

Pre Game Rhetoric: Pure Motivation or Simply Show?

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By the time athletes make it to the level of top Division I college programs and professional ranks, they are finely tuned athletic machines. Their whole life up to that point has been mostly consumed with honing their skills and abilities and pouring their heart and soul into their respective sport. Coaches, for obvious reasons, play a central role in an athlete's life and career. They have the arduous task of handling the pressures and burdens of bringing a team together, harnessing their skills, and molding them into a cohesive unit expected to compete at a high level every season. It takes a combination of intimate knowledge of the sport, excellent communication and people skills, organizational skills, and knowledge about how to psychologically manage a team. The great coaches in history and of today possess this unique skill set and are able to elicit high-level performances from their team on a nightly basis.

While one's physical abilities obviously play a significant role in their success as an athlete, often times the mental aspect of sports goes overlooked. There are countless stories of athletes who were touted as the next great player to ascend the ranks only to completely flame out and vanish into obscurity. The reasons surrounding these failed athletic careers are certainly multifaceted and complicated. However, once athletes reach a certain competition level there is no doubt that the physical tools and sport-related knowledge are clearly there. What is often the missing link is the right coach to motivate

and guide those players through the trials and tribulations of a long and grueling season. It is for this reason that organizations expel a great deal of resources to land the perfect candidate to lead a team. A great coach can mean the difference between winning a championship and missing the postseason entirely. To achieve success, coaches must learn how to inspire their teams every time they take the field of play. Pre-game speeches provide coaches with an opportunity to motivate, instill confidence, and provide direction. On the surface it may sound relatively easy, yet few people can do so effectively, especially when it matters the most. Being able to unify a team to achieve a common goal while also having to cater to the psychological intricacies of each player takes a gifted communicator. Often times, coaches' pre-game speeches adapt to the situation and the context in which they are delivered; yet I believe that there are common threads to pre-game rhetoric which link them together.

I am hoping to discover what rhetorical strategies coaches at the elite levels harness to motivate an immensely talented group of athletes to get them to perform at their best in a moment of great importance. Moreover, are pre-game speeches delivered before high pressure games even thought to be helpful or effective? In order to further understand how they are able to accomplish what seemingly few can successfully do, I will be analyzing a few of the more recent speeches given by coaches before a crucial game. I want to understand the rhetorical tactics that they used to hopefully uncover whether or not there are some similarities within them which ultimately coaxed great performances out of their teams when the stakes were highest.

With the hope of coming to a definitive conclusion on the issue I will first look at whether scholars even believe if pre-game speeches improve self-efficacy in players in

any way. Following that I will introduce the specific artifacts that I have chosen to base my arguments off of. I will let generic criticism as described by Sonja K. Foss in her work, “Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice” be my guide for how I will go about conducting my own rhetorical criticism of the selected pieces. Finally, I will draw conclusions and attempt to formulate a concrete answer to the proposed question while offering some final thoughts and perhaps some closing advice.

This study could potentially have a positive impact going forward amongst coaches and players, while also adding to the field of genre criticism and communication research. Often times it can be a challenging endeavor for coaches trying to navigate through the murky waters of player psyche. Shedding some light into what athletes communicatively and psychologically need to hear to perform at their best could be a remarkable tool for coaches at any level. By breaking down the various elements of these speeches it is my hope to provide some sort of structure which will give coaches the tools to formulate more effective speeches.

Literature

A Little Extra “Something”

There is much debate as to just how effective pre-game speeches are in regards to player performance and emotion. According to an article out of the *Journal of Sport Behavior* entitled, *An Exploratory Examination of the Effects of Coaches' Pre-Game Speeches on Athletes' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy and Emotion* by Tiffanye Vargas-Tonsing from Michigan State University, “...athletes' perceptions of informational content within a coach's pre-game speech can impact athletes' feelings of self-efficacy as well as athletes' emotions. A major strength of this study was its ability to assess athletes'

perceptions and feelings at the time in which they were occurring” (14). One of the main reasons I found this study to be so compelling is because it was conducted using high-level athletes as the basis of her research. Perhaps the most important statement out of her research which really narrows in on what this study is searching for is her findings on increased player emotions for one single game due to a pre-game speech.

To show even a small overall increase in efficacy within these athletes for just one game out of their entire season, and when their efficacy beliefs were likely already higher than average, is noteworthy. These results may begin to underscore the importance of examining this technique amongst less elite teams as well as teams that have not had as much opportunity to play together before their competitions, such as Olympic and World Cup teams (14).

In other words, she found that pre-game speeches do in fact work and have the ability to extract that little bit extra “something” out of an athlete.

