

RELATIONSHIP COACH-ATHLETE: OUTSTANDING TRENDS IN EUROPEAN RESEARCH**

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Abstract

Sports performance, although depending on individuals' characteristics, also reflects the way coach-athlete relationship takes place in the sport preparation process. Social psychology of sport has developed the study of the interaction processes between those actors, aiming at having a better understanding of them and at having a conceptual basis to propose the management of that relationship in order to make it more productive in terms of social and sport dynamics. International research has been following different approaches in the study of this subject: (1) the social-emotional approach has been pointing out to the emotional component resulting from the interaction between coach and athlete, which may have both positive, or negative effects on the athlete's adapting behaviours, as well as on the affective balance of the dyad. Empirical research on satisfaction, drop out, self-esteem or self-efficacy are some examples of research topics in this field, as well as those produced within the scope of analytical psychology models; (2) the organisational approach takes into account the concept that sport teams are organisations that despite having specific characteristics, can be studied according to the models of organisational psychology. Thus, the relationship coach-athlete is studied under the leader-member perspective. Chelladurai's Multidimensional Model of Leadership in Sport considers the antecedents and consequences of leader's intervention, as well as the behaviours developed by him/her. It has been the most productive model regarding international research; (3) the behavioural approach has been investigating the coach's concrete behaviours in training or competition by means of observational methodologies, inspired by Smoll's & Smith's Mediation Model, which classifies the coach's behaviours in interactional categories. Therefore, the coach will be able to evaluate his/her effect upon the athlete and to introduce the needed changes in his/her behaviour. This article discusses these models referring to the main results in international research and also presents a model of coach's anxiogenic behaviours in the context of the sport training process.

Key Words: coaching; leadership; relationship coach-athlete

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INTRODUCTION

Interaction processes between athletes and coaches have always been considered to be determinant factors for sports performance, for its repercussion at the behavioural, cognitive and emotional aspects of the actors. This influence is specially important in the athlete, because of the meaning given by competitive results to the whole investment in the process, by athletes, coaches, and sports organisations.

For instance, Vanek (1989) discusses the psychological processes underlying competition, emphasising those concerning the relationship coach-athlete and the importance of the coach's role in influencing and managing the athlete's behaviour. This author reports that the coaches' interpretation of good and bad performances influences deeply the athletes' success/failure because of the emotional impact it has on them. He concludes that both actors need learning to know each other, because co-operation between them is the psychological basis of the individualisation of coaching. In our opinion, the coach is responsible for initiating, not only the work of hetero-knowledge, but also of self-knowledge, because of his/her functions in the process, and of his/her supposed maturity, experience and education. Davis (1989), writes that the coach's influence upon their athletes will increase in the measure the athletes will perceive that he/she understands how athletes are experiencing the competitive situation. This fact is an important contribution to the harmony of attitudes and thinking between the actors, what has a significative impact on the success of the dyad.

Crevoisier (1985), in his inquiry to French football coaches, found three trends regarding the opinions on the coach-athlete relationship: (1) they must be intense, beyond professional issues, and mainly oriented towards human relations; (2) they must be distant and limited, mainly oriented towards the task; and (3) they must be frequent, depending on the players' needs and characteristics. On the other hand, he also found that a number of subjects consider authoritarianism as a need, in a type of relationship where players are considered to be workers who must follow the higher competence of their coaches. However, some other subjects admit the usefulness of a strong communication between both actors.

Following the line of similar reports in international literature, Carrier (1992) calls the reader's attention to the coach's strong control and influence on the athlete's behaviour extra-training and competition, namely in the decision of consulting the doctor or the psychologist. Also the impact of coach's emotions on their athletes is referred to by different authors, like Jarov (1982) and Davis (1989), that enhance the importance of the leader's self control in order not to increase the athlete's stress.

Notwithstanding the importance of these issues, only 6% of the articles on *The Sport Psychologist* are on the relationship coach-athlete (Vealey, 1993). Trudel, Côté & Donohue (1993) also wrote that there was very limited consistent knowledge on this matter until the 80's. In that decade a more systematic and scientific research began, specially due to the observational studies, but we may come to similar conclusions regarding research on leadership behaviours of coaches from Chelladurai's review (1993).

