COACH-PLAYER RELATIONSHIPS IN SOCCER: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: The study was conducted to find out the perceptions of effective coaching and coach- Players relationships within a team sports. The findings are based on interviews with 6 male coaches and 25 players from soccer teams. Qualitative data analysis reveals that relationships within team sport are based on mutual respect, Trust and honesty. The results also indicate that coaches and players describe two different types of coach- Players relationships-the close, `family' oriented relationship or the `professional', arms-length relationship-both of which are considered equally effective as long as The coaches and Players share the same attitude towards the relationship. These findings have implications for effective coaching and how coaches interact to develop relationships with their Players. They demonstrate that if coaches are to be perceived as effective, it is crucial to consider individual Players preferences with respect to the type of relationship formed. This highlights the need for specialised coach training in people management as the professional coaching role increasingly requires attention to personal development in conjunction with the technical, tactical and physical training of their Players.

Keywords: Coach- Player's relationships, sports coaching.

INTRODUCTION

In team sport, interpersonal relationships exist within the team or club where coaches regularly interact with players, assistant coaches, medical and support staff as well as administrative employees. Interpersonal skills are essential for the coaches particularly in order to develop players on and off the field. Sedgwick (2003) identify that expert coaches demonstrate effective interpersonal skills in their ability to recognise individual differences and establish positive support with each players. One football coach stated that the interpersonal nature of coaching was the most essential feature for practitioners to consider if they wish to be successful. Until recently, the majority of research in coaching addressed the psychological, physiological, tactical and technical development of the Players. Lyle (2002) asserts that coaching studies have not investigated interpersonal relationships sufficiently well to be able to describe these with confidence.

Moreover, Jones (2004) claims that little research examine the interaction between players and coaches. Given the importance of interpersonal relationships within various team and individual sport settings, it is surprising that the topic has received such minimal attention from coaching researchers. Further research is required in order to provide contextual examples of interpersonal relationships within the team sport setting. There is a considerable gap in the literature with respect to interpersonal relationships in sport. Research is needed to discover whether findings from a professional context are similar to studies within college settings because these environments have received considerable attention over time.

METHODOLOGY

Selection of Subjects

Coaches and Players from the soccer teams participated in the current study. The sample included six coaches and 25 Players from various soccer teams were selected for the purpose of the study.

Collection of Data

Collection of data involved semi-structured interviews with questions that asked coaches and players to describe their perceptions of effective coaching and interpersonal relationships. The initial interview topic explored participants' individual definitions of effective coaching with the aim of educing detailed responses in relation to the topic. Coaches and players were also asked about Effective and ineffective coach- player's relationships as well as factors perceived to be crucial for developing team cohesion. Probing questions were implemented to confirm or provide specific examples from their individual contexts. The interviews carried out before or after training over a period of during one month of competition from each team's.

Analysis of Data

The constant comparative method was used to generate key themes from the perceptions of coaches and players both within and across each team context. Constant comparison is a multi-stage analysis process that initially involves the identification of key text segments or meaning units which contain ideas relevant to research topic. These meaning units are appropriately coded with descriptive names, representative of the included content. Following this, the transcripts are re-read to check for links or disparity between pertinent meaning units.

For example the meaning unit, you want to play for a coach that you have the respect of. I think it's the same for the coach, he wants to coach the players that respect him" was assembled into the tag called Respect. The next phase of the analysis process involved the creation of properties where similarities or differences between the tags are collated, For example, the tags named Family atmosphere and Respect were allocated into the property entitled relationships. Links between property groups were identified and organised into broader categories, such as People Management. This procedure was replicated for each level of analysis; first within the individual cases, then as part of the cross-case analysis.

Results

The data analysis process which were refined to 6 tags relating to the property Relationships including Open door policy, Honesty trust and respect, Demonstrate an interest in players, Regular dialogue, Family atmosphere, Professional relationships. While the six tags are split into separate groups, many of the features identified are contingent on each other. For example, effective coaches were said to (a) take an interest in players development both on and off the field; (b) initiate regular dialogue with players in both formal and informal contexts to develop trust and respect; and (c) create an open-door policy to enhance feelings of approachability. Each of the tags is explored below.

Open door policy

Player and coaches describe how effective coaches are approachable and have an open door policy to help establish rapport and build relationships with the player group. If coach is more relaxed and approachable it definitely means the player can get a bit extra out of the relationship." Similarly an effective coach gives of the presence the player can come up and have a chat to you about stuff, not be untouchable, or unapproachable." Approachability is an appealing coach quality because it is linked to creating an open, relaxed environment or enhancing two-way communication between athlete and coaches. These factors are important qualities for effective coaching and suitable coach-player relationships.

Honesty, trust and respect

In this study, effective coaches developed open, honest and respectful relationships with the players. This is because a relationship with the players can't exist without honesty and trust. The data analysis also reveals that coaches who display respect and trust for players have more positive relationships and greater rapport with player than those who lack these qualities. Players want to play for a coach that has the respect of. I think it's the same for the coach, he wants to coach the player that respect.

Demonstrate an interest in players

In response to interview questions regarding how coaches form open relationships with their players, Coaches suggests that, I think you earn their respect by showing an interest in people and showing that you are there to improve them. Demonstrating interest in each individual are other crucial factors that help establish trust and respect between coaches and players. The coaches mention that informal conversations in the corridor or when travelling assist with showing an interest in players. You just have your conversations with them and sometimes they are structured and organised. But some of the more important ones I have been in it are just casually.

