Membership and involvement in groups is a fun- damental characteristic of our society. We band together in a large number and variety of groups for social reasons or to carry out more effectively some job or task. Thus, each of us interacts daily with numerous other people in group settings— in the family, at work, in social situations, on sport teams. The result is a reciprocal exchange of influence; we exert an influence on other peo- ple in groups and, in turn, those groups and their members have an influence on us. The following two examples illustrate just how powerful this influence can be. In February 2013, the Coronado T-Birds, an El Paso (Texas) high school basketball team, sub- stituted Mitchell Marcus into the final two min- utes of their last regular season game. What was special about this substitution is that Marcus was a student with developmental disabilities whose passion for basketball landed him the general manager position of the team and the respect and comradeship of the other players. During these last few moments of the season, Marcus’ teammates continually passed him the ball with the hope of having him score a basket; to no avail. However, with the other team in posses- sion of the ball out of bounds, in the last seconds of the game, an opposing player purposefully passed the ball to Marcus, who promptly scored two points. As Rush (2013) relays, “The crowd went into a frenzy, and Marcus was carried off the court like a conquering hero. His mother said she could cry about this moment forever. It was his first high school game and his last.” The example is powerful and moving; it also illus- trates the importance of team members’ support and chemistry. The second illustration, however, shows another side of group influence. In November 2011, Robert Champion was the victim of a hazing ritual as a member of the Florida A&M University band. Hazing is a process of humiliating new group members and represents an extreme of initiation rites. In Champion’s case, one activity involved walk- ing through a dark bus while being physically abused by other members of the team. Rafferty (2013) describes the tragic outcome of this event: “After he pushed his way through the beat-down and made it to the end of the bus, Champion complained of feeling sick. Shortly afterwards he collapsed and died [of] ‘hemorrhagic shock caused by blunt-force trauma,’ according to his autopsy.” These anecdotes show the dramatic influ- ence groups can have on their members. In the first example the influence was a positive one, whereas in the hazing case the influence was negative and destructive. The fundamental ques- tion is how groups can come to exert such influ- ence on individual members and their behaviors. From a coaching perspective, insight into this issue could produce possible prescriptions for the development of a positive, productive sport group—an effective, cohesive team. In this chap- ter, both the nature of groups and group cohe- sion are discussed, and some suggestions for the development of effective groups in sport settings are offered. The Nature of Sport Groups Definition As Carron and Eys (2012) noted, “every group is like all other groups, like some other groups, and like no other group” (p. 12). What this means, of course, is that every group not only contains characteristics that are common to every other group but it also possesses character- istics that are unique to itself. The uniqueness or diversity among groups has led group dynamics theoreticians to advance a variety of definitions in an attempt to portray what a group is. With regard to sport groups, Carron and Eys defined a team as: a collection of two or more individuals who pos- sess a common identity, have common goals and objectives, share a common fate, exhibit structured patterns of interaction and modes of communi- cation, hold common perceptions about group structure, are personally and instrumentally inter- dependent, reciprocate interpersonal attraction, and consider themselves to be a group. (p. 14) To understand how this definition applies within sport teams, explanations for each of the key characteristics are provided in Table 7-1. Many of the characteristics of a group sum- marized by Carron and Eys (2012) underpin a concept termed “groupness” (Spink, Wilson, & Priebe, 2010). Although groupness is likely present to some degree on all sport teams, each group will vary in the amount that is evident. For example, interactive team sports such as soccer or hockey generally necessitate teamwork among members during competition—a feature that is less evident in sequential team sports (e.g., baseball) and typ- ically absent among members of teams in indi- vidual sports like running or golf (Evans, Eys, &Bruner, 2012). Hence, these sports differ in the degree to which they require group processes— this is important to consider when (a) predicting how group members will interact and (b) devel- oping efforts to improve the group environment. Nonetheless, groups in each of these settings rely on one another in several ways (e.g., shar- ing a collective group goal) and, as such, team members are likely to have a powerful influence on one another. Thus, coaches or leaders of all types of sport teams must develop a strong sense of “we” to encourage positive group outcomes. Hand-in-hand with developing a sense of “we” is the development of cohesiveness. Group Cohesion Definition Groups are dynamic, not static. They exhibit life and vitality, interaction, and activity. Their vitality may be reflected in many ways—some of “we” and/or “us” evaluations). Individual attractions to the group represent each indi- vidual’s personal attractions to the group and, more specifically, what personal motivations act to retain an individual in the group (i.e., consists of “I” and/or “me” evaluations). As Figure 7-1 shows, cohesion within sport groups is consid- ered to have four facets: individual attractions to the group–task, individual attractions to the group–social, group integration–task, and group integration–social. However, it should be noted that qualitative and quantitative studies with youth and children suggest that their per- ceptions of cohesion appear to be less defined, and that assessing the broader dimensions of task and social cohesion is sufficient to gain an understanding of their group environment. The Correlates of Cohesiveness Because cohesiveness is multidimensional, it is associated with a wide variety of correlates or factors. Carron and Eys (2012) provided a frame- work to discuss the main correlates