

# Analysis of Amateur Soccer Players' Leadership Levels in Terms of Their Positions

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership characteristics of amateur soccer players in terms of positions and some variables. 300 amateur soccer players playing in different clubs in the districts and the city centre of the province of Samsun were included in the study. A personal information form was given to subjects to find out their positions and some variables and Leadership Scale for Sport which was developed by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) and which included 40 items and five subscales (training and instruction, democratic behaviour, social support, positive feedback and autocratic behaviour) was used to find out leadership levels. SPSS 22.0 program was used in the statistical analysis of the study. When the results of the study were examined, statistically significant difference was found only in positive feedback subscale when the subjects' leadership levels were compared according to age groups and education levels ( $p < 0.05$ ), while no significance was found in other subscales ( $p > 0.05$ ). When leadership levels were compared in terms of the total period of time they played soccer, their positions, the number of clubs they played for and the state of being the captain, no statistical significance was found in all of the subscales ( $p > 0.05$ ). As a conclusion, it can be seen that leadership levels of soccer players did not differ according to positions, the state of being the captain, the total period of time they played soccer and the number of clubs they played for, while positive feedback was found to develop positively only as age and the state of education increased.

**Keywords** leadership, soccer player, position, soccer

## 1. Introduction

Leadership has been assigned great importance in sport by athletes, coaches, and spectators (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998). Investigation of leadership behaviour and the effects of leadership in sport is very important in terms of understanding the performance of sport teams as an organization. Gardner et al. (1996) described the importance of studying the relationship of leader behavior, cohesion and performance relationship. It has been indicated that there are many factors for a successful performance in sport and that the factors influencing performance are grouped in two as internal sources and external sources (Ödemiş & Karagün, 2016, p.5201) It has been emphasized that in addition to internal factors such as age, gender, intelligence and psychological state, which are independent of external effects and which are partly innate; there are also external states such as temperature, climate, equipment, spectators, social environment, friendship, economic state and coach, which result from external factors and which indirectly influence performance (Bayraktar & Kurtoğlu, 2009, p.16). Soccer is one of the sport branches greatly influenced by these internal and external factors.

Performance in soccer does not only include physical, technical and tactical skills, but also psychological skills such as imagination, showing peak performance under stress, commitment, coping with stress, competition anxiety, determining a target, attention, concentration and leadership (Beswick, 2001). The concept of leadership, which is one of these psychological effects, is defined as the behavioural process influencing individuals and the group for predetermined purposes (Barrow, 1977, p.231). A leader is a person who coordinates the group, plans the work, has a say in the group and speaks for the group; a leader's primary mission is to make sure that duties are successfully fulfilled in the group (Kaya, 1996). Various studies have shown that leadership levels and some psychological and performance parameters influence ability of perception, making positive assessment, integrating with the team, imagining, coping with stress and managing competition anxiety (Horne & Carron, 1985, p.137; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995, p.276; Summers & Russel, 1991, p.30; Maby, 1997, p.5902; Konter, 2005, p.17; Garland & Barry, 1988, p.237; Gordon, 1998, p.36; Prapavessis, 1991; Pargman, 1998, p.296; Doğan et al., 2018, p.403; Kabadayı et al., 2017; Yılmaz et al., 2017; Cavusoglu et al., 2017, p.150; Bostancı et al., 2017, p.205; Bayram et al., 2017; Keskin et al., 2016, p.1; Bostancı, 2014, p.1021). In

addition, Garland and Barry (1988) defined good performance in soccer as time players are in the game and showed that five leadership factors consisting of training and instruction, democratic behaviour, autocratic behaviour, giving positive feedback and providing social support are important in predicting performance. It was found that the factor predicting performance level was autocratic behaviour and that there was a significant difference between autocratic behaviour and lower performance. Robinson and Carron (1982) showed results supporting these results.

So far, majority of research on athlete leadership has mostly been descriptive in nature. Yukelson, Weinberg, Richardson, and Jackson (1983) examined the characteristics of collegiate athletes who were rated high as leaders compared to those rated lower in leadership status. Another topic of interest in athlete leadership has been to examine the playing position of team captains who are the formal leaders of a team. Lee, Coburn, and Partridge (1983) hypothesized that soccer players occupying a central playing position (i.e., center fullback, midfield) were more likely to be designated team captains since they occupied positions requiring high interactions with others. The results of this study indicated that captains were more likely to occupy central playing positions on soccer teams regardless of the level of competition.

