Intercollegiate Coaches’ Servant Leadership and Their Athletes’ Sportspersonship

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Research Premise

- People notice when athletes are unethical and behave poorly

- Much research on coach behavior focuses on the performance, satisfaction, and motivation of the athletes who play for them

- Little research focuses on how coach leadership style influences their athletes’ sportspersonship orientations and behaviors
Research Question

- Is there a relationship between intercollegiate coaches’ servant leadership and their athletes’ ethically related sport orientations and behaviors?
Rationale for the Study: Leadership

Coaches are a powerful influence on their athletes.

Leadership is “the ability to influence people toward the attainment of goals.” (Liaos, Theodorakis & Gargalionos, 2003)

Coaches are leaders.
Character in sports matters (sportspersonship)
The way we view competition reflects the values inherent in our economic structure...Success is often defined in terms of winning (Coakley, 2004)
Opportunity Statement

Coach leadership style, particularly servant leadership, has not been studied in relationship to the sportspersonship of their athletes.
Opportunity Statement

Soccer has worldwide appeal; college and university sports draw substantial attention in American culture.
Opportunity Statement

Collegiate coaches and athletes constitute an easily defined subset of our society.
Constructing the Study

▪ Coach/Servant Leader/Moral Educator
  - Trust, humility, service
  - Character development

▪ Contesting Orientations
  - Metaphorical framework
  - Partnership
  - War

▪ Sportspersonship
  - Character orientations
  - Moral dimensions

▪ Sport Behavior--Soccer
  - Yellow/Red Cards
Coach/Servant Leader/Moral Educator

- Coach Behavior—Servant Leader/Moral Educator
  - Leader effectiveness—focus on followers; service as a catalyst of influence (van Dierendonck, 2011)
  - Coaching effectiveness—competence, confidence, connection, and character (Cote & Gilbert, 2009)
  - The aim of education—multiple dimensions of character—intellectual, civic, performance, and moral (Shields, 2011)

- What works in Character Education
  - Decades of research (Berkowitz, 2011, Berkowitz & Bier, 2005)
    - Trust, role modeling, teaching about character, service to others, nurturance etc.
  - Complementary attributes in servant leadership (Page & Wong, 2000)
    - Trust/inclusiveness, humility, serving others
Contesting Orientations: Conceptual Metaphor

- Metaphor is more than language. Metaphorical concepts underpin thoughts and actions (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)

- Metaphor is the way we conceive the world around us; the conceptual system that gives meaning, understanding and purpose to everyday life; not something we are usually aware of; conceptual metaphors give structure to our world (Shields and Bredemeier, 2011)

- One may hear words...but meaning requires an imaginative link from the listener’s experience to the abstract language symbols used by the speaker (Greenleaf, 1970)

- “Human cognition is fundamentally shaped by various poetic and figurative processes that constitute basic schemes by which people conceptualize their experiences and the world around them” (Gibbs, 2002)
Contesting Orientations: Conceptual Metaphor

**Time is Money**

- Conceptual metaphors help us understand one concept in terms of another—using source (money) and target (time) domains to help structure the way we conceive ideas and experiences...

- Conceptual metaphors provide mental maps that gives meaning to complex, abstract ideas in terms of familiar ones which both motivate and constrain our understanding.
Contesting Orientation: Partnership and War

- Contesting Theory
  - Conceptual metaphor applied to contesting (competition)

- Contest-is-partnership
  - Partnering (source); contest (target)
  - Etymological meaning of competition—to strive with

- Contest-is-war
  - War (source); contest (target)
  - Predominant conceptual metaphor—striving against
  - Implications for competition
Sportspersonship Orientations

▪ **Sportspersonship**
  – Attitudes and behaviors associated with ethics, moral values or character in competition
  – What best promotes the goals of sport such that participants will conduct themselves in a manner that increases rather than detracts from the mutual enjoyment of the activity (Keating, 1964)

▪ **Sportspersonship Orientations Model** (Vallerand and colleagues 1996;1997)
  – Respect and concern for... *(emphasizing the moral sub-scales)*
    ▪ Rules and officials
    ▪ Opponents
    ▪ Social conventions
    ▪ Full commitment toward participation
    ▪ Win at all cost approach to play (not utilized--reliability--Miller et al, 2004)
Sport Character: Athlete’s Sport Behavior

