

1 A three-wave longitudinal test of self-determination theory's mediation model of engagement and  
2 disaffection in youth sport

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### Abstract

Research adopting self-determination theory (SDT) supports a mediation model whereby coach motivational styles (autonomy support and interpersonal control) predict athletes' engagement and disaffection in youth sport via the satisfaction and frustration of psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Our study extends this research by examining SDT's mediation model longitudinally with three-waves of data. Two-hundred and fifty-two youth sports participants ( $M_{age} = 12.98$ ;  $SD = 1.84$ ; range = 11-17; female  $n = 67$ ) completed measures of study variables at the start, middle, and end of a competitive soccer season. Cross-lagged path analyses revealed that associations between the two coach motivational styles and athletes' engagement were mediated by psychological need satisfaction. Furthermore, a positive reciprocal association between psychological need satisfaction and engagement emerged over time. This study therefore supports the temporal assumptions underpinning SDT's mediation model but, importantly, evidences a mutually reinforcing interplay between athletes' psychological needs and their engaged behavior.

*Keywords:* Autonomy support; Interpersonal control; Motivation; Physical activity; Coaching; Engagement

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Participation in youth sport is an important source of physical, psychological and social well-being for adolescents (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity & Payne, 2013). Yet figures show that youth sports participation is declining across Europe, the US, and Oceania (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011; Commission of the European Communities, 2007; National Sporting Goods Association, 2010). Sports coaches are likely to be influential in whether adolescents continue to participate or dropout of youth sport (Barnett, Smoll & Smith, 1992). This is because coaches create conditions that foster either positive or negative experiences for their athletes, depending on their motivational style (Duda, 2013). Understanding coach behavior, and how it shapes experiences in youth sport, is therefore essential in order to promote persistence to health-enhancing sport and physical activity beyond adolescence.

### **Behavioral engagement and behavioral disaffection**

Continued participation in youth sport is closely linked with levels of behavioral engagement (Martin, 2008). As described by Skinner and colleagues (Skinner, Kindermann, Connell & Wellborn, 2009), behavioral engagement refers to a set of behaviors that encapsulate high levels of physical effort and perseverance, as well as mental efforts such as concentration and attention. These behaviors and mental efforts contribute to the development of motor and cognitive competencies (e.g., movement skills, information retention), and hence long-term task persistence is an important outcome of behavioral engagement (Blair & Razza, 2007; Furrer, Skinner, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2006; Guthrie, Schafer, & Huang, 2001). Yet this is not the only benefit. Behavioral engagement also facilitates social competencies by forging natural connections with peers, and offers opportunities to discover new areas of interest (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand & Kinderman, 2008).

Behavioral engagement, though, is not ubiquitous to youth sport and many athletes instead exhibit signs of behavioral disaffection. According to Skinner et al (2009), behavioral disaffection is a distinct construct, negatively associated with behavioral engagement, which refers to a set of

1 enervated behaviors, including passivity, a lack of initiation, giving up, as well as indicators of  
2 mental withdrawal, such as inattention and distraction. In contrast to behavioral engagement,  
3 behavioral disaffection impedes the development of motor and cognitive competences and thus,  
4 over time, gives rise to attrition (Blair & Razza, 2007; Furrer et al., 2006; Guthrie et al., 2001). It  
5 also, unlike behavioral engagement, fosters a disruptive social milieu and blocks opportunities to  
6 seek out new sources of motivation from the environment (Skinner et al., 2008). In short, when  
7 considering how to promote adolescents' persistence in youth sport, the adaptive effects of  
8 behavioral engagement and the maladaptive effects of behavioral disaffection are readily apparent.

### 9 **A self-determination theory approach to behavioral engagement and disaffection in youth** 10 **sport**

11 Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985), an organismic theory of human  
12 motivation, has been used to understand engagement and disaffection in achievement domains such  
13 as youth sport (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). From this perspective, levels of athlete engagement and  
14 disaffection are influenced by two coach motivational styles. The first motivational style is  
15 autonomy support. It refers to the degree to which coaches value athletes' opinions, offer desired  
16 choice, acknowledge negative affect, and provide meaningful rationales (Mageau & Vallerand,  
17 2003). The second motivational style is interpersonal control. It refers to the degree to which  
18 coaches pressure athletes to meet demands, solve problems on athletes' behalf, and adopt their own  
19 perspective, rather than the athletes' perspective (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-  
20 Ntoumani, 2009).

21 In this study we conceive autonomy support and interpersonal control as distinct, negatively  
22 related, coach motivational styles with unique associations to athletes' engagement and disaffection.  
23 We do so because these styles, although relatively stable at the contextual level, can sometimes  
24 alternate situationally as coaches' exhibit a broad array of behaviors in response to dynamic social  
25 circumstances (Bartholomew et al, 2009). The crucial difference between them, however, is that  
26 autonomy support and interpersonal control confer very different information. Autonomy

1 supportive provisions, on the one hand, embed personal relevance of sports participation and hence  
2 cultivate proactive outcomes such as engagement. On the other hand, controlling provisions socially  
3 impose the relevance of sports participation and hence foster reactive outcomes such as disaffection.  
4 In support of these ideas, perceived coach autonomy support and interpersonal control have been  
5 found to predict higher athlete engagement and disaffection in sport (e.g., Curran, Hill, Hall, &  
6 Jowett, 2014; Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier & Cury, 2002; Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda,  
7 2007).

8         A further tenet of SDT is that the effects of coach autonomy support and interpersonal  
9 control, on athletes' engagement and disaffection, are accounted for by the respective satisfaction  
10 and frustration of three psychological needs. These psychological needs represent inherent self-  
11 actualization tendencies, which permit well-being and optimal functioning when satisfied but  
12 contribute to ill-being and impoverished functioning when frustrated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The  
13 first, autonomy, is the need to experience behavior as originating from within the self (de Charms,  
14 1968). The second, competence, is the need to feel that one can effectively negotiate their  
15 interactions with the environment (White, 1959). The third, relatedness, is the need to create close  
16 social bonds and attachments with significant others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

17         Like autonomy support and interpersonal control, psychological need satisfaction and  
18 frustration are orthogonal constructs. That is, low autonomy, competence, and relatedness are not  
19 directly mirrored by high heteronomy, incompetence, and rejection (or vice-versa; Bartholomew et  
20 al., 2009). When satisfied, the needs provide the basis for the proactivity and enthusiasm indicative  
21 of engagement (e.g., Curran, Hill, Hall, & Jowett, 2015; Curran, Hill, & Niemiec, 2013; Joesaar,  
22 Hein, & Hagger, 2011). However, when frustrated, the needs provide the basis for the reactivity and  
23 passiveness indicative of disaffection (e.g., Curran et al., 2014; Bartholomew et al., 2011b;  
24 Belanger et al., 2012). Returning to SDT's account of engagement and disaffection, then, the  
25 psychological needs represent a unifying principle, linking coach motivational styles to athlete  
26 behaviours (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