In general, conceptual models aim at identifying and classifying the coaches' behaviours. That is the case of the Multidimensional Model of Leadership in Sports (Chelladurai, 1978), the Mediation Model of Leadership (Smith & Smoll, 1979), and the Normative Model of Decision Styles in Coaching (Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985). The Dynamic Model of Coaching (Côté, Trudel & Salmela, 1993) intends to be a global and systemic perspective, explaining the training-competition process centred on the coach intervention. Much of the international research — these included the European — is supported by these models, mainly regarding the behavioural and organisational approaches. However, in what concerns the social-emotional approach, we may suggest that the French analytical orientation is a leading one. This paper will discuss the relationship coach-athlete organised in these three approaches, specially highlighting the European research on the topic. A model of the coach's anxiogenic behaviours in the context of sport training process will be presented as well.

THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL APPROACH

This approach has been pointing out to the emotional component resulting from the interaction between coach and athlete, which may have both positive and negative effects on the athlete's adapting behaviours, as well as on the affective balance of the dyad. Although American authors have also produced some research, this has been mainly developed by the Europeans, namely by the French psychologists. The relationship coach-athlete is considered here beyond the instrumental aspects towards sports achievement, which has inspired most of the research, and it deals with the mutual affective-emotional influences experienced by coach and athlete, taking place in the interactive process where they both are actors. According to Levêque (1992), the intensity of the relationship comes from the deep investment in one activity shared by both actors, which is expressed by their strong effort during the coaching process, as well as by the significant periods of life in common, and shared emotions and tensions. This author underlines the fact that the unique sport achievement is the idealised object of two persons, that is reached through the performance of one of them:

the athlete. That is the reason why there is a mutual dependency which can only be understood in the context of each dyad because it responds to each member history and psychological dynamics, within the frame of the institutional constraints.

Chappuis & Thomas (1988) also highlight the emotional factors in the dyad, and consider that the athletes' dependency on their coach may be explained by their need of safety in the context of uncertainty and anxiety, regarding the competitive situation. The authors admit that sometimes these conditions may lead to the use of autocratic behaviours by the coach, but they suggest that he should stimulate the athlete's creativity, autonomy and self-confidence, to be developed by means of their participation in the team management. This will contribute to the two complementary functions of technical development and affective relationships. Carrier (1992) refers to the complexity of the coach's task: he/she must look self-confident and controlled in order to have a positive influence on the emotions of his/her athletes, despite the atmosphere of uncertainty and doubts where his/her intervention takes place. Bergerone, Cei, Ceridono & Formica (1988), suggest that the children's motivations for sport reflect their significant adults: the coach emerges as a reference person, specially during pre-adolescence and adolescence when the youngsters tend to separate from family, looking for new identifying models.

The multidimension of the coach's role has been pointed out by a number of authors in the last decades (e.g.: Carrier, 1992; Chappuis & Thomas, 1988; Thomas Missoum & Rivolier, 1987; Chauvier, 1987; Chappuis & Levèque, 1980; Antonelli & Salvini, 1978). Indeed, the coach faces the task of not only promoting the instrumental production but also regulating the affective relations; the athletes' perception of confident or symbolic parental identification; the need for authoritarian interventions or the source of references concerning the athlete's body. All this leads both to different and sometimes contradictory feelings projected on him/her by athletes, and also to counter-transference phenomena within or out of the sport context.

The social-emotional approach is not only connected to the analytic orientation. It also includes some empirical research developed by different authors. For instance, Kaliopuska (1993) found that Finnish non-professional coaches exhibited assertive and narcissism behaviours as a compensation to low levels of perceived self-esteem. Consequently, the empathy with the athletes decreased, leading to a disturbed coach-athlete relationship. Salminen & Liukkonen (1983), in their research including 400 Finnish athletes from various sports and their 68 coaches, concluded that the coach-athlete relationship is strongly emotionally based. In this study, the affective component of the coaches' behaviour observed in the training sessions, revealed the highest and significative correlations with their leadership style. It seems that the coach

who cares about the athletes' opinions and feelings, has a more positive relationship with them. On the other hand, Teipel (1993), who carried out a research with 230 German football players from different levels of competition, reports that coaches may be one of the most important source of stress originating bad performances.

Rosado, Campos & Aparício (1993) highlight the importance of the coaches' enthusiastic behaviours, as well as its perception by athletes, as optimising factors of relationship, having positive effects in coaching. In their research involving Portuguese subjects, it was possible to identify a set of enthusiasm and non-enthusiasm indicators which have mainly emotional contents. They concluded that enthusiastic behaviours are more frequent, and that there is an important variability in every new training session. We may probably suggest that the coach's social-emotional influence is a result of his/her spontaneous emotional states which, transmitted to the athlete, have a consequent impact in his/her affective-behavioural reactions.

