halliwell, 1989). As noted by Taylor (1995), observations of an athlete's body language can provide insight into the "self-confidence,

motivation, and emotional stability” (p. 343) of the performer. Indeed, previous research with competitive female curling athletes (ages 23 – 58 years) identified the conscious ability to control one’s overt body language—especially when experiencing emotions such as anger—as a critical aspect of emotional self-regulation that was necessary to prevent the non-verbal communication of unwanted or destructive messages to team mates (see Tamminen & Crocker, 2013). Similarly, instances of poor body language by players (e.g., banging a stick or excessive swearing) following situations of personal- or team-adversity was viewed by scouts as an emotionally driven response that might be indicative of a larger issue surrounding a lack of emotional maturity (or emotional intelligence). Repeated displays of this poor body language inevitably lead scouts to assign a ‘red flag’ to the player on the draft list. From an applied perspective, it is likely that young hockey players might benefit from educational sport psychology programs that teach them (a) about the importance of consciously controlling their body language before, during, and after competition, and (b) how such control might ultimately influence their own performance (Halliwell, 1989), the performance of their teammates (Tamminen & Crocker, 2013), and the impressions they leave with coaches (Larkin & O’Connor, 2017) and scouts who play a role in determining whether or not the athlete is selected to compete at higher levels of competition.

Eleven scouts spoke about selfish behavior and how such behavior diminished the draft status of young hockey players. A context-specific attribute that reflected selfish behavior in this study was termed ‘chiseling’ (i.e., trying to obtain points [i.e., recognition] on the game sheet from referees following offensive plays in which the player did not actually contribute to the play, and therefore did not deserve the point [i.e., goal or assist]). Although it might appear that chiseling is simply the antithesis of being a team player, it is worth noting that in no instances

did scouts indicate that chiseling had any immediate negative impact upon the team during competition. Rather, chiseling was viewed as a deeper character flaw that gave scouts the impression that the player lacked integrity or honesty (cf. Solomon & Rhea, 2008), and might therefore not be trusted to do the right thing or help the team in the future—where trust reflects a person’s “expectations, assumption, or belief about the likelihood that another’s future actions will be beneficial, favorable, or at least not detrimental to ones’ interests” (Robinson, 1996, p. 576). Thus, chiseling for points, or any type of overt behavior that is deemed to be a selfish act can “damage a player’s value in the eyes of peers, fans...coaches [and scouts]” (Uhlmann & Barnes, 2014, p. 4), and may ultimately undermine the level of trust between players that is necessary for effective team performance (see Martin, Wilson, Evans, & Spink, 2015). There would appear to be value in educating young hockey players that although they might think they are helping their draft status by accumulating more offensive points, if scouts believe that some of these points were obtained through chiseling, such actions could seriously undermine their future draft status.

Eleven scouts commented upon some aspect of parental behavior that could diminish the draft status of a player. The role of parental behavior in youth sport has received a considerable amount of research attention in the sport psychology literature (e.g., Holt & Knight, 2014; Jeffery-Tosoni, Fraser-Thomas & Baker, 2014; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Knight, Neely & Holt, 2011) and unruly overt parental behavior at competitions (e.g., criticizing or yelling at officials, verbal or physical altercations with opposing parents) has frequently been identified as a source of unwanted stress for many young athletes (see Elliott & Drummond, 2017; Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2014). Coaches have also spoken about the destructive influence that certain parental behaviors can have (e.g., anger/complaints towards coaches by parents,

emotional support to the child that is conditional upon the athlete meeting the parental expectations, and instruction from the parent to the child/athlete that is contradictory to the coach's instruction) upon the athletic development of young athletes (see Bean, Jeffery-Tosoni, Fraser-Thomas, & Baker, 2016; Elliott & Drummond, 2017; Ross, Mallett, & Parkes, 2015). Although there is an abundance of literature that has highlighted problems in Canadian youth hockey surrounding the overt actions of players' parents that involve the verbal abuse of officials, coaches, opposing players, and parents of opposing teams (see Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2014), to the best of the researcher's knowledge this is the first study to provide direct evidence from scouts that many of these unruly parental behaviors could seriously impede the likelihood of a young hockey player being selected to compete at a higher level of competition. In fact, some of the scouts were adamant that they simply would not consider drafting a player whose parents acted in unruly ways, regardless of how athletically talented the player might be. It appears that there is an ongoing need to develop, implement, and assess parent education programs in youth hockey—and in organized youth sport more generally (see Bean et al., 2016; Dorsch, King, Dunn, Osai, & Tulane, 2017)—that clearly articulates the negative impact certain parental behaviors can have upon their children's future playing opportunities.