Vargas-Tonsing has done the most extensive research to date on the specific issue of pre-game speech effectiveness. A previous study which she completed in 2007 looked at varsity collegiate athletes, both male and female, and tried to explore the perceptions of preferred content in pre-game speeches by both players and coaches. She also attempted to discover any gender differences between how pre-game speeches were perceived and what kind of speech each gender preferred to hear (emotional or informational). All of her research points to the positive effect that good pre-game speeches can have on high level athletes.

In another study which also comes from the *Journal of Sport Behavior*, a professional hockey team and their coach were followed and studied for an entire season in a “participant observation study of the emotional performances of professional hockey players before, during, and after professional games” (Gallmeier). Gallmeier noted and

documented various ways in which the coach delivered motivational stimuli, such as posted and verbal messages, throughout the day to his team. In doing so, it was found that the coach helped "peak" the athletes' feelings of emotion to correspond with game time. With his study, Gallmeier indicated that a team's coach has a vital role in directing the style of play.

Human Emotion, Motivation, and Self-Efficacy

Human emotion is a complex and abstract "thing" to comprehend and study. Since people vary so much from individual to individual, scientists have a difficult task when it comes to studying human emotions much deeper than on a broad scale. Before delving further it is important to first provide a definition of what "emotion" is. E.L. Deci conveyed the meaning of the term emotion with the following working definition in his article *The Psychology of Self-Determination*:

An emotion is a reaction to a stimulus event (either actual or imagined). It involves change in the viscera and musculature of the person, is experienced subjectively in characteristic ways, is expressed through such means as facial changes and action tendencies, and may mediate and energize subsequent behaviors (Deci 85).

With that definition in mind, a study published in the scientific journal of *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, found that "emotions act as a filter through which people view efficacy information" (Kavanagh & Bower 508). This essentially supports the viewpoint that an athlete's emotion prior to a game is crucial to their reception of a coach's attempt at increasing efficacy to achieve a desired result.

As coaches attempt to get their teams to peak at the right time, a crucial skill becomes the coaches' ability to motivate. Motivation is directly correlated with emotion, and without it, it is hard to imagine any athlete experiencing success at any level. Much

like emotion, motivation is a complicated aspect of human communication that has many different facets to it. Pre-game speeches provide coaches with an ideal opportunity to channel their team's wide array of emotions into positive self-efficacy that is hopefully sustained throughout the game. According to Conroy and Coatsworth, two factors affecting motivation include competence and the fear of failure. They continue on to define competence as "a basic psychological need that initiates or energizes behavior" (182). Competence, coupled with the fear of failure, is a strong force in motivating athletes; however, this concept can be extrapolated to numerous areas in life. It is human nature to be fearful of failing at any given task, and this intense desire to be perceived by others as competent and successful is crucial when striving to motivate. One could argue that most of what we do revolves around wanting to achieve success, appear competent, and avoid failure. The motivational process energizes, maintains, and directs behavior towards goals (Eccles & Wigfield). The theories surrounding motivation and achievement are extremely relevant to interpersonal communication in relation to coaching, and are well researched in the field of psychology. Achievement motivation theorists focus a great deal of research on behaviors involving competence. This behavior is generally defined as "the behavior in which the goal is to develop or demonstrate to self and others high ability or avoid demonstrating low ability" (Wright). According to Cognitive Evaluation Theory, "...elite performers ...choose...difficult and demanding goals the achievement of which confirms their feelings of competence and self determination..." (Hardy et al., 75). While this seems rather obvious on the surface, it cannot be overstated how important this seemingly simple concept is when looking at athlete performance in relation to motivation.

Athletes compete in sport for a variety of reasons, yet arguably the two most prominent reasons are due to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Understanding how these two major categories of motivation affect player performance is extremely important from a coaching perspective. In an article from *Applied Sport Psychology* entitled *Extrinsic Rewards and Motivation*, studies showed that “athletes who are intrinsically motivated participate in sports for internal reasons, such as enjoyment, whereas athletes who are extrinsically motivated participate in sports for external reasons, such as material rewards” (Hatch, Thomsen, & Waldron). There are glaring distinctions between these two types of athletes. While one isn’t necessarily always better than the other, it is imperative to find a proper balance between the two and subsequently provide the appropriate motivational stimuli. Intrinsically motivated athletes tend to exude increased confidence and self-efficacy and have greater satisfaction (Hatch, Thomsen, & Waldron). Furthermore, scholars suggest that those athletes who sustain high levels of intrinsic motivation throughout their careers maintain higher levels of performance. Conversely, athletes who are extrinsically motivated rely more on punishment/reward results to motivate them. They tend to focus more on material rewards and/or not wanting to disappoint an important individual(s) in their life. This mindset can have adverse effects on player values, because it potentially takes away from the “team” concept and turns the focus away from the team achieving something great to the individual achieving something great. On the surface, extrinsic motivation appears to be extremely negative; however there are various degrees to which athletes exhibit this motivational style.

