Athlete Leadership in Youth Sport

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Introduction

Sport team settings are fundamentally social in nature, engaging athletes in a wide range of interactions with teammates, coaches, parents, and competitors (Smith, Mellano, & Ullrich-French, 2019). Not surprisingly, sport also provides a fertile context for enhancing youth development (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005). It is estimated that approximately 47 million youth in the United States of America and Canada participate in sport (Canadian Heritage, 2013; Ewing & Seefeldt, 2002). When these individuals are enrolled in sport, there is a belief that they will benefit from their experience by acquiring not only sport-specific skills but also important life skills, such as leadership (Gould & Voelker, 2010). As Voelker, Gould, and Crawford (2011) found, simply participating in sport does not assure that leadership skills will be developed within this context. Nonetheless, coaches and athletes understand the importance of athletes possessing strong leadership skills (Bucci, Bloom, Loughead, & Caron, 2012; Duguay, Loughead, & Munroe-Chandler, 2016).

This chapter will be divided into four sections. The first section presents the conceptual background along with an overview of the literature examining athlete leadership at the youth sport level. The second section provides a discussion of how to develop the leadership capacity in youth athletes. The third section offers suggestions for future research in examining youth athlete leadership. We conclude the chapter with a summary that highlights some of the key aspects of athlete leadership.

Theories and Conceptual Models Used to Examine Athlete Leadership

Before discussing the theories and conceptual frameworks used in the study of athlete leadership, it is useful to highlight the definition of this construct. In the organizational context, numerous definitions have been advanced to define leadership (Northouse, 2018). These

definitions originate from a variety of viewpoints that include *leadership as the focus of group processes* (leaders are at the center of change), *personality perspective* (leaders possess special traits), *behavior* (leaders engage in action to bring about change to the group), *power relationship* (leaders have power and use it to effect change in others), and *goal achievement* (leaders help meet the needs of team members and achieve their goals). Regardless of the perspective used to define leadership, Northouse identified four central features such that leadership is (a) a process, (b) occurs within a team context, (c) involves influencing others, and (d) involves goal achievement. Although it is a common default to identify a coach as a sport team leader, athletes occupy leadership roles as well (Loughead, 2017). Using Northouse's four central features, Loughead, Hardy, and Eys (2006) defined athlete leadership as an athlete occupying a formal or informal role who influences team members towards a common goal. A key aspect of this definition is that athlete leadership is a shared team process comprised of mutual influence and distributed responsibilities amongst team members, who lead each other toward the accomplishment of common goals.

The theories and conceptual models used to study athlete leadership in youth sport are primarily derived from organizational psychology and sport coaching research. Two of the most frequently used include the Full Range Model of Leadership (Avolio, 1999) and the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (Chelladurai, 2007).

Full Range Model of Leadership

Avolio (1999) advanced a model of leadership from organizational psychology labeled the Full Range Model of Leadership (FRML). As the name implies, Avolio believed that effective leaders use a variety of leadership behaviors. The FRML focuses on three broad types of leadership behaviors labeled transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. According to

the model, the least effective leadership behaviors are laissez-faire, more effective are transactional, while transformational are the most effective.

Laissez-faire leadership behaviors are defined as a near avoidance or complete lack of leadership (Avolio, 1999; Burns 1978). Leaders who engage in laissez-faire leadership are doing so because they cannot decide what to do, do not care about the outcome, avoid taking responsibility, and/or are content with waiting for another person to take action. However, Avolio (1999) indicated that there are times when laissez-faire leadership is appropriate (e.g., when an athlete leader does not view the task or situation to be important or critical), and it is the frequency with which the athlete leader engages in laissez-faire behaviors that will determine that individual's perceived effectiveness.