## 1 **SDT's mediation model**

2           Within SDT's mediation model, then, we propose two pathways to engagement and  
3 disaffection. The first pathway is based on the provision of autonomy support and operates through  
4 psychological need satisfaction. When adolescents perceive their social-contexts to be replete with;  
5 (a) opportunities to voice and act on ideas (autonomy), (b) trust in abilities to be self-directed  
6 (competence), and (c) interest in others' perspectives (relatedness), psychological need satisfaction  
7 is promoted and so too is engagement (Skinner et al., 2009). The second pathway is based on the  
8 provision of interpersonal control and operates through psychological need frustration. When  
9 adolescents perceive their social-contexts to include; (a) a restriction of voice and choice  
10 (heteronomy), (b) a discerning tone (incompetence), and (c) a detached demeanor (rejection), the  
11 psychological needs are frustrated and disaffection is likely to result (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

12           A number of studies in sport have supported SDT's mediation model. Most of this work has  
13 centered on the path from autonomy support to psychological need satisfaction. Reinboth et al.  
14 (2004), for instance, observed that vitality and life satisfaction were positively predicted by coach  
15 autonomy support via psychological need satisfaction in youth sports participants (see also Adie et  
16 al., 2008). Similar findings have been obtained in samples of adult athletes, youth sport participants,  
17 and dancers reporting aggregate levels of coach autonomy support (e.g., Bartholomew et al.,  
18 20011a, study 3; Quested, Ntoumanis, et al., 2013; Quested & Duda, 2011), as well as in children  
19 reporting a relative score of teacher autonomy support (versus control) in high school (Jang, Reeve,  
20 Ryan, & Kim, 2009).

21           More recently, researchers have moved to examine perceptions of coach interpersonal  
22 control and psychological need frustration. Findings are similarly supportive of SDT's mediation  
23 model, and allude to the impoverishing consequences of coach interpersonal control. Here,  
24 Batholomew and colleagues (2011a, study 1) found that coach interpersonal control positively  
25 predicted depression and burnout in female adult athletes via higher psychological need frustration.  
26 This study also modelled autonomy support and found that unique variance in the satisfaction and

1 frustration of psychological needs was explained by the motivational styles (see also Gunnell,  
2 Crocker, Wilson, Mack, & Zumbo, 2013). Accordingly, the inclusion of both pathways (i.e.,  
3 motivational styles to engagement and disaffection via both need satisfaction and frustration) in  
4 SDT's mediation model appears to be important.

5         Shown in Figure 1 is SDT's mediation model, which includes two indirect parallel (bold)  
6 and two indirect cross-over (dashed) pathways. This model assumes both unique (parallel) and  
7 collective (parallel plus cross-over) effects of the motivational styles on engagement and  
8 disaffection via the psychological needs. Separate pathways have empirical support, but research is  
9 now begging to accrue that tests both unique and collective pathways within SDT's mediation  
10 model concurrently. Most germane to the current study, Curran and colleagues (2014) recently  
11 found support for the parallel and cross-over pathways shown in Figure 1 for youth sports  
12 participants' behavioral engagement and behavioral disaffection. In the study, coach autonomy  
13 support (interpersonal control) positively predicted psychological need satisfaction (frustration) and  
14 negatively predicted psychological need frustration (satisfaction). Psychological need satisfaction  
15 (frustration), in turn, positively predicted engagement (disaffection) and negatively predicted  
16 disaffection (engagement). This model, likewise, has support in physical education (Haerens,  
17 Aelterman, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Petegem, 2015), adolescent sport (Bartholomew et al.,  
18 2011b), and youth sport (Balaguer et al., 2012) settings.

19         A shortcoming of extant data on SDT's mediation model, though, is that much of it leans on  
20 cross-sectional designs. Mediation models using cross-sectional data cannot examine the temporal  
21 ordering of variables and are hence a poor indicator of directional causality. Furthermore, cross-  
22 sectional models must assume that mediated associations are stable over time (Gollob & Reichardt,  
23 1987) – an assumption at odds with dynamic social-contexts such as youth sport. These limitations  
24 are particularly noteworthy because recent longitudinal studies in the high school classroom  
25 indicate that certain paths in SDT's mediation model exhibit reciprocity and are unstable over time  
26 (i.e., psychological need satisfaction to engagement; Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2012; Reeve & Lee,

1 2014). The interpretation, therefore, is that SDT's mediation model may reveal a more complex set  
2 of relationships not captured with cross-sectional data.

3 In sport, a few attempts have been made to test the relations within SDT's mediation model  
4 over time. In these studies, support has been found for mediated associations of coach behavior on  
5 adolescent well- and ill-being via the psychological needs at both within-person (intra-individual  
6 change) and between-person (inter-individual change) levels (Adie et al., 2012; Balaguer et al.,  
7 2012; Quested & Duda, 2011). Yet these studies do not capture engagement or disaffection per se  
8 and include autoregressive paths with only two waves of data. The latter limitation is important  
9 because autoregressive paths permit tests of the extent to which one variable is related to future  
10 values of another variable, controlling for its earlier values (Gollob & Reichardt, 1987). Hence, in  
11 mediation models, a first wave of data collection is needed to establish a baseline, a second wave is  
12 needed to observe the effect of a predictor on future levels of a mediator, and a third wave is  
13 required to observe the effect of a mediator on future levels of a criterion (see Maxwell & Cole,  
14 2007). The present study was therefore conducted to mirror extant longitudinal data in an education  
15 context by extending longitudinal data on this topic in sport. To do so, we test SDT's mediation  
16 model, with three waves of data, across a competitive youth soccer season.

### 17 **The present study**

18 On the basis of recent research, longitudinal tests of SDT's mediation model are needed to  
19 examine the temporality and reciprocity of paths between the psychological needs and engagement  
20 and disaffection in youth sport<sup>1</sup>. This model appears in Figure 2 and contains causal, reciprocal,  
21 autoregressive, and additional direct effects. For causal effects, two solid boldface paths depict the  
22 hypotheses that season start autonomy support (control) would predict increases in mid-season  
23 psychological need satisfaction (frustration) that, in turn, would predict increases in season-end  
24 engagement (disaffection). As in previous research (e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2011b; Gunnell et al.,  
25 2013; Haerens et al., 2015), we also modelled the cross-over causal effects in SDT's mediation

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<sup>1</sup> Since analyses show that young athletes' perceptions of coach motivational style are reasonably stable over time, with 12-month correlations of .60 (Jöesaar, Hein, & Hagger, 2012), it seemed reasonable to measure autonomy support and interpersonal control at the initial time point only.



