Athlete Leadership in Sport

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Learning Objectives

On completion of this chapter, the reader should have:

1. Knowledge of the conceptual models used to study athlete leadership
2. Understand the methods used to assess athlete leadership
3. Appreciation of the existing research literature on athlete leadership
4. Understand the various approaches to developing athlete leadership

Introduction

Leadership is typically regarded as important for achieving effective team functioning. As noted in some of the other chapters in this book, coaches are important sources of leadership within their teams. For instance, coaches provide leadership in developing their athletes (e.g., personal growth, discipline), creating a positive team environment, and emphasizing the team as a collective. Further, coaches are largely responsible for constructing their own approach for leading their teams. For example, some coaches may value the technical skill development, while others are more concerned with the social development of their athletes. It is unreasonable to expect coaches to be able to fulfill each of their athletes' needs. As a result, athletes seek assistance from their teammates. This form of leadership is referred to as *athlete leadership*, which is a form of peer leadership characterized by the interaction with other individuals. Loughead et al. (2006) noted that peer leaders are critical to enhancing team dynamics. Peer leadership is useful within sport teams because it is a form of social support that athletes are likely to perceive as beneficial and less threatening than that provided by an authority figure such as a coach (Gross & McMullen, 1983). Typically, athletes who provide peer leadership are at a slightly more advanced stage of tenure than those they are leading. As such, teammates can more easily identify with and relate to them (Duguay et al., 2018; Ender & Newton, 2000).

Consequently, athlete leaders are sources of positive social influence by serving as teammates and role models.

Athlete Leadership Defined

Historically, leadership theory and research in sport has been dominated by a leader-centered perspective by adopting an individualistic approach to understanding leadership. However, this perspective fails to capture a central aspect of leadership. Specifically, leadership is a dynamic process carried out in a group or team context that is shaped by the interactions of multiple interdependent individuals (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Athlete leadership aligns with this perspective and is defined as athletes fulfilling formal or informal leadership roles within a team and influencing team members to achieve a common goal (Loughead et al., 2006). Therefore, athlete leadership is a fluid, inclusive, and interactive form of leadership (Loughead et al., in press). For instance, athletes can occupy a formal leadership role (i.e., assigned to a leadership position by the team) or an informal leadership role (i.e., emergent leadership role that is based on interactions with team members). The definition of athlete leadership infers that multiple athletes can provide leadership to their team. As a result, athlete leadership is shared among team members. Gibb (1954) was one of the early scholars to note the importance of leadership being shared among team members when he stated: “Leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group” (p. 884). As such, DeRue (2011) noted that shared leadership is a complex, adaptive process that involves a series of leading and following interactions. Within the context of a sport team, teammates will fulfill a leadership role when it is appropriate (i.e., leading) and will step back in other situations to allow other teammates to lead (i.e., following). With this approach to shared athlete leadership, teammates can exert leadership influence and provide guidance to one another

as needed. Therefore, shared athlete leadership can be defined as an emergent and dynamic team process comprised of mutual influence and shared responsibility dispersed among team members, who lead each other toward the achievement of team goals.

Based on the aforementioned definition, shared athlete leadership highlights four key characteristics. The first characteristic is related to the lateral influence among teammates. On that note, there are two sources of athlete leadership—formal and informal. The second characteristic highlights that athlete leadership is an emergent property of a team, whereby the leadership influence is pooled from team members. That is, the leadership influence does not emanate from either the formal or informal athlete leader but is shared collectively among teammates. The third characteristic concerns the distribution of influence. Shared athlete leadership is distributed and shared among multiple athletes rather than on one single leader (e.g., team captain). The first two characteristics indicate that shared athlete leadership focuses on leadership influence from potentially all team members, whereas this third characteristic highlights how leadership is dispersed across teammates. The fourth characteristic highlights the dynamic nature of shared leadership, whereby athlete leadership can be assumed by different athletes either at the same time or at varying points in the team's season.

Theoretical Models and Conceptual Frameworks

Within the field of athlete leadership, two of the most used models to examine leadership behaviors are Chelladurai's (2007) Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML) and Avolio's (1999) Full Range Model of Leadership (FRML). As for the MML, it is a linear model composed of antecedents, throughputs, and outcomes. The antecedents directly influence the throughputs (operationalized as leader behaviors). The three categories of antecedents include leader, member, and situational characteristics. Leader characteristics refer to trait and personality

characteristics of the leader such as age, expertise, gender, and experience. Member characteristics refer to attributes such as gender, age, personality, and ability. Finally, situational characteristics are those environmental factors such as norms, group goals, task type, and group composition. The throughputs are operationalized as the leader behaviors referring to the required, preferred, and perceived leader behaviors. The required leader behaviors are those needed in certain situations and are directly influenced by the antecedents of situational and member characteristics. Preferred leader behaviors are the actions that individuals desire to see from their leaders. The actual behavior is influenced by the antecedents as well as required and preferred behaviors in order to determine how the leader will eventually act. In turn, it is hypothesized that the leader behavior displayed will impact outcomes such as performance and athlete satisfaction.