It became apparent that enhancing- and diminishing-intangibles played an important role in helping scouting staffs generate the final draft-list that ranked the players each organization was considering. A number of scouts indicated that diminishing intangibles were particularly important when ranking top-end (i.e., highly skilled) prospects if a player had been assigned a red flag that would give some cause for concern about a specific player-attribute that might have a negative impact upon the team or organization at a later date. Several scouts also noted the important role that intangibles played in the middle to later rounds of the draft when the more

physically talented players had been selected. At this stage of the draft, scouts indicated that most of the undrafted players were quite similar in terms of their physical and playing capabilities, and so the intangible characteristics were given a much more prominent role in determining which players should (or should not) be drafted. This approach is similar to the procedures used by head coaches of provincial-select youth sport teams when deciding whether to select or deselect the so-called ‘fringe players’ in their squads (see Neely et al., 2016). In other words, the presence of enhancing intangibles or diminishing intangibles seemingly plays a more critical role when tie-breaking decisions were required to select or not select players who had similar playing abilities.

As indicated by the final theme that emerged from the thematic analysis, results of the study revealed an ongoing investigative process that was used by scouts throughout the competitive season to evaluate draft prospects. In other words, evaluations were based upon multiple observations (from multiple people) over a prolonged period of time in an effort to ensure that the most informed decisions could be made by scouts and their respective organizations regarding the draft status of prospects (cf. Neely et al., 2016). Information about the intangible characteristics of players was obtained by scouts from multiple sources including on-ice observations, social media, and interviews with players, parents, coaching staffs, and training staffs. Although each source of information helped to provide additional insight into the intangible characteristics of players, it is important to acknowledge that decisions were not based upon any single source of information (e.g., social media) where the validity of the information may be called into question as it relates to making personnel selection decisions (see Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, & Junco, 2016).

Practical Implications

Overall, the results of this study appear to have a number of applied/practical implications for individuals who work in the talent-identification business of youth sport, and particularly in the scouting business of youth hockey. Specifically, any individual who is in the early stages of his/her scouting career should be advised that talent identification in youth sport goes far beyond the assessment of players' physical, technical, and tactical abilities. In other words, simply having the knowledge to assess the performance-based skills of a hockey player (or soccer player, or volleyball player, etc.) does not appear to be sufficient when attempting to make a fully informed decision about the draft suitability of a prospect. It is therefore recommended that scouts, selectors, and evaluators learn about the 'harder to measure' attributes of 'the person behind the player' when making decisions about which players to select (or not select) in the evaluation process. Although performance-based 'analytics' (e.g., statistical summaries of points scored, minutes played, pass completion rates, etc.) are playing a bigger role in the talent identification process in sport (see Gerrard, 2017; Vollman, 2016), these statistics are unlikely to inform an organization as to the likelihood that a prospect will have a good interpersonal fit or develop good interpersonal relationships with existing team members. This is important to consider because previous research has shown that interpersonal or relationship conflicts within sport teams can have an extremely debilitating impact upon team members (e.g., Holt, Knight, & Zukiwski, 2012), which in turn can undermine team performance (see De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Nevertheless, with the increasing technological advancement of player tracking systems that are used for analytic purposes, such systems may one day play a role in tracking certain behavioral tendencies (that were identified in this study) that could reveal information about certain intangible player characteristics that are valued by scouts. For

example, given that the *compete* level of players was highly valued by the scouts in this study, tracking systems could be developed to generate statistics around skating speed and the extent to which a player skates hard for the puck as a function of the score in the game or the time remaining in the game throughout a season. This type of analytical statistic could one day be used to supplement the scouts' observational assessments of this intangible player characteristic.

The results of this study may also have important practical implications for young athletes who aspire to play at higher levels of competition, and more specifically to young hockey players who are hoping to be drafted to a WHL team. Although physical, technical, and tactical skills still form the primary basis of evaluation in the eyes of most junior hockey scouts, this research highlights the importance of a player's character (i.e., the person behind the player) in the evaluation process. As such, players might benefit from educational programs that focus on the principles of positive youth development through sport to enhance their understanding of how and why good 'character' and good 'citizenship' can not only contribute positively to society at large (see Holt et al., 2017), but can also enhance the draft status of the player in the eyes of the scouting community.

Finally, the results of this study may have important practical implications for the parents of young athletes who are seeking to compete at higher levels of competition, particularly as they relate to the overt behaviors of parents at their children's hockey games. From the current results, it is evident that many scouts payed attention to the behaviors of parents at hockey games, where instances of unruly or disruptive behavior could seriously undermine the draft status of a player.