Obviously some behaviors are more detrimental to a team concept than others, but just because an athlete is more extrinsically rather than intrinsically motivated certainly

does not mean that he or she will negatively affect the team, because extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are directly associated with one another. They can also adversely affect one another if not balanced correctly. This needs to be taken into account by the coach so as to most effectively relate to the player during the course of a season and when delivering a pre-game speech. Hatch, Thomson, and Waldron offer ways in which coaches can manage these two styles of motivation within their teams. According to them, a coach's behavior can influence the intrinsic motivation of their team by helping them feel as though they control their own behavior even with the presence of extrinsic rewards. They continue on to state that coaches can accomplish this job by giving verbal and nonverbal reinforcement based on specific behaviors of the team. An example of this might be making an attempt to positively reinforce a player's efforts by highlighting the specific things they do well to help the team (Hatch, Thomson, & Waldron). This can significantly increase an athlete's belief about their abilities (thus, an increase in self-efficacy).

Coaches and athletes should work together as a unit to set individual and team goals that are challenging and realistic. Coaches that establish an open-door policy of communication with players, meaning players are allowed to provide some input into strategy and game plan, tend to have more success getting through to their teams. This communication style is geared towards intrinsic motivation and can be extremely effective when carried out in the correct manner. "The more athletes experience competence and success due to their own actions and skills, the greater their intrinsic motivation. Even with extrinsic rewards, athletes who feel like they are in control of their behaviors will be more satisfied..." (Hatch, Thomson, & Waldon). When players feel as

though they have some control and say in how the game plan will be executed, it gives them a sense of confidence that their coach believes in them and is rewarding them for their performance and effort up to that point. This emphasis on a group dynamic and a cooperative learning environment can go a long way in having a positive impact on intrinsic motivation. There are obvious ways in which a coach can apply these techniques during a pre-game speech. Specifically, by allowing players to comfortably speak their minds and provide feedback and opinions (within reason of course) in regards to a given game and/or game plan. In essence, it provides players with a sense of validation and connectedness with their coach and in this way, coaches can positively motivate their team.

The evidence that has been presented clearly shows that perceived competence and proper motivation are key components to athlete success; coaches would be wise to focus on player efficacy in pre-game speeches. Elite athletes already have the skills and incentives present to be successful, yet self-efficacy is often what determines how successful they will become.

People's beliefs in their efficacy shape the types of anticipatory scenarios they construct and rehearse. Those who have a high sense of efficacy, visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides and supports for performance. Those who doubt their efficacy, visualize failure scenarios and dwell on the many things that can go wrong (Bandura).

Throughout the course of a season, teams go through a number of ups and downs that are simply a part of the ebb and flow of sports. Perhaps contrary to popular belief, experiencing some failure along the way is actually a positive in terms of building efficacy amongst players. Achieving success too easily leads to false beliefs and can be damaging to player performance because they come to expect unrealistic results.

Bandura goes on to state that “Some setbacks and difficulties in human pursuits serve a useful purpose in teaching that success usually requires sustained effort. After people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks.” Coaches can use this notion to help motivate their players and remind them of the adversity that they have overcome and triumphed over. In doing so, coaches subsequently establish achievement goals while also re-enforcing player competence.

Coping With Player Anxiety

Along with the challenge of motivating a team coaches also have to understand that players have a number of thoughts, feelings, and emotions surging through them prior to game time. There are a number of causal mechanisms that can invoke negative anxiety in an athlete, whether it’s playing in front of a large number of people or the magnitude of the game itself, the bottom line is that it needs to be controlled as much as possible. If these emotions are not channeled correctly, coaches can have a team that plays with a great deal of unease and tension rather than with focus and confidence. There is a fine line between getting a team “up” for the game and creating unwanted stress and anxiety. Coaches need to be prepared for the reality of player anxiety before they give an emotionally charged pre-game speech. While some emotional arousal is desired and expected/necessary, coaches need to be wary of crossing the line and causing an adverse reaction to a player’s mindset.

In a well-known study in sports psychology entitled *The Stress on High Performance Athletes*, the idea surrounding athlete stress and anxiety is given a more in-depth analysis. Stated quite simply, “a low anxiety level is a prerequisite to success in

athletics and an elevated level is detrimental to optimal performance” (Kroll 212). If coaches can have a better understanding of the issues surrounding athlete anxiety, then they can in turn craft their pre-game speeches accordingly to either counteract the negative effects of anxiety or increase their teams’ level of urgency. Unfortunately, elite athletes occasionally do not approach a big game (or any other game) as if it were of any importance. This type of low-level anxiety can be equally detrimental to a teams play, because instead of players trying too hard, they fail to try hard enough. High-level coaches spend ample amounts of time with their teams and thus have an intimate relationship with their players to be able to know which individuals fall into which category. By understanding the causes of anxiety and being able to successfully differentiate between anxiety and arousal, coaches can more effectively prepare their teams in a pre-game speech.

