

Title:

Coach-athlete compatibility and athlete's perception of coaching behaviors.

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Abstract:

Expanding on Kenow and Williams' (1992, 1997) investigation of factors that may influence athletes' perception and evaluation of **coaching** behaviors, the present study examined the relationship of coach-**athlete** compatibility to the evaluation of **coaching** behaviors, as well as the relationship of trait and state anxiety and state self-confidence to the evaluation of **coaching** behaviors while controlling for coach-**athlete** compatibility. Female collegiate basketball players ($n = 68$) completed the SCAT, CSAI-2, **Coaching** Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ), and a measure of compatibility. Trait anxiety, state cognitive and somatic anxiety, state self-confidence, and compatibility were significantly related to athletes' evaluations of **coaching** behaviors (p [less than] .05). Stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed that compatibility and state cognitive anxiety significantly predicted athletes' evaluations of **coaching** behaviors ($r = .63$, $p = .001$). The results support Smoll and Smith's (1989) model of leadership behaviors in sport and suggests additions to the model.

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Considering the importance of the coach in determining the quality and success of an **athlete's** sport experience, surprisingly little research exists that identifies optimal **coaching** behaviors and factors that influence the effectiveness of particular behaviors. Smoll and Smith (1989) proposed that **coaching** effectiveness is mediated by athletes' perception and recall. Overt **coaching** behaviors are perceived and given meaning by each **athlete** resulting in an attitude toward both the coach and the sport experience. Similarly, Shaver (1975) has suggested that an individual's perception of another's behavior is more important than the behavior itself in determining one's feelings or actions toward the other person.

Smoll and Smith's (1989) model of leadership behaviors in sport provides a framework for examining the cognitive and affective processes that may mediate an **athlete's** reaction to their coach's behavior. The central process of their model states that a coach behaves in a certain way, the athletes perceive and

recall these behaviors, and based on this perception and recall the athletes have an evaluative reaction to the coach's behavior. The model also includes three classifications of mediating variables which impact the central process: 1) situational factors (e.g., nature of the sport, level of competition, practice vs. game setting, etc.), 2) coach and **athlete** individual difference variables (e.g., age, sex, perceived **coaching** norms, goals/motives, etc.), and 3) the coach's perception of athletes' attitudes. Thus, according to the model, the ultimate effectiveness of **coaching** behaviors results from many complex interactions of the mediating variables.

In order to assess athletes' perception and evaluative reactions to selected **coaching** behaviors, Kenow and Williams (1992) developed the **Coaching Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ)**. A later study indicated that the 28-item questionnaire factored into five specific aspects of **coaching** behavior: 1) Cognitive/attentional effects of coach's behavior, 2) Supportiveness, 3) Emotional control and composure, 4) Communication, and 5) Somatic effects of coach's behavior (Kenow & Williams, 1997). Utilizing the CBQ, Kenow and Williams (1992) assessed the relationship of female intercollegiate basketball players' competitive trait anxiety and competitive state cognitive and somatic anxiety and self-confidence to the perception and evaluation of their coach's behaviors. They found that athletes who had higher trait anxiety, higher state cognitive anxiety, and lower state self-confidence perceived and evaluated their coach's behaviors more negatively.

In a later study with a larger subject pool, Kenow and Williams (1997) replicated only the cognitive anxiety results using both the factor scores and the total CBQ score. Again, athletes who scored high in cognitive anxiety evaluated their coach's communication behaviors and the perceived cognitive/attentional effects of their coach's behaviors more negatively. Kenow and Williams (1997) found additional significant correlations between state somatic anxiety and coaches' emotional control and composure, as well as between state cognitive anxiety and the perceived somatic effects of their coach's behavior. In discussing the discrepancy in findings across the studies and schools, Kenow and Williams (1997) suggested that differences in coach-**athlete** compatibility may mediate the influence of anxiety and self-confidence on athletes' perception and recall of **coaching** behaviors. To date, sport psychologists have given little attention to the interaction between coach and **athlete** and how that interaction contributes to maximum **athlete** performance. Carron and Bennett (1977) suggested that in determining coach-**athlete** compatibility, it is necessary to assess not only the coach's personality and behavior, but also the **athlete's** desire for such traits and behaviors in their coach.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore (a) whether coach-**athlete** compatibility is significantly related to athletes' perception and evaluation of **coaching** behaviors, (b) whether compatibility mediates the relationships of anxiety and self-confidence with athletes' perception of **coaching** behaviors, and (c) whether compatibility, trait anxiety, state anxiety, and/or state self-confidence

can significantly predict athletes' perception of **coaching** behaviors.

Methods

Subjects. Female collegiate basketball players (n = 68) from non-scholarship programs participated in the study. All subjects had at least one full season of playing experience under their current head coach. Subjects participated voluntarily and with the assurance of anonymity. We contacted the athletes only after obtaining the coach's permission.