1 model (solid cross-over boldface lines). Here, however, we offer no specific hypotheses owing to  
2 the orthogonality of constructs and mixed findings in the literature.

3 We also model reciprocal effects as theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and research (Jang et al.,  
4 2012; Reeve & Lee, 2014) alludes to the reciprocal interplay of the psychological needs and  
5 engaged behavior. Here, two dashed upwardly sloping cross-lagged paths depict the hypotheses that  
6 season start and mid-season engagement (disaffection) predict increases in mid-season and season  
7 end psychological need satisfaction (frustration). Moreover, autoregressive effects are also  
8 included, and are depicted as eight horizontal lines to represent the effects of each variable on itself  
9 at a later time point. These paths are statistical controls, and allow the causal and reciprocal effects  
10 in the model to reflect that of change. Finally, to further understand the temporal dynamics of  
11 SDT's mediation model, we also model a number of additional direct effects in Figure 2. These are  
12 depicted as downward sloping diagonal paths, which provide an estimate of the variance explained  
13 in the outcome variables (viz. engagement and disaffection), by the motivational styles (viz.  
14 autonomy support and control), over and above the psychological needs. In so doing, the additional  
15 direct effects test for potential exogenous pathways of influence, which would otherwise be  
16 assumed as null (Selig & Preacher, 2009).

## 17 Method

### 18 Participants and procedure

19 The participants were youth soccer players representing recreational clubs in the North of  
20 England ( $M$  age = 12.98; range = 11-17). A multi-section questionnaire was given to the  
21 participants in a training session setting at three time points; season start (September;  $n = 316$ ,  
22 female  $n = 80$ ), mid-season (January;  $n = 219$ , female  $n = 58$ ) and season-end (May;  $n = 197$ ,  
23 female  $n = 49$ )<sup>2</sup>. No significant differences were observed on the study variables for those who were

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<sup>2</sup> Attrition occurred for several reasons. First, 2 clubs were unable to recruit the required number of players to their teams and therefore were forced to cease competition soon after the season began. Second, 2 clubs declined to participate in subsequent data collections after the first questionnaire because they couldn't allocate sufficient time before/after training for questionnaire response. Finally, a particularly severe winter, and subsequent sacrifice of training time, resulted in a failure to schedule time 2 and 3 data collection with 3 clubs.

1 lost to the final sample versus those who responded at all three time points<sup>3</sup>. Participants who  
2 completed only one questionnaire were removed. The data from participants who completed the  
3 questionnaire at least twice (season start and mid-season, season start and season end or all three  
4 time points;  $n = 252$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ; female  $n = 67$ ) were used in all subsequent analyses. These  
5 participants had been with their present coach for an average of 3.60 ( $SD = 2.60$ ) years with whom  
6 they spent an average of 4.90 ( $SD = 4.40$ ) hours each week. Ethical approval was obtained from the  
7 relevant university ethics committee prior to participant recruitment.

## 8 **Instruments**

9 Instruments that assessed perceptions of the coach motivational style were administered at  
10 the season start only. The other instruments were administered at all three time points. The stem for  
11 each questionnaire was adapted to focus participants on their experiences in soccer and all items  
12 were responded to on a scale which ranged from 1 (*not true at all*) to 7 (*very true*).

13 **Engagement and disaffection.** Engaged and disaffected behaviors were measured using the  
14 behavioral sub-scales of the Engagement Versus Disaffection with Learning Scale (EVDLS;  
15 Skinner, Kindermann & Furrer, 2009), adapted to soccer training, as this is the primary learning  
16 domain for young soccer players (Curran et al., 2014). The behavioral engagement (e.g., “I try hard  
17 to do well in training”) and behavioral disaffection (e.g., “In training, I do just enough to get by”)   
18 each contain 5 items. The adapted EVDLS has been found to be valid and internally reliable in  
19 youth sports participants (Curran et al., 2014).

20 **Psychological need satisfaction.** Psychological need satisfaction was measured using the  
21 Basic Need Satisfaction in Sport Scale (BNSSS; Ng, Lonsdale & Hodge, 2011). This instrument  
22 contains autonomy (10 items; e.g. “In soccer, I can take part in the decision-making process”),  
23 relatedness (5 items; e.g. “In soccer, I feel close to other people”) and competence (5 items; e.g. “I  
24 have the ability to perform well in soccer”) satisfaction sub-scales. The three sub-scales were

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<sup>3</sup> Multivariate analysis of variance revealed that the mean scores on the study variables were not significantly different between attrited and non-attrited participants [ $F(6,248) = 1.59$ ,  $p = .15$ ]. Furthermore, the Box’s M test similarly showed that the covariance matrices of attrited versus non-attrited participants did not differ [ $F(21,18640.77) = 1.54$ ,  $p = .06$ ].

1 averaged to form a psychological need satisfaction composite in this study. We created this  
2 composite because SDT; (a) does not specify a link between the specific psychological need  
3 satisfied (or frustrated) and the type of behavior that ensues, and (b) assumes that the psychological  
4 needs are inter-dependent (see Deci & Ryan, 2000 for a detailed overview of this issue). The  
5 BNSSS has been found to possess adequate psychometric properties in sport (Ng et al., 2011).

6 **Psychological need frustration.** Psychological need frustration was measured using the  
7 Psychological Need Thwarting Scale (PNTS; Bartholomew et al., 2011a). This instrument contains  
8 autonomy (4 items; e.g. “I feel pushed to behave in certain ways in soccer”), relatedness (4 items;  
9 e.g. “I feel others in football can be dismissive of me”) and competence (4 items; e.g. “There are  
10 situations in soccer where I am made to feel inadequate”) frustration sub-scales. On the same basis  
11 as psychological need satisfaction, the three sub-scales were averaged to form a psychological need  
12 frustration composite in this study. The PNTS has been found to possess adequate psychometric  
13 properties in sport (Bartholomew et al., 2011a).

14 **Autonomy support.** An adapted sport version (Gillet, Vallerand, Paty, Gobance & Berjot,  
15 2010) of the Perceived Autonomy Support Scale for Exercise Settings (PASSES; Hagger,  
16 Chatzisarantis, Hein, Pihu, Soos & Karsai, 2007) was employed to measure perceived coach  
17 autonomy support. This twelve-item instrument captures athletes’ perceptions of coach autonomy  
18 support (e.g. “I feel that my coach provides me with choices, options and opportunities about  
19 whether to play soccer”). This adapted version of the PASSES has been found to possess adequate  
20 psychometric properties in sport (Gillet et al., 2010).