Defining Rhetoric and Generic Criticism

The word *rhetoric* tends to mean different things for different people. Occasionally it is equated with “empty, bombastic language that has no substance”; something politicians know a great deal about (Foss 3). Other times it is thought of as something associated only with the ancient Greeks, involving “flowery, ornamental speech laden with metaphors and other figures of speech” (Foss 4). Thankfully, modern rhetorical criticism does not focus on ornamentation. For our purposes, Foss defines rhetoric as “...the human use of symbols to communicate. This definition includes three primary dimensions: (1) humans as the creators of rhetoric; (2) symbols as the medium for rhetoric; and (3) communication as the purpose for rhetoric” (Foss 4). It is impossible to discuss rhetoric further however without making mention of the godfather of it all:

Aristotle. Aristotle is most widely known for his teachings on ethos (character), pathos (emotions), and logos (reason) from his aptly named work, *Rhetoric*. It is from his teachings that scholars and non-scholars alike gained a better understanding of how rhetoric shapes our lives and influences our day to day interactions with others.

In an analytical piece surrounding Aristotle's work, Kenneth Burke attempts to determine "What, in sum, would be the salient traits of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*?" (334). He continues on to say that Aristotle's "art" is "constructed about his stress upon persuasion as the *purpose* of rhetoric" (Burke 334). Since coaches are essentially trying to "persuade" their teams to play well and rise to the occasion by means of a delivered speech (rhetoric), this definition seems to be quite appropriate.

To narrow down the choice of means, he makes a division into kinds of oratory: deliberative (concerned with the expediency of steps still to be taken); forensic (concerned with the justice or injustice of past acts); and demonstrative or epideictic (concerned with praise and blame, primarily involving the present) (Burke 334).

According to this statement, pre-game rhetoric falls into the genre of epideictic rhetoric. Coaches are attempting to appeal to their player's emotions, give praise, and mainly focus on the here and now. Aristotle argues that for epideictic oratory, "amplification is particularly appropriate" and "an audience's confidence in the speaker is the most convincing proof of all" (Burke 334-335). This is an important concept to remember moving forward because it will be discussed in greater detail.

With Aristotle's notion of rhetoric in mind, in order to come to a better understanding on how coaches rhetorically influence player efficacy I will be using Generic Criticism. According to Foss the purpose of generic criticism is "to understand rhetorical practices in different time periods and in different places by discerning the

similarities in rhetorical situations and the rhetoric constructed in response to them...” (193). While this paper will not be concerned with artifacts from different time periods, it will be concerned with different rhetorical situations and the rhetoric that is used to address that situation.

Foss provides us with three different kinds of elements that constitute a rhetorical genre, the first being the “situational requirements or the perception of conditions that call forth particular kinds of rhetorical responses” (193). In order to classify an artifact as fitting into a specific rhetorical genre you must determine whether or not it fits into a situation that could be deemed as a type of genre. For instance the focus of this paper is pre-game speeches, which occur in a situation that is generally perceived as a motivational/public address situation, thus placing it into a specific rhetorical genre. The second element of a genre is that it also contains “substantive and stylistic characteristics of the rhetoric—features of the rhetoric chosen by the rhetor to respond to the perceived requirements of particular situations” (Foss 193). The substantive elements are those that pertain to the *content* of the rhetoric, while the stylistic elements deal with the *form*. The third and final element of a rhetorical genre according to Foss is the “organizing principle.” Stated simply, the organizing principle consists of all of the previously mentioned elements put together in order to provide an all-inclusive term for the other characteristics of a genre.

The purpose of these elements is to offer a means of discerning whether or not a genre exists; and if it does exist, whether or not related rhetorical artifacts contain these characteristics which can then link them to that genre. Foss sums this all up nicely by stating that, “A genre, then, is not simply a set of features that characterizes various

“rhetorical acts but a set of interdependent features” (194). The absence of any of these characteristics would alter the organizing principle and would consequently eliminate the artifact from being a genre.

Numerous notable contributions have been made that further developed the idea of generic criticism. Scholars such as Edwin Black who first coined the term *generic criticism*, Lloyd F. Bitzer who came up with the notion of the rhetorical situation, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, and Mikhail Bakhtin have all made significant contributions in advancing the study of genre criticism and how we think about it today. When doing genre criticism there are three different routes you can take in terms of how you go about analyzing your artifact: Generic Description, Generic Participation, or Generic Application. For my study, I will be utilizing generic description in my analysis of the selected artifacts.