Regular dialogue

In relation to initiating regular dialogue with players, players explain that effective coach-player relationships involve: touching base with them maybe not every week but maybe once every fort night, seeing how they're going, what they're thinking, what their thoughts are on the team's development, and just get a feel for how they are and just not to lose touch with them. If a player don't talk to the coach a lot then I think players can feel a little bit alienated and that they have not been helping you as much as what you think they could.

Family atmosphere

Players perceive that effective coaches form close relationships with their players are a kind of people person, someone you can approach and talk to have a joke with here and there, you don't just want talking to them. This shows how important it is for some players to be able to relate to coaches, share jokes with them and even possess a similar hobby outside the game. Coaches indicates that close relationships should be established between coach and players in order to encourage those involved to become like a family: a lot of these boys, they become virtually family to you and that's how I think it should be you got a be a little bit careful that you Don't get too emotionally attached but at the same time I think it's pretty important that There's that little bit of a family atmosphere that built their relationships on the concept of ``Together Each Achieves More''

Professional relationships

In contrast to the soccer team participants, players and coaches claim that a professional distance must exist if the coach is to be considered effective. The ``professional'' relationship exists where coaches and players remain at arm's-length distance from the coach in which coaching staff remained approachable but not matey. In this context, the coach and players make a distinction between being a `coach' and a `mate' because decision-making became easier if a professional distance is maintained.

DISCUSSION OF FINDING

Coach- Player relationships that foster trust and respect may enhance the atmosphere at the team and in turn encourage players to be more receptive of coach feedback, decisions regarding team strategy, training activities and selections. Coaches and players acknowledged that trust and respect work as both the product and the building tools in the coach- players relationship. This suggests that some college players possess a similar mentality to coaching staff concerning the formation of personal bonds with the coach outside the traditional performance-based relationship to enable both the coach and players to perform effectively.

Much like the participants' explanations about demonstrating an interest in order to generate respect between coaches and players, Jones et al. (2004) argue that being aware of what individual players are experiencing both on and off the field helps establish rapport and positive relationships between elite players and coaches.

Similarly, results from the Potrac et al. (2002) study reveal that to be completely successful, an elite soccer coach needs to be easily approachable and able to relate to his players not only as footballers but more importantly, as people, to gain their confidence, trust and loyalty.

Instigating these actions demonstrates that effective coaches care about team members and attempt to make athletes feel comfortable in the team environment. In contrast it is described the relationships as negative when limited interaction occurred between players and coach. They also explain that negative relationships surface when relationships are purely based on working towards sport-specific goals. Demonstrate that a positive relationship occurs when college coaches and players intentionally interact with each other during practice, competitions and in other situations not directly related to their sport. This scenario creates a situation where the players and coaches enjoy spending time together on both a personal and professional level.

The results from the current research suggest that professional or family-style relationships are considered appropriate for effective coaching. This demonstrates that various types of relationships can exist across different sport contexts yet still be considered effective. The type of relationship established within the team reflects the coach's philosophy and the beliefs of the players. Therefore, the type of individual relationship coaches have with each players may differ given that one player might want a close, amicable relationship with the coach while another could prefer an arm's-length, professional relationship. This highlights the importance of considering the players ' needs, wants, and beliefs when developing a team and once again illuminates the need for alignment between coach and player perceptions for effective coaching to result.

Although differences existed amongst coach and players perceptions within and across sport contexts regarding the type of relationship that is most suited to effective coaching, all participants highlighted the need for some form of relationship to exist. This correlates with Vergeer (2000), who stated that the significance of interpersonal relationships is likely to differ across varying competitions, and social circumstance. The results from the current study suggest that the nature of the sport has no bearing on the relationship developed—it is more of a personal choice of the players and coaches. Without a genuine relationship, management of the team falters because developing relationships assist coaches in managing the team, establishing a comfortable team environment, and enhancing communication between the players and coaches.

Practical Implications and Significance of the Study

The above findings suggest that success as a coach is not solely judged on the quantity of wins you have, but also on the quality of relationships you develop with your players. Despite the importance of establishing mutual respect and rapport amongst players and coaches, a sense of ambiguity still exists in relation to the most suitable type of interpersonal relationships in team sport settings. If a coach does not interact positively with the team, the effectiveness of instruction and players application to training may be undermined. Further more.

The coach- player's relationship is very important because a satisfied player is a necessary pre-requisite for players to perform at the highest level. These findings have implications for effective coaching and the future role of coaches in team settings. One of the implications from the current study reflects the need for additional coach training in personal skills and people management.

This highlights the changing expectations of the coach, whose role increasingly requires greater attention to personal development as opposed to the mere technical, tactical and physical training of their players. This is especially poignant given the expansion of team sport. Certain parameters that influenced the present research included the time of the year in which research took place, the limited sample size and the focus on male-only perspectives. In respect to the

Timing for data collection, the participants' beliefs and behaviours may have been influenced by whether the team was in competition and winning or losing. These forces could affect the coach's involvement and communication style in training while also shaping their players' personal outlook on the research topic. An ethnographic or action-research project, whereby the researcher is involved with a team or several teams during the course of an entire competition, would offer great insight into ongoing coaching behaviours and strategies as they occur in various sport contexts.

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