21 **Interpersonal control.** The Controlling Coach Behaviors Scale (CCBS; Bartholomew,  
22 Ntoumanis, & Thogersen-Ntoumani, 2010) was employed to measure perceived coach interpersonal  
23 control. This instrument contains controlling use of rewards (4 items; e.g. “My coach only uses  
24 rewards or praise to make me train harder”), negative conditional regard (4 items; e.g. “My coach  
25 pays me less attention if I have displeased him/her”), intimidation (4 items; e.g. “My coach  
26 threatens to punish me to keep me in line in training”), and excessive personal control (3 items; e.g.

1 “My coach tries to control what I do during my free time”) sub-scales. As in previous research  
2 (Taylor, Turner, Gleeson, & Hough, 2015), the four sub-scales of the CCBS were averaged to form  
3 a coach interpersonal control variable. This scale has been found to possess adequate psychometric  
4 properties in sport (Bartholomew et al., 2010).

5 **Data analysis.** We employed cross-lagged path analysis of observed variables with  
6 autoregressive and cross-lagged paths to test the hypothesized model using AMOS version 18.0  
7 (Arbuckle, 2009). In line with Maxwell and Cole (2007), all possible autoregressive paths were  
8 included alongside the causal, cross-lagged, and additional direct effects of interest. Furthermore,  
9 we modelled covariances between the disturbance terms to reflect the possibility that third variables  
10 account for shared variance in the mediators and criterions (Anderson & Williams 1992). To  
11 evaluate model fit, we relied on a combination of incremental (IFI and CFI) and absolute (RMSEA)  
12 indexes. Fit was deemed acceptable in this study if IFI and CFI > .90 and RMSEA < .10 (Marsh,  
13 Hau & Wen, 2004).

## 14 **Results**

### 15 **Preliminary analyses**

16 At each time point, for those that responded, missing values were replaced with the mean of  
17 the non-missing items in the respective sub-scale for each individual case (Graham, Cumsille &  
18 Elek-Fisk, 2003). This approach was justified on account of the low number of missing items at  
19 each of the three time points and evidence of randomness (Little’s MCAR  $\chi^2$  for data across all time  
20 points = 154.61,  $df = 152$ ,  $p = .43$ ) in the distribution of the missing data (Tabachnick & Fidell,  
21 2007). Across the time points, where questionnaire non-response accounted for missing data, Full  
22 Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) method for model estimation was used (Enders &  
23 Bandalos, 2001). Means, standard deviations, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, and bivariate

1 correlations for each variable at each time point can be found in Table 1<sup>4</sup>. All scales demonstrated  
 2 acceptable internal reliability. The bivariate correlations were in the directions predicted by SDT.

### 3 **Hypothesized model and causal effects**

4         The results of the cross-lagged path analysis for the hypothesized model appear in Figure 3.  
 5 The findings suggest that the model fit the data adequately  $\chi^2 = 105.51$ ,  $df = (33)$ ,  $p < .01$ ; IFI = .94;  
 6 CFI = .94; RMSEA = .09, 90% CI [.07-.11]. With autoregressive paths as statistical controls, three  
 7 significant causal effects emerged. First, season start autonomy support predicted increases in mid-  
 8 season psychological need satisfaction. Second, season start coach interpersonal control predicted  
 9 decreases in mid-season psychological need satisfaction. Finally, mid-season psychological need  
 10 satisfaction predicted increases in season-end engagement. The remaining causal effects in our  
 11 model were non-significant (see Table 2).

### 12 **Reciprocal effects**

13         Of the four tested reciprocal effects, one was significant (see Figure 3). With autoregressive  
 14 paths as statistical controls, mid-season psychological need satisfaction predicted increases in  
 15 season end engagement, and mid-season engagement predicted increases in end of season  
 16 psychological need satisfaction. The remaining reciprocal effects in our model were non-significant  
 17 in the presence of their autoregressive paths (see Table 2).

### 18 **Additional direct effects**

19         A number of additional direct effects emerged in our analyses (see Figure 3). Specifically,  
 20 coach autonomy support at season start negatively predicted athletes' mid-season disaffection.  
 21 Likewise, coach interpersonal control at season start negatively predicted athletes' mid-season  
 22 engagement. Finally, and unexpectedly, athletes' season start psychological need satisfaction  
 23 positively predicted their mid-season disaffection. All other additional direct paths in the model  
 24 were non-significant (see Table 2).

### 25 **Mediation**

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<sup>4</sup> Not shown in Table 1 are the distributional properties of the 14 study variables. Skewness values averaged  $M = |.76|$  (highest value = -1.11), and kurtosis values averaged  $M = |.72|$  (highest value = 2.10). These statistics indicate that the data are approximately normal in terms of their underlying distribution of values.

1 To assess the statistical significance of the mediation paths in our model, specific indirect  
2 effects were calculated as the product of the coefficients (i.e.,  $ab$ ) and their 95% confidence  
3 intervals were estimated using Mackinnon, Fritz, Williams and Lockwood's (2007) PRODCLIN  
4 program. Provided a zero effect is not observed between the upper and lower bound of the 95%  
5 confidence interval, the indirect effect is deemed significant at the  $p < .05$  level. The analysis  
6 produced a number of statistically significant indirect effects. Supporting our mediation model, the  
7 positive indirect effect of season start coach autonomy support on athletes' season end engagement  
8 via their mid-season psychological need satisfaction was significant ( $ab = .04$ , 95% CI [.01, .08]).  
9 Similarly, the negative indirect effect of season start coach interpersonal control on adolescents'  
10 season end engagement via their mid-season psychological need satisfaction was also significant  
11 ( $ab = -.03$ , 95% CI [-.07, -.01]).

12 In addition, the negative indirect effect of coach autonomy support on athletes' season end  
13 disaffection via their mid-season disaffection was significant ( $ab = -.06$ , 95% CI [-.13, -.00]).  
14 Likewise, the positive indirect effect of coach autonomy support on athletes' season end  
15 psychological need satisfaction via their mid-season psychological need satisfaction was also  
16 significant ( $ab = .07$ , 95% CI [.02, .13]). The negative indirect effect of season start coach  
17 interpersonal control on athletes' season end psychological need satisfaction via their mid-season  
18 engagement was significant ( $ab = -.02$ , 95% CI [-.05, -.00]), as was the negative indirect effect of  
19 coach interpersonal control on athletes' season end engagement via their mid-season engagement  
20 ( $ab = -.05$ , 95% CI [-.11, -.01]). Finally, the negative indirect effect of coach interpersonal control  
21 on athletes season end psychological need satisfaction via their mid-season psychological need  
22 satisfaction was significant ( $ab = -.06$ , 95% CI [-.11, -.02]). No other significant indirect effects  
23 emerged.