As I have previously mentioned I believe that pre-game speeches, while outwardly motivational, contain distinguishing features that deviate slightly from conventional motivational/public address rhetoric. I will attempt to isolate these rhetorical anomalies and argue that the commonalities within pre-game speeches lead us to believe that they belong in their own special niche of performative discourse. Generic description, a subcategory of generic criticism, will be utilized in order to logically arrive at this conclusion. Turning to Foss once more, the purpose of generic description is “...to define a genre and then formulate theoretical constructs about its characteristics” (197). She breaks the process down into four steps: (1) observing similarities in the rhetorical responses to particular situations; (2) collecting artifacts that occur in similar situations; (3) analyzing the artifacts to discover if they share characteristics; and (4)

formulating the organizing principle of the genre (197). Generic description requires that you speculate that a genre of rhetoric does in fact exist, that you provide a varied collection of sample artifacts that potentially represent this genre, and that you then proceed to advance the genre's defining characteristics, stylistic features, and organizing principles.

In summary, we now know that scholars do in fact believe it is possible for coaches to positively affect player performance for a particular game by delivering an effective pre-game speech. By peaking player emotion at the right time, understanding what motivates players and increases their self-efficacy, and helping them cope with pre-game anxiety and stress, coaches can craft a truly motivating pre-game speech. In the following section it is my hope to unravel a relatively unknown genre of communication through generic criticism and give it some substance. I have selected three speeches delivered recently in big game scenarios by some highly regarded Division I college coaches from men's basketball and football and will attempt to critically analyze them to discern their effectiveness and classification as motivational/performative discourse within communication.

Applying Genre Criticism

The Artifacts

The first artifact that I am going to introduce and be examining is the pre-game speech delivered by the coach of the Kansas Jayhawks, Bill Self. Self is regarded as one of the best current coaches in men's college basketball. He was awarded AP Coach of the Year in 2009 for his outstanding achievements and his ability to lead his team deep into the NCAA tournament year in and year out. The particular speech I will be

analyzing occurs before their championship game against Memphis in 2008. College basketball playoffs, which are infamously called March Madness, take over the sports world for an entire month each year. Predictions are made, brackets are filled out, disappointment is frequent, and while it may sound hyperbolic, it is also a time when basketball legends are made. Some of the greatest players and coaches in NBA history first made their names on the biggest stage in college basketball.

This particular year (2008) was quite a historic year in college basketball because for the first time ever, all four teams that made it to the Final Four were number one seeds. That being said, Memphis had been the best and most consistent team all year and the odds were against Kansas to pull off the upset victory. The magnitude of the event was a major factor because the spotlight in a game such as this is immense. Self has been praised for his ability to be able to get his teams to rise to the occasion. In this particular speech, Self acts as the rhetor and delivers the speech to his team right before they took to the floor for warm-ups. No one else was present in the locker room at the time which allowed for a very realistic feel to what it must be like to be a member of that team. The result was an incredible Jayhawk victory which will be remembered for years to come.

The second artifact that I am going to compare and contrast the first one with comes from one of the other best coaches from NCAA college basketball. Billy Donovan, coach of the Florida Gators basketball team, delivered this particular pre-game speech before their NCAA championship game in 2007 against Ohio State. They ended up winning the game which was the second of their back-to-back championships. This is important to mention because they were the first team accomplish this feat in more than

15 years. This speech is a powerful one due to the huge historical significance of the game and because they had an entire country rooting against them. Coach Billy Donovan is quite obviously the rhetor in this artifact. He had the unenviable job of trying to focus a group of young men on the biggest game of their lives, and make sure that they did not get overwhelmed and caught up in the moment and the ferocious, unrelenting media storm.

The 2007 Florida Gators team featured four players that are currently playing in the NBA and are either starting or receiving significant playing time, so it gives you an idea of the kind of talent that that team possessed. The occasion of the speech was none other than the championship game, their second in as many years. The only people present in the locker-room during the time of the speech were the 20 or so players and coaches, and one lone camera man. Much like the Bill Self speech, it gives the speech a very intimate feel and increases the intense emotions felt by both the audience watching from the comfort of home and the players themselves.

The third and final artifact that will be discussed in this paper comes from the extremely competitive world of NCAA Division I college football. In this particular speech, Coach Bill Stewart from the West Virginia Mountaineers delivers an impassionate pre-game speech before their big game in the Fiesta Bowl in 2008. Stewart was in an extremely difficult position in this particular year. At the time he was only the interim head coach for WVU because their previous coach, the extremely popular Rich Rodriguez, left the team to coach at Michigan State. It was an extremely controversial decision and left Stewart in a very tough spot. However, he led the team to an incredible season and a 48-28 upset of the heavily favored Oklahoma Sooners. Shortly thereafter

Stewart signed a contract extension to become the official head coach, rewarding him for his remarkable work under heavy scrutiny. Acting as the rhetor in this artifact, Stewart delivered an extremely emotional speech in front of the Mountaineer team and coaching staff. He had a great deal of pressure on him to produce, and that emotion was evident throughout his delivery.