The fact that players' positions can necessitate different physical and physiological requirements (Beck, 1991; Robinson & Carron, 1982, p.364; Bansgbo, 1994; Konter, 1997) can also necessitate different psychological skill requirements. Goldberg (1998) stated that physical, technical, tactical and mental requirements can differ from sport to sport and even in terms of positions played in a sport. Although studies have been conducted about positions and psychological skills in sport psychology so far, the number of studies is still limited and the results found are far from definite results. It is thought that the biggest reason for this is differences in branch, socio-economic differences and other psychological and physical characteristics. For instance, while Konter (1996) did not find a difference between positions of players in soccer and their pre-game state anxiety, Leonard (1987) found significant differences about positions in university basketball.

Based on all this information, the purpose of this study is to compare the leadership levels of amateur soccer players in terms of their positions and some parameters. The results of the study showed whether leadership levels, which have been researched in a limited number of studies and which are thought to have a significant influence on performance in terms of sport psychology, caused differences between positions in soccer, which is one of the most popular sports of our day.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Study Design*

300 male soccer players who were actively playing in the amateur sports clubs in the districts and city centre of Samsun province were included in the study. Leadership Scale for Sport-Preferred leader behaviour form developed by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) was used in the study to find out the leadership characteristics of the players. The participants filled in informed consent form and they were told that it was important to read the questions and fill in the questionnaire form carefully in terms of the validity and reliability of the study. The positions and demographic information of the participants were determined with the personal information form prepared by the researcher.

### *2.2 Leadership Scale for Sport*

Leadership Scale for Sport which was developed by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) and which included 40 items can be applied on athletes in every branch and every level. Leadership Scale for Sport consists of a total of 5 subscales. These are training and instruction, democratic behaviour, social support, positive feedback and autocratic behaviour. According to the results of analysis performed to test the reliability values of the scale used in the study, Cronbach Alpha coefficients were found as 0.73 (training and instruction), 0.82 (democratic behaviour), 0.76 (autocratic behaviour), 0.69 (social support) and 0.70 (positive feedback). In addition, total internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found as 0.79. These results are within acceptable limits that can be accepted as "good".

### *2.3 Data Analysis*

SPSS version 22.0 was used for statistical analyses. Normality assumption was examined with Shapiro-Wilk test. In case of normal distribution, groups of two were analyzed with independent t test, while groups of more than two were analyzed with ANOVA test. When the groups were not normally distributed, groups of two were analyzed with Mann Whitney U test, while groups of more than two were analyzed with Kruskal Wallis test. p value of less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

### 3. Results

Table 1. Descriptive Information of the Participants

		N	%
Level of Education	High school	92	30.7%
	Undergraduate	208	69.3%
Age group	20 years and younger	94	31.3%
	Between 21 and 25 years	162	54.0%
	26 years and younger and older	44	14.7%
Total years of playing soccer	Between 1 and 5 years	40	13.3%
	Between 6 and 10 years	164	54.7%
	Between 11 and 15 years	84	28.0%
	16 years and more	12	4.0%
Positions of players	Defense	26	8.7%
	Forward	74	24.7%
	Goal keeper	20	6.7%
	Midfielder	94	31.3%
	Right-left winger	20	6.7%
	Right-left back	34	11.3%
	Stopper	32	10.7%
Number of clubs	1	44	14.7%
	2	64	21.3%
	3	60	20.0%
	4	40	13.3%
	5 or more	92	30.7%
Have you ever been a captain during the time you played soccer?	Yes	180	60.0%
	No	120	40.0%

Table 2. Comparison of Leadership Characteristics based on the players' level of education

			N	Average	Std. Deviation	p
Training and instruction	Level of education	High School	92	53.43	±3.46	0.505
		Undergraduate	208	53.60	±4.24	
Democratic behaviour	Level of education	High School	92	36.22	±3.13	0.891
		Undergraduate	208	36.28	±3.84	
Social support	Level of education	High School	92	33.17	±2.84	0.815
		Undergraduate	208	33.65	±4.68	
Positive feedback	Level of education	High School	92	18.20	±2.57	0.039*
		Undergraduate	208	19.23	±2.63	
Autocratic behaviour	Level of education	High School	92	19.22	±2.20	0.785
		Undergraduate	208	19.34	±2.50	

\*  $p < 0.05$

When soccer players' leadership characteristics were compared in terms of their levels of education, significance was found only in positive feedback subscale ( $p = 0.039$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), while no significance was found in other subscales ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 2).

