Student-Athletes' Psychological Well-Being in Intercollegiate Sports: Authentic Leadership and Athletes' PsyCap (ASAP) Model

Minjung Kim, East Stroudsburg University
Hyun-Woo Lee, Georgia Southern University
Bomin Paek, Seoul National University

Management - Leadership (College Sport)  
Poster  
Abstract 2017-195  
Friday, June 2, 2017  
1:50 PM  
Room: Sopris

Background and Significance
Intercollegiate sports have become one of the most competitive sport industries in recent history. In 2015, the total revenues of college sports were over than $16.2 billion, and the market of college football had about 10 million fans in the United States (SBRnet, 2016). Due to this competitive environment, intercollegiate sports have been faced with a variety of huge challenges such as assault, cheating, and drug abuse (Hums & MacLean, 2004). This goes against one of the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) core values, which is to promote student-athletes’ well-being under the amateurism principle. To achieve better athletic performance, student-athletes are pressured, resulting in high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout. Accordingly, previous sport management and psychology studies have focused on determining the factors that decrease athletes’ stress levels and help to overcome performance slumps (e.g., Grove, Eklund, & Heard, 1997; Hill, Hall, & Appleton, 2010). However, several positive psychologists (Luthans, 2002; Nelson & Cooper, 2007) have recently argued that taking a positive approach to individual strengths is a pivotal component for not only promoting individuals’ well-being but also achieving sustainable competitive advantages. In doing so, it is time to consider positive psychological states of individuals beyond higher performance in sport teams (Anagnostopoulos, Winand, & Papadimitriou, 2016).

Purpose
Based on positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), the newly emerging concept is psychological capital (PsyCap), concerning individuals’ strengths and how they can thrive in organizations (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). PsyCap ultimately improves individuals’ psychological well-being (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010), as long as it promotes individuals’ positive attitudes, behaviors, and performance outcomes in organizations (Gooty, Gavin, Johnson, Frazier, & Snow, 2009). Notwithstanding the substantial attention paid to PsyCap in the occupational psychology and management literature, there has been limited research on applying PsyCap and exploring its influences on athletes’ performance and well-being. Correspondingly, the first main purpose of this study is to explore the role of student-athletes’ PsyCap on their athletic performance and psychological well-being (PWB).

With respect to the individuals’ well-being and ability to flourish in their organizations, research on positive organizational behavior (POB) reported that a leader’s authenticity is one of the most crucial aspects for enhancing followers’ PsyCap (Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008). Authentic leadership emphasizes not only moral characteristics of leaders but also commitment to follower development (Gardner, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005; Michie & Gooty, 2005). Therefore, in our context, the second purpose of this study is to understand how coach’s authentic leadership impacts their athletes’ PsyCap levels. To achieve the research purposes, a conceptual framework of Authentic Leadership and Student-Athlete’s PsyCap (ASAP) is proposed.

Authentic Leadership and Student-Athlete’s PsyCap (ASAP) Model
Our conceptual framework consists of three main components. First, ASAP model specifies dimensions of coaches’ authentic leadership: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing (Gardner et al., 2005; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). Authentic leadership can be defined as “a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behavior that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting followers’ inputs” (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009, p.423). In our context, coaches as authentic leaders are likely to be true to themselves (i.e., self-awareness), openly share information with student-athletes (i.e., relational transparency), behave in accordance with their internal core values (i.e., internalized moral perspective),
and improve decision-making skills (i.e., balanced processing).

Second, ASAP model includes the postulate that a coach’ authentic leadership influence the levels of students-athletes’ PsyCap. Through theoretical and empirical research, the components of PsyCap have been determined by four sub-constructs: hope, efficacy, optimism, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). As a higher-order construct, PsyCap indicates “what you are becoming” in the development sense (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). In college sport teams, student-athletes under an authentic leader are able to reinforce their efficacy through the process of being encouraged to share their opinion and freely express their thoughts with their coach. Based on the high quality of the coach-athlete relationship, authentic coaches’ sincere feedback enables student-athletes to redirect paths to their goals (i.e., hope). Particularly in adverse situations (e.g., slumps or losses), student-athletes under authentic leaders are more likely to recover from setback (i.e., resilience) and even develop constructive plans (i.e. optimism) because they believe their coach will support them to sustain personal growth.

Third, the proposed framework includes the proposition that student-athletes’ PsyCap levels influence their athletic performance and PWB. An authentic leader who value the strength building of each follower is expected to have more successful performance at both the individual and group level (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009; Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004). Because student-athletes who are self-efficacious, hopeful, optimistic, and resilient set challenging but realistic goals and effectively forecast obstacles, they are more likely to invest the necessary effort in their training. PWB is the overall effectiveness of individuals’ psychological functioning based on subjective experiences associated with human development and existential challenges of life (Wright & Cropanzano, 2007). Because student-athletes’ athletic experiences are one of the crucial life domains, their experiences in sports arising from high PsyCap levels enable them to improve their PWB. Taken together, the four PsyCap constructs can synergistically contribute to student-athletes’ successful goal achievement and employee’s psychological functioning, which is the product of PWB.

Contributions

The proposed ASAP model contributes to sport management scholarship and college sport teams in a number of ways. The ASAP model is an initial attempt to explain how a coach’s authentic leadership can enhance student-athletes’ PsyCap, athletic performance and well-being. In describing the relationships among core components, the ASAP model can serve as guidance in expanding scholarship on sport management and positive organizational behavior. Foremost, the inclusion of student-athletes’ well-being offers another justification of sport team success in the sport management literature. Such approach can be carried out by concentrating on PsyCap as a new framework for creating more competitive and positive sport teams.