Coaching Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ). The **Coaching Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ;** Kenow & Williams, 1992) assessed athletes' perceptions and evaluations of **coaching** behaviors. The CBQ consists of 28 items (20 actual items and eight fillers) with each responded to on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Positively worded items (e.g., "Criticism from my coach is done in a constructive manner.") were reverse weighted so that higher total scores reflected a more negative evaluation of the coach's game behaviors. Not counting the eight filler items, potential scores range from 20 to 80. For the present study, the directions asked the subjects to assess **coaching** behaviors that typically occurred when playing against one of the top three teams in the conference.

Anxiety measures. The Sport Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT; Martens, 1977) assessed competitive trait anxiety. The Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2; Martens, Vealey, & Burton, 1990) measured general state anxiety and self-confidence. The CSAI-2 assesses the intensity of perceived self-confidence and somatic and cognitive anxiety symptoms. Modified instructions for the CSAI-2 directed subjects to respond as if they were going to play one of the top three teams in the conference.

Compatibility measure. Subjects were asked to rate how compatible they felt they were with their coach on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not very compatible to 9 = highly compatible. Compatibility was defined as "the degree to which your (**athlete's**) goals, personality, and beliefs are consistent with your coach's goals, personality, and beliefs."

Procedure. Questionnaire packets and standardized, detailed instructions for testing the athletes were mailed to the coaches. To ensure confidentiality, the coaches passed out the packets, read the testing instructions to the athletes, and then left the room. The athletes completed their questionnaires, sealed their responses in an envelope, signed their name across the seal, and placed their envelope into a large manila envelope which was mailed back to the investigators. Testing took place prior to a practice session. No games occurred within two days of the testing session in order to avoid potential response distortion.

Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Pearson product-moment

correlations coefficients were computed between the moderator variables. All of the SCAT and CSAI-2 items significantly correlated with one another. Compatibility correlated with only self-confidence (see Table 2).

Correlational analysis was used to assess the relationship between athletes' trait anxiety, state cognitive and somatic anxiety, state self-confidence, compatibility, and total and factor scores for the CBQ (see Table 3). High trait anxious athletes evaluated overall **coaching** behaviors more negatively than did low trait anxious athletes. In particular, high trait anxious athletes evaluated the coach's communication behaviors and the perceived cognitive/attentional effects of the coach's behavior more negatively. Athletes who scored high in cognitive anxiety also evaluated overall behaviors, and the perceived cognitive/attentional and somatic effects of the coach's behavior more negatively. Athletes who scored high in state somatic anxiety evaluated the coach's communication ability more negatively. Athletes low in self-confidence evaluated overall behaviors, the coach's supportiveness, and the perceived cognitive/attentional and somatic effects of the coach's behavior more negatively. Athletes who were highly compatible with their coach evaluated overall behaviors and each behavior factor more favorably than athletes who were less compatible with their coach.

To determine if differences in coach-**athlete** compatibility influenced the anxiety and confidence relationship, the correlations were recalculated after partialing out differences in compatibility. Partial correlations altered only the self-confidence results. A significant relationship was no longer present between low self-confident athletes and evaluations of the coach's supportiveness behaviors ($r = -.23$, p [greater than] .05) and the somatic effects of the coach's behavior ($r = -.21$, p [greater than] .05).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Trait Anxiety	20.84	4.68	10	30
Cognitive A-State	21.73	6.12	12	36
Somatic A-State	21.76	6.22	10	36
State Self-Confidence	21.99	5.36	9	36
Compatibility	6.72	1.74	1	9

Coaching Behavior Questionnaire

COG	7.70	2.24	4	14
SUP	8.99	2.48	4	15
EM/C	6.17	1.45	3	9
COM	7.57	1.70	4	13
SOM	3.90	1.34	2	8
Total	40.96	7.89	24	61

Note: Cognitive/Attentional Effects of Coach's Behavior (COG), Supportiveness (SUP), Emotional Control and Composure (EM/C), Communication (COM), Somatic Effects of Coach's Behavior (SOM).

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine the significant predictors of athletes' perception and evaluation of overall **coaching** behaviors. Compatibility was the best predictor, $F(1,66) = 33.99$, p [less than] .01, [R.sup.2] = .34. The findings indicated that athletes who perceived high compatibility with their coach evaluated their coach's behaviors more positively ([Beta] = -.58). The only other significant predictor was state cognitive anxiety, $F(2,65) = 21.79$, p [less than] .01, [R.sup.2] = .40. The higher an **athlete's** cognitive anxiety, the more negatively they evaluated their coach's behavior ([Beta] = .25).

Discussion

This study provides support for trait anxiety, state cognitive and somatic anxiety, state [TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 2 OMITTED] self-confidence, and coach-**athlete** compatibility as variables associated with athletes' perception and evaluation of **coaching** behaviors. Smoll and Smith (1989) have suggested trait anxiety is an individual difference variable in their model of leadership behaviors in sport. Consistent with previous studies examining state anxiety and state self-confidence (Kenow & Williams, 1992, 1997), this study supports adding state cognitive and somatic anxiety and [TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 3 OMITTED] state self-confidence as individual difference variables in Smoll and Smith's (1989) model for leadership behaviors in sport.