A second model that has been used to study athlete leadership behaviors is the FRML (Avolio, 1999). This model encompasses three broad categories of leadership behaviors that range from ineffective to effective. First, the most ineffective and passive form of leadership is laissez-faire, described as the absence of leadership, whereby leaders avoid taking any action. A second more active and effective form of leadership behaviors are contained within transactional leadership. This type of leadership focuses on the exchanges that occur between leaders and followers in order to meet their own self-interests. From a behavioral standpoint, it can take the form of contingent reward in which the leader clarifies to the follower what the follower needs to do in order to be rewarded for their effort. In addition, transactional leadership can also take on the form of active management-by-exception, where the leader monitors the performance of followers and takes corrective action if the follower fails to meet the necessary standards. Or it can take the form of passive leadership where the leader adopts a passive management-by-

exception behavior by waiting for problems to arise before taking any corrective action. Third, transformational leadership is an expansion of transactional leadership and is characterized as the leader moving the follower beyond self-interest using four leadership behaviors: idealized influence, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. Avolio (1999) argued that effective leaders will use both transactional and transformational leadership behaviors with their followers. For instance, early in the leader-follower relationship, transactional leadership can be effective in establishing trust. This is accomplished by both parties holding up their end of the exchange (i.e., task completion by the follower and reward by the leader). Consequently, trust is built, and the leader can continue to influence the follower and eventually utilize transformational leadership behaviors where the help transform the follower into an eventual leader (Avolio, 1999).

While the MML (Chelladurai, 2007) and FRML (Avolio, 1999) have been vital in advancing athlete leadership research over the last 15 years, these two conceptual frameworks are primarily theorized at the dyadic level. That is, these conceptual frameworks are used to explain an athlete leader's influence over teammates, and not necessarily the influence on team-level processes. However, two new conceptual models have been advanced to study athlete leadership that may be used to better understand these group processes. The first one is derived from the work by Yukl (2012) who synthesized over 50 years of research examining effective leadership behaviors. Yukl notes that his hierarchical taxonomy contains leadership behaviors that are used to influence the performance of groups. Based on his analysis, Yukl advanced a hierarchical taxonomy that contains four meta-categories labeled as *task-oriented*, *relations-oriented*, *change-oriented,* and *external* leadership, and within those four categories are 15 leadership behaviors. Maechel et al. (2020) tested Yukl's four meta-categories within the context

of athlete leadership and found good model fit of this four-dimensional model. The testing of this four-dimensional model for athlete leadership included defining the 15 leadership behaviors proposed by Yukl to make them appropriate to athlete leadership and included five additional leadership behaviors based on the existent athlete leadership literature. Task-oriented leadership behaviors are those where the objective is to accomplish the job in an efficient manner. As a result, the athlete leadership behaviors associated with task-oriented leadership include clarifying goals, establishing team structure, decision-making, maintaining standards of performance, and training. Relations-oriented leadership refers to increasing human and social capital where the emphasis is on increasing intrapersonal resources and developing interpersonal relationships. As such, the athlete leadership behaviors include personal development, managing conflict, promoting teamwork, recognizing good performance, individual support, role modelling, and empowering. As for change-oriented leadership, this meta-category refers to activities that advocate for change, articulate an inspiring vision, encourage innovation, and inspire collective learning. The athlete leadership behaviors include inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, advocating change, and fostering collective learning. Lastly, external leadership refers to acquiring the necessary information and resources, along with promoting and defending the interests of the team. The athlete leadership behaviors are comprised of networking, representing the team, external monitoring, and information gathering.

The second more recent athlete leadership model advanced by Loughead et al. (in press) is a working model based on the extant literature (see Figure 1). It is not meant as a definitive model of athlete leadership, but one that provides an initial framework for organizing and integrating information concerning this construct. As social psychology researchers, we believe an ecological perspective is needed for understanding and explaining athlete leadership. This

