Many researchers suggested that transformational leadership is positively associated with work and followers’ attitudes and behaviors at both an individual and organizational level as well as organizational outcomes in various industries including sport fields (Bass, 1985; Davis, 2002; Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995; Lim, & Cromartie, 2001; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). Transformational leaders help followers develop fundamental value, belief, and their attitudes to achieve a high level of performances. In particular, this type of leadership has a significant impact on psychological empowerment and organizational citizenship behavior to actively enhance organizational effectiveness (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bomer, 1996). Recent trends of leadership studies are more interested and extended in researching the mediating effect between transformational leadership and organizational effectiveness (Barroso Castro, Villegas Perinat, Casillas Bueno, 2008; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, Fetter, 1990; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, Chen, 2005) rather than beyond simply measuring the effect of the variables. It is because some research has found that there is a path to influence organizational outcomes as an indirect effect that has not been studied systematically and substantially (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, Bhatia, 2004; Barroso Castro et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2005). Considering these aspects, it is essential to identify the analysis of both direct and indirect effects as well as correlations of those factors in a variety of areas. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship among three variables (transformational leadership, psychological empowerment, and organizational citizenship behavior) and more specifically, the mediating effect of psychological empowerment between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behavior in team sport organizations.

Psychological empowerment is defined as “increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in cognitions that reflect an individual’s active orientation to his or her work role” (Spreitzer, 1995). According to Conger and Kanungo (1988), leaders who are transformational and offer collective vision in organizations are likely to well create empowered followers. Bass (1985) also emphasized it is great that providing a clear vision from leaders should motivate followers empowered in an organizational setting. Followers who perceive high level of empowerment are able to perform better tasks performances with self-efficacy and self decision-making (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Likewise in sports environment, this concept may assume that there is a great potential to make athletes feel empowered by transformational leaders during training and competitions, then it will help increase intrinsic motivation and voluntary decision making as in-role behavior when they are playing. Eventually, strengthening followers’ empowerment may act as a central mechanism of enhancing both organizational objectives and organizational effectiveness (Avolio, 1999; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Yukl, 1998). Thus, those kinds of evidence approved the relationship between transformational leadership and psychological empowerment.

Another new concept for measuring organizational effectiveness that has attracted wide attention is organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB is defined as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988, p.4). OCB plays a significant role of promoting various organizational activities although it is not an essential prerequisite at a formal task of followers. It voluntarily helps coworkers and superiors, shares organizational objectives and values with organizational members, and has cooperation together as an extra-role behavior in organizations. Podsakoff et al (1996) suggested that transformational leadership has a positive impact not only on in-role behavior but on extra-role behavior or OCB. They particularly focused on the importance of OCB in organizations that would create the benefits of organizational performances. Those concepts are referred and applied to sport settings in order to improve organizational effectiveness in sport teams because they mostly need cooperative and well-organized teamwork as well as voluntary participation for better performances.

Data were collected from total population of handball players with a total of five teams in Korean men’s professional handball league during 2009 season. The respondents age categorization was 20s (78.2%), 30s (20.5%), and 40s (1.4%) respectively. The highest group of athlete careers was more than 10 years to less than 20 years (86.1%), more than 20 years (12.5%), and less than 10 years (1.4%) respectively. A survey method was implemented including 20 items for transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1995), 12 items for psychological empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995), and 22 items for organizational citizenship behavior (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 1990) that those items were already verified in the studies. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much.” Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients for reliability showed relatively reliable scores of internal consistency for all three factors (α = .634 to .961). To test hypotheses,
regression analysis and three-step mediated regression analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986) were used.

The results indicated that head coach’s transformational leadership was a positive effect on athletes’ psychological empowerment (R-square change = .21, F (1,71) = 19.20, p < .01) and organizational citizenship behavior (R-square change = .10, F (1,71) = 8.10, p < .01). Also, the psychological empowerment positively affected on the OCB (R-square change = .35, F (1,71) = 38.98, p < .01). Finally, the psychological empowerment fully mediated the relationship between the transformational leadership and the OCB (R-square change = .36, F (2,70) = 19.44, p < .01). In accordance with Baron and Kenny’s (1986) three-step mediated regression analysis, first step was satisfied that the transformational leadership affected the mediator, the psychological empowerment ($\beta = .46, p < .01$). Second step was also valid that the transformational leadership indicated to affect the OCB ($\beta = .32, p < .01$). Third step reflected that the mediator had a significant impact on the OCB ($\beta = .60, p < .01$) so that it was finally satisfied. If these conditions all hold in the predicted direction, then the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable must be less in the third step than in the second (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Thus, this third step was not statistically significant to the second so that the psychological empowerment fully mediated the relationship between the transformational leadership and the OCB.

Overall, head coach’s transformational leadership has a positive impact and leads to effective athletes’ psychological empowerment and OCB as an extra-role behavior in the context of sports. In addition to that, the psychological empowerment fully mediates the relationship between head coach’s transformational leadership and the OCB so that awareness and importance of athletes’ empowerment are proved in team sport organizations. Thus, a new structural relationship among those three variables verified by this study will be contributed to new insight into theoretical and practical domains.