Transactional leadership is referred to as leadership that acknowledges and targets the self-interests of the members of the team as a means of influence (Avolio, 1999). Transactional athlete leaders create contingencies and agreements with their followers (i.e., teammates) that outline specific behaviors and how teammates will be rewarded or disciplined. Typically, rewards are given to teammates after they behave in a manner that meets the leader's approval, while punishments are given to teammates after they engage in behaviors that go against the expectations of the leader. Athlete leaders using transactional leadership engage in corrective and constructive behaviors. For instance, corrective behaviors are characterized by an athlete leader encouraging a change in the teammate's actions (e.g., be more cooperative with teammates) in order to avoid being reprimanded (e.g., negative feedback). Constructive behaviors are characterized by an athlete leader rewarding positive or approved behavior as a means of encouraging teammates to behave according to the leader's or group's standards. Avolio (1999) noted that transactional leadership behaviors are foundational to the development of

transformational leadership. This process is established when an athlete leader gains the trust of his/her teammates by upholding agreements and contingencies. The key characteristic differentiating transactional leadership from transformational leadership is that the latter emphasizes encouraging teammates to act beyond their self-interests to achieve more for the good of the group. That is, transformational leadership can be viewed as a special, expanded case of transactional leadership, in that both transformational and transactional leadership are linked to the achievement of goals and objectives (Avolio, 1999). However, these two types of leadership differ on the process by which the leader motivates teammates (Hater & Bass, 1988).

Consequently, transformational leadership is viewed as the process of an athlete leader broadening and elevating the interests of teammates, generating awareness and acceptance amongst teammates for the purposes and mission of the group, and motivating teammates to go beyond their self-interests for the good of the group with the ultimate goal of helping teammates become future leaders (Burns, 1978). Transformational athlete leaders employ one or more of the following four behaviors to encourage their teammates to grow into leaders: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. *Idealized influence* is displayed when an athlete leader acts in ways that promote trust, admiration, and respect. When those views and feelings are established, the athlete leader is seen as a role model. In turn, teammates begin to identify with the athlete leader and emulate their leader's behavior. *Inspirational motivation* is displayed when an athlete leader behaves in ways that motivate and inspire his/her teammates by providing understanding and meaning to the tasks the teammates are asked to complete. An athlete leader providing inspirational motivation is thought-provoking, enthusiastic, and optimistic. This type of leadership enhances team spirit.

Intellectual stimulation is displayed when an athlete leader stimulates his/her teammates to be creative and innovative. The athlete leader promotes team norms that encourage teammates to seek and obtain knowledge and to have the ability to challenge their own perspectives and the perspectives of others. This allows teammates to question assumptions, reframe problems, and approach recurring situations with fresh and new perspectives. As the teammates start to act on their new thoughts and perspectives, the athlete leader, in turn, begins to reconsider his/her own perspective. Therefore, the team, as a whole, is intellectually stimulated.

Individual consideration is displayed when an athlete leader views and treats each of his/her teammates as individuals with unique needs. The athlete leader may take on the role of a mentor, coach, teacher, confidant, and/or counselor to support the teammate in achieving his/her goals. In other words, the athlete leader has a personalized approach to match each teammate's needs and desires, and these differences amongst teammates are regularly evaluated so the athlete leader can determine whether he/she should maintain or change leadership behaviors.

Multidimensional Model of Leadership

Although the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML; Chelladurai, 2007) was originally developed to study coaching, it has been used more recently to examine athlete leadership (Loughead, 2017). The MML is a linear model comprised of antecedents, leader behaviors, and consequences. As for the antecedents, the MML emphasizes situational characteristics, athlete leader characteristics, and member characteristics as influential antecedents to leadership behaviors. *Situational characteristics* consist of factors including the goals of the team, the type of task, along with the cultural and social context of the group. Situational characteristics are hypothesized to have the strongest impact on the *required leader behaviors* (i.e., what the athlete leader should do to best lead the team), while having a partial

impact on *preferred leader behaviors* (i.e., the preferences of teammates for athlete leader behaviors), and an indirect impact on *actual leader behaviors* (i.e., the behaviors in which the athlete leader engages). *Leader characteristics* consist of the athlete leader's personality, experience, and expertise. Athlete leader characteristics are believed to have the strongest impact on actual athlete leader behaviors. *Member characteristics* consist of teammates' abilities related to the task at hand and personalities (e.g., need for achievement). Member characteristics have the strongest impact on preferred athlete leader behavior, while having a partial impact on required athlete leader behavior and an indirect impact on actual athlete leader behavior.