Although no scouts spoke about 'good' parenting behavior that would enhance the draft status of a player, eleven scouts specifically commented on how 'bad' parenting behavior could diminish the draft status of a player. Interestingly, a recent study on the concept of 'exemplary

parenting' in youth sport (see Pynn, Dunn, & Holt, in press) highlighted the importance that both coaches and parents placed upon parents' ability to control their emotions (and corresponding behaviors) before, during, and after competitions. Pynn et al. suggested that this emotional control within parents was likely linked to emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), and that applied educational interventions may be useful in helping some parents enhance their emotional intelligence abilities (also see Ciarrochi & Mayer, 2007). It is possible that such parental interventions could indirectly assist young hockey players in their efforts to be drafted and play at a higher level of competition if parents successfully develop levels of emotional intelligence that enable them to control their emotions and exhibit fewer negative/unruly behaviors at their children's competitions (cf. Teques, Calmeiro, Martins, Duarte, & Holt, 2018). This may be a fruitful avenue for future research.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the results of this study can help researchers, scouts, parents, and athletes to better understand what, how, and why certain intangible player characteristics can impact the draft-status of draft-eligible players, there are a number of study-limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the degree to which results apply beyond the specific context of high-level male youth hockey in Canada is unknown. Hockey is a high-contact team sport, therefore the degree to which the results apply to non-contact team- and individual-sports remains unknown. Similarly, all of the participants (i.e., scouts) were male, and the athletes they were evaluating were male. It is possible that a different list of intangible characteristics may have been generated if the study had been conducted with female evaluators who assessed female athletes. Previous research in sport has shown that male and female athletes can have different preferences towards the leadership behaviors of their coaches (see Chelladurai, & Saleh, 1978), and preferences for

certain types of leadership behaviors can also differ between male and female athletes based upon the gender of their coaches (see Reimer & Toon, 2001). It therefore seems possible that male and female evaluators/scouts/coaches/selectors in sport may perceive leadership characteristics differently and look for different leadership intangibles when evaluating potential recruits. Indeed, organizational psychology research has shown the existence of gender differences in the way male and female interviewers assess candidates at job interviews (see Chapman & Rowe, 2001). In light of these findings, it would seem prudent if future research accounted for the gender of both the evaluator and the athlete when examining intangible player characteristics in the talent identification process.

Another potential limitation of the study relates to the fact that the researcher was a long-standing member of the scouting community that participated in the study. Not only did this increase the challenges of ensuring that the researcher successfully bracketed his own pre-existing views on intangible player characteristics in both the interview and data-analytic aspects of the research (see Fischer, 2009), it is possible that some participants (from competing organizations) may have deliberately withheld information regarding their views about the intangible characteristics of players in an effort to maintain a professional advantage over the researcher and his organization in the draft process. Although reasons for withholding information about certain topics in qualitative research interviews can vary widely across participants and studies (Dundon & Ryan, 2009), the pre-existing trust and rapport between the researcher and most participants likely reduced this potential threat to the trustworthiness of the data. The interview with the content expert—who had no vested interest in either helping or hindering the success of the researcher and his organization—also helped to alleviate this concern.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that no attempt was made in the current study to assess the degree to which scouts had actually made good (i.e., appropriate/correct) decisions regarding the players they had identified as suitable draft picks for their respective organizations. In other words, it cannot be inferred from the results of this study that the scouts were ‘correct’ in their evaluations of which intangible player characteristics actually contributed to the long-term success of draft picks and their teams. That being said, it seems unlikely that WHL teams would continue to hire these experienced scouts—all of whom had 5 or more years of scouting experience in the league and had collectively amassed 265 years of scouting experience—if the teams did not believe that the ongoing recommendations of the scouts regarding the suitability (or unsuitability) of draft prospects were not contributing to the success of their respective organizations. Longitudinal research that systematically documents and evaluates drafted players on their intangible characteristics (as judged by scouts prior to the draft) and tracks the progress and performance of these players throughout their WHL careers and beyond (e.g., into intercollegiate hockey or professional hockey) would help determine which, if any, of the intangible player characteristics identified in this study were most strongly associated with the career development of athletes who compete in sports that employ a draft process.

