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An evaluation of leadership behavior preferred by individual sports athletes at inter-college level

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the leadership preference of inter College level female athletes involved in individual sports; and to discover the difference in preferred leadership among inter-College level athletes involved in individual sports. Four hundred and nine female athletes from individual sports (Track and Field=146, Gymnastics=142, and Cross Country=121), who represented their respective Colleges in individual sports and games, i.e. Gymnastics, Cross Country, and Track and Field at various inter-college competitions, and who volunteered to participate in the study, were selected as the subjects. Their age ranged from 18 to 25 years. The Leadership Scale for Sports developed and prepared in 1994 by P. Chelladurai was used to measure five dimensions of leader behaviour preferred by female athletes involved in individual sports. Means, standard deviations, and the F-ratio were computed to establish the significance of the differences among the athletes regarding the five dimensions of leader behaviour of preferred leadership. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$. The data analysis revealed that the female players from the individual sports group had similar preferences in all the leader behaviour dimensions.

Keywords: Preferred leadership, individual sports, inter-college level

Introduction

Leadership is an ability that causes other people to become aware of the person attempting to lead, to recognize the information or idea which he is trying to present, and to move or act on the basis of the idea toward some predetermined end. In the context of this research, leadership means well trained, experienced and educated teachers of physical education who assist the students institutionally and professionally within the physical education program.

Leadership might broadly be considered "the behavioural process of influencing individuals and groups toward set goals" which is interpersonal in nature, entails a high degree of direct interaction with the athletes, and bears directly on the motivation of the team members. This definition is useful because it encompasses many dimensions of leadership. In sport and exercise, these dimensions include decision-making processes, motivational techniques, giving feedback, establishing interpersonal relationships, and directing the group or team confidently. To understand the psychological dimensions of athletics, one must plumb a critical actor on the stage. Throughout the years, the coach has been portrayed in many ways, at times as dogmatic and tough but able to imprint quality into their athletes.

Generally, coaches and athletes have tended to agree on what they would consider a successful coaches' personality pattern to be. Their model is an outgoing, stable individual who would to a degree dominate the sports situation and the athletes in his or her charge. They also believe that the coach should be highly intelligent, realistic, practical, confident, and secure yet inventive, willing to break with tradition, able to make decisions, and self-sufficient. Athletes seem to believe that a coach should be a person who could be leaned upon in competitive crises; coaches believe the person should be able to organize and control athletes.

Athletes, when queried, have reported that what they like best about effective coaches is the freedom from sarcasm with which they run their practices, along with effective skill teaching and conditioning procedures used. Athletes also like coaches to relate equally well to, and to spend equal amount of time with both the more talented as well as the less effective players. Athletes doing individual sports seem to have more intense feelings about their coaches than

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the athletes in team sports, as perhaps the latter are able to "lay off" some of their feelings to the others on the team, while in individual sports the athletes must deal with their mentor in a direct one-to-one manner. One major dimension of coaching behavior involves complex and sometimes controversial interactions between the coach and athletes (and their parents) to the extent and of the kind of social support which is expected of the coach toward his/her athletes. Some sports, like gymnastics and track and field, where the coach works basically on a one-to-one relationship with his/her athletes, will usually foster a more personal and supportive role by the coach than in team sports.

The interaction process between athletes and coaches has always been considered to be a determinant factor of sports performance, for its repercussion at the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects. Because of the importance given by the athletes to the relationship with their coaches, they report meaningful thoughts and dreams centered in the coaches. However, this coach-athlete relationship may be disturbed by a number of factors, such as incompatibilities between their personalities. The co-operation between the coach and the athlete is the psychological basis of coaching individualization. Indeed, coaches decision depend on their interpretation and cognition, but they deeply interfere in sport and personal life of their athlete with positive or negative consequences. In fact, the coaches; working methods and interpersonal style have impact upon their athletes since the earlier stage of these ones' evolution. The structuring of their adaptive skills will have expression in their performance and everyday life.

The purpose of the study was to assess the leadership preferences of inter-college level female athletes in different individual sports. It was hypothesized that inter-college level female athletes in individual sports would differ significantly in their leadership preferences. In this study total 409 females were selected as the subjects. The age of the subjects ranged from 18 to 25 years. The training age (sport experience) of the female athletes ranged from 8 to 11 years; they had also participation in national competitions, and represented their colleges in various competitions.

