



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

Adrian J. Ferrera
University of La Verne



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 (Anshel, 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 athlete's 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 & Sedgwick, 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 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, 58 are in 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 situation conditions, 4, 10, 16, 21, 27, 33, 39, 45 are social support behavior, 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 of 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).

Table 1.
One-way analysis of variance for preference of social support behavior and gender

Summary Table					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between	115.64	1	115.64	5.30	.023
Within	2772.50	127	21.83		
Total	2888.14	128			

A one-way analysis of variance was performed to examine the differences 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 ($M = 21.09$, $SD = 3.29$), $F(1, 126) = 5.35$, $p < .05$. (Table 2).

Table 2.
One-way analysis of variance for preference of autocratic behavior and age

Summary Table					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between	61.67	1	61.67	5.34	.022
Within	1452.79	126	11.53		
Total	1514.46	127			

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1

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.

Hypothesis 2

There is no previous research that compared age and preference of coaching behaviors. In this particular study, age was said to be a predictor of preferred coaching behavior of athletes. It was hypothesized that athletes under the age of 19 years would prefer more autocratic coaching behaviors when compared to athletes over the age of 19 years. There was significant variance between these two groups and preference for autocratic behavior. However, the hypothesis was not supported. Instead of athletes under the age of 19 years preferring autocratic behavior, athletes older than the age of 19 years preferred more autocratic coaching behavior.

There could be two explanations for these findings. First, at the age of 19 years athletes are probably in their freshman or sophomore years. Being in a new program, younger athletes may feel that they may be able to contribute to an athletic program by sharing new and innovative ideas, techniques or even strategies. From an athletes perspective, having an autocratic coach will limit the presentation of these ideas. Secondly, older athletes may have been in the program and know what the coach expects. In turn, they would probably prefer the coach to tell them exactly what he or she wants them to do so there will be no future consequences.

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.

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. In addition, the sample for this particular study came from one university.