The three leader behaviors (required, preferred, and actual) are hypothesized to affect the consequences of athlete performance and satisfaction. When the athlete leader behaves in accordance with teammates' preferences and the needs of the situation, it is hypothesized that teammates will experience higher levels of performance and greater amounts of satisfaction. These consequences will also provide feedback to the athlete leader that will then influence their actual behavior.

Measuring Athlete Leadership in Youth Sport

In terms of assessing athlete leadership, research has been guided primarily by the two theoretical frameworks discussed above. In particular, with the advancement of the MML (Chelladurai, 2007), Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) developed the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) to test the hypothesized relationships contained within this model. The LSS was originally conceived to measure coach leadership behaviors and historically has been one of the most widely used leadership measures in sport (Loughead, 2017). Loughead and Hardy (2005) were one of the first to modify the LSS to assess athlete leadership behaviors by modifying the stem that preceded the items. In the original version of the LSS, the stem reads "My coach" whereas

in the athlete leader version the stem reads “The athlete leader(s) on my team.” This slightly modified version of the LSS consists of 40 items and assesses the same five dimensions as the original version: training and instruction, positive feedback, social support, democratic behavior, and autocratic behavior. The first dimension, training and instruction, measures athlete leader behaviors aimed at improving teammates’ performance through physical and skill development. The second dimension, democratic behavior, measures the extent to which the athlete leader allows team members to participate in decisions related to the team. The third dimension, autocratic behavior, examines behavior that involves the athlete leaders’ independence in decision making. The fourth dimension, social support, measures the athlete leader’s concern for his/her teammates’ welfare. Finally, positive feedback is the fifth dimension and examines the leader’s tendency to reinforce a team member’s behavior. The athlete leadership version of the LSS has shown to be valid and reliable. That is, Vincer and Loughead (2010) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis and found reasonably good model fit for the five-factor model.

When measuring the athlete leadership behaviors from the FRML (Avolio, 1999), two inventories have been used. The first to be used was the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X; Bass & Avolio, 1995), which consists of 36 items measuring four transformational, three transactional, and one laissez-faire leadership behaviors. The first transformational behavior, idealized influence, assesses the athlete leader(s) serving as a role model. The second behavior, inspirational motivation, assesses the athlete leader(s) motivating and inspiring others. The third behavior, intellectual stimulation, assesses the athlete leader(s) encouraging others to challenge assumptions. The fourth behavior, individual consideration, assesses the athlete leader(s) paying attention to individual needs of teammates. The first transactional behavior, contingent reward, measures the athlete leader(s) rewarding teammates for their performance.

The second transactional behavior, management-by-exception active, measures the athlete leader(s) taking action to avoid mistakes made by teammates. The third transactional behavior, management-by-exception passive, measures the athlete leader(s) intervening after mistakes. Finally, the laissez-faire leadership behavior examines an absence of leadership behaviors. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted by Price and Weiss (2013) found less than ideal model fit with high correlations between leadership factors. To achieve an acceptable fit, the 8-factor model was reduced to three factors.