Conclusion

The results of this thesis highlight the important role intangible characteristics play in the evaluation process that is used by junior hockey scouts to assess the draft-suitability of young players. The results indicate that scouts (and their respective organizations) consider a wide range of attributes and characteristics in the evaluation process that go far beyond the performance-based indicators of players’ physical, technical, and tactical abilities. As was mentioned by numerous scouts, a high degree of consideration is given to ‘the person behind the

player' during the evaluation process. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that people who play a role in the training and development of young hockey players (e.g., coaches, parents, support staff, etc.) may wish to evaluate the degree to which their efforts are systematically directed towards teaching and reinforcing the importance of intangible attributes such as character, leadership, passion, body language, and 'team-first' behaviors to young players. This point is emphasized because examination of the manual for the Long Term Player Development Plan for hockey in Canada (see Hockey Canada, 2013) reveals a predominant focus upon the technical, tactical, and physical development of young players, and a negligible focus upon the aforementioned 'intangible characteristics' that can also enhance the development of young players. Notwithstanding the essential role that technical, tactical, and physical skills have in the development of young hockey players, it may be the presence of certain enhancing-intangibles (or absence of certain diminishing-intangibles) that ultimately enable some athletes to be drafted and move to the next level of competition within their sport.

The intangible player characteristics that were described by scouts in this study generally provide a behavioral reflection of underlying psychological characteristics that are assumed to exist within the players who are being evaluated. Although many of these psychological characteristics may be 'engrained' in athletes by the time they are being scouted for junior, college, or professional levels, researchers have suggested that the development and implementation of psychological skills (e.g., self-awareness/assessment, goal setting, self-talk, emotional regulation) can help athletes develop or enhance certain psychological characteristics that may be associated with 'enhancing intangibles' (see Dohme, Backhouse, Piggott & Morgan, 2017). Perhaps the implementation of psychological skills training at early stages of athletic development is the juncture where educational psychological skills programs can best help

young athletes to develop behavioral tendencies that truly reflect positive psychological characteristics underlying the player.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

Hi [NAME OF SCOUT]. Thanks for taking the time to participate in this study which I am using to complete my thesis as part of my MA degree at the University of Alberta. The information you provide in the interview will not only help me complete my degree but will hopefully be used to further enhance the knowledge base we have in the scouting community to help us evaluate future draft picks in the WHL. As a reminder of the things that were written in the information letter you received, I want to reassure you that you are in no way obligated to participate in this interview or answer any specific questions that I might ask. Your participation is completely voluntary and no-one inside or outside of your organization or the league will know if you participated or not. I am recording this interview so that I can go back to your responses in detail once we are finished.

I want to assure you that every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity. If there is anything you say that might identify who you are I will make sure that you get the opportunity to screen the information before it is ever included in the final version of my thesis or in any public presentation of the study that might follow (i.e., paper or conference presentation). A fake name will be assigned to your interview responses to further protect your identity and to protect the identity of your club and/or anyone who you might mention by name in the interview. Although my supervisory committee members—Dr. John Dunn and Dr. Nick Holt—are co-investigators on this project, it is important to understand that even they will be unable to determine your identity at any stage during the research process. They will never receive a list of the names of the scouts who participate in the study, and they will never have access to the audiotape of this interview. They will have access to the transcripts that come from these interviews but all of your identifying information (including your name) will be removed from the typed transcripts they eventually receive. So, every effort will be made to ensure that no one knows your identity at every stage of the research.

It's important for me to stress that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I'm going to ask. As a fellow scout in the league, I'm interested in your experiences, perceptions, and views about the so-called 'intangible player characteristics' that you use to evaluate players and that you consider in your decision-making process as to whether or not you think a player would make a good draft prospect. The things I'm talking about go beyond the physical, technical, and tactical abilities that scouts typically consider when evaluating players. These "intangible player characteristics" are often "harder-to-see", "harder-to-evaluate", and "harder-to-describe" than many of the physical, technical, and tactical abilities that we consider, but are still considered by scouts as being important when making our draft-selection choices.

So the focus of this interview is based around your views of what these "intangible player characteristics" are, and why you think they are important to consider when making decisions about draft prospects. They can relate directly to the player, or anything that you consider to be part of the player's background.

So now that I've given you an overview of why we are having this interview, do you have any questions you want to ask me before we get started?

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Question: Just to get us started, and for a bit of background information (which we will not include in the published report), can you tell me about your own previous competitive experiences in sport, and a bit about your background as an amateur scout in the league?

Probes:

- Were you ever drafted by a junior or professional team?
- Did you end up playing in that league?
- How did you get involved in scouting?
- How long did you, or have you been scouting in the WHL?
- How many teams did you, or have you, scouted for in the league?
- What is your official title within your organization?
- Is scouting your full-time position?
- Approximately how many games do you, or did you, scout in a typical WHL season?
- How many WHL drafts have you attended?
- At what age did you first begin scouting for a WHL organization?

