

Relationship between preferred leadership style and motivation in young soccer regional players

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Abstract:

The purpose of the present study was to examine the preferred leadership profile and motivation of young soccer players. The sample was composed of 99 young male soccer players between (12 to 15 yrs). To evaluate the motivational level of the players, the Sports Motivation Scale (SMS) was used. Leadership was assessed through the Leadership Scale for Sport. Normality of data was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The comparison between different age groups was analyzed through the Mann-Whitney U test. To verify the relationship between leadership style and motivation, the Spearman correlation coefficient was applied ($P < 0.05$). The results showed that the preference for leadership profile and coaching is given by non-autocratic coaches, who focus on training instruction and help in social support, keeping players more motivated for sports practice. Intrinsic motivation was shown to be related to instruction training style ($r = 0.21$), social support style ($r = 0.20$), and autocratic leadership style ($r = -0.20$). In general, the present study seems to contribute to the knowledge of the coach-athlete relationship and how to keep athletes motivated, evidencing the best style of coaching.

Key Words: Soccer, Leadership, Motivation.

Introduction

Psychology has been gaining prominence in the sports environment, due to the influence exerted by psychosomatic aspects in this context (Rubio, 2000). Using existing evaluation instruments in the literature, it becomes possible to characterize personality profiles (Samulski, 1992), coaches' leadership profiles (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978), motivation for sports practice (Weinberg & Gould, 2001), and anxiety (Machado, 1997), among others. In addition, these data help in the planning and execution of activities by coaches and other professionals involved in sports preparation.

Studies investigating sports leadership have been conducted since the 1970s, evidencing the importance of the leader/coach's behavior on sports performance, directly impacting the psychological wellbeing of athletes (Carron, Hausenblas & Eys, 2005; Smith & Smoll, 2005). According to Becker (1999) every coach has their own style of leadership, being influenced by their experience as a sportsman, as well as coming from other aspects of their formation. In this sense, the literature shows two predominant leadership profiles in sport: autocratic and democratic.

Coaches who present an autocratic profile, often seek to establish collective guidelines and decisions alone, disregarding proposals by athletes (Costa, 2006). Regarding coaches who present a democratic profile, decisions are made in groups by majority acclamation, everyone participates and is equal and is encouraged to do so. In addition, in this leadership model, criticism and punishment are minimized (Fiedler & Chemers, 1981).

The Multidimensional Model of Leadership in Sport (MMLE) proposed by Chelladurai and Saleh (1978) presents the integration of the various approaches of leadership study, reinforcing the need for the coaches to obtain a congruence between three types of behaviors: those required by the context, those preferred by the athletes, and those effectively taken up in everyday work. These are the behaviors that postulate the effectiveness of the leader, due to the characteristics of the athletes and the limits of each situation determined by the organizational system itself. Preferred leadership attitudes are indirectly affected by group characteristics, and change according to environmental, physical and psychological attributes (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980).

The leadership profile adopted by the coach is directly related to athlete satisfaction and possibly to motivation (Horn, 2002). In a review on the subject in the literature, it is believed that there is still too little knowledge about how players are led in the training process, specifically in the under-13 and under-15 categories in soccer. This concern is important, since the coach is principally responsible for transmitting knowledge and is a professional and personal reference for athletes (Durand-Bush, 2007; Machado, 2007). In this sense, the self-

determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) presents content related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, based mainly on the dialectical relationship between the social context and living organism, confronting previous studies that are based on extrinsic and intrinsic motivation as constructs. This theory characterizes motivation as a continuous built by levels of self-determination, from the least self-determined (amotivation and extrinsic motivation) to the most self-determined (intrinsic motivation).

Given the relevance of the leadership profile adopted by the coach on the satisfaction and performance of young players, the aim of this study was to analyze the preferred leadership profile and motivation of young under-13 and under-15 football players belonging to regional teams in Brazil. This information could help coaches to structure intervention strategies more appropriate for each age group.

Material & methods

Participants

The study was characterized as descriptive with a cross-sectional design. In total, 120 players aged between 12 and 15 years belonging to an extension project at State University of Maringá, the Cocamar Soccer Training Center and the Miosotis Sport Center were evaluated for participation in the study. The following inclusion criteria were adopted: (1) participated in a systematized training process for at least two years; (2) participated in regional competitions and (3) signed the Free and Clarified Consent Term (FCCT). Thus, the final sample was composed of 99 soccer players grouped in two game categories: under-13 (n=38) and under-15 (n=61).