Given that there has been mixed empirical support for the MLQ-5X, there have been calls for researchers to use other inventories to assess transformational leadership (e.g., Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003). One of those questionnaires that has been used to measure athlete leadership behaviors is the Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory (DTLI; Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009). The DTLI was developed based on items from the Transformational Leadership Inventory (TLI; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990) and MLQ-5X (Bass & Avolio, 1995). In total, the DTLI version for measuring athlete leadership behaviors contains 27 items and measures one transactional leadership and six transformational behaviors. The first behavior, inspirational motivation, examines athlete leader behaviors that motivate and inspire teammates. The second behavior, appropriate role modeling, examines the athlete leadership behaviors of setting the example for teammates to emulate. The third behavior, individual consideration, examines athlete leader behaviors that demonstrates attending to individual team member's personal needs and feelings. The fourth behavior, intellectual stimulation, assesses athlete leader behaviors that encourages team members to be innovative and creative. The fifth behavior, high performance expectations, examines athlete leader behaviors that express expectations of high standards. The sixth behavior, fostering

acceptance of group goals, examines athlete leader behaviors that promote a focus on common goals. The transactional behavior, contingent reward, examines athlete leader behaviors that are characterized by an exchange process between the leader and team member. Callow and colleagues (2009) showed that the 7-factor model had very good fit.

Athlete Leadership Research

In the last fifteen years there has been an emerging body of research examining various facets of athlete leadership. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyze this entire body of work, we present research that is of interest to those concerned with youth sport, and in particular, with a focus of a period from the late teens through the early twenties known as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). The first part of this section focuses on the attributes of athlete leaders. The second section highlights the number of athletes fulfilling leadership roles within their teams. The third section draws attention to the research on youth athlete leadership behaviors in relation to group dynamics.

Some of the research interested in athlete leadership within an emerging adult population has investigated the attributes of athlete leaders. At the intercollegiate level, Loughead et al. (2006) examined the characteristics of athletes occupying a leadership role (i.e., formal vs. informal role). The results indicated that formal and informal leaders were identified as team leaders (i.e., athletes who provided leadership to a large portion of their teammates); however, formal leaders were more likely than informal leaders to be identified as the team leader. Furthermore, athletes who held either a formal or informal leadership role were more likely to be starters, supporting the notion that higher athletic ability plays a role in being viewed as an athlete leader. These findings show that the responsibility of leading a team does not rest solely

on the shoulders of the formal athlete leader; rather, leadership is shared amongst a group of players.

In an examination of Major Junior A (ages 17-21 years) and intercollegiate hockey captains, the characteristics of athlete leaders from the perspectives of coaches and athlete leaders, respectively, were explored. Dupuis, Bloom, and Loughead (2006) conducted semi-structured interviews with six former varsity male hockey captains, who were selected by their respective coaches for being exceptional leaders. The captains reported that effective leaders should be strong communicators, remain positive in front of teammates, control their emotions during games, and be respectful toward both teammates and the coaching staff. Using a similar protocol as Dupuis et al., Bucci et al. (2012) interviewed six elite level hockey coaches to identify characteristics of successful team leaders. These coaches highlighted that team leaders need to possess a strong work ethic, be a positive role model for their teammates, and be able to follow the coaching staff's instructions. Other characteristics of athlete leaders included being generous, honest, and showing a concern for teammates' well-being. Additional characteristics that have been shown in other sports include being trustworthy (Holmes, McNeil, & Adorna, 2010) and having a stronger work ethic than teammates (Holmes, McNeil, Adorna, & Procaccino, 2008). Taken together, these studies highlight the numerous attributes and characteristics that are expected of effective athlete leaders.

Another approach to studying athlete leadership has been to examine the number of athlete leaders within a team. One method used to determine the number of athlete leaders on a team is to calculate the percentage of leaders. For instance, Loughead et al. (2006) examined the perceived amount of peer (i.e., viewed as a leader by less than 50% of teammates) and team leaders (i.e., viewed as a leader by more than 50% of teammates) on a variety of interdependent

sport teams. The findings indicated that the number of perceived peer and team leaders was dependent on the role they played. Specifically, for peer athlete leaders, 35% held a task leadership role (i.e., directing the team toward achieving a goal), 47% held a social leadership role (i.e., solving interpersonal conflicts), and 31% held an external leadership role (i.e., carrying out duties outside the team environment). For athletes identified as team leaders, 15% held a task leadership role, 11% held a social leadership role, and 8% held an external leadership role.