## 24 Discussion

25 This study longitudinally tested SDT's mediation model of athletes' engagement and  
26 disaffection in youth sport. As expected, the effects of season-start coach autonomy support and

1 interpersonal control to athletes' season-end engagement were mediated by athletes' mid-season  
2 psychological need satisfaction. No significant causal effects, however, were observed in the case of  
3 psychological need frustration and disaffection. In addition, our analyses qualified SDT's mediation  
4 model by evidencing the presence of reciprocal effects between psychological need satisfaction and  
5 engagement. Akin to other longitudinal studies (Jang et al., 2012; Reeve & Lee, 2014), the casual  
6 and reciprocal effects in our model were small in magnitude but predicted meaningful proportions  
7 of variance over and above the autoregressive paths. Next, we describe the conceptual and practical  
8 implications of these findings for SDT and youth sport.

### 9 **Causal effects**

10 This is the first study to examine SDT's mediation model with three waves of data in a sport  
11 context. As such, it provides an important extension to extant cross-sectional (e.g., Adie et al., 2008;  
12 Curran et al., 2014; Reinboth et al., 2004) and longitudinal (e.g., Adie et al., 2012; Balaguer et al.,  
13 2012; Quested & Duda, 2011) research by supporting the causal assumptions underpinning SDT's  
14 mediational sequence. Here, season start coach autonomy support positively predicted mid-season  
15 psychological need satisfaction that, in turn, positively predicted season end engagement. Coach  
16 autonomy support is therefore an enriching motivational style – contributing to gains in athletes'  
17 psychological need satisfaction and engagement over the course of a season. By contrast, season  
18 start coach interpersonal control negatively predicted mid-season psychological need satisfaction  
19 that, in turn, negatively predicted season end engagement. Coach interpersonal control, then, is an  
20 impoverishing motivational style – contributing to season long reductions in athletes' psychological  
21 need satisfaction and engagement.

22 Though non-significant, causal paths from the coach motivational styles to adolescents'  
23 psychological need frustration are worthy of mention. These null findings suggest that autonomy  
24 supportive and controlling behaviors do not predict variability in athletes' psychological need  
25 frustration over time. While this might be expected for autonomy support, it is an unexpected  
26 finding in the case of coach interpersonal control, which has been shown to positively predict

1 change in psychological need frustration (Balaguer et al., 2012). There are a number of possible  
2 explanations for this finding. Athletes whose psychological needs are frustrated may, in the short-  
3 term, invest extra effort to demonstrate worth as compensatory source of competence and/or  
4 relatedness (see Koestner & Losier, 2002). Alternatively, the effects of coach interpersonal control  
5 on psychological need frustration may have been masked by suppression in the model due to the  
6 high inter-correlation of these constructs at season start ( $r = -.51$ , see Table 1; Cohen, Cohen, West,  
7 & Aiken 2003). In whichever case, these null findings require careful consideration in future  
8 research.

### 9 **Reciprocal and additional effects**

10 As hypothesized, psychological need satisfaction and engagement shared a reciprocal  
11 association. Mid-season change in psychological need satisfaction predicted change in season end  
12 engagement. Yet change in mid-season engagement also predicted change in season-end  
13 psychological need satisfaction, even after controlling for change in mid-season psychological need  
14 satisfaction. This finding is in line with data from education domains (Jang et al., 2012; Reeve &  
15 Lee, 2014), and suggests that athletes behaviorally engage in order to fulfil their psychological  
16 needs, which in turn promotes more behavioral engagement. Such a reciprocal interplay is at the  
17 core of SDT's organismic meta-theory, and our analysis certainly supports an amplifying cycle of  
18 proactivity in youth sport (viz. higher psychological need satisfaction to higher engagement to  
19 higher psychological need satisfaction and so on), which appears to be triggered by autonomy  
20 support, but inhibited by interpersonal control.

21 Alongside the reciprocal effects, some noteworthy additional indirect effects emerged. The  
22 negative indirect effect of season start coach autonomy support to season end disaffection via mid-  
23 season disaffection was significant, as was the negative indirect effect of coach control to season  
24 end engagement and psychological need satisfaction via mid-season engagement. The coach  
25 motivational styles therefore appear to have direct associations with athlete engagement and  
26 disaffection, over and above the psychological needs, which endure over time. Moreover, season



1 start interpersonal control negatively predicted season end psychological need satisfaction via lower  
2 mid-season engagement. Hence controlling behaviors appear to restrict opportunities for athletes to  
3 both receive and seek out psychological need satisfaction, because they directly predict lower levels  
4 of engaged behavior.

5 Finally, there was an unexpected additional indirect effect in our analysis. Season start  
6 psychological need satisfaction positively predicted mid-season behavioral disaffection that, in turn,  
7 positively predicted season end behavioral disaffection. This finding, again, may be indicative of  
8 suppression as psychological need satisfaction is highly inter-correlated with the other predictor  
9 variables in the model (see Table 1). When this is the case, a predictor (psychological need  
10 satisfaction) can have a large absolute negative correlation with a criterion (disaffection) but have a  
11 reversed beta weight provided one or more of the other predictors in the model are assigned credit  
12 for that predictor's shared explanatory ability (Cohen et al., 2003). Further research, though, is  
13 needed to confirm that this relation is indeed an artefact of suppression.

#### 14 **Practical implications**

15 This study found that coach autonomy support triggers higher athlete psychological need  
16 satisfaction and engagement, whereas coach interpersonal control has the opposite pattern of  
17 association. The conclusion, therefore, is that coaches should promote autonomy support and reduce  
18 interpersonal control. To this goal, a number of practical strategies can be adopted, which have been  
19 detailed elsewhere (see Reeve, 2006, Ntoumanis & Mallet, 2014). Another important finding in this  
20 study is that psychological need satisfaction and behavioral engagement share a reciprocal  
21 association. The practical implication here is that athletes are inclined to behave in manner  
22 conducive to the fulfilment of their own psychological needs. To expedite this process, athletes  
23 might be encouraged to not only behaviorally engage, but to also cognitively engage in sport by  
24 deliberately planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating for experiences of autonomy and  
25 competence. They may also be encouraged to seek out social support, or spend time with teammates  
26 to whom they have a close interpersonal connection, to generate opportunities for relatedness. Put

1 simply, to be effective facilitators of engagement and long-term persistence, our data shows that  
2 coaches must be willing to relinquish behavioral control and structure environments that provide  
3 athletes with opportunities to engage themselves.