Table 3. Comparison of soccer players' leadership characteristics in terms of age groups

			N	Average	Std. Deviation	p
Training and instruction	Age group	20 and younger	94	54.02	±3.78	0.747
		Between 21-25	162	53.14	±4.27	
		26 and older	44	54.05	±3.42	
Democratic behaviour	Age group	20 and younger	94	36.43	±3.13	0.599
		Between 21-25	162	36.36	±4.01	
		26 and older	44	35.55	±3.13	
Social support	Age group	20 and younger	94	33.68	±2.37	0.379
		Between 21-25	162	33.48	±5.18	
		26 and older	44	33.23	±3.29	
Positive feedback	Age group	20 and younger	94	18.19	±2.57	0.047*
		Between 21-25	162	19.07	±2.57	
		26 and older	44	19.86	±2.80	
Autocratic behaviour	Age group	20 and younger	94	19.26	±2.26	0.608
		Between 21-25	162	19.22	±2.53	
		26 and older	44	19.68	±2.30	

\* p&lt;0.05

When soccer players' leadership characteristics were compared in terms of age group, significance was found only in positive feedback subscale ( $p=0.047$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), while no significance was found in other subscales ( $p>0.05$ ) (Table 3).

Table 4. Comparison of soccer players' leadership characteristics in terms of total years of playing soccer

			N	Average	Std. Deviation	p
Training and instruction	Total years of playing soccer	Between 1 and 5 years	40	52.25	±4.09	0.172
		Between 6 and 10 years	164	53.50	±3.80	
		Between 11 and 15 years	84	54.31	±4.43	
		16 years and more	12	53.17	±2.79	
Democratic behaviour	Total years of playing soccer	Between 1 and 5 years	40	36.20	±3.38	0.215
		Between 6 and 10 years	164	35.98	±2.73	
		Between 11 and 15 years	84	37.19	±4.93	
		16 years and more	12	33.83	±3.49	
Social support	Total years of playing soccer	Between 1 and 5 years	40	34.47	±7.46	0.792
		Between 6 and 10 years	164	33.21	±2.29	
		Between 11 and 15 years	84	33.52	±5.26	
		16 years and more	12	34.33	±1.97	
Positive feedback	Total years of playing soccer	Between 1 and 5 years	40	18.25	±3.11	0.431
		Between 6 and 10 years	164	18.78	±2.64	
		Between 11 and 15 years	84	19.50	±2.33	
		16 years and more	12	18.83	±3.06	
Autocratic behaviour	Total years of playing soccer	Between 1 and 5 years	40	19.55	±2.42	0.589
		Between 6 and 10 years	164	19.37	±2.24	
		Between 11 and 15 years	84	19.24	±2.74	
		16 years and more	12	18.00	±2.28	

When soccer players' leadership characteristics were compared in terms of total years of playing soccer, no statistical significance was found in all subscales ( $p>0.05$ ) (Table 4).

Table 5. Comparison of soccer players' leadership characteristics in terms of their positions

