It is Time to Consider Student-Athletes’ Well-Being and Performance Satisfaction: The Roles of Authentic Leadership and Psychological Capital

Minjung Kim, The University of Mississippi  
Young Do Kim, Elon University  
Hyun-Woo Lee, Texas A&M University  
Han Soo Kim, The University of Mississippi  
Minseok Kwag, Cheongju National University of Education

Management - Organizational Behavior (College Sport)  
Thursday, May 30, 2019  
2:35 PM

It has pressured student-athletes to achieve improved athletic performance, resulting in high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout (Harris & Smith, 2009). In order to promote athletes’ mental health and development of life, it is necessary to expand the scope of coaching leadership studies from the follower-centered perspective. Authentic leadership was introduced as an emerging form of positive leadership that underscores the ethical and moral behaviors of leaders (Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018).

The current study endeavored to enhance the understanding of authentic leadership-based pathways leading to performance satisfaction and well-being of student-athletes. From positive organizational behavior approach, psychological capital, a high-order construct of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans & Youssef, 2004), has been regarded as an essential mediator between authentic leadership and follower-oriented outcomes (e.g., Malik, 2018). Overall, the purpose of our study was to empirically examine the influence of a head coach’s authentic leadership on student-athletes’ performance satisfaction and psychological well-being in intercollegiate sports by testing the mediating role of PsyCap in the aforementioned relationships.

We developed an online survey questionnaire and collected data from 224 student-athletes in Divisions I and II institutions in the United States. The questionnaire included scales for authentic leadership (Kim, Kim, & Reid, 2017), PsyCap (Avey, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2008), performance satisfaction (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1998), and psychological well-being (Keyes, 2005). In testing a structural equation modeling, the results showed a reasonable model fit ($S$-B $\chi^2 = 865.0$, df = 450, $p < .001$, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .06). Both direct paths from authentic leadership to performance satisfaction (H1: $\gamma = .12$, S.E. = .11, $p = .28$) and psychological well-being (H2: $\gamma = .05$, S.E. = .13, $p = .72$) were non-significant. However, the mediated paths of PsyCap from authentic leadership to athletic satisfaction (H3: $\gamma = .40$, S.E. = .07, $p < .001$) and from authentic leadership to psychological well-being (H4: $\gamma = .38$, S.E. = .09, $p < .001$) were positive and significant. Taken together, the authentic leadership of the head coaches not only fostered students-athletes’ performance satisfaction but also augmented psychological well-being only through the enhancement of PsyCap.

Our findings contribute to an improved understanding of a head coach’s authentic behavior in sport teams and illuminate how student-athletes’ performance satisfaction and psychological well-being can be augmented through PsyCap enhancement. The results of this study also present a number of practical implications for coaching leadership and student-athlete development in the intercollegiate sport setting. Foremost of these is that authentic leadership may be an attractive style to coaches in college sports teams, especially for improving athletic performance. Second, the findings of this work are expected to guide sport leaders to consider practical authentic leadership strategies to enhance the well-being of student-athletes. In future research, testing the moderating effects (e.g., school year levels, the quality of the coach–athlete relationship, division levels, and types of sports) in our research model may allow for in-depth explanations of various phenomena and conditions in sport organizations.