perspective implies that athlete leadership behaviors are the results from the interaction of both the individual and situational determinants. Consequently, in planning research and intervention efforts, researchers need to consider not only the individual athletes but also important situational and social forces that act on the athletes who are members of sport teams. As such, a central component of this working ecological model is the notion that athlete leadership is a shared phenomenon. The definition of athlete leadership from Loughead et al. (2006) along with several studies (e.g., Duguay et al., 2018) indicate that numerous athletes display leadership and do so using a broad spectrum of behaviors. In addition to the athletes sharing leadership behaviors, our ecological model incorporates factors that focus on *psychological* (i.e., characteristics and psychological factors of athlete leaders, teammates, and/or coaches, individual level outcomes), *social* (i.e., situational characteristics, team level outcomes), and *organizational* (i.e., team characteristics, team culture) levels of influence to provide a comprehensive framework for integrating multiple theoretical perspectives (e.g., Chelladurai's, (2007) MML and Avolio's (1999) FRML). We believe shared athlete leadership is maximized when athletes understand that effective team functioning is not only about the leadership behaviors they display but also require an understanding of the team environment. That is, educating athletes on leadership behaviors when not understanding a team's dynamics will not produce effective leadership. Therefore, we deem our ecological model that combines both individual and team level factors will be useful in achieving effective leadership.

\Insert Figure 1 here

Measurement of Athlete Leadership

Researchers have used two general quantitative approaches when examining athlete leadership: questionnaires and social network analysis. The first approach has resulted in the use

of traditional self-report questionnaires to measure the frequency of athlete leadership behaviors. While the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) was originally developed to measure coaching behaviors, it has been adapted to the context of assessing athlete leadership behaviors. Specifically, the 40 items assess five different dimensions of leader behaviors: 1) *Training and Instruction* reflects the behaviors of an athlete leader targeted at improving the performance of teammates and instructing them in the skills and tactics of the sport; 2) *Democratic Behavior* assesses the degree to which an athlete leader includes team members in the decision-making process; 3) *Autocratic Behavior* reflects the degree to which an athlete leader is independent in his/her decision making; 4) *Social Support* measures the degree to which an athlete leader is engaged in satisfying the interpersonal needs of other; and 5) *Positive Feedback* assesses the degree to which an athlete leader praises and encourages teammates for good performance.

Originally developed for use in a military setting, the Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory (DTLI; Callow et al., 2009) has been used in the assessment of athlete leadership behaviors. The DTLI's 31 items measure six transformational and one transactional athlete leadership behaviors. When assessing athlete leadership, *Contingent Reward*, the only transactional leadership behavior, reflects the athlete leader's tendency to provide positive reinforcement when teammates perform as expected. The remaining five behaviors measure transformational leadership. *Individual Consideration* reflects the degree to which an athlete leader pays individual attention to teammates' feelings and needs. *Inspirational Motivation* is the extent to which athlete leaders energize teammates and view the future with optimism about achieving team objectives. *Intellectual Stimulation* measures an athlete leader's ability to challenge teammates' assumptions and promote creativity. *Fostering Acceptance of Group Goals*

assesses the degree to which an athlete leader promotes cooperation and goal setting among teammates. *High-Performance Expectations* assesses the expectation for excellence and high performance on the part of team members. Finally, *Appropriate Role Modeling* evaluates the extent to which athlete leaders set good examples for teammates.

While the LSS (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) and the DTLI (Callow et al., 2009) have been primarily used to measure athlete leadership behaviors, both of these inventories were originally developed to assess sport coaching and military contexts, respectively. Often times we are questioned whether these two inventories are appropriate when measuring athlete leadership behaviors. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the LSS and DTLI have shown both inventories to be valid and reliable (see Callow et al., 2009; Vincer & Loughead, 2010). Further evidence supports the usefulness of measuring the athlete leadership behaviors contained in these two inventories. Specifically, Duguay et al. (2018) asked athletes to rate on a 5-point scale how important (higher scores reflect greater importance) it was for their athlete leaders to exhibit these leadership behaviors. For eight of the 11 leadership behaviors, scores were above four, and the other three were above three on the 5-point scale. Taken together, the results showed that the leadership behaviors contained within the LSS and DTLI are important for athlete leaders to exhibit.

In addition to examining the leadership behaviors of athletes, researchers have examined the characteristics of athlete leaders using the Sport Leadership Behavior Inventory (SLBI; Glenn & Horn, 1993). This inventory is framed on the basis of an interactional approach to leadership effectiveness. Interactional theories suggest the examination of athlete leaders' characteristics should be specific to this population. Thus, the SLBI taps into 19 personal characteristics deemed desirable for athlete leaders to possess. Participants are asked to rate each

