Athlete’s Preference of Coaching Behaviors:
A Study of Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

In order to be successful in team sports and other group activities, a team or group has to be able to work together. For a team to be effective, the team needs to have an effective leader. The coach of a team is usually established as the ultimate team leader. He or she has the authority over the team and what the team will do. The role of a coach is defined as a leader, teacher, role model, limit setter, psychologist or counselor, friend or mentor, parent substitute, and family member (Anshe1, 2003).

When addressing gender as a factor for preferred coaching behaviors, there have been many inconsistencies in the research. Chelladurai’s Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML) proposed that the gender of an athlete is a contributing factor to athlete’s preference of coaching behavior. In turn, this will affect the required behavior of the coach. A gender comparison study in Australia suggests that athletes’ gender has little or no influence on coaching behaviors (Sherman, Fuller, & Speed, 2000). Similar to Sherman et al (2000), gender difference between coach and athlete was not an issue for the Canadian athletes (Cote & Pedgwick, 2003).

This current study will focus on athletes and preference of coaching behaviors. With several inconsistencies in research regarding gender, it is believed that male athletes will prefer more social support behavior when compared to female athletes. It is also hypothesized that athletes under the age of 19 will prefer more autocratic coaching behavior when compared to athlete over the age of 19.

METHOD

Participants

A nonrandom sample of 129 participants was used for this study. The 71 men and 58 women were all Division Three (D3) athletes with 55.7% Euro-American/White, 27.5% Latino/Hispanic, 9.2% being African-American/Black, 1.5% Asian, 0.8% Bi/Multicultural, 0.8% reporting “Other” and 0.8% declining to state their ethnicity. The mean age of the sample was 20 years.

Measures

This was a cross-sectional, survey method design intended to examine preferred coaching behaviors of athletes. The 5-page survey asked participants to respond to a) demographic questions and b) statements on the topic of coaching behaviors.

Independent Variables. The independent variables for this study are gender and age. Respondents were asked to indicate gender (male or female) and age (open-ended) on the provided demographics sheet. Subgroups were also broken down by age of athlete under 19 years of age and athletes over 19 years of age.

Dependent Variables. The Revised Leadership Scale for Sports (RLSS; Zhang, Jensen, & Mann, 1997) is designed to measure athletes’ preference of coaching behaviors across six dimensions. Participants were to respond to 60 statements regarding preferred coaching behaviors using a 5-point scale (1=Never (0%), 2=Seldom (25%), Occasionally (50%), Often (75%), Always (100%). All statements were preceded with the statement “I prefer my coach to…” This is a cumulative matrix scale where high scores indicate greater preference for the desired coaching behavior. Since there are six subscales, statements 1, 7, 13, 19, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 52, 55, 56 are the democratic behavior section, 2, 8, 14, 25, 31, 37, 43, 49, 53, 56, 59, 60 are for positive feedback, 3, 9, 15, 20, 26, 32, 38, 44, 50, 54 are for situational conditions, 4, 10, 16, 21, 27, 33, 39, 45 are for positive feedback, 5, 11, 17, 22, 28, 34, 40, 46, 51, 57 are for training and instruction and questions 6, 12, 18, 23, 29, 35, 41, 47 are for autocratic behaviors.

Procedure

Surveys were administered during a scheduled team meeting. During this meeting the coach was not present while surveys are being completed. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and all responses would remain confidential. To indicate agreement to participate, the attached consent form was signed and detached from the survey. Once completed, the surveys were returned to the researcher and participants were provided a short debriefing explaining the research project.

RESULTS

A one-way analysis of variance was performed to examine the difference in preference of social support coaching behavior between male and female athletes. As hypothesized, male athletes report significantly higher levels of preference for social support coaching behavior (M = 28.66, SD = 4.61) when compared to female athletes (M = 26.75, SD = 4.74), F(1, 127) = 5.297, p < .05. (Table 1).

Hypothesis 1

Results indicate athletes over age nineteen (M = 22.49, SD = 3.47) preferred more autocratic coaching behavior as opposed to athletes under the age of nineteen (M = 21.06, SD = 3.29), F(1, 128) = 5.35, p < .05. (Table 2).

Hypothesis 2

A one-way analysis of variance was performed to examine the difference in age on the preference for autocratic coaching behavior. As predicted, age did have a significant effect on preference of autocratic coaching behavior. However, the results were not congruent with the hypothesis. Results indicate athletes over age nineteen (M = 22.49, SD = 3.47) preferred more autocratic coaching behavior as opposed to athletes under the age of nineteen (M = 21.06, SD = 3.29), F(1, 128) = 5.35, p < .05. (Table 2).

Limitations

Being that the sample came from a Division Three (D3) university, could be the cause of conflicting evidence with previous research. There has been little to no research that has studied D3 institutions. Furthermore, there was minimal variance among all the six dimensions for the variables that were tested. Since D3 universities do not give scholarships, athletes may only be playing for personal enjoyment.

DISCUSSION

It was hypothesized that male athletes would prefer more social support behavior when compared to female athletes. The results did indicate a significant difference between genders and preference for social support coaching behavior. The findings show support for the predicted hypothesis. On the other hand the findings are not congruent with previous research (Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004). The present study found that male athletes had a significantly higher preference for social support behavior when compared to female athletes.

For the current research, there are a number of reasons men could have possibly preferred more social support behavior from their coach. Since all the male athletes have male coaches, they may want their coach to be sensitive to their feelings and opinions. Second, the athlete may even look at his coach as a role model or even a father figure. Lastly, with more attention from the coach, athletes may have more confidence in their performance.

CONCLUSION

• Male athletes preferred more social support behavior when compared to female athletes.

• Athletes older than the age of 19 years preferred more autocratic coaching behavior rather than athletes who are younger than 19 years of age.

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