Test protocol

To evaluate the level of motivation of the players, a Sport Motivation Scale (SMS) was used, proposed by Brière, Vallerand, Blais and Pelletier, L.G. (1995) and validated for the Portuguese language by Bara et al. (2011). The scale consists of 28 questions classified into seven subscales quantified on a 7-point Likert scale. To reach a better understanding of the motivation data, 7 domains were grouped into 3 dimensions, as proposed by Borges et al. (2015) and Schnaider et al. (2016):

Frame 1. Three dimensions used to group seven domains of Sport Motivation Scale

Intrinsic motivation	Extrinsic motivation	Amotivation
To achieve objectives	Introjection	Amotivation
For stimulating objectives	Identification	
To know	External motivation	

Leadership was assessed through the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS) proposed by Chelladurai and Saleh (1978) and translated to the Portuguese language by Serpa, Lacoste, Antunes, Pataco and Santos (1989). The scale consists of 40 questions that represent 5 dimensions related to leader behaviors. The interviewee was required to choose from five possible answers within a 5-point Likert scale. The LSS consists of three questionnaires: the first investigates the coach's self-assessment of his/her leadership profile, the second considers the athletes' perceptions of the style of leadership exercised by their coach, and the third assesses the athletes' preferred coach profile. In the present study, only the version of athletes' preference was considered in relation to the coach's leadership profile.

Statistical analysis

Regarding data analysis, descriptive statistics with median and 1st and 3rd quartiles values are used to characterize the sample. The normality of the data was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. In the comparisons between the U-13 and U-15 categories the Mann Whitney-U test was used. The relationship between motivational and leadership variables was verified using the Spearman correlation coefficient test. The level of significance was set at 5%. The data were processed by the SPSS software package version 20.0.

Results

Table 1 presents a comparison of preferred leadership style between U-13 and U-15 groups.

Table 1. Comparison between preferred leadership style between U-13 and U-15 groups.

Dimension	U-13 (n=38)	U-15 (n=61)	P
	Md (Q1 - Q3)	Md (Q1 - Q3)	
Training and Instruction	4.27 (3.88 – 4.69)	4.46 (4.04 – 4.85)	0.19
Social support	3.38 (2.75 – 4.00)	3.50 (2.88 – 3.88)	0.83
Positive feedback	4.30 (3.80 – 4.80)	4.60 (4.00 – 5.00)	0.10
Democratic behavior	3.33 (2.97 – 3.80)	3.67 (3.05 – 3.94)	0.20
Autocratic behavior	2.20 (1.75 – 2.85)	2.20 (1.80 – 2.80)	0.95

Note: Note: Md = Median; Q1 = 1st quartile; Q3 = 3rd quartile.

No significant differences were identified between leadership preferred dimensions when comparing the U-13 to U-15 groups. Both age groups presented similar preferences regarding leadership style.

Figure 1 represents significant correlations between motivation information and preferred leadership style of young soccer regional players:

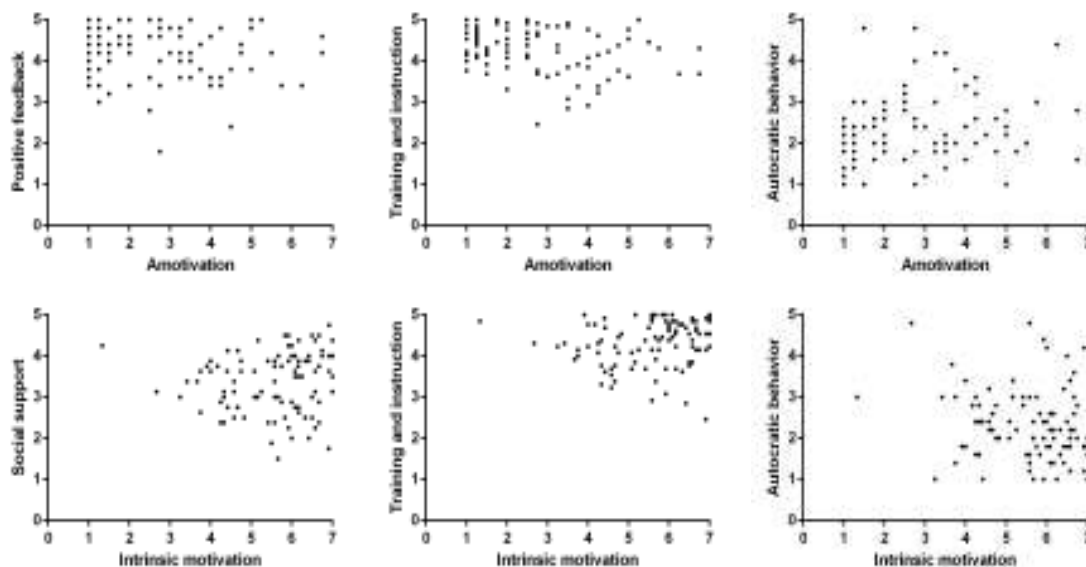


Figure 1. Correlations between motivation information and preferred leadership style of young soccer players

Intrinsic motivation presented a direct relation with “training and instruction” ($r = 0.21$), “social support” ($r = 0.20$), and “autocratic behavior” ($r = -0.20$). Amotivation showed to be related to “training and instruction” ($r = -0.31$), “positive feedback” ($r = -0.20$), and “autocratic behavior” ($r = 0.37$).

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the preferred leadership profile and motivation of young soccer regional players. Regarding the comparison between the leadership style preferred by the young athletes, Souza, Serpa, Colaço and Canato (2009) found similar results to the present study, in which players of different categories did not present different perceptions about the behavior of their coaches or about how they would like them to behave. This similarity is probably due to the proximity of age, and the fact that the players are in the period of adolescence.