An expansion to the previous studies was the significant relationship of coach-**athlete** compatibility with athletes' perception and evaluation of **coaching** behaviors. Athletes who felt more, compared to less, compatible with their coach experienced fewer negative cognitive/attentional and somatic effects from their coach's behavior during game situations. Athletes who felt more compatible also felt more supported by their coach and evaluated his/her communication ability more favorably. These findings are consistent with those of Chelladurai (1984). He found perception/preference discrepancy on all five Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) dimensions to relate significantly to basketball players' satisfaction with their coach's leadership. If the athletes' goals, personality, and beliefs are consistent with those of their coach, the interaction of the individuals will likely be satisfactory to both parties producing a positive interpersonal atmosphere. Conversely, if the **athlete** is incompatible with the coach (i.e., the **athlete's** goals, personality and beliefs are inconsistent with those of the coach), certain psychological needs for the **athlete** may not be met. This could lead to frustration and loss of self-confidence on the part of the **athlete**. These feelings may then impact on the athletes' perception and recall of **coaching** behaviors.

An interesting discovery in this study was that as athletes' self-confidence increased, so too did coach-**athlete** compatibility (see Table 3). While this finding is interesting, there is a question of cause and effect. Does an **athlete's** low self-confidence contribute to incompatibility with the coach or does incompatibility with the coach contribute to a lessening of an **athlete's** self-confidence? All coaches enjoy working with the highly confident, self-motivated **athlete**.

However, if an **athlete** does not exhibit high levels of self-confidence, does this contribute to **coaching** behaviors that make the coach-**athlete** interaction less compatible? Or, conversely, if an **athlete** is placed in a situation where he/she feels incompatible with the behaviors expressed by the coach, can this lead to a lessening of that **athlete's** self-confidence? The research design of this study does not provide an empirical basis for answering these questions. Future researchers may wish to address this issue. From a practical standpoint, it would be beneficial for coaches to develop good rapport with and demonstrate support for (Smoll & Smith, 1989) their athletes as this should improve the coach-**athlete** interaction regardless of the causal direction of the self-confidence/compatibility relationship.

The second purpose of this study was to determine if coach-**athlete** compatibility mediated the relationship of anxiety and self-confidence with athletes' perception of **coaching** behaviors. When compatibility was controlled, trait anxiety, cognitive and somatic state anxiety, and state self-confidence were still significantly related to athletes' perception and evaluation of **coaching** behaviors. Only the self-confidence relationship with the supportiveness and somatic effects of the coach's behavior factors were altered; however, the relationships were still close to significance. Thus, it appears that compatibility has only minimal mediational effects on anxiety and self-confidence in relation to athletes' perception and evaluation of **coaching** behaviors.

From the regression analysis of this study, it appears that coach-**athlete** compatibility and athletes' cognitive anxiety are the best predictors of the way athletes will perceive and evaluate their coaches' behavior. Thus, it would appear meritorious to have coach-**athlete** compatibility added to the **athlete** individual difference variables, reflected in Smoll and Smith's model.

Carron and Bennett (1977) have pointed out that previous research on coach-**athlete** compatibility ignored the role of the **athlete** in the relationship. They suggested the importance of assessing the interactions among the needs, involvement, and contributions of both the coach and **athlete** to obtain an accurate conclusion regarding compatibility. Thus, there appears merit for adding the **athlete's** perception of coach-**athlete** compatibility to the list of **athlete** individual difference variables in Smoll and Smith's (1989) model. Lanning (1979) best illustrates this point with the following example. Assume that a coach has a dominant personality. This coach will have a strong need to be in charge of everything and everyone in the program. Now assume a new superstar point guard entering the program has a personality that produces a high need for independence and flexibility. This will probably contribute to an incompatible coach-**athlete** situation. The results of this study suggest that this incompatibility will affect that athletes' perception, recall, and evaluation of the coach's behaviors.

From a practical standpoint, it would be wise for coaches to make conscious efforts to improve their interpersonal relationships with their players, as well as

learn how to identify signals of high cognitive anxiety in their athletes. Creating positive coach-**athlete** relations and learning how to employ simple relaxation/confidence-building techniques should be the first steps in creating more receptive and positive coach-**athlete** interactions.

In conclusion, Smoll and Smith (1989) have stated, "leader effectiveness resides in both the behaviors of the leader and the eyes of the beholder." (p. 1544) Therefore, it is important to those involved in the **coaching** profession that we continue to investigate the interactions of the variables listed in Smoll and Smith's (1989) model as well as actively pursue an exploration of additional variables that might contribute to athletes' perceptions and evaluations of **coaching** behaviors and ultimately, leader effectiveness.

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