#### 4 **Limitations**

5         This study has limitations. We did not measure coach motivational styles at every time  
6 point. Multiple measurements of coach motivational style would strengthen future research –  
7 especially because they permit tests of the possibility that, over time, athlete behaviors may impact  
8 the motivational styles of their coaches (Reeve, 2009). Moreover, we employed composite variables  
9 to measure interpersonal control, psychological need satisfaction, and psychological need  
10 frustration in this study. Such an approach may mask the presence of a number of associations  
11 between specific aspects of interpersonal control (e.g., conditional regard) and specific  
12 psychological needs (e.g., incompetence). Subsequent research should seek to disaggregate these  
13 variables for a more nuanced analysis.

14         Another limitation is that we employed a cross-lagged path model to test our hypotheses.  
15 These models permit tests of temporal precedence and potential reciprocal effects, which are  
16 important considerations for SDT. Nonetheless, a legitimate criticism of the cross-lagged path  
17 model is that it assumes all athletes are changing in a systematic way. This means that any within-  
18 person variability existing around the average rate of between-person change is overlooked (Selig &  
19 Preacher, 2009). It is therefore important that future research supplements our analysis with random  
20 slope models, which can model trajectories of within-person change.

21         Finally, the current study did not assess perceptions of structure and involvement from  
22 coaches. Structure refers to the help, support, rules, and limits that socializers provide to foster  
23 subordinates' competence (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Involvement refers to the interest, warmth  
24 and concern that socializers show their subordinates to foster relatedness (Skinner, Wellborn, &  
25 Connell, 1990). Recent studies have shown that structure and autonomy support interact to predict  
26 higher psychological need satisfaction and engagement in high school children (Jang, Reeve &

1 Deci, 2010; Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, Soenens & Dochy, 2009) and youth sports  
2 participants (Curran et al., 2013),. Therefore, it is important for future research stemming from our  
3 work to include autonomy support, structure, and involvement in SDT's mediation model.

#### 4 **Conclusion**

5 This study provides a number of important conclusions. Foremost, the motivational styles  
6 that coaches adopt have significant implications for youth sports participation. In line with SDT,  
7 coach autonomy support at the beginning of a season fosters increases in athletes' season end  
8 behavioral engagement, because it increases athletes' perceptions of mid-season psychological  
9 need satisfaction. By contrast, coach interpersonal control at season start yields reductions in  
10 athletes' season end behavioral engagement, because it reduces athletes' perceptions of mid-season  
11 psychological need satisfaction. Many countries are experiencing steep declines in youth sports  
12 participation, especially in adolescence. These causal effects offer insight for practitioners and  
13 indicate that increased long-term engagement in youth sport is more likely when coaches exhibit  
14 autonomy support (as opposed to interpersonal control).

15 Alongside the practical implications, reciprocal relationships also emerged in our analysis  
16 which have significant implications for SDT. Here, the positive reciprocal effect of psychological  
17 need satisfaction and behavioral engagement indicates that athletes, over time, receive (from  
18 coaches) *and* seek out (in the form of their engagement) opportunities for autonomy, competence,  
19 and relatedness. From this non-linear perspective, multiple feedback loops exist between the  
20 psychological needs and behavioral engagement, which are mutually reinforcing. Hence, our study  
21 supports the temporal assumptions of SDT's mediation model but, importantly, underscores the  
22 reciprocal interplay between athletes' psychological needs and their engaged behavior – an  
23 interplay that demands consideration in subsequent (cross-sectional) research.

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Table 1. *Scale Reliabilities, Descriptive Statistics, and Inter-Correlations.*

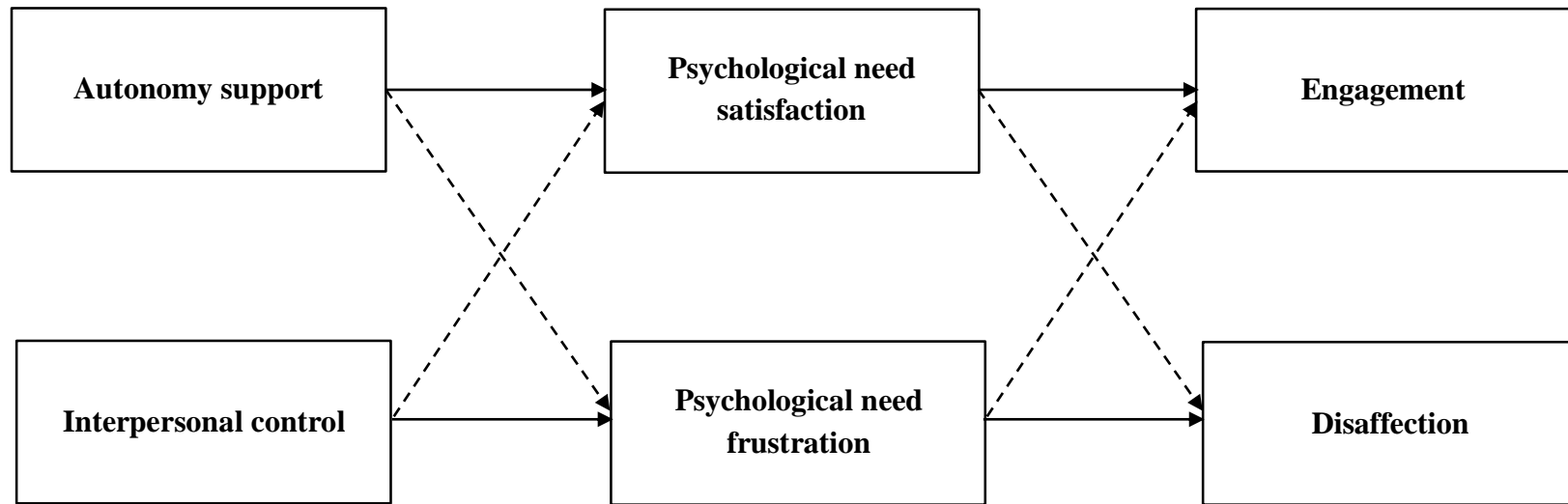
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1.Coach autonomy support T1	.95													
2.Coach interpersonal control T1	-.51**	---												
3.Psychological need satisfaction T1	.45**	-.33**	---											
4.Psychological need frustration T1	-.55**	.51**	-.39**	---										
5.Behavioral engagement T1	.40**	-.26**	.55**	-.32**	.83									
6.Behavioral disaffection T1	-.41**	.51**	-.20*	.56**	-.42**	.81								
7.Psychological need satisfaction T2	.40**	-.25**	.62**	-.27**	.30**	-.07	---							
8.Psychological need frustration T2	-.31**	.34**	-.24*	.51**	-.29**	.33**	-.27**	---						
9.Behavioral engagement T2	.40**	-.23**	.42**	-.29**	.44**	-.23*	.49**	-.15	.78					
10.Behavioral disaffection T2	-.20**	.27**	-.02	.28**	-.22*	.50**	-.13	.38**	-.20**	.72				
11.Psychological need satisfaction T3	.26**	-.21*	.38**	-.20**	.21**	-.11	.54**	-.13	.39**	-.07	---			
12.Psychological need frustration T3	-.35**	.28**	-.34**	.46**	-.34**	.19*	-.38**	.44**	-.22*	.18*	-.33**	---		
13.Behavioral engagement T3	.33**	-.13	.32**	-.22**	.30**	-.09	.42**	-.15	.53**	-.16*	.60**	-.21*	.76	
14.Behavioral disaffection T3	-.23*	.19*	-.21*	.35**	-.35**	.36**	.03	.18*	-.24*	.35**	-.11	.25*	-.22*	.77
<i>M</i>	5.40	2.50	5.40	2.75	5.67	2.73	5.47	2.64	5.70	2.80	5.47	2.71	5.75	2.80
<i>SD</i>	1.14	1.13	.91	1.14	1.05	1.31	.89	1.22	.97	1.21	.89	1.30	.93	1.24