			N	Average	Std. Deviation	p
Training and instruction	Positions of players	Defense	26	53.00	±3.42	0.863
		Forward	74	53.43	±3.78	
		Goal keeper	20	53.80	±5.73	
		Midfielder	94	54.17	±3.82	
		Right-left winger	20	52.90	±2.28	
		Right-left back	34	52.94	±5.75	
		Stopper	32	53.31	±3.26	
Democratic behaviour	Positions of players	Defense	26	35.23	±3.90	0.290
		Forward	74	35.78	±2.89	
		Goal keeper	20	36.00	±2.79	
		Midfielder	94	36.28	±2.76	
		Right-left winger	20	35.10	±2.38	
		Right-left back	34	36.24	±3.31	
		Stopper	32	39.06	±6.67	
Social support	Positions of players	Defense	26	32.23	±4.38	0.825
		Forward	74	33.17	±2.35	
		Goal keeper	20	36.00	±8.89	
		Midfielder	94	33.15	±2.32	
		Right-left winger	20	33.30	±1.70	
		Right-left back	34	35.65	±7.29	
		Stopper	32	32.63	±3.28	
Positive feedback	Positions of players	Defense	26	17.92	±3.43	0.461
		Forward	74	18.68	±2.40	
		Goal keeper	20	20.10	±2.23	
		Midfielder	94	19.32	±2.64	
		Right-left winger	20	18.90	±3.35	
		Right-left back	34	18.24	±2.59	
		Stopper	32	19.06	±2.26	
Autocratic behaviour	Positions of players	Defense	26	18.85	±2.27	0.701
		Forward	74	19.49	±2.59	
		Goal keeper	20	18.80	±1.55	
		Midfielder	94	19.13	±2.48	
		Right-left winger	20	19.90	±2.33	
		Right-left back	34	19.29	±2.64	
		Stopper	32	19.69	±2.33	

When soccer players' leadership characteristics were compared in terms of their positions, no statistical significance was found in all subscales ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 5).

Table 6. Comparison of soccer players' leadership characteristics in terms of the number of clubs they played in

			N	Average	Std. Deviation	p
Training and instruction	Number of clubs	1	44	52.32	4.60	0.646
		2	64	54.16	4.21	
		3	60	53.57	4.39	
		4	40	53.75	3.52	
		5 or more	92	53.61	3.51	
Democratic behaviour	Number of clubs	1	44	35.86	2.71	0.287
		2	64	36.12	3.34	
		3	60	35.30	2.81	
		4	40	37.05	2.98	
		5 or more	92	36.83	4.72	
Social support	Number of clubs	1	44	32.95	2.65	0.622
		2	64	34.47	5.60	
		3	60	32.69	3.04	
		4	40	33.70	1.92	
		5 or more	92	33.52	4.95	
Positive feedback	Number of clubs	1	44	18.36	3.08	0.107
		2	64	18.66	3.12	
		3	60	18.50	2.24	
		4	40	18.55	2.48	
		5 or more	92	19.78	2.26	
Autocratic behaviour	Number of clubs	1	44	19.32	2.42	0.723
		2	64	19.47	2.65	
		3	60	19.33	2.19	
		4	40	18.65	2.32	
		5 or more	92	19.43	2.46	

When soccer players' leadership characteristics were compared in terms of the number of clubs they played in, no statistical significance was found in all subscales ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 6).

Table 7. Comparison of soccer players' leadership characteristics in terms of their state of being captain

			N	Average	Std. Deviation	p
Training and Instruction	Have you ever been a captain during the time you played soccer?	Yes	180	53.87	3.66	0.476
		No	120	53.07	4.46	
Democratic behaviour	Have you ever been a captain during the time you played soccer?	Yes	180	36.34	3.98	0.813
		No	120	36.13	3.04	
Social support	Have you ever been a captain during the time you played soccer?	Yes	180	33.21	2.85	0.747
		No	120	33.93	5.64	
Positive feedback	Have you ever been a captain during the time you played soccer?	Yes	180	19.07	2.52	0.600
		No	120	18.68	2.83	
Autocratic behaviour	Have you ever been a captain during the time you played soccer?	Yes	180	19.09	2.35	0.162
		No	120	19.62	2.47	

When soccer players' leadership characteristics were compared in terms of the state of being captain, no statistical significance was found in all subscales ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 7).

#### 4. Discussion

When the results of the existing study were examined in general, difference was found only in positive feedback subscale in terms of the variables of age (Table 3) and level of education ( $p < 0.05$ ). These results show that as age increases, the characteristic of positive feedback also increases and similarly, as the level of education increases, the style of positive feedback develops. However, in terms of the leadership levels of soccer players based on their positions,

which is the primary purpose of our study, statistical difference was not found in any of the subscales. Similarly, no statistical significance was found in the variables of total years of playing soccer, how many clubs soccer players played in and their state of having been a captain ( $p > 0.05$ ).

