

Coach-athlete relationship model



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Introduction

The coach-athlete relationship is widely recognised as one of the most important interpersonal relationships in sport (Jowett and Cockerill, 2002; Lyle, 1999). In the past, coaching focused largely on improving the physical and technical skills of the athlete; however, more recently, the importance of developing the athlete's psychosocial skills has also been acknowledged (Miller and Kerr, 2002). It is now accepted that the behaviours, thoughts and emotions of the coach and athlete are interconnected, with both individuals having a mutual appreciation and respect for each other (Jowett and Meek, 2000; Philippe and Seiler, 2006). The main goal of the coach-athlete dyad is to produce an outcome of improved, high performance from the athlete, and the quality of this relationship can impact significantly on whether successful outcomes are achieved. The aim of this paper is to review published evidence on the nature and dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship and the potential influence of significant others on this dyad.

Conceptual models to investigate the dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship

Traditionally, the dynamics between coach and athlete have been studied from the perspective of coaching leadership (Jowett, 2005). The earlier models which provided a conceptual framework for this research include the Mediation model (Smoll and Smith, 1989), the Multidimensional model (Chelladurai, 1993) and the Coaching model (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, Russell, 1995). These models focus on the behaviours of the coach, perceptions of these behaviours, and the impact of such behaviours on outcome variables such as performance and satisfaction. A number of newer

conceptual models have been developed which also largely have a behavioural focus (Jowett and Cockerill, 2002; Mageau and Vallerand, 2003; Poczwadowski, Barott, Peregoy, 2002; Wylleman, 2000). Worthy of note is the Motivational model proposed by Mageau and Vallerand (2003), which may be of value in the study of inspirational motivation, a recent focus of leadership research. This considers whether an individual shows an exceptional ability to lead others to higher performance levels and/or provide inspiration through the use of clear principles and goals, and has been shown to be strongly associated with athletes' level of satisfaction with their coach (Gomes, Sousa, Cruz, 2006). It can be argued that a major limitation of all these models is that they fail to consider the non-behavioural aspects of the coach-athlete relationship (e. g. thoughts and emotions) which may also be importance influencers of the effectiveness and success of this relationship.

The 3Cs and Co-orientation models

The Closeness, Commitment and Complementarity (3Cs) conceptual model developed by Jowett and colleagues incorporates both behavioural and non-behavioural components of the coach-athlete dyad, and reflects the relational aspects of emotions, cognitions and behaviours, respectively (Jowett, 2002; Jowett, 2003; Jowett and Cockerill, 2002; Jowett and Meek, 2000). An additional interpersonal construct, co-orientation, has also been evaluated and is included in the Co-orientation model (Jowett, 2006; Jowett and Clark-Carter, 2006). This adds another dimension by considering coaches' and athletes' perceptions about each other from three different aspects: actual similarity, assumed similarity and empathic understanding

(Jowett, 2005). Both the 3Cs and Co-orientation models have been pivotal in recent research investigating the nature of the coach-athlete dyad from the perspective of the athlete in individual sports including swimming (Philippe and Seiler, 2006; Poczwardowski, Barott, Jowett, 2006).

Analysing the nature of the coach-athlete relationship

In addition to their own perspective on the coach-athlete relationship, both members of the dyad will also form perceptions of how the other member views the relationship. Laing and colleagues (1966) first proposed the terms ‘direct perspective’ (i. e. the individual’s own perspective) and ‘meta-perspective’ (the individual’s perception of the other dyad member’s perspective). More recently, Kenny and Acitelli (2001) developed a method of measuring the accuracy of these perceptions (Kenny and Acitelli, 2001). A study using this methodology has investigated empathic accuracy and assumed similarity in perceptions of closeness, commitment and complementarity in the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett and Clark-Carter, 2006). Findings showed that empathic accuracy and assumed similarity were evident in both coach and athlete perceptions; however, athletes were more accurate in identifying their coaches feelings in terms of closeness, while in newer relationships, both members showed higher levels of empathic accuracy.

Communication is another important component of the coach-athlete dyad (Jowett, 2003; Phillipe and Seiler, 2006). Studies have demonstrated that effective communication promotes a shared understanding of the importance of key issues between both dyad members and may therefore reduce the likelihood of problems or conflict occurring within the relationship

The Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) is a self-report instrument developed to explore the nature of the coach-athlete relationship by examining closeness, commitment and complementarity from a meta-perspective (Jowett and Ntoumanis, 2004). The validity, internal consistency and reliability of this questionnaire were demonstrated in two independent samples of British coaches-athlete dyads. More recently, a Greek language version of the questionnaire (GrCART-Q) has been developed, together with a modified version incorporating co-orientation (Jowett, 2006). The validity and reliability of both versions of this questionnaire were confirmed in a sample of coach-athlete dyads from individual sports (Jowett, 2006).

Effective versus successful coach-athlete relationships

When considering the nature of the coach-athlete dyad, it is important to distinguish between effective and successful relationships. Effective relationships are underpinned by values such as empathy, support, acceptance, respect and responsiveness (Jowett and Cockerill, 2003; Jowett and Meek, 2000). While these undoubtedly provide positive psychosocial benefits for the athlete, they will not necessarily improve performance. In contrast, successful relationships are ones in which a measure of performance success has been achieved, although these may not always be effective in nature (Jowett, 2005).

The influence of significant others on the coach-athlete relationship

It has been suggested that the coach-athlete relationship should not be considered solely as two members of the dyad working together, but also should also take account of the influence of significant others. For example, some believe that coach leadership may be a shared function rather than a

role taken on by the coach alone (Jowett, 2005; Jowett and Chaundy, 2004) while in the case of children, parents and other family members may play an important role in the development and success of the athlete (Cheng, Marsh, Dowson, Martin, n. d.).

To conclude, there is a considerable body of literature investigating the nature and dynamics of the coach-athlete dyad and those factors which may influence the development, effectiveness and success of this important relationship.

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