of their teammates. Some of the descriptions used to characterize these leadership attributes include athlete leaders being determined, positive, motivated, consistent, organized, responsible, skilled, confident, honest, and respected.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is the second quantitative approach used to measure athlete leadership. SNA is a research method that aims to examine the relationships that individuals and teams form with each other. That is, SNA assesses athlete leadership between members, thereby providing a different perspective in relation to other athlete leadership measures noted above. Social networks are defined as a set of network members (nodes) that are connected by one of more types of relations (ties) (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In the context of team sports, SNA methods allow for the simultaneous examination of relations between team members (e.g., cohesion, friendship, leadership) and individual-level attributes (e.g., age, playing position, leadership status) (Lusher et al., 2010). It has been suggested that *degree centrality* (individual level), *degree centralization* (network level), and *density* (network level) are the most relevant measures to study shared leadership in social-network research (Gockel & Werth, 2010). As such, a node with a high *indegree centrality* is indicative of a player who is looked to often by teammates for leadership. With respect to *network centralization*, a low degree of shared leadership is observed when influence stems from one player (high network centralization) whereas a high degree of shared leadership is observed when influence is distributed more equally (low network centralization). Finally, *density* indicates the average leadership influence within the teams (Gockel & Werth, 2010).

Despite the scant research using this type of quantitative approach to study athlete leadership, researchers have found that (1) over the course of a season there were increases in the overall amount of task and social leadership (Duguay, Hoffmann, et al., 2020), (2) the leadership

responsibilities on a team are shared by numerous athletes (Duguay et al., 2019; Fransen et al., 2015a), (3) teammates feeling more socially connected to their team when high quality leadership is available (Fransen et al., 2015b), and (4) having high quality athlete leadership was positively associated with stronger feelings of team cohesion (Loughead et al., 2016).

While these SNA studies advanced our understanding of athlete leadership, most of them used aggregated data from sports teams. Consequently, only one study included the specific sociograms (a graphic representation of the social network) associated with each of the teams (Duguay et al., 2019). Researchers must continue to analyze the athlete leadership networks of individual teams in order to gain a better understanding of team functioning. Moreover, given that leadership takes time to develop, longitudinal designs (rather than the typical cross-sectional design) would allow for the exploration of the temporal nature of leadership.

In a review of transformational leadership in sport (including both coach and athlete leader studies), Arthur et al. (2017) noted several measurement issues. They mentioned that relying on single source questionnaire measures as independent variables can lead to omitted variable bias, simultaneous bias and common source, and common method bias (cf., Arthur et al., 2017). They further argued that measuring leadership into a global, single-score index is problematic given the multidimensionality of leadership. The use of objective measures of coaches' (or in this case athletes') behaviors that would not be affected by raters' perception, has been suggested as an alternative to questionnaires (Arthur et al., 2017). What is said in speeches, pep talks, or press conferences (at elite levels) could be coded for charismatic tactics.

Further, if the LSS and DTLI are to be used as measures of athlete leadership, item analysis should be conducted to determine their appropriateness for measuring athlete leadership. For instance, the LSS item "Encourages team members to make suggestions for ways of

conducting practices" may be attributed more to coaches than athlete leaders since the latter may not have the ability or authority to dictate practices or training sessions. Moreover, it is possible other aspects of leadership have yet been discovered (Avolio, 1999). In our in-depth interviews with athletes about behaviors they believe constitute effective athlete leadership, we found leadership behaviors from both the LSS and DTLI were present. However, we also found other leadership behaviors unique to athlete leadership that also emerged. Therefore, one promising avenue for the inclusion of additional leadership behaviors is Yukl's (2012) four-dimensional model of leadership. Maechel et al. (2020) tested Yukl's four-dimensional model within the context of athlete leadership and found that all four dimensions significantly predicted perceived athlete leadership effectiveness. Thus, in order to capture the full extent of athlete leadership behaviors, a specific questionnaire targeting all four functions is imperative.

Athlete Leadership Research

Athlete leadership research over the last two decades has broadened our understanding of athlete leaders and leadership behaviors they exhibit. We first begin with a review highlighting the characteristics of athlete leaders. We then examine the athlete leadership behaviors associated with athlete- and team-level outcomes. Finally, we review the research examining the sharedness of athlete leadership.

Characteristics of Athlete Leaders

Researchers investigating the characteristics of athlete leaders have focused on the perspectives of coaches, athletes, and athlete leaders. Coaches identify athlete leaders as team members who are older (Bucci et al., 2012), more tenured, and starters (Loughead et al., 2006). Coaches also value a number of traits in their athlete leaders including being highly skilled (Moran & Weiss, 2006), having a strong work ethic, and working well with the coaching staff

(Bucci et al., 2012). Further, athletes who are ambitious, honest, generous, and competitive are perceived more favorably as leaders by their coaches (Bucci et al., 2012). Similarly, coaches also report athlete leaders are those who display the characteristics of being independent, confident in their abilities, understanding toward their teammates (Moran & Weiss, 2006), yet who are humble, mature, optimistic, and approachable (Imholte et al., 2019).