THE BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH

The behavioural approach systematises research aiming at verifying in a direct way, the coach's influence upon the attitudes and behaviours of their athletes during the coaching process. However, some other studies about coach's behavioural modification have been reported too. Observation, questionnaires, and interviews involving athletes and coaches, are the methods used in this approach. Taking into account that the coach is a behavioural modifier of athletes, most of the research, tries to find out what kind of influence does take place in the process. For example, Martin & Lumsden (1987) state that in order to enhance sports performance, the coach must specifically and frequently evaluate the athlete's behaviour; use positive procedures of behaviour modification; distinguish developing and maintaining desired behaviours; encourage athletes to compete with themselves regarding patterns of excellence; constantly self-evaluate, experiment and re-evaluate coaching methods; and usually involve athletes in the process.

Research suggest that the coaches influence the athletes' behavioural patterns beyond technical aspects. Escarti, Garcia-Ferriol & Cervello (1993), following Bandura's social learning model, studied 351 Spanish male and female youngsters between 13-16, in judo and swimming. They concluded that the coach is an important source of influence concerning the athletes' motivation and perception of self-efficacy. It was also verified that athletes with higher levels of self-efficacy evaluated better their coaches. The pygmalion effect seems to take place in sport activities too (e.g.: Davis, 1989; Martinek, Crowe

& Rejeski, 1982). Indeed, the coach's expectation concerning the athletes' sport potential has its expression in their performance and evolution, specially regarding those who are younger and have lower self-esteem.

Also interesting is the fact that coaches seem to be very pleased with the feeling they experience when modelling the athletes' characteristics. Zukowska & Zukowska (1993), in their study of 361 Polish coaches from 19 sports and having different levels of education, concluded that modelling, influencing and developing abilities of youngsters were the most valued factors in their coaching activity. In fact, Jarov (1982) expresses the philosophy of the former socialist countries, by stating that the coach should educate the athlete's will in "a process directed towards the influence of thinking, feelings and attitudes of sports people, in order to shape and develop their qualities of constant volition that are necessary to reach the victory on behalf of the team, of the club, or of sport in general" (p.25). We just would like to raise the question whether this explicit socialist principles are exclusive of the system, or may be implicit in other European societies...

The French author Vom Hofe (1987) agrees that the coach has a determinant influence in the athletes towards conformity, namely regarding his/her own values. He suggested that it comes from the coach's power concerning social control, and from the athletes' wish to please him/her. His research revealed that subjects competing in an intermediate level, had higher levels of conformity as compared to those in lower competitive levels, who have more diversified reactions concerning the coach's pressure.

The intervention in competition has also been studied by some European researchers. However it is not as productive and systemised as Salmela's international group's (Baria, Salmela, Côté, Russel, Moraes, Baier, Ping & Pristarincha, 1993; Baria & Salmela, 1987; Salmela, Petiot, Hallé & Régnier, 1980; Salmela, 1979). Isberg (1993) analysed the coach's type and quantity of messages during the game, in top level collective sports in Sweden. The results revealed that the instructions were the most frequent messages, followed by positive reinforcement and social support. Pina & Rodrigues (1993) studied Portuguese coaches' behaviours and their athletes' reactions, in different levels of competition, in volleyball, during "time out" and "set changing". The most frequent behavioural categories were "prescriptive", "auditory", "team" and "tactic", respectively in the dimensions "object", "form", "direction" and "content". Regarding the athletes' reaction, the authors verified that it was 100% "attentive", and mostly "concordant". It was also concluded that lower level teams had higher values in the dimensions "rejection" of athletes and "positive affection", "technical" and "psychological" of coaches.

As to the coaches' intervention before the game and during breaks there is little research (Crevoisier, 1985; Davis, 1989; Schellenberger, 1990) and

different perspectives. However, we may conclude that sometimes: a) it is too much naïf; b) affected by coach's emotions; c) may have negative emotional effects in some players; d) should be more planned and systematic.

Scientific research studies pointed out to the importance of the coach in psychological management and regulation of athletes and teams during competitions, which seems to be accomplished in an intuitive way. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to suggest that the importance of this function should be rationally carried out, and taking into consideration the data from psychological research.

Some research concerning the behavioural modification of coaches is reported as well. Barata & Lacoste (1988) developed a case study with a Portuguese basketball coach, who showed a set of behaviours to be eliminated or modified. After giving him the feedback regarding the diagnostic evaluation, the authors registered the coach's behaviours during each training session and gave him the correspondent feedback again. At the end of the program, it was observed that the coach's behaviour had modified according to the objectives. Similar research on coach's behavioural modification had already been reported by Cratty & Hanin (1981).

