Meditating Role of Cohesion in Relationship between Athlete Leadership and Athlete Satisfaction

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Leadership, one of the most critical variables of group environment, has been studied extensively in sports (Aoyagi, Cox, & McGuire, 2008; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995). However, the majority of leadership research focused on leadership behavior of coaches solely, while may overlook another important leadership source in sports: athletes. Although previous studies supported the idea that athlete leadership is positively associated with cohesion and satisfaction (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Riemer & Toon, 2001; Vincer & Loughead, 2010), little research has investigated the relationship between these team dynamics altogether (Vincer & Loughead, 2010).

Loughead and Hardy (2005) suggested that coaches and athlete leaders exhibited leadership behaviors in different aspects. For instance, coaches are perceived by athletes to provide a higher level of task-orientated and autocratic behavior than athlete leaders. By contrast, athlete leaders are reported by the team members to display more social-orientated and democratic behavior to a degree beyond their coaches (Loughead & Hardy, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between athlete leadership, cohesion, and athlete satisfaction among student-athletes from both individual and team sports in the NCAA Division I institutions. Researchers have aimed to examine whether cohesion serves as a mediator between athlete leadership and athlete satisfaction at NCAA Division I level according to task and social dimensions.

A total of 171 student-athletes (i.e., team sports: n = 99, individual sports: n = 72) from the NCAA Division I institutions were recruited. All participants of this study completed a questionnaire, containing Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980), Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ; Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985), and Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1998) either through online or printed survey.

Independent t-tests were conducted to examine whether team dynamics were statistically different in team sports from individual sports. Findings indicated that no significant difference between individual and team sports existed in team dynamics (e.g., leadership, cohesion, and satisfaction). Multiple regression analyses were performed to assess the relationship between team dynamics from both task and social dimensions, respectively. Findings revealed that task cohesion partially mediated the relationship between task leadership and task satisfaction, as well as task leadership and social satisfaction. Moreover, social cohesion fully mediated the relationship between social leadership and task satisfaction and partially mediated the relationship between social leadership and social satisfaction.

Findings suggested that both task and social cohesion are playing a mediating role between athlete leadership and athlete satisfaction at NCAA Division I level, supporting Carron’s (1982) conceptual framework of cohesion, while task related leadership behaviors can affect athlete satisfaction directly. This study could add empirical evidence that athlete leadership behaviors have a considerable influence on team dynamics whereas the majority of leadership research in the field of sports management has focused on coaches. Finally, it may be interesting to further examine the effects of other independent variables (i.e., environment, personal, and team factors) on team dynamics of college sports.