In regard to research asking athlete leaders themselves, these individuals indicated that strong interpersonal, communication, and task skills are of great importance for effective leadership (Dupuis et al., 2006; Wright & Côté, 2003). These characteristics have been echoed by their teammates. Specifically, fellow teammates have indicated that athlete leaders who are viewed as high-quality were conscientious, extraverted, articulate, and trustworthy (Fransen, Haslam, Steffens, Mallett, et al., 2020). Further these characteristics were moderated by leadership function (task, social, external, and motivational). For instance, high-quality task leaders were perceived to be self-confident, self-assured, perceptive, dominant, and diligent and exhibited less neuroticism than their teammates. High-quality external leaders were more sensitive, outgoing, dominant, perceptive, self-confident, and self-assured than their teammates. High-quality motivational leaders were more outgoing, diligent, self-confident, self-assured, and determined than their teammates (Fransen, Haslam, Steffens, Mallett, et al., 2020). Preferences for certain leader characteristics also differed by gender with male athletes valuing task experience and having athlete leaders who are trustworthy, whereas female athletes preferred strong interpersonal and communication skills from their athlete leaders (Holmes et al., 2010).

Outcomes of Effective Athlete Leadership

Researchers have reported positive associations between athlete leadership behaviors and individual- and team-level outcomes. In terms of individual-level outcomes, Weiss and

colleagues examined youth soccer players in two separate studies. They found that the frequency of athlete leadership behaviors was positively associated with teammates feeling competent about their skills and being more intrinsically motivated (Price & Weiss, 2013) as well as having stronger friendships (Moran & Weiss, 2006). Further, Paradis and Loughead (2012) examined the relationship between youth athlete leadership behaviors and athlete satisfaction. The athlete leadership behaviors of training and instruction, social support, positive feedback, and democratic behavior were positively related to athlete satisfaction. In a qualitative investigation of informal athlete leadership in professional sport, Imholte et al. (2019) found that informal athlete leaders who exhibited the leadership behavior of social support were helpful to their teammates in managing negative emotions. Moreover, formal athlete leaders reported using leadership behaviors to help their teammates develop positive life skills (e.g., social skills; Santos et al., 2019).

As for team-level outcomes, athlete leadership behaviors have been shown to be positively related to collective efficacy (e.g., Price & Weiss, 2011) and cohesion (e.g., Vincer & Loughead, 2010). For instance, Vincer and Loughead (2010) found that the athlete leadership behaviors of training and instruction, social support, positive feedback, and democratic behavior were positively related to task and social cohesion, (Vincer & Loughead, 2010). Similarly, Callow et al. (2009) found that transformational leadership behaviors such as fostering acceptance of group goals, individual consideration and high-performance expectations were positively associated with task cohesion, and fostering acceptance of group goals was positively associated with social cohesion.

Examining the Sharedness of Athlete Leadership

Given that numerous athletes on teams occupy leadership roles, researchers have examined how coaches can promote and foster shared athlete leadership within their teams, the dynamic nature of shared athlete leadership, and the benefits of having this form of leadership. Duguay, Loughead, et al. (2020) noted that coaches play a pivotal role in facilitating the development of shared athlete leadership, such that coaches viewed empowering their athletes as key in fostering shared leadership. de Cruz (2019) noted that empowerment is key in developing shared leadership since it supports athlete's sense of competence and facilitates motivation. The coaches in the Duguay, Loughead, et al. study also commented that being a leader on a sport team is too big of a role for one athlete to occupy. Coaches promoted the use of shared athlete leadership by using leadership groups. The size of these leadership groups was dependent on factors such as the maturity of the athletes and the number of veteran players on the team. As a result, coaches used a variety of methods to distribute the leadership within the team through the use of leadership councils, captain rotations, and athlete leaders for different roles (e.g., academic captains, weight room captains). In order to cultivate an environment of shared leadership, coaches used two strategies. The first was to create a positive team environment. One approach noted by the coaches was to eliminate the status differences between athletes (e.g., newer vs. more established players) by making sure athletes felt that they had a voice within the team by having open lines of communication, developing trust, and engaging in team-building activities. The second strategy was the deliberate development of leadership. The coaches used multiple methods to develop shared athlete leadership including having shared experiential learning opportunities such as small and large team discussions and leadership development workshops.

