Development of a Scale to Measure Professional Athletes as Role Models

Doyeop Kim, Troy University
Gi-Yong Koo (Advisor), Troy University
Susan Kim (Advisor), Korea National Sport University

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American sports programs have continued to emphasize the dramatic play, passionate nature, and characteristics of superior athletes (Strudler, 2000). This representation has helped sports fans know a lot of official and personal information about their favorite players, such as performance records, salary, appearance, personality, medical history, and off-field conduct (Caughley, 1984). With the growing popularity of professional athletes under the spotlight, children and adolescents who participate in sports look up to these athletes (Norwich Union, 2003). As a result of this positive attitude toward professional athletes, the governments of western countries have established and operated after-school programs which utilize star athletes to promote physical activity (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007). For example, ‘Playing for success’ is a program which was designed to promote youth participation in sport by utilizing soccer players in Great Britain (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007). As such, because of prominence and visibility due to media attention, professional athletes are expected to play an important public role (Guest & Cox, 2009). Leading sports stars are celebrities, and society expects them to conduct pro-social behavior in and out of the court (Coakley, 2001; Rojek, 2006). Therefore, these athletes are highly regarded as potential role models for children and adolescents (Coakley, 2001). However, in spite of the importance of the concept, a scientific instrument to rigorously measure young people’s perception on professional athletes as role models has not been conducted systematically (Guest & Cox, 2009). Though sport commentators often talk about athletes as role models for the youth of today, discourses on this issue are not based on empirical findings. Rather, the term is superficially used to address normative behavior of professional athletes (Addis, 1996).

Previous studies (Burch & Murray, 1999; Feezell, 2005; Globus, 1998; Harris, 1994; Kellnner, 1996; Simons, 1997; Wilson & Sparks, 1996) have identified key attributes that define the concept of sports role models. The attributes include clothing styles, athletic footwear, fame, wealth, high social status, perceived positive value to society, supreme athleticism on the court, desire to win, championship, greatness throughout a career, charismatic play style, good personality, confidence, sportsmanship, fair play, community service, strong family ties, moral behaviors, hard work toward reaching a goal, dedication, commitment, love and respect for the game, and charitable work. Additionally, other studies represented several attributes of athletic role models, such as physical skills, moral behavior on and off the court, personal characteristics, interpersonal and intellectual abilities, self-actualization, giving back to society, physical characteristics, and socio-economic status (Assibey-Mensah, 1997; Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Fleming, Hardman, Jones, & Sheridan, 2005; Giuliano, Turner, Lundquist, & Knight, 2003; Guest & Cox, 2009; May, 2009; Vescio, Wilde, & Crosswhite, 2005). Furthermore, scales which were previously developed have been used to measure the relationship between a general sports role model and sports consumer behavior. For example, Rich's (1997) five-item role model scale in the management field have been used in several sports marketing studies (Bush, Martin, & Bush, 2004; Clark, Martin, & Bush, 2001; Martin & Bush, 2000). Also, the three-item sports role model factor as a part of the sport interest inventory scale was used in several sports consumer behavior studies (Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002; Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2003; Kim & Trail, 2010).

However, in spite of the importance of the sports role model concept measured by these existing scales to predict sports consumer behavior, both of these existing scales fail to fully capture various dimensions of sports role models. Little is empirically known about what characteristics are demonstrated by successful athletic role models for their admirers. By better clarifying the athletic role model construct, this scholarly work can be useful to both practitioners in guiding professional athletes’ and their followers’ normative behavior on and off the court, and scholars in applying this newly-developed scale to a new line of future research. For example, this new scale may be used to measure how on-court and off-court behavior of high-profile athletes as public role models influences the athletic careers and personal lives of student athletes and sports fans’ patronage intentions for their favorite athletes. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to develop a valid and reliable instrument to measure the multiple dimensions...
of sports role models for collegiate student athletes.

The current study reviewed the relevant literature comprehensively and identified 72 potential items to measure the construct of interest. For example, eight items were identified for athletic performance (Biskup & Pfister, 1999; Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Feezell, 2005; Fleming et al., 2005; Freedman-Doan & Eccles, 1996; Funk, et al., 2002; Giuliano et al., 2003; Guest & Cox, 2009; Harris, 1994; May, 2009; Vescio et al., 2005; Wilson & Sparks, 1996); four items were identified for social behavior off the court (Feezell, 2005; Fitzclarence & Hickey, 1998; Giuliano et al., 2003; May, 2009; Sukhdial, Aiken, & Kahle, 2002); seven items were identified for contribution to community (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Burch & Murray, 1999; Feezell, 2005; Fleming et al., 2005; Globus, 1998; Guest & Cox, 2009; May, 2009); 11 items were identified for personal qualities (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Clark et al., 2001; Giuliano et al., 2003; Guest & Cox, 2009; Lopiano, 2000; Vescio et al., 2005); 21 items were identified for professional qualities (Biskup & Pfister, 1999; Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Bush et al., 2004; Feezell, 2005; Fleming et al., 2005; Giuliano et al., 2003; Globus, 1998; Guest & Cox, 2009; Strudler, 2000; Vescio et al., 2005; Wilson & Sparks, 1996); five items were identified for morality (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Feezell, 2005; Guest & Cox, 2009); three items were identified for self-actualization (Addis, 1996; Giuliano et al., 2003; Guest & Cox, 2009; May, 2009); six items were identified for fame and fortune (Assibey-Mensah, 1997; Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Clark et al., 2001; Fleming et al., 2005; Giuliano et al., 2003; Strudler, 2000; Wilson & Sparks, 1996); three items were identified for physical appearances (Kellner, 1996; Simons, 1997; Strudler, 2000); and four items were identified for physical characteristics (Fleming et al., 2005; Giuliano et al., 2003; Vescio et al., 2005).

Researchers are recruiting approximately 500 student athletes who attend Division I universities in the North region of South Korea and who perceive professional athletes as their role models. This sample size was determined on the basis of Gorsuch's assertion (1983) that five people per item are needed to conduct an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The researchers are asking these potential participants to answer a questionnaire which consist of a series of 7-point Likert scale items that range from 1 (i.e., strongly disagree) to 7 (i.e., strongly agree). The process of developing a new scale follows the following steps: 1) item generation; 2) item evaluation; 3) scale construction (Cabrera-Nguyen, 2010, Hinkin, 1995). For the content validity of the scale, the items have been reviewed by a panel of experts in the departments of sport management, physical education, and psychology. These items have been revised based on their feedback. For the face validity of the scale, the items have been reviewed by 30 undergraduate students in the department of sport management. At this moment, a main study is being conducted by using the student-athlete sample. For a factor structure of the scale, an EFA will be conducted. The factor structure will be established based on the results of the EFA. For the reliability of the scale, an internal consistency test (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) will be conducted. The 14-item self-concept development measure was included in the questionnaire to test the criterion validity of the sport role model scale.