Rules of game:
Soccer--17 Laws
• Law 5— Referee
• Law 12—Fouls and Misconduct
Cautions (yellow cards)
Ejections (red cards)
Methods

▪ **Design**
  - Correlational, Quantitative Survey, Four Variables

▪ **Sample**
  - NCAA DIII Conferences--13 total (3 public/10 private)
  - NCAA DIII Soccer Programs—849 total (411m/438w)
  - Invitations—208 programs; Responses—47 coaches/teams (20m/26w/1both)
  - Individual participants—274 (85m/189w); Teams—17 (6m/11w)

▪ **Measured Constructs**
  - Servant Leadership—RSLP-S (Rieke, Hammermeister & Chase, 2008);
  - Sportspersonship Orientations—MSOS (Vallerand et al., 1997);
  - Contesting Orientations—COS (Shields, Funk & Bredemeier, 2015);
  - Sport Behaviors—Yellow/Red Card Aggregates
Logic Model

Coaches' Servant Leadership
Trust/Inclusion; Humility; Service

Athletes' Contesting Orientations
Partnership; War

Athletes' Sport Behaviors
Yellow/Red Cards

Athletes' Sportspersonship Orientations
Respect for Rules and Officials; Concern for Opponents
Relational Hypotheses: Individual Tests (1-6)

There will be a significant ...

1. positive correlation between the Revised Servant Leadership Profile for Sports (RSLP-S) and the Multidimensional Sportspersonship Orientations Scale (MSOS).

2. positive correlation between the sub-scales of RSLP-S (SLTI—trust/inclusion; SLH—humility; SLS—service) with the moral sub-scale (MSOS_MD; respect for rules and officials; concern for opponents) of the MSOS.

3. positive correlation between the RSLP-S and the Partnership sub-scale of the Contesting Orientation Scale (COP).
Relational Hypotheses: Individual Tests (1-6)

There will be a significant ...

4. negative correlation between the RSLP-S and the War sub-scale of the Contesting Orientation Scale (COW).

5. positive correlation between the MSOS_MD and COP.

6. negative correlation between the MSOS_MD and COW.
Relational Hypotheses: Team-Level Tests (7-10)

There will be a significant...

7. positive correlation between yellow/red card aggregates for teams and team average RSLPS, SLTI, SLH and SLS scores.

8. negative correlation between yellow/red card aggregates for teams and team average MSOS_MD scores.

9. negative correlation between yellow/red card aggregates for teams and team average COP scores.

10. positive correlation between yellow/red card aggregates for teams with team average COW scores.
Results

- There was a small, but significant, positive relationship between the service sub-scale of servant leadership (SLS) and the moral scale of sportspersonship orientations (MSOS_MD).

- Servant leadership was significantly and positively related to partnership contesting orientation.

- Positive and negative correlations, both moderate and highly significant, were found to exist between the moral scale of sportspersonship and contesting orientation (partnership and war). This fit the pattern found in previous research on sportspersonship (Shields et al, 2015).

- There was a substantial negative relationship between team yellow/red card aggregates and servant leadership, especially with the service sub-scale, where the relationship was significant.
Implications for the Practice

- **Coaches are leaders.**
  - This study makes a compelling argument for coach servant leadership as a positive influence on the ethically-related orientations and behaviors of the athletes they lead, both directly on behavior, and indirectly through the positive relationship servant leadership has with *partnership* contesting orientation.

- **Coaches are moral educators**
  - Role modeling, mentoring, building trust, embracing service to others, empowering athletes, and teaching about character are just a few of the strategies that work in the classroom and can work in sport.
  - Teach athletes how to compete; teach them that competition is “striving with”
Tweetable Takeaways

- Soccer athletes tend to receive fewer yellow/red cards when coaches are perceived servant leaders #CoachServantLeader
- Soccer athletes tend to view opponents as partners and game as mutual quest for excellence, when coaches are perceived servant leaders #CoachServantLeader
- Soccer athletes tend to respect rules, officials, and show concern for opponents when contesting as partners—not enemies #CoachMoralEducator
Thank you!