Another important aspect to consider in better understanding shared leadership is *time*. The component of time highlights that shared leadership is a dynamic construct where different team members can participate in the team's leadership. Using a SNA approach, Duguay, Hoffmann, et al. (2020) examined one youth hockey team to assess for changes in task and social leadership over the course of a season. The results demonstrated that as the season progressed task leadership changed (i.e., who was doing this type of leadership) but the degree of centralization did not increase (i.e., the number of players doing this type of leadership did not grow). In contrast, the team's social leadership structure became significantly more shared over time as the season proceeded with more players exhibiting this type of leadership. Similarly, using a SNA approach, Duguay et al. (2019) examined the degree of athlete leadership sharedness in four female soccer teams. In each of these four soccer teams, athlete leadership was shared among team members. However, the degree of sharedness varied for each team meaning that some teams had more athletes participate in the leadership of their team, while other teams had fewer athletes. Despite the difference in the amount of sharedness, one finding was consistent in all four teams. Every athlete was viewed by at least one other teammate as providing leadership to them. This finding highlights the importance of developing the leadership potential in all athletes.

Shared athlete leadership within (e.g., multiple social leaders) and between leadership types (e.g., different leaders for social and task functions) is associated with several benefits. In a qualitative investigation of university athletes, participants expressed that having a high degree of shared leadership (i.e., athlete leaders encompass 85% of the team) leads to more available leadership (e.g., athletes can pick which leader to approach in specific situations), individual-level outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, confidence), team-level outcomes (e.g., communication,

cohesion, effort), and greater frequencies of favorable leadership behaviors (e.g., idealized influence, social support) (Crozier et al., 2013). Further, Morgan et al. (2013, 2015) have shown that shared leadership facilitates team resilience. Coaches also report that having shared leadership groups can enhance support for coaches and athletes, decision making, team culture, and leadership succession and, ultimately, improve team performance (Haddad et al., 2021).

The perceived benefits noted from these qualitative studies have also been supported by quantitative studies. In relation to team-level outcomes, athlete leadership operationalized as task, social, external, and motivational leadership functions have been positively associated with team identification and collective efficacy (Fransen et al., 2014). Leo et al. (2019) expanded on these findings by investigating relationships between the sharedness of task, social, and motivational leadership and their ties to several team-level outcomes. Their findings indicated positive associations among shared task athlete leadership and collective efficacy, task cohesion, and performance and negative associations with role, task, and relationship conflict. Shared social athlete leadership was positively associated with social cohesion and perceived performance and negatively associated with role and task conflict. Lastly, shared external athlete leadership was positively associated with social cohesion and a desire to continue playing sport.

Shared athlete leadership can also impact perceptions of coaching as shown by Fransen, Mertens, and colleagues' (2020) findings demonstrating a positive relationship between shared athlete leadership and perceptions of coach leadership quality. More specifically, athletes on teams with high density and moderate centralization have more favorable perceptions of their coaches' task, social, and motivational leadership. Taken together, teams reap many benefits from having athlete leaders who share the leadership responsibilities.

Practical Applications: Athlete Leadership Development

Research examining athlete leadership development is currently limited. To our knowledge, there are only nine published articles dedicated to the development of athlete leadership. This lack of research attention is surprising given the proliferation of empirical evidence (e.g., meta-analyses) on the effectiveness of leadership development in non-sport leadership studies (e.g., Avolio et al., 2009; Collins & Holton, 2004). In fact, leadership is considered one of the most important life skills that athletes should acquire and develop to help them achieve success in sport and life (Gould et al., 2006).

The existing athlete leadership development literature has drawn inspiration from a variety of sources. Certain leadership development programs are theoretical grounded, while others rely on the personal experiences of the professionals (i.e., researcher, consultant) implementing the program. The current athlete leadership development literature can be divided into two main categories based on the type of participants targeted: intercollegiate and youth athletes.

Intercollegiate Athletes

Voight (2012) conducted a season-long athlete leadership development program with two NCAA Division I volleyball teams targeting the leadership development of team captains and assistant captains. The goals of this program were to (a) improve team performance through better leadership, (b) improve team communication and functioning, (c) teach the captains and assistants on leading the team on a daily basis including practices and games, and (d) foster the personal leadership development of captains and assistants. In order to fulfil the goals of this program, a 15-stage approach to leadership development was developed and implemented by the author. These stages included discussing the positives/negatives of being a leader, responsibilities of being a leader, how to make effective decisions as a leader, how to self-reflect, and assessing leadership and team needs. At the end of the season, the author interviewed two

captains and two assistants asking them to describe their perceptions of having gone through this leadership development program. In terms of the benefits of the program, the leaders believed it help to empower themselves, increased the team and individual performances, and enhanced the team's cohesion.