The Defining Characteristics of Pre-game Rhetoric

I have previously claimed that pre-game speeches fall into a motivational/public address genre, and that I believe they belong in their own class within motivational rhetoric. It may seem obvious to classify occasions such as the artifacts selected in this paper as motivational, however there are many different rhetorical devices used that determine if a speech and/or situation is motivational or not. More importantly, what elements do they possess that differentiates them from other motivational rhetoric? I want to break these artifacts down and understand *what* makes them effective and so motivational.

Throughout my research I found that pre-game rhetoric seems to contain six common features: (1) visual aids; (2) sport-specific terminology and language (jargon); (3) associative language; (4) anticipation; (5) ideographs; and (6) narratives. These inherent similarities within the genre of pre-game rhetoric assist coaches in addressing athlete needs prior to game time; specifically with motivation and alleviating anxiety. The rhetorical techniques in the discussion to follow, used in conjuncture with the six aforementioned strategies, will only help the cause of a pre-game speech.

Motivational and/or inspirational rhetoric in sports tends to stay fairly consistent across the board. Arguably the closest relative to the pre-game family of rhetoric is

military rhetoric. They contain some of the same elements, yet the contexts in which they are delivered make them quite different because pre-game speeches contain stylistic features that are unique to sports. Some of the features that they share include their epideictic nature, meaning they are “concerned primarily with ‘the present’...” (Beale 222). As I briefly touched on earlier, epideictic rhetoric is considered a form of performative rhetoric, which quite clearly relates to pre-game speeches. Pre-game speeches can be viewed as a type of performance, except it is a performance that is meant to be motivational. We can break this performance down into something that is known as a “perlocutionary act”. A perlocutionary act is “one in which *by* ‘saying something’ someone issues an utterance which achieves certain effects on its audience” (Gaines 207). In his work entitled *A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts*, Paul Newell Campbell elaborates further on the topic of a perlocutionary act: “...it is the act of saying something that ‘will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speakers, or of the persons’” (qtd. in *Ibid* 98). Keeping that in mind, we can see that along with being epideictic and performative in nature, pre-game speeches are also perlocutionary acts in which coaches attempt to evoke or combat a number of player emotions.

Coaches, or anyone delivering a speech for that matter, are attempting to identify with and persuade their audience. The situational context and goals of the speech play a significant role in the manner in which the coach goes about achieving his or her task. Kenneth Burke, who developed the five key terms of Dramatism and laid the groundwork for how we understand generic criticism today, defines the process of identification as a

process in which the speaker and audience appears similar (Burke 20). Due to the common interest that coach and athlete share, there is a strong sense of identification present which acts as a unifying force. It is this perception of unification that is at the root of the power of identification (Burke 20). A coach can obtain significant power over his team in this way: the power to unite. Moreover, the coach can heighten his credibility.

Burke continues on to discuss the interconnected rhetorical components of identification and persuasion. To change attitudes, attain good will, and hold attention, Burke claims that an audience can only be truly persuaded if the speaker can “talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea”—by identifying his or her own ways with the ways of the audience (Burke 55). Drawing on Burkes concepts, it is evident that persuasion and identification are intimately related and a key component in a discussion of the genre of pre-game rhetoric.

The content of motivational rhetoric always has a positive message deeply rooted in its core which provides the individual(s) with a sense of hope, comfort, and belief that “it” can be done. The message that the rhetor is trying to convey can vary greatly depending on the situation that is occurring around him or her, but there is *always* a message behind it and that is important to understand. Quite often motivational speeches will include the building blocks of an ideological construct, utilizing a term coined by Michael McGee which he labeled as “ideographs.” Ideographs are the “basic structural elements, the building blocks, of ideology...they signify and ‘contain’ a unique ideological commitment...” (McGee 455). These ideographs are words that a society understands as representing something larger than the word itself, associating that word

with a particular movement or social belief. Ideographs exist and function in “normal, every day discourse” and are widely accepted and understood by the population. An example of an ideograph would be words such as “Liberty” or “Freedom”. These words mean something to people on a large scale and are fundamental beliefs which are widely held in our society. In a motivational situation, ideographs can be a powerful rhetorical device that, when used properly, can evoke an extremely positive response from the audience.

The repetition of a word or phrase is another popular tool used in motivational rhetoric. It is usually this word that is the ideograph; it gives the audience something to grasp on to and focus on. Quite frequently this word represents the positive message that the rhetor is attempting to put forth, and it will stand alone as the source for inspiring an audience. President Obama’s presidential campaign had one major inspirational message that it relentlessly keyed on, and that was the call for “Change”. This ideograph came to represent his entire campaign, including himself as a person and what he would mean to the White House. It was an extremely powerful and effective rhetorical tool that proved to be quite useful in motivating the American people to vote in his favor. True motivational rhetoric will follow these guidelines and include the characteristics mentioned above. But the question remains, do my selected artifacts qualify as being true, effective pieces of pre-game motivational rhetoric?