Instrumentation

Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) by Chelladurai was used to assess the leadership behavior preferred by the subjects. The 40-item LSS measures the five dimensions of leadership behavior, i.e. Training and instruction, Democratic behavior, Autocratic behavior, Social support and Positive feedback. The athletes' preferences for specific leader behavior displayed by the coach were assessed by using the preference version of LSS. The sample item read, e.g., "I prefer my coach to see to it that athletes work to capacity". Each statement described specific behavior exhibited by the coach. For each statement there were five alternatives - 1. Always (100% of the time); 2. Often (about 75% of the time); 3. Occasionally (50% of the time); 4. Seldom (about 25% of the time); 5. Never (0.00%). The scoring of each of the items was as follows; Always = 5, Often = 4, Occasionally = 3, Seldom = 2, Never = 1. The sum of the scores on the items in a dimension was divided by the number of items in that dimension to derive the dimension score for a subject. The purpose of the study was explained to the subjects. The directions were read out at dictation speed to make the subjects understand what exactly they were required to do. There were no right or wrong answers. There was no time for the completion of the questionnaire but the subjects were

instructed not to ponder too long over any questions. All the subjects were instructed to respond to the questionnaire independently. Once the instructions were clear, the questionnaire was distributed to the respondents along with the writing material. As soon as a group of athletes completed the questionnaire, the questionnaires were collected. It was verified that no response was left unanswered.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed for the individual sports groups, i.e. Gymnastics, Track and Field and Cross Country, separately for the five dimensions of preferred leadership behavior.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a single independent factor (Female athlete) in the individual sports groups was computed along with five dimensions of leadership behavior as the set of the dependent variable in order to find out the significance of the difference among individual sports groups and among different sports within each group separately. The data pertaining to this are presented in Table 1.

Results

The descriptive statistics of preferences on five dimensions of leader behavior of inter-college level female players in individual sports is shown in Table 1. The mean score of the five dimensions of leader behavior as preferred by the individual sports group at inter-college level are shown in Figures 1 to 3.

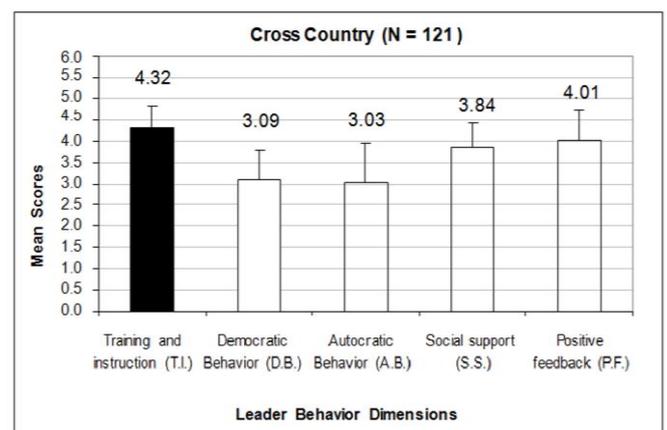


Fig 1: Mean scores of inter-college level

Female Cross Country athletes on the five dimensions of leader behavior

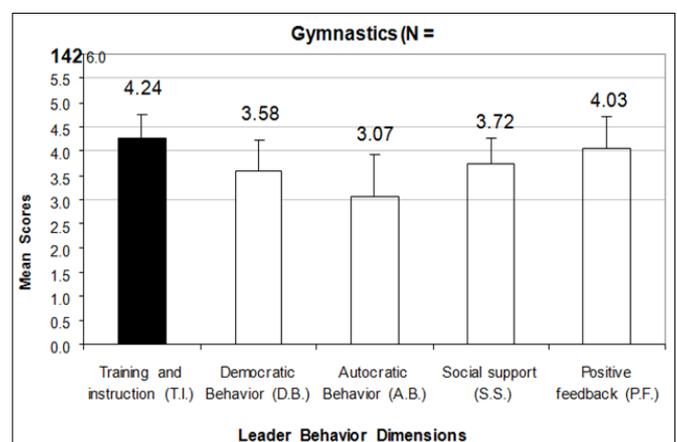


Fig 2: Mean scores of inter-college level female Gymnasts on the five dimensions of leader behavior