Building on these results with the objective of determining whether the amount of athlete leaders impacted an athlete's level of satisfaction, Eys, Loughead, and Hardy (2007) found that athletes who perceived an equal number of leaders across the three leadership roles (task, social, external) were more satisfied with their athlete experience than those with an unequal number of leaders in each role. Although knowing the number of perceived athlete leaders is interesting, it is not known whether this perceived percentage reflected the ideal number of athlete leaders that should be leading a team. Crozier, Loughead, and Munroe-Chandler (2013) sampled intercollegiate athletes to discover what constitutes the ideal number of formal and informal athlete leaders on a team. The results showed that 85% of a team's roster should be comprised of athlete leaders, with 19% occupying a formal role and 66% occupying an informal role. In practical terms, a roster of 17 athletes would, therefore, have three formal leaders and 11 informal athlete leaders.

These results reinforce the notion that athlete leadership is a shared phenomenon, and that numerous members of a team should serve in a leadership capacity. The implications of these findings are important for the field of group dynamics. If we concede that athlete leadership is a shared phenomenon, as the evidence would suggest, we will be moving toward a new understanding of leadership within sport teams. That is, athlete leadership is not a top-down

status in a hierarchy, nor as a role for only "high-potential" athletes. Rather, it is a collaborative relationship amongst teammates with the goal of helping to improve group processes and ultimately how the group performs.

A second method to determine the number of athlete leaders present on a team has been through the use of social network analysis (SNA), a set of methodological techniques that is used to describe and explore relationships amongst individuals and groups (Scott, 2017). The advantage of SNA over the use of percentages when calculating the number of athlete leaders concerns the relational nature of individuals within teams (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007); whereby SNA allows for complexities within teammate relationships (e.g., centralization, density, direction) to be examined (Scott, 2017). Using data from four adolescent female soccer teams, Duguay, Loughead, and Cook (in press) found there were multiple formal and informal leaders within these teams indicating that leadership was shared amongst teammates. A novel finding within this study pertained to the degree of sharedness. In particular, for two of the teams, leadership was decentralized (i.e., shared amongst a large group of teammates), while on the other two teams, leadership was more centralized in nature meaning it was contained to a smaller group of players.

A final method used to study athlete leadership is to examine the leadership behaviors exhibited by athlete leaders and their association to several group dynamics constructs. The one group dynamic construct that has been studied the most in youth sport has been cohesion, followed by collective efficacy. Using the LSS (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) with an intercollegiate sample, Vincer and Loughead (2010) found that training and instruction and social support were positively related to both social and task cohesion, but democratic behavior was positively associated to only task cohesion, and autocratic behavior was negatively related to

both task and social cohesion. In examining formal and informal athlete leaders separately, Burkett, Blom, Razon, and Johnson (2014) reported that training and instruction, social support, and positive feedback were positively related to task cohesion, while autocratic behavior was negatively related to task cohesion for formal leaders. Additionally, social support and positive feedback were positively related to social cohesion, while autocratic behavior was negatively related to social cohesion for formal leaders. The same relationships were found for informal leaders with the exception of democratic behavior, which demonstrated a positive relationship with task and social cohesion, and no relationship was found between autocratic behavior and task and social cohesion.

There are also studies that have assessed athlete leadership using transformational leadership inventories in relation to cohesion. Using the DTLI, Callow et al. (2009) showed that individual consideration, fostering acceptance of group goals, and high-performance expectations were positively related to task cohesion, while fostering acceptance of group goals was associated with social cohesion. Applying the MLQ-5X (Bass & Avolio, 1995), Price and Weiss (2013) found that transformational leadership (a composite measure composed of the athlete leadership behaviors of intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and the transactional leadership behavior of contingent reward) was positively related to task cohesion, social cohesion, and collective efficacy.