*Note.* Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) are shown on the diagonal. T = Time. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  values for the individual measures that were used to form the coach control, psychological need satisfaction and psychological need frustration composites were: conditional regard ( $\alpha = .80$ ), intimidation ( $\alpha = .84$ ), negative use of rewards ( $\alpha = .79$ ), excessive personal control ( $\alpha = .87$ ), autonomy satisfaction (T1  $\alpha = .85$ ; T2  $\alpha = .86$ ; T3  $\alpha = .84$ ), competence satisfaction (T1  $\alpha = .85$ ; T2  $\alpha = .82$ ; T3  $\alpha = .88$ ), relatedness satisfaction (T1  $\alpha = .82$ ; T2  $\alpha = .79$ ; T3  $\alpha = .84$ ), autonomy frustration (T1  $\alpha = .79$ ; T2  $\alpha = .82$ ; T3  $\alpha = .87$ ), competence frustration (T1  $\alpha = .81$ ; T2  $\alpha = .86$ ; T3  $\alpha = .90$ ) and relatedness frustration (T1  $\alpha = .82$ ; T2  $\alpha = .87$ ; T3  $\alpha = .88$ ). \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

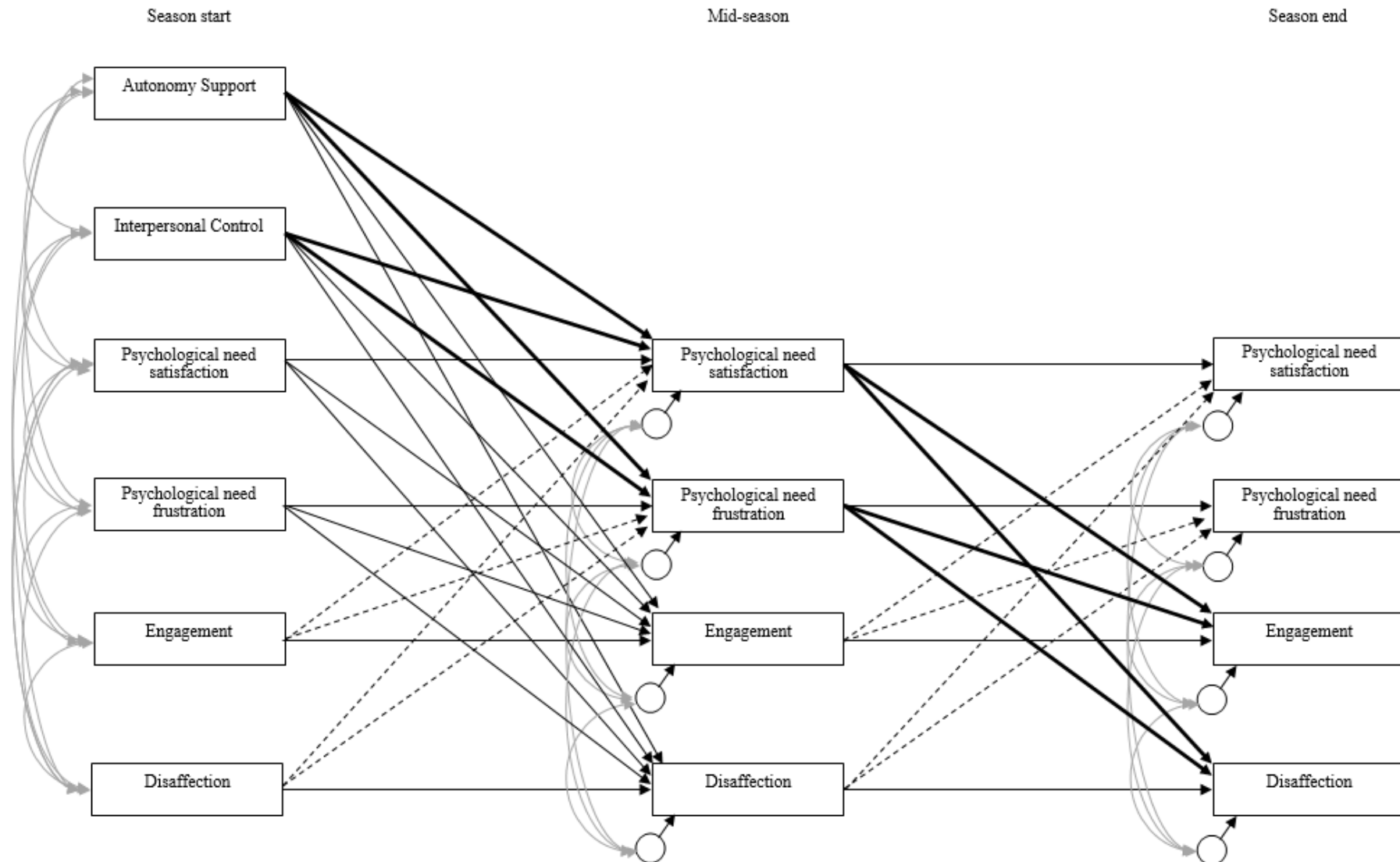
Table 2. Standardized Path Coefficients for the Cross-Lagged Path Model