While the Voight (2012) approach focused on formal leaders, Duguay et al. (2016) utilized a shared athlete leadership approach. That is, this program included developing all athletes of two teams regardless of their leadership status. In four workshops presented over the course of the season, this program taught the participants about how they could exhibit the leadership behaviors assessed by the LSS (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) and the DTLI (Callow et al., 2009), and how these leadership behaviors impacted a team's dynamics. Each workshop was designed whereby the participants received (1) a presentation of the leadership behaviors to be learned, (2) a demonstration of these leadership behaviors in action, and (3) the opportunity to practice these leadership behaviors. Throughout the workshops, activities (e.g., role playing, case studies) highlighted how the leadership behaviors benefited the participant personally but also how they benefited the team's dynamics (cohesion, communication, motivation, and satisfaction). Additionally, each participant was given an athlete leadership handbook to support the material covered in the workshops. The results, pre- and post-intervention, showed that the leadership program positively impacted most of the athlete leadership behaviors targeted. More precisely, participants reported using eight of the 10 leadership behaviors (i.e., training and instruction, democratic behavior, social support, positive feedback, appropriate role model, inspirational motivation, high-performance expectations, and fostering acceptance of group goals and promoting teamwork) significantly more often after completing the leadership development

program compared to when they started the program. Further, the results also demonstrated increases in athlete satisfaction and peer motivational climate.

Youth Athletes

Gould and Voelker (2010) developed the Captain's Leadership Training Program (CLTP), which has been utilized in various athlete leadership development studies (e.g., Blanton et al., 2014; Pierce et al., 2018). The CLTP was designed to teach high-school athletes how to be effective team captains. The program was delivered as a one-day workshop separated into three breakout sessions over the course of the day. Additionally, each participant was given a leadership guidebook (i.e., Becoming an Effective Team Captain: Student-Athlete Guide) to reinforce the learning that occurred in this one-day workshop. The six-chapter guidebook contains information concerning the leadership skills covered throughout the program, including role modeling, effective communication, motivation, team-building and cohesion, and handling tough situations. The authors have noted that the CLTP has been well received by the athletes (e.g., athletes have reported that the workshops have been helpful and enjoyable), changes about the program (e.g., increased emphasis on learning leadership), and challenges (e.g., lack of supervising high-school teachers and coach involvement). The authors also discussed potential future directions including the importance of developing a concurrent program for coaches and the need to hold athletes more accountable (e.g., feedback provided to captains through a leadership report card).

Using the same program developed by Duguay et al. (2016), Boisvert et al. (2020) implemented it with a U17 male ice hockey team over the course of a season. The results from pre- and post-intervention measures showed that the leadership program helped maintain levels of athlete leadership, cohesion, and collective efficacy throughout the season. In addition, a focus

group interview at the end of the season revealed that the leadership program was beneficial in helping the players improve their leadership behaviors, along with maintaining perceptions of cohesion and collective efficacy. Additionally, players mentioned the program improved communication among team members and helped them deal with conflict more effectively. The results of this study are encouraging since the participating team had a difficult season with a winning percentage of 16%. Thus, it appears that the leadership development program was able to buffer against some of the effects of losing by preserving leadership and some of the team's dynamics.

Athlete Leadership Development: Peer Mentoring

In addition to using athlete leadership development programs, another method that can be used to foster leadership is through peer athlete mentoring. Peer athlete mentoring is defined as a dynamic process in which a more experienced and knowledgeable athlete, known as the mentor, serves as a trusted role model to another athlete, referred to as the mentee, assisting the mentee in achieving their goals along with supporting their personal growth and development (Hoffmann et al., 2017). While many athletes benefit from being in a mentoring relationship, it is important to note that not every athlete experiences these benefits. In fact, nearly 40% of Canadian intercollegiate athletes have never considered another athlete as a peer mentor (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2016a), and one in five of a sample of Canadian National team and intercollegiate athletes had never been peer mentored (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2019).

Hoffmann (2019) proposed strategies for practitioners (i.e., coaches, mental performance consultants) interested in facilitating the development of peer athlete mentoring relationships. In particular, Hoffmann suggested two broad approaches can be utilized. The first are strategies that allow for mentoring relationships to develop informally. Informal mentoring relationships are

preferable due to their natural occurrence between mentor and mentee (Hoffmann, 2019). Informal mentoring stems from a process of mutual discovery where mentors and mentees identify with one another. From a practical standpoint, practitioners can hold meetings at the beginning of the season to discuss how peer mentorship can be beneficial to the team's vision and goals. These types of meetings help to lay the groundwork for informal peer mentoring relationships to occur naturally between athletes (Hoffmann).