Athlete Leadership Development in Youth Sport

In light of the many positive relationships between athlete leadership and variables related to effective team functioning (e.g., cohesion, collective efficacy), it is important for those interested to use this context as a vehicle to develop the leadership capacity of young athletes. Consequently, we have separated this section of the chapter between two approaches to

leadership development. The first approach focuses on the individual, viewing leadership primarily as an input to group dynamics. In this regard, leader interventions focus on improving *intrapersonal* development, such as individual skills, abilities, and knowledge. The second approach considers leadership development as an outcome of group dynamics. That is, leadership interventions focus on *interpersonal* development, seeking to build relationships in order to improve cooperation and resource exchange within the group. Therefore, we structured this information below by its center of attention, using the terms *leader development* (intrapersonal) and *leadership development* (interpersonal; Day, 2000).

Leader Development

Why do athletes need leader development training? Surely, many athletes become good leaders without having received deliberate leadership training. Contrary to popular belief, mere participation in youth sports does not necessarily foster leadership (Extejt & Smith, 2009). However, those young athletes who did gain leadership experience in sport (i.e., captaincy) were found to earn higher wages (Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005) and demonstrate heightened leadership aptitude (Grandzol, Perlis, & Draina, 2010) later in life. This finding certainly highlights the benefit of developing youth athlete leaders. Unfortunately, there are only a few studies that have examined leader development in youth sport.

In a review summarizing 25 years of general leader development research, Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee (2014) found that experience, skill, personality, self-development, parental modeling, and feedback were critical factors. How do the factors listed by Day and colleagues translate to the context of athlete leader development? Voelker et al. (2011) provided insights into this question through the experience of being a sport team captain. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 college freshmen, who reported on their leadership

337 experience in high school. The interviews focused on their experiences as captains (e.g., roles,
338 duties, and difficulties), their leadership situation (e.g., school, team, and coach characteristics),
339 and leadership behaviors. The participants noted there was significant pressure being a captain
340 with them being held accountable for the team's performance. Specifically, the participants
341 highlighted that they were responsible for being a role model to the other players, motivating
342 teammates, and offering support and mentorship to their teammates. However, the participants
343 did not feel prepared to assume the role of captain. The participants felt that their coaches did not
344 lend much support or guidance to their role as leader. Instead, the participants learned to fulfill
345 their leadership responsibilities by utilizing previous personal experience, former captains,
346 veteran athletes on the team, siblings, parents, past coaches, and community members. In
347 summary, this study shed light on the deficits of leader development in sports.
348 In a case study using two NCAA Division I volleyball teams, Voight (2012) developed a
349 season-long intervention program targeting team captains. The leader development program
350 consisted of 15 stages, including, *clarifying responsibilities, team needs assessment, leadership*
351 *skills assessment, reflection,* and *feedback*. According to the author, this season-long
352 intervention had a positive effect on the team's captains as indicated by their qualitative
353 evaluations. In particular, two elements were especially helpful to their leader development:
354 feedback and reflection. Research within the context of positive youth development emphasizes
355 the value and benefits of receiving feedback (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis,
356 2005). Similarly, organizational psychology research favors the use of feedback for leader
357 development (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). As for reflection, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning
358 theory helps to explain why this element is important for leadership development. According to
359 Kolb, reflection supports generalization, and thus the transfer of experience from one situation to

the next. Therefore, athlete leaders in youth sport need to be supported in their developmental experiences. Parents, coaches, and sport psychology consultants can play a major role in this process. By giving feedback and opportunities for reflection, it is possible to contribute significantly to leader development.