There are a great number of studies conducted in literature examining leadership characteristics according to different branches. However, there are limited numbers of studies on soccer. When some of these are examined, it can be seen that none of the positions had more important or more dominant characteristics when compared with the others. Regardless of position, some players in the team were found to be more dominant in some psychological parameters when compared with others. Konter (1996) examined soccer players' pre-game state anxiety in terms of their positions and did not find a difference. Leonard (1987) on the other hand found significant difference in basketball players in terms of positions. In the Orientation Inventory they applied on 17 different soccer teams and their leaders in English Football League, Cooper and Payne (1972) found that attacking players were significantly more self-orientated than both Staff and Defense, while managers were more task-oriented than attackers and defense. Türksoy's (2006) study which assessed leadership characteristics of soccer players in Super League and First League in terms of their positions did not show any differences for defense, midfield and forward players in terms of democratic, training and instruction and autocratic behaviour subscales, while positive feedback subscale was found to differ significantly for goalkeepers. While training and instruction subscale was found to differ for midfielders in the present study which was conducted on amateur league, in Türksoy's study which was conducted on Super League and First League, positive feedback subscale was found to differ significantly for goalkeepers. It is thought that such a difference occurs from the positions of players and league status. In another study conducted, Chelladurai and Riemer (1980) grouped soccer players in two as offensive and defensive. The results of this study showed that defense players' scores about democratic behaviour subscale differed significantly. It is thought that the difference between this study and our study results from the fact that the study was conducted on only one team, the concept of position was grouped only in two (defense and offense) and there were cultural differences between the countries.

Çakıoğlu (2003) conducted a study on university students playing soccer and reported that the results obtained for all positions showed a significant difference on autocratic behavior characteristics. In Donuk's (2006) study, which analyzed coaches' behaviours on professional soccer players, it was found that coaches in Turkish Professional soccer leagues had an autocratic characteristic according to athletes' perceptions. As can be seen from these results, there are differences between positions and leadership levels. It is thought that these differences can be due to players' state of being professional or amateur, the leagues they play in, socioeconomic levels, lifestyles and a great number of psychological factors. In addition, in terms of some of the characteristics of players who had leadership characteristics, Yukelson et al. (1983) stated that besides skills and experience, internal control was also a good indicator in predicting leadership status. Players who felt more control on their environment were found to have higher scores in leadership scale. Glenn et al. found that players who had high competence perceptions and global self-respect, low external control and high psychological androgyny were assessed as having higher leadership characteristics by their friends. The aforementioned studies addressed personality characteristics about player leadership. In terms of coaches, competence/ability was found to be associated with leadership characteristics. It can be argued that one of the significant concepts associated with success and performance in soccer is being the team captain. In professional soccer, it is a known fact that generally players who have been in the team for a longer time, who show a more regular and stable performance, who have more experience and who show more leadership characteristics become the captain (Konter, 2004). In the present study, no statistical significance was found in leadership levels when the state of being captain was taken into consideration (Table 7). However, Pargman (1998) stated that players who had high success motivation were assigned to leadership position by their coaches with a higher possibility and concluded that this was because coaches considered having a motivation for success as a primary factor for success. Konter (2004) reported that coaches generally expected players with physical ability and skills to be leaders or chose such players as captain and also players determined leadership about their friends with different criteria. According to these results, coaches can expect leadership from players who are not accepted by other players in the team or they can assign such players as the captain. This in turn reveals the question whether the captains in the team are a real leader. That is, coaches generally choose captains who are success oriented and who have skills, experience and professionalism in terms of soccer and this choice sometimes causes them to make players who do not have leadership characteristics to captain teams. The result that there were no significant differences between the state of being captain and leadership levels can be explained with these.

As a conclusion, it can be seen that leadership levels in soccer did not differ according to factors such as position, state of being captain, years of playing soccer and the number of clubs players played in and that only positive feedback states developed significantly as their age and level of education increased. Based on these results and the literature, it is thought that leadership does not only depend on players' experience or positions in their field, but can develop with other psychological and sociological factors and that soccer players' leadership characteristics will stand out more as their age and level of education increase.

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