

Athlete leadership dispersion and satisfaction in interactive sport teams

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Abstract

Objective: Athlete leadership on sport teams can be represented by an individual occupying a formal or informal leadership role within a team who influences a group of team members to achieve a common goal [Loughhead, Hardy, & Eys, (2006). The nature of athlete leadership. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 29, 142–158]. Previous research has suggested that individuals involved in sport view the presence of athlete leaders as a crucial component to the effective functioning of the team [Glenn & Horn, (1993) Psychological and personal predictors of leadership behavior in female soccer athletes. *Journal Applied of Sport psychology*, 5, 17–34]. The purpose of the present study was to examine, at both the beginning and end of a competitive season, the relationship between individual perceptions of athlete leader dispersion across three types of leadership functions (i.e., task, social, external) and satisfaction.

Method: Participants included 218 intercollegiate athletes from a variety of interactive team sports. At the beginning and end of their competitive seasons, athletes indicated who the task, social, and external leaders were on their respective teams and responded to four dimensions of the Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire [Riemer & Chelladurai, (1998) Development of the Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ). *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 20, 127–156].

Results: Those who perceived all three leadership functions to be represented to the same degree (i.e., higher number of leaders for all three functions, an average number of leaders for all three functions, or a lower number of leaders for all three functions) were more satisfied with their team's performance and

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degree to which the team was integrated than those individuals who perceived an imbalance in the number of athletes engaging in those functions.

Conclusion: The relative number of leaders within sport groups is related to individual perceptions of satisfaction.

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Introduction

Athlete leadership on sport teams can be represented by an individual occupying a formal (i.e., prescribed by the organization) or informal (i.e., emerged over time via team interactions) leadership role within a team who influences a group of team members (i.e., a minimum of two team members) to achieve a common goal (Loughead, et al., 2006). While the majority of leadership research in sport has been conducted on formal leadership roles such as the coach or manager, anecdotal and empirical evidence provides support for the importance of leadership roles performed by athletes. A quote by Brent Barry of the National Basketball Association's Seattle Supersonics highlighted the importance of player leadership on a sport team:

Barry is comfortable shepherding his teammates. "I really don't think the scoring mentality is in me...my job is to help guys along and pull guys aside, which is good for the team" (Thomsen, 2004, p. 84).

Several authors have noted that most individuals involved in sport view the presence of athlete leaders as a crucial component to the effective functioning of the team influencing variables such as structure, cohesion, and team motivation (Glenn & Horn, 1993; Todd & Kent, 2004; Yukelson, 1997). Recent empirical research has also highlighted the importance of athlete leadership in sport. For example, Loughead and Hardy (2005) found that athlete leaders exhibited social support, positive feedback, and democratic decision-making style leadership behaviors to a greater degree than coaches. Moreover, Glenn, Horn, Campbell, and Burton (2003) reported that the style of athlete leadership was related to trait anxiety and team climate (i.e., mastery and performance oriented) amongst elite adolescent female soccer players.

These examples aside, a good portion of this previous body of research has been devoted to clarifying the types of athlete leaders on sport teams. One method of classification has been based on the *functions* athlete leaders engage in. In summarizing previous literature (e.g., Carron, Hausenblas, & Eys, 2005; Kogler Hill, 2001; Mosher, 1979; Rees, 1983), Loughead, et al. (2006) noted that athlete leaders are involved in task related functions (e.g., assist the achievement of the groups goals/objectives), social related functions (e.g., help satisfy individual member psychosocial needs), and external related functions (e.g., representing the group at meetings and media gatherings). Similarly, the aforementioned quote by Brent Barry illustrates the task and social functions of athlete leadership.

Given the variety of functions athlete leaders fulfill, a number of studies have sought to determine the characteristics of these individuals (e.g., Glenn & Horn, 1993; Lee, Coburn, & Partridge, 1983; Loughead et al., 2006). Of particular relevance to the present investigation, Loughead, et al. (2006)

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