The second approach is to formalize peer mentoring relationships among the athletes (Hoffmann, 2019). Blake-Beard et al. (2007) outlined three approaches to fostering formal mentoring relationships: (a) practitioner-assigned matching, (b) choice-based matching, and (c) assessment-based matching. First, coaches and/or practitioners can pair mentors and mentees based on their own subjective evaluations of which athletes represent a suitable pairing. This approach can be effective but comes with the risk of athletes feeling left out of the matching process (Hoffmann, 2019). In that case, practitioners can elect to formalize peer mentoring relationships through choice-based matching. This approach enables mentors and mentees to mutually agree to undertake a mentoring relationship. However, a pitfall of this method is the potential of only a few mentoring relationships emerging, leaving others without a mentor/mentee (Blake-Beard et al., 2007). Lastly, practitioners can choose to pair athletes through assessment-based matching. Compatibility can be determined using data derived from assessment tools. For this approach to be successful, compatibility between mentor and mentee is crucial.

Regardless of the approach utilized to foster mentoring relationship between athletes, practitioners can also make use of technology. Consequently, electronic mentoring, or e-mentoring, can be utilized as a means of communication between athletes (Hoffmann, 2019).

Evidence suggests that e-mentoring can produce many similar benefits to traditional mentoring relationships (Hoffmann, 2019). Video communication technology (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams) are potential avenues through which to develop and maintain peer athlete mentoring relationships, particularly when meeting face-to-face is unfeasible.

Future Research Directions

To continue advancing the field of athlete leadership, it will be critical to use a variety of theoretical frameworks. To date, the majority of research examining leadership behaviors has utilized components of Chelladurai's (2007) MML and Avolio's (1999) FRLM. While these frameworks have been useful and will continue to be useful, researchers are encouraged to adopt other theories and/or frameworks to fully understand the construct of athlete leadership. For instance, Yukl's (2012) four meta-categories appears to be relevant, so developing the 15 athlete leadership behaviors associated with those four meta-categories seems like a fruitful endeavor. To date, researchers have examined athlete leadership behaviors and its relationship to individual and team level outcomes. However, athlete leadership is more complex than the relationship between leadership behaviors and individual and team level outcomes. We have advanced a working framework (see Figure 1) to encourage researchers to examine the components of the model but more importantly stimulate thoughts and ideas on conceptualizing a framework that is unique to athlete leadership. To assist in the examination of the relationships contained within our working framework, the development of an athlete leadership specific inventory is required. On this front, the majority of current athlete leadership inventories (e.g., LSS and DTLI) measure the frequency of the leadership behavior being displayed. Another alternative to consider is the effectiveness or quality of the leadership behavior being exhibited by the athletes.

Nearly every athlete leadership development program has been conducted face-to-face (i.e., researcher/practitioner physically present delivering the program). While this method of delivery has shown to be beneficial, it is limited in the number of athletes it can reach. An avenue for future research is the use of web-based technologies to enlarge the reach of these athlete leadership development programs. The process of developing online leadership development platforms can vary depending on both the type of learning (e.g., synchronous or asynchronous) and the goals of the program (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Asynchronous learning refers to instances where participants are not connected online at the same time, and can be facilitated through various formats, such as modules. Asynchronous learning provides flexibility and convenience to the participant, but also lacks the interpersonal nature provided through interactions with the instructor and other participants (Vonderwell, 2003). In contrast, synchronous learning provides the opportunity for real-time online communication, through technologies such as videoconferencing on platforms such as Zoom (Finkelstein, 2006). Synchronous communication can enhance peoples' sense of social presence so that communication feels real, even though mediated by technology (McInnerney & Roberts, 2004). Synchronous conferencing technologies can simulate the sense of community and social interactions experienced in face-to-face learning (Kear et al., 2012). Regardless of the type of learning, the use of technology offers significant advantages, such as reach, convenience, low cost, and eco-friendliness.

Chapter Summary

In comparison to other topics within the field of social psychology in sport, athlete leadership has a relatively short history. Nonetheless, researchers have highlighted the importance of this construct to the sporting environment mainly through how athlete leadership

impacts team dynamics. The goals of the chapter were to provide a definition of athlete leadership stressing the importance of the shared nature of this construct along with theoretical frameworks that have guided previous research and models that could be used in future research. Further, we provided a succinct overview of the inventories and methods used to test the relationships from these frameworks. We also underlined some of the research examining athlete leadership and drew attention to development programs and peer athlete mentoring opportunities for those interested in enhancing the leadership within their teams. Finally, we suggested some possibilities for future research with the goal of the continued development of this construct.

Discussion Questions

1. Research suggests that athlete leadership is shared among numerous athletes on a team. How can coaches and teammates ensure that athletes have the opportunity to serve in a leadership role?
2. What are some of the methods used to measure athlete leadership? What are some of the positives and drawbacks of these methods?
3. Synthesize the research to date regarding athlete leadership. Based on that synthesis, identify areas of future research and justify its importance in order to move the field of athlete leadership forward.
4. Why is it important for teams to have leadership emanating from the athletes? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having too many or too few leaders?

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Figure 1

A Working Model for the Study of Athlete Leadership