



The Impact of Season Success on New Coach-Athlete Relationships

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore potential changes throughout a competitive season on student-athletes' perceptions of their relationships with new coaches, based on the team's success during the season. It was hypothesized that student-athletes' perceptions would significantly improve when they experienced a successful season, more so than student-athletes who experienced a non-successful season. A total of forty-eight female collegiate team sport student-athletes from a Division I university participated in this study. At the beginning and end of the season, participants completed the long direct Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Rhind & Jowett, 2008), which examines the closeness, commitment and complementarity of the coach-athlete relationship. Results indicated significant changes in the interactions for the closeness and commitment dependent variables, with the non-successful group's scores significantly decreasing, while the successful group's scores did not significantly change. Findings from this study indicate that aspects of the student-athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship may change throughout the competitive season relative to the team's success.

Literature

- A coach-athlete relationship is determined by a growing mutual respect and appreciation between a coach and athlete (Jowett, 2005).
- The relationship is instrumental in effective coaching because it provides the foundation for which both the coach and athlete's emotional, practical, social, and psychological needs are fulfilled (Jowett, 2009a).
- Athletes commonly describe a positive relationship with a coach as one involving commitment, cooperation, positive mentoring, good communication, and/or friendship (Jowett, 2005).
- Athletes who perceive a positive relationship with their coach often have increased levels of motivation, satisfaction, and overall self-esteem (Jowett, 2005).
- Jowett used past coach-athlete relationship models to develop a bi-directional conceptual model that incorporates athletes' efforts in creating a positive coach-athlete relationship known as The 3Cs + 1C model (Jowett, 2005; Jowett, 2009a; Jowett, 2009b).
- The "3Cs" of this model represent closeness, commitment, and complementarity and the "1C" represents co-orientation, which reflects the interpersonal perceptions of both members and the degree of commonality (Jowett, 2009a; 2009b).
- Coaching leadership and coach-athlete relationships have been shown to predict how team members will interact with one another (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004), which can affect their team success.
- Positive coaching behaviors and increased team cohesion significantly contributed to team success (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Murray, 2006), while negative coaching behaviors, such as displaying inequality or treatment between players, embarrassment of athletes, and ridiculing athletes in the presence of their teammates, can lead to decreased team cohesion and failure (Turman, 2008).

Methodology

Participants

- Participants were from a mid-size NCAA Division I university
- Consisted of 48 female collegiate team sport student-athletes
- Demographics: age = 19.5, White/Caucasian 93.7%
- Players reported playing an average of 1.8 years in the college setting
- Played under current coach's instruction for average of 5.5 months

Assessments

- Demographic Questionnaire
 - Participants given ten background questions related to their age, ethnicity, year in college, sport, years of college playing experience, and months played under current coach.
 - Participants answered if they preferred to play for a male or female coach, if they were currently playing the position they prefer, if their current coach recruited them to play for their university, and opinion about the reasons for an unsuccessful season.
- Athlete-Coach Relationship
 - An athlete's perception of her relationship with her coach was measured using the long direct Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Rhind & Jowett, 2008)
 - The long direct CART-Q contains twenty-nine statements in which the participants rate their agreement or disagreement with the statements on a Likert type scale.
 - Participants were asked to rate the way they felt about these statements while they are training with their current head coach.
- Season Success
 - For the current study, a *successful season* was operationally defined as a team with a winning percentage of more than .500 and who qualified for the conference tournament.
 - Successful or non-successful season information was obtained from the University's athletic website and the teams' schedule.

Procedures

- After obtaining IRB approval, the researcher sought approval from head coaches and discussed informed consent with interested student-athletes.
- Participating student-athletes chose a self-selected identification number, which remained blind to the researcher as to not bias the results.
- The demographics sheet and CART-Q were completed after a practice prior to the conference season starting.
- The second round of data acquisition (completion of the CART-Q) took place one week after the completion of the conference season, approximately seven weeks after the initial round of assessments were completed.

Results

Descriptive Information

- The majority of participants preferred to play for a male coach (77%), and all participants were currently playing for a male coach.
- The majority of participants reported playing the position that they wanted to play (87.5%), and only a few student-athletes were recruited by their current coach (12.5%)
- During previous non-successful seasons, 25% of participants felt that their coach was responsible for team's lack of success, 37.5% felt the players on team were responsible, and the remaining 37.5% of participants felt it was a combination of players, coach, assistant coach, and/or captains who were to blame.

Changes in the Coach-Athlete Relationship

- Three two-way repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to examine differences in the pre and post competitive season coach-athlete perceptions based on season success groups for each of the three subscales (i.e. closeness, commitment, and complementarity); the alpha level was set at .015 to control for error due to three ANOVAs
- Results indicated significant interactions for
 - Closeness dependent variable, $F(1, 48) = 10.102, p < .015, \eta^2 = .18$
 - Commitment dependent variable, $F(1, 48) = 15.57, p < .015, \eta^2 = .253$
- Results did not indicate a significant change for the complementarity dependent variable
 - $F(1, 34) = 1.681, p > .015, \eta^2 = .05$
- Post-hoc dependent t-test analyses were conducted; the hypothesis that student-athletes in the non-successful group who experienced non-successful seasons would report a decrease in the coach-athlete relationship was supported in
 - Closeness, $t(31) = 4.33, p < .015, \eta^2 = .772$
 - Commitment, $t(31) = 4.166, p < .015, \eta^2 = .738$

Discussion

- The findings from this study indicated that the student-athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship did significantly change throughout the competitive season based on team success.
- The student-athletes who experienced a successful season perceived the closeness and commitment aspects of the coach-athlete relationship to be higher at the end of the season compared to the student-athletes who experienced an unsuccessful season.
- The non-successful group perceived their relationship with their coach to be less affectionate and less dedicated after experiencing a non-successful competitive season.
- Cooperation with their coach was not perceived to have changed with either group.
- Coaches who use effective coaching behaviors that result in team satisfaction often develop better relationships with their athletes. To effectively deal with the flow of the team's successes and failures, coaches may want to adapt their leadership approach and/or behaviors accordingly (Hoigaard et al., 2008).
- It is difficult to decipher the role success has in the coach-athlete relationship, but despite that difficulty coaches should still be aware of how their role and behaviors affect athletes.
- No significant difference for season success in the participants' perception of complementarity, meaning participants' opinion of coach's perception of their cooperation during training was not significantly different between successful and non-successful groups
- Coaches must show affection for their athletes as well cognitive efforts for team success.
- The findings from this study were based on a small sample size and only included female student-athletes, and most would consider themselves white, so the generalizability is limited