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Perceived coach leadership style and psychological well-being among South African national male wheelchair basketball players

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ABSTRACT

Background: An understanding of psychological welfare in sport is essential for the advancement of coach development frameworks and practices to meet the needs of contemporary disabled athletes.

Objective: This study investigated the perceived coach leadership style and psychological well-being (PWB) of South African senior national level male wheelchair basketball players ($n = 16$, $M_{age} = 32.13$, $SD = 6.62$ years).

Methods: An exploratory, quantitative cross-sectional study design was employed in which the Leadership Scale for Sport, Subjective Vitality Scale, and Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale were utilised to collect the data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to describe and analyse the data respectively.

Results: Players exhibited high levels of subjective vitality and overall PWB. The perceived coach leadership style was strongly represented by the exhibition of training and instruction, and positive feedback behaviour which were also moderately and significantly associated with players' subjective vitality scores and various dimensions of PWB. Moderate and strong negative associations were also noted between players' positive relations with other and the coach's exhibition of democratic, and autocratic leadership behaviour respectively. Essentially, hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed that components of perceived coach leadership style were not found to predict PWB.

Conclusion: Although further investigation on national level disabled athletes is warranted, it was concluded that aspects of coaches' leadership style in conjunction with athletes' national level experience could contribute to athletes' professed states of PWB in their sport environment. This study represents essential yet persistently understudied information on selected social settings in sport.

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Introduction

Wheelchair basketball is one of the most appealing team sports for disabled athletes and has grown tremendously from recreational events aimed at socialising injured war veterans into disabled sport to Paralympic representation.¹ Wheelchair basketball is played by individuals' with permanent severe leg disability or paralysis in the lower extremities of their body (paraplegia)

inflicted by congenital maladies or acquired by means of spina bifida, cerebral palsy, birth defects, amputations, or paralysis caused by accidents. A team consists of twelve players of which five players are allowed on court during competition.²

An ongoing impediment in wheelchair basketball is the difficulty in recruiting trained coaches with good leadership skills.¹ Leadership is broadly defined as a process of providing meaningful direction to individual/collective efforts, and causing these efforts to be expended in the achievement of agreed and meaningful norms of attainment.^{3,4} Leadership in sport is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct in which proficiency is a product of the leader's behaviour, situational characteristics, and facets of the group environment.^{5,6}

A growing body of literature has underscored the favourable influence of coach behaviour (i.e. support for athlete autonomy, a mastery focused and socially supportive approach) on the psychological welfare and mental health of athletes.^{7–11} Considering

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the positive influence of coaches' behaviour on athletes' psychological demeanour, it is also important to be cognizant of the manifestation and impact of maladaptive coach behaviour.¹² Drawing on this notion, empirical evidence implied that athletes' views on coach behaviour related to the psychological thwarting of needs are a consistent predictor of psychological ill-being and maladaptive outcomes such as disordered eating, burnout, depression, and negative effects.⁹

The concept of psychological well-being (PWB) raised in this context, refers to the extent to which a person "fulfils their potential", "realize their true nature", and "functions at an optimal level" (p. 732).¹³ PWB consists of key elements namely: autonomy; environmental mastery; personal growth; positive relations with others; purpose in life; and self-acceptance.^{14,15} Vitality is typically seen as a complex psycho-physiological state that necessitates constructs of energized behaviour such as enthusiasm, vigour, liveliness, and positivity.¹⁶ It is generally accepted that feeling vital is robustly associated with PWB,¹⁶ subjective happiness and life satisfaction.¹⁷

Despite the findings which ratify the effects of certain coach qualities in sport, accurate dissemination of understanding on the influence of coach leadership behaviour on athletes' psycho-emotional standing in their sport environment remain limited and uncertain, especially in elite level disabled sport. Furthermore, modern-day coaching practices are still contrived by incongruence between coaches' self-evaluated leadership styles and the actual leadership styles preferred by their athletes.¹⁸ Moreover, many disabled athletes in developing countries are subjected to sub-optimal coaching practices or have opted to be self-coached in their sport due to unapprised disabled sport coach development frameworks adjoined by indifferent and unqualified coaching practices.^{19,20}