Table 2: An analysis of variance of preferences of inter-College level FEMALE players in individual sports on leader behavior dimensions

| Type of Behavior | Source of Variance | Sum of square | df | Mean squares | F |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----|--------------|------|
| Training & Instructions | Between Groups | 1.43 | 2 | 0.71 | 2.74 |
| | within groups | 105.67 | 406 | 0.26 | |
| Social Support | Between Groups | 0.95 | 2 | 0.47 | 1.41 |
| | within groups | 136.37 | 406 | 0.34 | |
| Positive Feedback | Between Groups | 0.07 | 2 | 0.03 | 0.07 |
| | within groups | 203.67 | 406 | 0.50 | |
| Autocratic Behavior | Between Groups | 2.24 | 2 | 1.12 | 1.45 |
| | within groups | 314.97 | 406 | 0.78 | |
| Democratic Behavior | Between Groups | 0.02 | 2 | 0.01 | 0.02 |
| | within groups | 171.54 | 406 | 0.42 | |

*F.05 (2, 406) = 3.02

As can be seen from Table 2, the inter-college level female players of individual sports (i.e. Athletics, Cross Country, and Gymnastics) did not differ significantly in their preferences in any dimensions of leader behavior.

ANOVA revealed that the inter-college level female players involved in individual sports (i.e. Track and Field, Cross Country and Gymnastics) did not differ in their preference on the five dimensions of leadership behavior. Thus, the hypothesis that the athletes of individual sports (i.e. Track and Field, Cross Country and Gymnastics) would differ in their leadership preferences was rejected.

Researchers found differing leadership preferences based on the game type. Challadurai found that athletes involved in individual sports (independent task) or closed sports such as swimming (non-variable task) preferred more democratic behavior than their respective counterparts, who preferred more autocratic behavior. Lindauer examined the preferred leadership behavior of athletes of individual and team sports and reported that individual sport athletes preferred a greater degree of democratic behavior and positive feedback. In a study on student athletes from NCAA university divisions I and II, Beem concluded that athletes in golf, gymnastics, swimming, etc. showed greater preferences for democratic behavior. In open sports (a stable environment such as golf), student athletes had significantly greater preferences for autocratic behavior than the athletes in closed sports (i.e. changing environment such as tennis). In another study on individual sports, combative sports and team sports by Kim *et al.*, it was reported that the combative sports athletes preferred more autocratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback from their coaches than did the other groups. Furthermore, individual sports athletes preferred more democratic behavior from their coaches than the other groups. The individual sports athletes included in this study expressed the need for training and instruction and positive feedback from their coaches (Table I).

The preferences expressed by the athletes are not in congruence with the above-cited studies. It seems that the inter-college athletes included in the study were more serious about their performance and were more goal-oriented. Their coaches should aim at improving the athletes' performance by emphasizing and facilitating hard and strenuous training, instructing the athletes in skills, techniques and tactics of the sport. They should recognize and reward their good performance. This contrasting result may be attributed to the fact that these athletes might not have been trained seriously and regularly by a qualified coach. Indian culture and sporting environment may also be one of the possible reasons for these leadership preferences. Situation differences between sports

might determine the salience of leadership behavior, and that leadership would be divergent among nations. Chelladurai *et al.* studied leadership in a cross-national setting and found differences in leadership behavior and satisfaction with leadership among Canadian and Japanese athletes that arose from cultural differences.

Future research might examine the aspects of Chelladurai's multidimensional model in order to evaluate its relevance to Indian conditions. Further research on sports leadership should address the factors that affect performance, such as age, training age / experience, level of participation, ability, gender etc. along with the coach's characteristics, because the coach has the greatest influence on the player's performance.

Conclusion

Within the limitation of the study, the following conclusion was reached: The players of different sports including the individual sports group had similar preferences on all the leader behavior dimensions. It is recommended that coaches dealing with inter-college level female players may adjust their coaching behavior according to the preferences expressed by the players. Because of the lack of research evidence with regard to sports-specific leadership in the Indian sports scenario there is an ample scope for researchers to address a number of potentially important areas.

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