THE ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH

This approach is based on the concept that sport teams are organisations with unique characteristics, within a broader organisational context, where the coach acts as a leader who must respect the organisational aims and objectives, as well as the members and situational characteristics. On the other hand his/her personal factors have expression in his coaching behaviours.

Most of the research has adopted Chelladurai's Multidimensional Model of Leadership which takes the antecedents and consequences of leader's intervention into account, as well as the behaviours developed by him/her, and uses the author's "Leadership Scale for Sports" (LSS) (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978) as an evaluation tool. LSS classifies the coach's behaviour according to his/her interaction style (instruction, positive feedback, and social support) and decision making style (autocratic and democratic). Data from studies on athletes' perceptions or preferences about their coaches' behaviours, as well as on coaches' self-perception, reveal that the higher values concern positive feedback (Leitão, Serpa & Bártolo, 1993, in Serpa, 1993; Liukkonen, Salminen & Telama, 1989; Serpa & Almeida, 1994; Serpa & Valadares, 1991; Sanches & Serpa, 1991, in Serpa, 1992) and instruction (Carvalho & Serpa, 1991, in Serpa, 1992; Serpa & Antunes, 1989; Serpa, Pataco & Santos, 1989). In what concerns to decision making, autocratic behaviours have the lowest values in some studies

(Serpa & Almeida, 1994; Serpa & Valadares, 1991; Sanches & Serpa, 1991; Leitão, Serpa & Bártolo, 1993) while democratic behaviours are less frequent in some others (Liukkonen, Salminen & Telama, 1989; Serpa & Antunes, 1989; Serpa, Pataco & Santos, 1989; Carvalho & Serpa, 1991).

Piéron (1985) tried to interpret the decision making process by suggesting that the autocratic style is more adequate in complex and important problems, but the athletes' participation in decision making is preferred when only one of these attributes is present. On the other hand, in the absence of any of those attributes, there is no specific preference, because the situation is considered not to be important.

Regarding gender as the independent variable, Salminen, Liukkonen & Telama (1990) verified that the female Finnish coaches were perceived by the athletes as less democratic and with more social support behaviours as compared to men. These female coaches perceived themselves as having less instruction, social support and positive feedback behaviours as compared to male coaches. Serpa & Valadares (1991), concluded that Portuguese judo coaches were more autocratic towards male than towards female athletes.

Leadership behaviours have been related to athletes' maturity, taking into account the level of competition, age, or sport experience. Crespo, Balaguer & Atienza (1993), report that Spanish tennis coaches use more autocratic behaviours with beginners and intermediate groups, than with advanced groups. Serpa & Valadares (1991) verified that 285 Portuguese judo athletes perceived more frequency in autocratic behaviours as experience increased. If we also analyse results from other studies (e.g.: Carvalho & Serpa, 1991; Liukkonen & Salminen, 1990; Serpa, 1990), research on this topic seems not to be conclusive, which may be due to the fact that the whole phenomena is a reflex of a multifactor interaction which cannot be considered separately.

Research previously reviewed, also suggests that the coaches' characteristics (gender, age, professional experience) influence leadership styles, and that there are differences between the athletes' perception and the coaches' self-perception. The type of sport is also related to different leadership styles, suggesting that a more structured leadership may be adequate when there are diverse tasks and interdependence among the group members.

Although performance is the reason for sports, there are only a few international studies regarding this topic as a consequence of leadership behaviours. This happens in the European context, where results (Serpa & Antunes, 1989; Serpa, Pataco & Santos, 1989) don't allow us to come to reliable conclusions. The same can be said regarding European research on satisfaction as an output of leadership, although Sanches & Serpa (1991) had similar results of the Canadian and American researchers, where satisfaction tends to be related to the perceptions of the democratic and instruction dimensions.

CONCLUSIONS FROM REVIEWED RESEARCH

European research on coach-athlete relationship follows international patterns, namely the ones reported to American and Canadian literature concerning behavioural and organisational approaches. Results also point out to the same direction. The socio-emotional approach, however, has been more popular among European psychologists.