Analyzing the Artifacts

Looking first at the speech delivered by Bill Self of the Kansas Jayhawks, one of the things that drew my attention immediately was that he was much more calm and collected in contrast with the other two rhetors I am focusing on. He does not raise his

voice and yell to try and fire his team up; he instead keeps his reserved demeanor and uses his words to inspire. Some coaches in his situation tend to use volume to instill passion and desire in their teams, Self goes against the grain in this aspect. He brings up the past, recalling their accomplishments during the season up to that point in order to ease tension and make players feel as though they had already won in a sense.

You guys have had an unbelievable year; the winningest team in Kansas basketball history. Think about that. You are the winningest team in Kansas basketball history. Nobody can ever take that from you. Nobody. So if they can't take that from you, basically we got nothing to lose tonight. Nothing. But we got so much to gain (Self).

This portion of his speech was a prime example of a coach attempting to increase his players' feelings of competence while simultaneously decreasing player anxiety. I would argue that Self touches on the ideal of "fun" in order to associate winning and fun together. It reminds players that, aside from the high stakes, it is supposed to be a fun occasion. This aspect tends to get lost in all the hype and emotional build up leading in to the game. He does not completely diminish the magnitude of the situation though, his mentioning that they have "nothing to lose, but so much to gain" is evidence of that.

This pre-game speech is rhetorically successful because it intertwines Self's sense of confidence in his team while acknowledging the accomplishment of being in their position. For example,

The reason I feel so confident about us winning, is because we don't have to change one bit who we are. For 39 games, you displayed how hard you're going to play, you displayed how you're going to guard, you displayed how you're doing to rebound, and you displayed how we're going to steal extra possessions. All we have to do is be ourselves (Self).

While his use of basketball terminology in this portion of the speech is certainly not complicated, it is still an excellent example of how coaches will use the appropriate

terminology to aid in the motivational process. The use of basketball jargon is also an example of associative language which is directly tied into identification. Self ends his speech with further reiteration of having *fun*. In the final section of his speech he goes into a small narrative, drawing on his and his staff's past experiences in such situations. He tells the team, "You can ask Danny about this...most every day, if not every day for the rest of your life, you will be reminded or think of this night". That being said, if I had to narrow it down to the ideograph that he uses which really stands out, I would argue that it would be his emphasis on the word "moment."

There is obvious intent to make players understand that they will remember this incredible occasion for the rest of their lives. That is the underlying theme that he uses to motivate his team for *this* game. He wants them to understand the magnitude of the game and the moment they are in, with the hopes that they will rise to the occasion and emerge victorious. Self also uses visual aids to assist in reinforcing his game plan. He accomplished this by writing key concepts down for players to look at and focus on. This speech includes all of the key characteristics and fits nicely into the genre of sports rhetoric.

Moving on to the second artifact from Billy Donovan, this particular speech is delivered before the Florida Gators went on to win their second straight Division I basketball championship. Overall, we see a far more animated display of motivational rhetoric throughout its duration. Donovan's speech is shorter yet far livelier in terms of inflection and delivery. Immediately he begins by mentioning what they as a team have been about all season long, saying "Guys, it has been about the same thing for us the entire year. It has been about us becoming the best team we can be." It is in this way

that he is able to create a narrative; one of the six key elements of the pre-game genre. He follows this by using a theme that Self used as well, that being recognizing the “moment.” At this point in the speech Donovan begins to increase his intensity:

Guys, tonight is not about the past and it’s not about the future. It’s about right now. You guys have got to want this night to last forever. You’ve got to want to run and play and defend, all night long. You’ve got to live in the moment, and understand there’s going to be adversity, and there’s going to be challenges. That is what has brought us close together as a team, the adversity and the challenges. Live in the moment, cherish each moment, and go out there and play as a team (Donovan).

Donovan mentions two more ideographs for his team to focus on, “adversity and challenges.” I felt this was a very powerful moment in his speech because those two words really embody the overall spirit of sport and competition. They are ideals that athletes can relate to on a number of levels and they are words that evoke a strong “team” concept which Donovan makes note of. The last lines of the speech further show the importance coaches seem to put on focusing on the here and now of a game of great magnitude.

This speech fits cleanly into the pre-game genre of rhetoric as well. It has an underlying message and a situation warranting its delivery, along with one or two main points or ideographs that you can pick up on and associate the speech with. Furthermore, the necessary rhetorical qualities of increasing player efficacy and anticipation, lessening anxiety, and identification are all present and easily identifiable. Much like Self, Donovan has key terms and elements of the game plan written on a whiteboard as part of his visual aid.