Path	Season start → Mid-season				Mid-season → Season end			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	[95% CI]	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	[95% CI]	$\beta$
Autonomy support →								
Psychological need satisfaction	.13*	.06	[.01, .25]	.17	--	--	--	--
Psychological need frustration	.01	.08	[-.15, .17]	.01	--	--	--	--
Engagement	.12	.07	[-.01, .26]	.15	--	--	--	--
Disaffection	-.18*	.09	[-.36, -.00]	-.18	--	--	--	--
Interpersonal control →								
Psychological need satisfaction	-.11*	.05	[-.21, -.01]	-.14	--	--	--	--
Psychological need frustration	.13	.08	[-.03, .29]	.12	--	--	--	--
Engagement	-.13*	.06	[-.27, -.03]	-.15	--	--	--	--
Disaffection	.01	.08	[-.15, .17]	.01	--	--	--	--
Psychological need satisfaction →								
Psychological need satisfaction	.49**	.07	[.35, .63]	.52	.43**	.08	[.27, .59]	.42
Engagement	.17	.09	[-.01, .34]	.16	.25**	.05	[.15, .35]	.23
Disaffection	.24*	.11	[.04, .40]	.18*	.20	.11	[-.02, .40]	.14
Psychological need frustration →								
Psychological need frustration	.51**	.08	[.35, .67]	.49	.48**	.07	[.34, .62]	.44
Engagement	-.02	.06	[-.15, .09]	-.03	-.01	.05	[-.11, .09]	-.02
Disaffection	-.02	.08	[-.17, .15]	-.01	.12	.08	[-.04, .23]	.12
Engagement →								
Engagement	.17*	.07	[.05, .33]	.19	.35**	.07	[.21, .49]	.37
Psychological need satisfaction	-.07	.05	[-.17, .02]	-.09	.20**	.07	[.06, .34]	.22
Psychological need frustration	-.09	.08	[-.25, .07]	-.08	-.16	.09	[-.34, .02]	-.12
Disaffection →								
Disaffection	.39**	.07	[.25, .53]	.42	.34**	.08	[.18, .50]	.32
Psychological need satisfaction	.06	.04	[-.02, .14]	.07	.05	.04	[-.03, .13]	.07
Psychological need frustration	-.08	.07	[-.22, .06]	.01	.01	.08	[-.15, .17]	.01

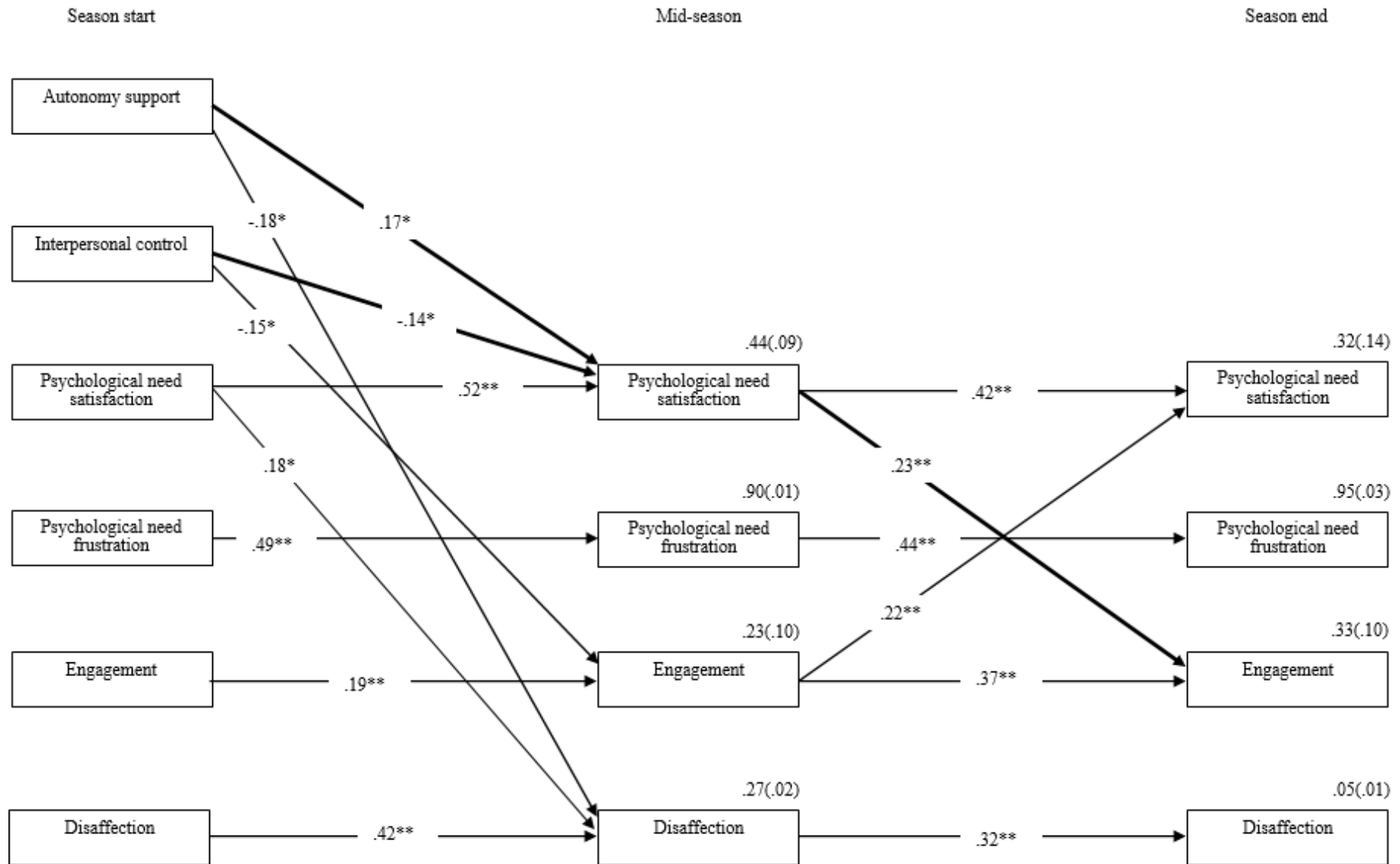
Note.  $\beta$  = standardized path coefficient; *SE* = standard error; *p* = two-tailed probability value; *R*<sup>2</sup> = variance explained over and above autoregressive pathways; *b* = unstandardized path coefficient; CI = confidence interval. \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01



**Figure 1** Self-determination theory's mediation model of engagement and disaffection. *Note.* Solid arrows depict positive associations, and dashed arrows depict negative associations.



**Figure 2** The hypothesized cross-lagged path model. *Note.* The eight downwardly sloped boldfaced solid lines test for causal effects. The four upwardly sloped non-boldfaced dashed lines test for reciprocal effects. The eight downwardly sloped non-boldface solid lines test for additional direct effects. The eight non-boldface solid horizontal paths are the autoregressive controls.



**Figure 3** Standardized parameter estimates for the hypothesized model. In the interest of clarity, only significant paths are presented.  $R^2$  values in parentheses denote the unique variance explained in the criterion variables over and above the autoregressive paths. Model fit:  $\chi^2 = 105.51$  (33); IFI = .94; CFI = .94; RMSEA = .09, 90% CI [.07-.11].