In short, the main ideas can be summarised as follows:

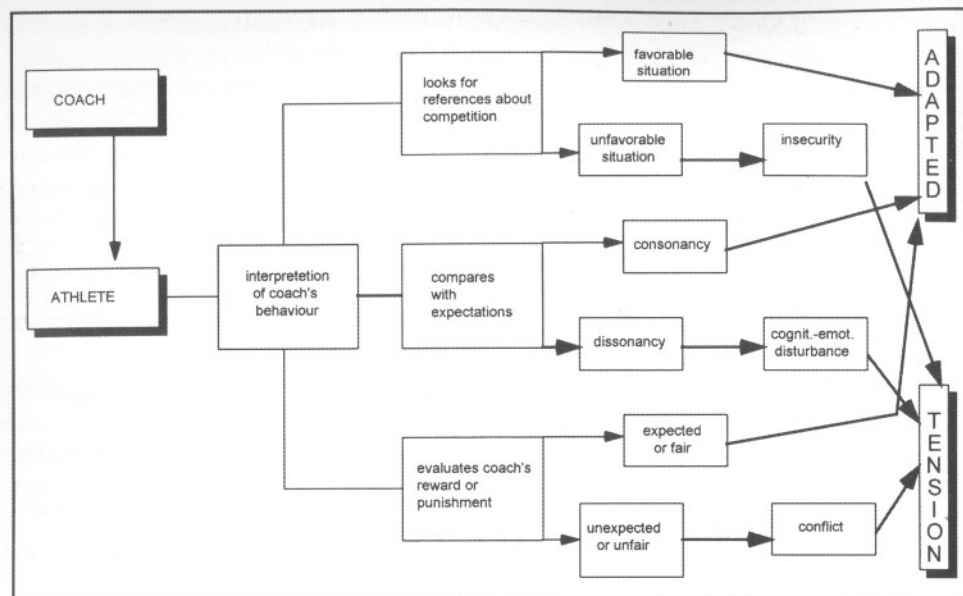
- the coach is a significant person to athletes in general;
- the relationship coach-athlete is an important factor affecting sport performance;
- through observation or questionnaires, research has mostly described the coach's behaviours and related them to the athletes' behaviours;
- the coaches' positive behaviours have been privileged by researchers;
- although the emotional component is an outstanding one in the relationship coach-athlete, there is not enough research on the coach's behaviours leading to athletes' negative emotions.

THE MODEL OF COACH'S ANXIogenic BEHAVIOURS

The Model of Coach's Anxiogenic Behaviours takes into consideration that the coach and his/her interaction with the athlete is often a source of tension and anxiety, and it proposes a framework to understand and study this negative influence of coaches on athletes. Based on the cognitive social psychology paradigm, it considers that the athlete's perception of verbal and non-verbal behaviour of his/her coach, determines cognitions, emotions and behaviours related to the competitive context where interaction takes place.

In this Model, by antecedents we mean the coaches' verbal and non-verbal behaviours, and by consequences the athletes' emotional reactions. It is suggested that the athlete interprets the coach's behaviours by comparing them to the cognitive elements mediating his/her emotions. When perception is consonant to the desired or expected structure, the athlete's adapting reactions take place. When this doesn't happen, tension and anxiety are experienced. Three types of conditions can take place:

1. Concerning the situation. When the athlete faces an unstable competitive situation, he/she looks for some signs from his/her coach, in order to interpret and understand how competent he/she is to solve problems. If these signs make him perceive the situation as a favourable one, he will have an adapted behaviour. On the contrary, if



Model of Coach's Anxiogenic Behaviours (S. Serpa)

the situation is perceived as unfavourable, the athlete will feel insecure and anxious;

- Concerning the coach. The athlete has some expectations on his/her coach's behaviour, related to the competitive situation, based on the history of their relationship. When the coach's behaviour is in consonance with those expectations according to the relational pattern, the behaviour tends to be adapted, but when dissonance takes place regarding the expectations and the coach's actual behaviour, the athlete may develop feelings of tension and anxiety;
- Concerning the athlete. Negative feedback or punishment may be the coach's reaction towards the athlete's behaviour, which is evaluated by the athlete according to his/her own references. When punishment is considered to be fair, and possibly it is expected, the athlete will adapt to the situation, but when it is unexpected or perceived as unfair, a conflict will promote emotional tension in him/her.

The Model of Coach's Anxiogenic Behaviour should make the athletes understanding of negative emotions easier — which are not considered in other models — based on their cognitive elaboration of their coach's behaviours. It is supposed to help the coach having a feedback on his/her anxiogenic impact on their athlete, and then enable him/her to change his/her behaviour. Therefore,

a specific aspect of the dyadic process is supposed to be conceptualised in order to give a practical contribution to the global coaching process.

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