

Toward a Grounded Theory of Leadership Development in the Context of Intercollegiate Sport

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In spite of the time and effort devoted to leadership research in academic and popular literature (Pierce & Newstrom, 2008), consensus has not been reached yet on how best to define leadership (Bass, 1990), let alone on how to develop effective leaders. Most research in the area and the disagreements formed are predicated on the assumption first that leadership matters (Chelladurai, 2007) and second that it can be taught (Kotter, 1990). As researchers have begun to increasingly turn their attention to the effects of leadership in the sport context, some have started to question whether those with the inherent talents for leadership are simply drawn to the environment, or whether the environment has an effect on the leadership development of the student-athlete (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999). In essence, are the leaders on these teams developed, identified, or both?

As intercollegiate programs are constantly finding themselves under budgetary pressure, especially in Canada, administrators are persistently required to justify their presence and the resources required to maintain them in an academic setting. The study, by adding to the emerging literature around leadership development specifically for the sport domain, will help provide a better understanding of the efficacy of intercollegiate teams in promoting the development of student-athletes. Armed with the knowledge that the development of leadership tools and processes can be sharpened and transferred to other walks of life, athletics programs can be better situated in the context of the overall experience of the university student.

While it contains some genetic antecedents (Johnson, Vernon, Harris, & Jang, 2004) the concept of leadership is best described as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2007, p.3). This definition underscores, among other things, that leadership is available to anyone. The process can occur among smaller segments of an organization (Loughead & Hardy, 2004), or even between those not formally designated as leaders on a team (Loughead, Hardy, & Eys (2006). However, studies based on Rosenthal's (1974) expectancy theory show that coaches at various levels of competition give differential feedback to athletes based on their expectancy levels (Horn, 1984; Solomon, DiMarco, Ohlson, & Reece, 1998). While leadership ought to be available to everyone, coaches are instead associating leadership tendencies with a player's athletic skill (Glenn & Horn, 1993). Wright and Cote (2003) argued that while these developments show some of the characteristics of leaders in sport, they do not show how these behaviors developed.

This study aims to go one step further by exploring not only how these behaviors developed, but whether participants can reflect on how leadership development impacted their life outcomes. While Wright and Cote did analyze the leadership development of current intercollegiate student-athletes from adolescence onwards, they did not venture into the outcomes of those participants. As has been shown in prior research and theory, leadership development can still be effective at any age and does not have to be limited to adolescents (Conger, 1992; Gardner, 1990).

Data is gathered through the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews designed to enable participants to provide their firsthand experiences and to uncover their self-perceived notions of whether participation had a positive effect on leadership development (Kihl, Richardson, & Campisi, 2008). The participants are recruited from a university in the southwestern region of Ontario who played intercollegiate basketball between 1965 and 1970. The sample includes members from both the men's and women's teams in order that the underheard voices of some participants are not left out. Participants who played during these years are close to reaching the traditional age of retirement and are in a position to reflect upon their time as a student-athlete as well as their subsequent life outcomes. The interview guide is pilot tested on five participants recruited from the intercollegiate hockey team of the same era due to the similarities in the nature of the sport and schedule, as well as the similarities in age of members of the sample (Wright & Cote, 2003). Questions focus on the participants' retrospective recall of whether leadership development occurred in the intercollegiate sport context and whether this had an impact on their lives and careers. Constant comparative method is used to analyze responses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), where a priori themes, extracted from a thorough review of prior literature, are supplemented with emergent themes based on coding and analysis of participants' responses (Patton, 2002).

The results shed light on a sample of both men's and women's intercollegiate sports experiences and their perception of whether participation on these teams had an effect on their leadership development as they reflect on their subsequent careers and life outcomes. Experiences from female student-athletes ought to be extremely interesting due to sport's deep roots in male hegemony (Davis & Duncan, 2006), and the disproportionate quantity of coverage given to women's sports in general (Duncan, 2006). The findings will have implications for the debate over what type of environment is suitable for effective leadership

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development. If segments of intercollegiate sport such as basketball are found to be an effective arena in which to proactively teach leadership to student-athletes then perhaps the question of how best to develop effective leaders can begin to be answered. As Ball (1975) noted, sports teams fit the general description of a formal organization, which can be beneficial when comparing the findings in press that consistently bemoan the lack of leaders in society (Tichy, 1997; Kotter, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Gardner, 1990; Conger, 1992). Based on the findings, directions for future research will also be presented for enriching the leadership development practices of sport management practitioners. References Available Upon Request