The third and final artifact I selected for discussion comes from Bill Stewart prior to when the West Virginia Mountaineers took the field as underdogs for the 2008 Fiesta Bowl. Stewart begins his speech by acknowledging the magnitude of the moment (a seemingly re-occurring theme) and telling his team that “We got a great opportunity; we got a dandy out there waiting for us.” He follows this up by re-enforcing the team’s game plan of fast, hard-nosed, clean football. Stewart repeats key phrases and his keys to winning the game in order to make sure they stay engrained in his team’s heads.

Offense, play fast. Defense; swarm, swarm and tackle. Punch that ball out every chance you get and keep bustin’ them. Special teams lay it on the line and attack your responsibilities, attack.

We’ve got to out-block them, we’ve got to out-tackle them, we’ve got to out-hit them and hustle.

It’s real simple. You out-block them, you out-tackle them, and you out-hustle them (Stewart).

Staying true to pre-game rhetoric, Stewart then makes use of ideographs; emphasizing words such as “pride”, “heart”, “brother”, and leaving “no doubt” about who was going to win on “this night.” Out of the three coaches I examined for this study, from my perspective Stewart was by far the most successful at identifying with his team. He came across as very endearing and he gave me the sense that he truly loved every player in the room. I felt this really came across throughout the speeches’ duration and the players seemed to be responding and feeding off of it as well.

It’s Mountaineer pride. Nothing cheap! From the heart! Damn I’m proud to be with you, I’m proud to be with you. We’ve got a good one. We are going to out-strain, and out-hit these guys. Let them know, leave no doubt tonight, *leave no doubt tonight*, no doubt; they shouldn’t have played the old Gold and Blue. Not this night! Not this night! Don’t leave your wingman. Don’t ever, ever, ever bail out on your brother. You help, you strain, and you just fight. Start fast! Stay on top on them! It’s a game lads lets have fun and go out there and get us a big victory (Stewart).

Stewart, like Donovan, uses a great deal of emotion behind his rhetoric to further inspire his team. That being said, the one thing that I felt Stewart exceeded at was the way in which he crescendos and decrescendos his phrases. There are peaks and valleys to his speech that add a great deal to the intensity, and in my opinion significantly enhance his effectiveness as a speaker. He masterfully adds vocal inflection on the most important words at various high points of intensity throughout the speech and then follows them with parts of quiet intensity. In contrast to this, Donovan is fairly animated throughout the entirety of his speech. However as we have now established, the known crucial elements are all present and identifiable throughout Stewart's impassioned speech. It includes everything one could want and look for in a pre-game motivational artifact.

Conclusion

One major point that jumped out at me upon looking at these three speeches was their striking similarities in many ways, which clearly showed their inclusion in a particular subcategory within the motivational/public address genre. All of the selected coaches put a heavy emphasis on the need for players to step up to the occasion and cherish the moment and the situation that they were in. This continued to resurface as the key ideograph employed by coaches on their players. It seemed as though they felt as if their players possibly did not fully understand the wonderful achievement they had accomplished. The age of the athletes was most likely the driving force behind this; however I think the idea of centering in on the "moment" can be extrapolated to professional athletes as well. Stemming from years of experience, the coaches understood how immensely lucky they all were and how difficult it would be to replicate.

I believe that this is in part what makes these speeches so motivationally effective. The coaches discussed in this paper all were able to help their players fully comprehend their situation and remind them all of how they got to the point at which they were at, and then instruct them to take advantage of the incredible opportunity. In terms of what the research surrounding motivation, self-efficacy, and genre criticism have shown, these coaches utilized the crucial components that contribute to an effective pre-game speech.

I was surprised at the extensive use of ideographs not only throughout the cited speeches of this paper but also throughout others that I came across. It would appear that ideographs play a significant role in the motivation of athletes in big game scenarios, possibly even more so than in standard motivational rhetoric. Perhaps concentrating all of a team's emotions onto one key factor allows for the effective channeling of emotions into improved in-game performance. The way a speech is delivered also can play a role in effectiveness because it is said that teams will often take on their coach's demeanor. Whatever your view, this criticism certainly is in no way a scientific conclusion, it is merely an attempted probe into a complex and unfamiliar area of rhetoric.

Evidence was presented showing that pre-game speeches can in fact have an effect on player performance. The presented evidence gave credence to the overarching goal surrounding the purpose of this paper: attempting to identify *what* makes pre-game speeches rhetorically successful at channeling athlete emotion. In conjuncture with that, it was also my hope to narrow in on the common elements of pre-game rhetoric which classifies them in a specific genre. With the help of genre criticism and generic description, pre-game speeches now seem to have their own place amongst other genres. Hopefully this criticism can open doors to new ways of thinking about player/coach

relationships. With further exploration, perhaps down the road experts will be able to eventually provide coaches at all skill levels with motivational strategies that they can use to get the best effort from their teams when it matters most.

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