In a similar study, Oliveira, Voser and Hernandez (2004) analyzed the ideal coach's leadership style preference among soccer and futsal players in the junior, juvenile, and professional categories. The findings pointed to a significant difference in preference among professional athletes over junior and juveniles athletes, where younger athletes tended to prefer a coach who gives more feedback than professional athletes.

In figure 1 a significant correlation can be observed between “training and instruction”, and intrinsic motivation ($p = 0.03$). On the other hand, when there is no “training and instruction”, a negative correlation with amotivation is identified ($p = 0.01$), where with the lack of training instruction it is possible to verify that there is no motivation to practice or even play soccer. Thus, “instruction and training” represents an important dimension for a soccer coach who works with players of 12 to 15 years old, meaning that during the training process, coaches must instruct players in terms of acquisition of technical skills and tactics related to the game (Schneider et al. 2016).

In the study conducted by Leitão, Serpe and Bártolo (1993), in which the objective was to compare the self-perceived leadership styles of high-performance coaches and the perception of the athletes in a Portuguese junior football national selection, significant differences were identified in the “autocratic” and “training and instruction” dimensions, the first being greater in the coaches' perception and the second in the view of the athletes. The coach, exercising mostly the role of commander of the team, prefers thus to have the leadership and control of the athletes, since the athletes always see the need for a training and instruction style, independent of the leadership style of the coach (Costa, Samulski & Costa, 2009).

The results show that the coach who presents social support to athletes consequently increases their intrinsic motivation ($p = 0.03$), however, if the leader does not practice social support, the levels of amotivation are not modified ($p > 0.05$). In addition, Gomes, Pereira and Pinheiro (2008), in a study with soccer and futsal practitioners, verified that men and women prefer different behaviors in their coaches, signaling higher levels of

social support in female athletes. Although this study was performed on a larger scale, this result indicates a considerable degree of importance in the social support dimension, noting that the non-adoption of this model with male athletes does not provide a significant increase in amotivation.

In relation to the preferred leadership style “positive feedback”, there is no significant difference when it is presented, however, when there is no feedback athletes tend to feel unmotivated ($p = 0.04$), thus, giving instructions and reinforcement about the activities is valuable to player development. Costa, Samulski, and Marques (2006), aiming to analyze coaches’ leadership profiles of a Brazilian state level championship in 2005, found that the situational aspects positive feedback and social support are considered fundamental to soccer coaches’ leadership. It was also shown that coaches in the professional sphere perceive the need to give positive feedback to their team, thus avoiding amotivation of the athletes in accordance with the present study.

When comparing the leadership style of youth and adult team coaches, the results of Sonoo, Hoshino and Vieira (2008) reported that the “positive feedback” dimension presented a statistically significant difference, showing that, for young athletes, the coach adopts predominantly positive feedback, a fact that is not available within adult athletes. Autocratic behavior is badly perceived by athletes as it considerably decreases intrinsic motivation ($r = -0.20$; $p = 0.04$), at the same time as significantly increasing amotivation ($r = 0.37$; $p = 0.01$), for example, intrinsic motivation ($r = -0.20$; $p = 0.04$). In this way the “Autocratic behavior” profile is not indicated to teach/train soccer to adolescents and younger categories. Duarte, Teques and Silva (2017), evaluated 213 male soccer players between 18 and 34 yrs, verifying that Autocratic behavior can negatively influence the athlete’s self satisfaction about personal and collective sporting performance, impairing the achievement of goals, as well the relationships with coaches.

Costa, Samulski and Costa (2009), aiming to investigate the leadership profile of Brazilian base category coaches verified that these are considered more autocratic and focused on the training and instruction aspects. In the four categories collected (under 13, 15, 17, and 20) it is important to note that there was no difference between coaches’ perceptions. It was concluded that coaches work with an autocratic behavior with their teams and show concern about educational and instructional behavior, which means that they seek improvement in the tactical, technical, and motivational aspects of their athletes. In contrast, the present study shows that coaches have similar leadership profiles in all categories; therefore their teaching/training methodology meets the preference of the athletes evaluated. It is worth emphasizing that this research was conducted in a regional environment with amateur players, and the study of Costa, Samulski and Costa (2009) with coaches at national level, competing in high-level competitions.

Conclusions

The investigated athletes presented the same preferred coach’s leadership style, democratic behavior, which focuses on training and instruction and also helps in social support, thus keeping players more intrinsically motivated for sports practice. On the other hand, if the leader omits positive feedback (instruction and reinforcement) and adopts an autocratic behavior, athletes increase their levels of amotivation, confirming the initial hypotheses of the study that coaches directly influence the motivation and amotivation of the athlete.

As a limitation of the research, the restriction of the sample to only three training sites within a single city is indicated. However, the results obtained by this study are presented as a theoretical subsidy for those involved in the preparation of young soccer players to become aware of the implications and importance of motivational instructions when leading and training a team.

The development of further research is suggested, investigating the issues, causes, and factors related to the motivation and preference of soccer athletes with respect to the coach and their profile and behaviors during training activities, in the different categories and pointing out the implications in the sports context.

Conflicts of interest - The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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