Leadership Development

Given that leadership development focuses on developing interpersonal relationships, Van Velsor, McCauley, and Ruderman (2010) noted that leadership development can be accomplished by developing shared beliefs about a team's leadership, enhancing collective leadership practices, and evaluating the group's ability to produce leadership. That is, leadership becomes shared amongst a group of individuals. In fact, shared leadership is defined as "a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both" (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1). Fundamental tenets of shared leadership are that (a) several team members are able to take on leadership roles (Manz & Sims, 1987), (b) empowering team members leads to greater collaboration and coordination (Yeatts & Hyten, 1998), and (c) team effectiveness is enhanced (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Consequently, an important aspect of leadership development using a shared leadership perspective is developing the team and its members as a collective.

To date, only a few studies have utilized a shared leadership development approach with youth athletes that encompasses interpersonal elements. Using a workshop format, Duguay et al. (2016) worked with all team members of two intercollegiate sport teams over the course of a season. The intervention consisted of developing the leadership behaviors and understanding how these behaviors influenced team functioning. For instance, the athletes practiced the leadership principles learned within each workshop on their teammates. All workshops concluded with a whole team discussion highlighting how the leadership behaviors can benefit

each athlete and how they benefit the team as a collective. The results of the intervention showed significant increases in regard to leadership behaviors, athlete satisfaction, and peer motivational climate from pre- to post-intervention.

Similar to Duguay et al. (2016), Boisvert, Loughead, and Munroe-Chandler (2019) conducted a season-long leadership development program with one male major midget hockey team (i.e., U16) playing in a competitive ice hockey league, targeting the enhancement of athlete leadership behaviors, cohesion, and collective efficacy. No significant changes were found from pre- to post-intervention for these variables. Although all of the variables increased pre- to post-interventions, the authors concluded that the high mean pre-intervention scores contributed to a ceiling effect. Consequently, a focus group interview was conducted with the team's leadership core to obtain their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the program. Participants in the focus group mentioned that the leadership program provided them with the leadership behaviors to communicate more effectively and constructively deal with conflict by finding solutions that benefited all team members. Further, the participants noted that the leadership program helped them remain united during a difficult season from a performance perspective.

Future Research Directions

To continue advancing athlete leadership research in relation to youth sport, it will be important to use strong theoretical frameworks. To date, the majority of research has relied on aspects of the MML (Chelladurai, 2007) and FRML (Avolio, 1999). In regard to the MML, most of the research has centered on perceived leadership behaviors and its relationship to outcomes such as cohesion and collective efficacy. However, athlete leadership is more complex than what has been investigated to date and it would be critical to determine the role of the antecedents contained within the MML, such as situational factors, and how they impact youth athlete

leadership behaviors. As for the FRML, the model hypothesizes that effective (athlete) leaders should use more transformational leadership behaviors compared to transactional. This assumption should be tested, which could assist in developing more effective leadership development programs.

From a measurement perspective, the development of an inventory targeting athlete leadership behaviors specifically is warranted. As Avolio (1999) noted there are other leadership behaviors that are yet uncovered. To date, the measures used with a younger population have been those (e.g., LSS, DTLI) that were originally conceived for adult samples. On a related note, the majority of inventories used to assess athlete leadership behaviors typically measure the frequency of the behavior. Another viewpoint to consider is the effectiveness or quality of the leadership behavior being exhibited by the athletes. Finally, it appears that athlete leadership is a shared process not requiring an athlete who can perform all of the essential leadership functions but rather a group of athletes who collectively perform them. Utilizing models of shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003) would encourage youth sport researchers to explore the additional correlates that are associated with athlete leadership.

Conclusion

In comparison to sport coaching, athlete leadership has a relatively short history. However, the research that has emerged highlights the importance of this construct for effective sport team functioning, particularly at the youth level. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a succinct overview of the theoretical constructs that have guided research in this area, along with the inventories used to test the relationships from these frameworks. Further, we highlighted some of the research examining athlete leadership in youth sport and provided the results of leadership development programs for those interested in enhancing leadership within their teams.

Lastly, we suggested exciting avenues for future research with the goal of encouraging youth sport researchers to continue to aquire knowledge pertaining to this construct.

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