A narrow focus on coach behaviour in the assessment of its correlation with associative psycho-emotional outcomes among disabled athletes could provide impetus for future study and may also be used as a tool for informative disabled sport coach development frameworks. Moreover, insight gained could also contest various countries' perpetuating lack of academic curiosity in and professional commitment to disabled sport.²¹ Against this background, the following research questions are formulated: 1) What is the perceived coach leadership style among South African national male wheelchair basketball players?; 2) What are the levels of PWB among South African national male wheelchair basketball players?; and 3) What is the relationship between the perceived coach leadership style and PWB of South African national male wheelchair basketball players?

Materials and methods

Participants

Sixteen South African (SA) national male wheelchair basketball players aged between 20 and 46 years ($M_{age} = 32.13$, $SD = 6.62$ years) were purposively recruited to participate in the current study. The participants were selected on the basis that they were active members of the SA senior national team for the 2017/2018 competition season, 18 years of age, did not suffer from any personally known medical and/or clinical disorder that would prevent them from accurately responding to the questionnaires, as well as being proficient and articulate in the English language. Almost half (56.4%) of the participants had been playing wheelchair basketball at the national level for three or more years. Fourteen participants acquired their disability while two reported their disability to be congenital.

Data collection procedure

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Research Ethics Committee (Ref #: FCRE2017/06/009SCI) of the Tshwane University of Technology. A quantitative cross-sectional study design was adopted for data collection. Prior to data collection, the participants were requested to sit through an information session and peruse an information sheet explaining the aim, procedures and participation requirements. Willing participants had to provide written informed consent prior to completing a multi-section pen-and-paper questionnaire package. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary; they were assured the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The questionnaires were administered by the principal investigator during the SA national team's official training camp. Completion of the questionnaire package took approximately 25 min.

Measures

Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS)

The LSS was used to assess participants' perceptions of their coach's leadership style.⁶ The 40-item LSS consists of the following five dimensions: i) Training and Instruction (13 items); ii) Democratic Behaviour (9 items); iii) Autocratic Behaviour (5 items); iv) Social Support (8 items); and v) Positive Feedback (5 items). Versions of the LSS have been developed to measure both athletes and coaches perceptions of leader behaviour on a Likert-type scale with response format ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The LSS has shown a high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.79 – 0.93 and adequate validity (accepted *a priori* for the purpose of this study) based on comprehensive explanations provided on questionnaire construction,⁶ and subsequent evaluations.^{25,26}

Subjective Vitality Scale (SVS)

The SVS was used to measure the participants' perceived levels of energy and vitality.²⁷ SVS was initially developed by Ryan and Frederick (1997) (containing 7-items) and later revised to a shorter 6-item version which prompts respondents to indicate the degree to which the statement of each item is true for them 'in the present moment' (in their sporting environment) scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). The range of a score varies from 7 to 49 with higher scores indicating more subjective vitality. Two versions have been developed (i.e. state and trait levels) of which the state-level measure was utilised in the present investigation. The shortened version demonstrated desirable psychometric properties, test validity, and complete reliability with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89.²⁷ Acceptable goodness of fit indexes were recently reported for the SVS within a sport activity setting.²⁸

Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS)

Ryff's PWBS was used to assess participants' levels of PWB comprising six distinct subscales namely, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.¹⁵ Initially, the scale was defined with 20 items per dimension (120 items in total) which yielded Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.81–0.88.¹⁴ Shortened versions have since been standardised into 3, 9 and 14-item forms which demonstrated statistical power that correlates well (0.70–0.89) with the 20-item parent scales.¹⁵ The 3-item dimension scale version (18 items in total) was used in the present investigation of which items are rated on a 6-point continuum that ranges from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*).

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