of cohesion in sport teams. Figure 7-2 shows the four general categories: environmental factors, personal factors, leadership factors, and team factors. In the follow- ing sections, some of the main correlates within each general category are discussed. Environmental Factors Perhaps the most easily identifiable correlates of cohesion are environmental factors—those factors that are demonstrated by the setting in which group members interact (e.g., physical characteristics of the environment). Most nota- bly, individuals who are in close proximity (i.e., who are physically close to each other) have a greater tendency to bond together. Being in close contact provides the opportunity for inter- action and communication, which may hasten group development. To provide this opportunity, team members should be placed into situations that make interaction inevitable. Some situa- tions in sport that ensure physical proximity among group members include having a team locker room, encouraging team members to take classes with one another, or scheduling games that require the team to travel and/or stay with one another. The team’s size also is associated with the development of cohesiveness. Widmeyer, Braw- ley, and Carron (1990) demonstrated that there is an inverted-U relationship between social cohesion and team size in intramural basketball teams. That is, moderate-sized groups showed the greatest cohesiveness, and larger and smaller groups exhibited the least. Interestingly, the results of this study also showed that task cohe- siveness decreased with increasing group size. Widmeyer and colleagues felt that this decrease could be attributed to the fact that it is more difficult to obtain consensus and task commit- ment in larger groups. Although these studies are limited to a basketball setting, it is clear that the number of athletes, coaches, and staff members have an influence on team cohesiveness. Personal Factors Personal factors that are associated with cohesion include the characteristics, beliefs, or behaviors of group members. An important personal factor associated with the development of both task and social cohesion in sport teams is satisfaction. Satisfaction is derived from many sources, such as whether or not a team provides opportunities to feel valued and competent, as well as whether an individual feels socially related to his or her teammates (Reimer & Chelladurai, 1998). Sat- isfaction also results from the recognition from others and, as such, the coach-athlete relation- ship is a key contributor. Ultimately, satisfied athletes are likely to have a positive influence on team functioning and, conversely, athletes who experience high cohesiveness will likely feel more satisfied (Widmeyer & Williams, 1991). Competitive state anxiety is another personal factor that is related to cohesion. Ath- letes who perceive their teams to be higher in task cohesion experience less cognitive anxiety and are more likely to view their symptoms of both cognitive (e.g., worry) and somatic (e.g., sweaty palms) anxiety as beneficial and neces- sary for peak performance (Eys, Hardy, Carron, & Beauchamp, 2003). In describing the relationship between cohesion and anxiety, Wolf, Sadler, Eys, and Kleinert (2012) proposed that athletes feel like they have more resources at their disposal, and feel less pressure, when they are members of cohesive teams. Thus, cohesive settings should lead to more facilitative perceptions of anxiety because athletes perceive the sport situation as a challenge (i.e., “this is an exciting situation that I can cope with”) as opposed to a threat (i.e., “this is an impossible situation and I am hopeless”). Chapter 12 contains more information about competitive anxiety. Another personal factor related to cohe- sion is the degree to which athletes engage in social loafing—the tendency for individuals to decrease the amount of effort they expend when completing a group task compared to the amount of effort expended when alone. There are several reasons why individuals reduce their effort in a group. One primary reason is that it is easy for an individual to get “lost in a crowd” and, thus, reduce his or her effort because others can’t identify how much or how little individual effort is exerted. However, McKnight, Williams, and Widmeyer (1991) found that members of swimming relay teams who reported high lev- els of task cohesion were less likely to be social loafers. Leadership Factors The interrelationships among the coach, the athlete, cohesiveness, and performance are com- plex. In a mutiny, for example, cohesion is high, the leader–subordinate relationship is poor (and the leader is excluded from the group), and per- formance from an organizational perspective is poor. One example of the complex interrelation- ship among coach, athlete, cohesiveness, and performance comes from a study by Widmeyer and Williams (1991). They had golf coaches rate the importance they attached to task cohesion and to social cohesion, and the number of tech- niques they used to foster cohesiveness. These measures were not related to their athletes’ per- ceptions of the amount of team cohesiveness. In short, coaches did not appear to play a crucial role in the development of group cohesion. However, the coach’s decision style can have an influence on the level of cohesiveness within the team. When people have ownership over a decision, they tend to support that decision more strongly. Team members engage in behav- iors more persistently, with greater intensity, and for a longer duration when they have had an opportunity to participate in decision making. As Westre and Weiss (1991) found, when high school coaches were viewed as engaging in more democratic behaviors, their players perceived the team to have higher cohesion. Furthermo ecent literature in sport psychology highlights the importance of transformational leader- ship (see Chapter 6), which describes at least four influential behaviors (Bass & Riggio, 2006) including idealized influence (e.g., setting pos- itive examples and adhering to group values), inspirational motivation (e.g., clearly convey- ing the shared vision for the group), intellectual stimulation (e.g., encouraging followers to be involved in problem solving), and individual- ized consideration (e.g., paying attention to the needs of each group member). Generally speak- ing, transformational leadership behaviors have been demonstrated to have a positive associa- tion with athletes’ perceptions of team cohe- sion (Price & Weiss, 2013; Smith, Arthur, Hardy, Callow, & Williams, 201