Question: Before we talk about the “intangible characteristics of players” that you consider important, can you briefly tell me about some of the more obvious (or objective) player characteristics that you typically evaluate when you assess a player?

Probes:

- Physical?
- Tactical?
- Technical?
- Game sense?
- Performance indicators? (analytics & game statistics)
- How difficult is it to typically assess these characteristics?
- What do you think the typical level of consensus or agreement would be among the WHL scouting community if you all sat down and watched the same player at the same time on 5 different occasions throughout a season?

MAIN QUESTIONS

OK. Now that you have given me your thoughts on what we might call the more obvious or objective player characteristics that you evaluate, let’s turn our attention to the more “intangible” characteristics that you consider when you evaluate potential draft prospects. As I said earlier, these are things that may be harder to see, harder to evaluate, or harder to describe, and usually go beyond the technical, tactical and physical attributes of players, but are things about a player you’d like to know or feel are important to know before you draft him.

What Question(s): Can you please list/describe the “intangible player characteristics” (beyond the physical, technical and tactical abilities of players) that you consider when you evaluate players for the draft?

Probes:

- Why is each characteristic important?

- How easy/difficult is it for you or your organization to obtain information about these characteristics?

Why Question(s): How much do intangible characteristics ‘*weigh into*’ decisions when making draft choices?

Probes:

- Are these characteristics formally or informally evaluated and discussed within your organization?
- How much time is spent discussing these characteristics within your organization at the draft?
- Does the importance of intangibles vary as a function of higher vs. lower ranked/rated prospects? Do intangibles influence the order of your teams’ draft list?

Question: If you had a player who possessed all of the necessary physical, technical, and tactical abilities to be successful as a hockey player in your organization, are there any “intangible characteristics” that a player might possess (or not possess), or that exist in the player’s background, that would make you very reluctant to draft him?

Probes:

- Why?
- Has this ever been a determining factor in deciding not to draft a player? (Provide details if such a case exists).

Question: Can you think of any cases within your organization (or within another organization) where more knowledge or more consideration of certain “intangible characteristics of a player” might have influenced a team’s decision to draft (or not draft) the player?

- Probe for specific good/bad examples of players

Question: Can you think of any cases within your organization (or within another organization) where a player was not considered to have the physical, technical, or tactical abilities to be successful, but the player was nevertheless drafted as a result of the “intangible characteristics” he possessed and went on to be successful in your team or in the league?

- Probe for specific good/bad examples of players

How Questions(s): Can you please list/describe how you gather information on “intangible player characteristics” (beyond the physical, technical and tactical abilities of players) that you consider when you evaluate players for the draft?

- How/where/when do you gather this information?
- Who do you talk to get this information? (coaches, parents, teachers, social media, interviews, questionnaires)?

Do you have any specific examples of sources that provide added or more insightful data than others?

Question: If you were to select the **three** most important “intangible player characteristics” that you would advise young players to develop to enhance their prospects of being drafted, what would they be?

- Why did you select these three examples?

CLOSING QUESTION

Question: Is there anything else about the “intangible characteristics of players” or the “way we evaluate/consider these attributes” in our draft-selection evaluations that we have not yet discussed but you would like to mention before we end the interview?

Appendix B – Member Reflection One Page Summary and Graphic

The purpose of this study was to identify ‘intangible player characteristics’ that junior scouts used to determine the draft-suitability of eligible hockey players (in the Western Hockey League). The findings suggest that after scouts identify players with adequate, on-ice, playing ability they then sought more information about the person behind the player. The perception of the person was reflected by scouts’ evaluation of two different types of intangibles – intangibles that enhanced players draft status and intangibles that diminished players draft status. Enhancing intangibles were seen to increase the draft status of a player and included *compete, character, leadership/being a team player* and *passion*. Diminishing intangibles, which often raised red flags for scouts, were seen to decrease the draft status of a player and included a *lack of enhancing intangibles, bad body language, being selfish, and undesirable parental behavior*. When junior hockey scouts prepared the final list of player names for the annual WHL draft, their final decision between players with similar playing ability often came down to the intangibles (enhancing vs diminishing intangibles) of those players. More specifically, when scouts were forced into making decisions about a group of similar players they used intangibles to choose the player that best fit the current organizational culture. Junior hockey teams wanted to incorporate players, especially after the first several rounds, that were good, well rounded citizens representing the team or ‘brand’ in a positive fashion as opposed to selecting a player that might be disruptive to the organization in the future. Especially after the elite players (in terms of physical playing ability) were selected in the first several rounds, scouts appeared to prefer the best person, according to intangibles important to the organization, over the physical ability of a player.

Display Graphic:

