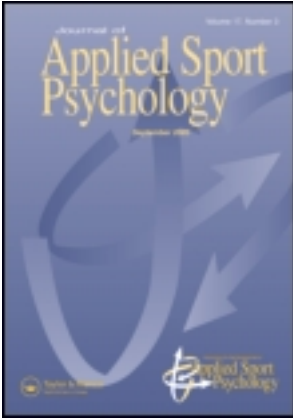


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Ice Hockey Coaches' Perceptions of Athlete Leadership

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The purpose of this study was to identify ice hockey coaches' perceptions of the factors influencing athlete leadership. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with six high performance ice hockey coaches of elite 16- to 20-year-old athletes. The results indicated how coaches selected and developed their athlete leaders, how they fostered the coach-athlete leader relationship and the responsibilities of their athlete leaders. These results provide coaches with new information on how to identify and develop their athlete leaders, as well as how to cultivate positive relationships with them.

The role of the coach is to deliver quality coaching and a positive learning and performance environment, which is accomplished by teaching athletes sport (e.g., technical, tactical), social (e.g., cooperation, responsibility), and leadership skills (e.g., perseverance, hard work; Bloom, 2002; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995). Given its relevance in sport, it is not surprising that leadership has been assigned great importance by both athletes and coaches (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998) and effective leadership has been identified as a crucial factor in achieving team success (Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001). Most of the research examining leadership in sport has primarily focused on the coach. However, the presence and importance of athlete leadership within teams has recently received some attention (Loughead, Hardy, & Eys, 2006). For example, Loughead et al. (2006) defined an athlete leader as an individual occupying either a formal or an informal leadership role within a team who influences team members towards the achievement of a common goal. Based on this definition, there are two types of athlete leaders. On the one hand, formal athlete leaders are those who have been designated as a leader by their team, such as, a captain or assistant captain. On the other hand, informal athlete leaders are those who emerge as a leader based on their experience and interactions with other team members.

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Research has revealed a great deal of information on some of the key characteristics of athlete leaders as well as the roles they play on a team (e.g., Dupuis, Bloom, & Loughead, 2006; Holmes, McNeil, Adorna, & Procaccino, 2008; Loughead et al., 2006; Moran & Weiss, 2006; Price & Weiss, 2011; Todd & Kent, 2004; Wright & Côté, 2003; Yukelson, Weinberg, Richardson, & Jackson, 1983). For example, Todd and Kent (2004) examined leader behaviors of high school student athletes and found that 75% of them identified work ethic as the single most important characteristic. Furthermore, Dupuis et al. (2006) found that male ice hockey team captains controlled their emotions, respected their teammates and coaches, had positive attitudes, a strong work ethic, and communicated effectively. In a similar study on intercollegiate athlete leaders, Wright and Côté (2003) found that athlete leadership development focused on four components: high skill, strong work ethic, enriched cognitive sport knowledge, and good rapport with people. Finally, Yukelson et al. (1983) found that varsity soccer and basketball players who were identified as leaders were perceived by their peers as being highly skilled athletes. Therefore, there is a consensus that athlete leaders, whether they were a formal or an informal leader, possessed a strong work ethic, were respected by their teammates, and looked to reach high performance levels. These qualities helped them develop positive relationships with their coaches and teammates, and facilitated their leadership duties. As well, these findings identified the potential impact athlete leaders can have on other team members.

One aspect that may influence athlete leadership development is the relationship between the coach and athletes. Philippe and Seiler (2006) found that a close rapport between national level athletes and coaches was important for the personal and athletic development of the athlete. The closer the relationship, the easier it was for athletes to communicate openly about a variety of topics with their coach. Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, and Peterson (1999) also examined factors influencing Olympic athletes and found teams that met or exceeded performance expectations had healthy relationships with their coaches built on trust, effective communication, and a detailed plan to perform well during competition. Finally, Jowett and Cockerill (2003) found that a mutual respect between players and coaches led to positive coach-athlete interactions and enhanced athlete performance. Taken together, athletes viewed the development of a mutually respectful relationship with their coach as a valuable source of support and encouragement in and out of sport.

To date, the majority of leadership studies have been based on the athlete's perceptions. To expand the current understanding and knowledge base of this area, it would be important to examine the coach's perceptions of his/her athlete leaders and the factors that influence their interactions, because leadership behaviors among athletes have been identified by coaches as an important component of success (Gould, Hodge, Peterson, & Petlichkoff, 1987). Thus, obtaining coaches' perceptions of athlete leadership would provide a more complete view of athlete leadership.

To identify the factors that influence a coach's perceptions of his/her athlete leaders, the coaching model (CM; Côté et al., 1995) and the multidimensional model of leadership (MML; Chelladurai, 1978) were used as frameworks for this study. The CM is practical for researchers in sport as it provides a framework that describes coaching behaviors. It helps explain how coaches structure their knowledge in the development of athlete leaders by focusing on a series of primary and peripheral components influencing athlete growth. The CM implies that coaches create a mental model that helps them evaluate their plan of action and consequently maximize their team's potential. The mental representation of team potential is influenced by three peripheral components: the athlete's characteristics, the coach's personal characteristics, and the contextual factors, which in turn determine which of the primary components of organization, training, and competition must be improved to develop the athlete and the

team. Taken as a whole, the CM is an integration of primary and peripheral components that allow coaches to establish guidelines to create optimal conditions for athlete performance and development and in turn, help identify coaches' knowledge and strategies when dealing with athletes.

The MML is a linear model comprised of antecedents, leadership behaviors, and outcomes. The antecedents consist of situational characteristics, leader characteristics, and member characteristics. Situational characteristics are referred to as the specific demands of the situation, such as group norms and the composition of the group. Leader characteristics include their personality, age, or experience. Finally, member characteristics consist of the team member's personal characteristics (e.g., cultural background, ability, maturity, and age). The leader behavior component of the model is categorized into three types of behaviors: required, perceived, and preferred. Required leader behavior refers to behaviors that are needed for a particular situation. Chelladurai (1978) specified two outcomes of leadership behaviors in the MML: team member satisfaction and performance. In sum and in relation to the examination of athlete leadership, the CM provides a framework for establishing the knowledge about the development of athlete leaders. More specifically, the CM helps understand which variables influence coaches' decisions and in turn, their behaviors. It is also important to examine the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. The MML addresses how coaches work with and influence athlete leaders. Moreover, the MML states that coaches are required to balance the situational demands (required behaviors) with the individual preferences of the team members (preferred members) to make the appropriate decisions and action (actual behaviors) that will lead to optimal team performance and athlete satisfaction.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine ice hockey coaches' perceptions of the factors influencing athlete leadership. In particular, this study examined various components of athlete leadership, such as how athlete leaders are selected and developed, the role of an athlete leader, athlete leader behaviors, and the coach-athlete leader relationship. To date, the majority of research in athlete leadership has used a quantitative methodological approach. However, there are advantages in implementing a qualitative approach, specifically with an interview format. Interviews have been identified as one of the most powerful tools to understand human beings (Fontana & Frey, 1994). More importantly, qualitative interviews gain insight into participants' knowledge and experience in a specific domain, and can permit the researcher to initiate a topic for discussion while allowing the interviewee to answer freely, with relatively few restrictions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This knowledge can ultimately lead to a more comprehensive and effective understanding of athlete leadership in sport.

Gathering the knowledge and experiences of expert coaches could provide aspiring coaches, sport administrators, and athletes with valuable practical information. Specifically, this study would provide coaches with a deeper understanding of how to identify, communicate, and deal with their team leaders. Consequently, coaches would be better prepared to evaluate what type of leader would best serve him as well as the players. These results could potentially enhance the understanding of coaching success with respect to the value and impact of athlete leaders.

METHOD

Participants

Prior to data collection, ethical approval for the study was obtained from the first author's university research ethics board. Using a convenience sample, six elite male ice hockey coaches of high performance 16- to 20-year-old athletes participated in the current study. This purposeful sample was designed to enhance the focus of the study and to ensure the results

Table 1
History of Coaching Background and Accomplishments

Name	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
Age Range	30–39	30–39	50–59	40–49	30–39	30–39
Coaching Experience	13 years	16 years	33 years	25 Years	15 Years	18 Years
Elite Head Coaching Experience	MJ AAA	MJ AAA	MJ CIS	AAA	MJ AAA	AHL MJ AAA
Personal Coaching Awards as Head Coach	Coach of the Year Midget AAA	Coach of the Year QMJHL	Coach of the Year QMJHL	Coach of the Year Midget AAA	Coach of the Year QMJHL	Personality of the Year QMJHL
International Coaching Experiences	World Under 17 Challenge	World Under 18 Championship	World Junior Championship	World Under 17 Challenge	World Under 17 Challenge World Junior Championship	World Under 18 Championship World Junior Championship

Leagues

Midget AAA (AAA).

Major Junior Hockey League (MJ).

Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS).

American Hockey League (AHL).

were not confused by a variety of contexts. In the sport of ice hockey there are typically one captain and two to three assistant captains on every team who each wear a letter on the front of their jersey designating their status as leaders. They have several important roles to fulfill including interacting with the coaches, their teammates, and the media (cf. Dupuis et al., 2006). The inclusion of our participants was based on four criteria. First, they had a minimum of 5 years head coaching experience at either the Midget AAA or Major Junior Hockey League levels. Midget AAA hockey is the highest level of competitive minor hockey in Canada, while Major Junior is the highest level of junior hockey in Canada and is the primary drafting league for the National Hockey League for players aged 16 to 20. Second, they had completed at least Level 3 in the old National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) in Canada or competition (high performance) stream certification from the new program¹. Third, they were a member of a coaching staff (e.g., head coach, assistant coach) in an international competition (e.g., World under 17 Championship, World under 18 Tournament, World Junior Hockey Championship) in the past 10 years. Finally, each coach was identified as one of the best in their field by a group of knowledgeable hockey experts. This group included one member of Hockey Quebec, one member of Hockey Canada, and members of the current research team. Table 1 provides a detailed summary of the six participants' coaching background and accomplishments prior to commencement of this study.

Interview Type

Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with each of the participants, similar to other studies that focused on expert coach's knowledge (e.g., Côté et al., 1995; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). This type of interview allowed researchers to initiate a topic of discussion, while giving the interviewee the opportunity to answer openly with few restrictions and to introduce what he regarded as relevant (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The use of this interview approach created an environment that allowed the researcher to build a conversation within a

precise subject area, to formulate questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style on a pre-determined subject (Patton, 2002). Each interview lasted between 75 and 90 min and occurred in the city where the participant was coaching at a mutually agreed upon time, date, and location.

Prior to the interview, the researcher established a positive rapport with the participant by initiating a general discussion related to the coaching profession or sport of ice hockey. The interviewee also shared some of his background information, such as the number of years involved in sports, coaching, and education. Sharing this information allowed the interviewee to establish some commonality or connection with the interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), building a constructive relationship with the interviewee is an essential component to a successful interview.

Interview Guide

An interview guide was created for the present study by the current research team (see Appendix). The interview guide consisted of four sections. Section 1 contained opening questions intended to initiate the discussion (e.g., Can you describe your coaching experience and progression for me?). The questions in section two were based on the CM (Côté et al., 1995; e.g., How does your vision of the team's potential influence the type of characteristics you look for in an athlete leader?) and the MML (Chelladurai, 1978; e.g., How does your leadership style influence the type of leader you look for?). The third section consisted of a summary question that linked the topic of study and summarized previous answers (e.g., From your experience, what are the key factors that differentiate great athlete leaders from average athlete leaders?). Lastly, the fourth section included two concluding questions which gave the interviewee the opportunity to add any comments they felt were relevant to the study. To assure consistency, the same interview guide was used with each participant. During the interview, three types of questions were asked: main, probe, and follow up (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Data Analysis

The goal of the data analysis was to create a system of emerging categories that represented coaches' perceptions of athlete leadership by constantly comparing the data (Charmaz, 2008). These categories were formed using a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993). In particular, categories were generated from the data obtained from the interviews as opposed to pre-determined prior to analysis. This inductive approach included four steps: creating meaning units, tags, properties, and categories (Côté et al., 1993).

Prior to the data analysis, each transcript was transcribed verbatim with only minor edits (Côté et al., 1993). For example, changing names to code numbers occurred to ensure participant confidentiality. Each interview was analyzed line-by-line and divided into different pieces of information, known as meaning units. Tesch (1990) describes a meaning unit as a segment of text comprised of words, sentences, or entire paragraphs that communicate the same idea and relate to the same topic. To create a computerized index system through which all meaning units may be retrieved, NVIVO 7, a computer program designed specifically for qualitative data, was used. Each meaning unit received a tag relevant to its content. Once tags were assigned to each meaning unit, they were examined for similarities and grouped together into larger groupings, called properties (Côté et al., 1993). Then, each property received a tag based on the common features shared by these meaning units (Côté et al., 1993). Finally, each property was examined and grouped into similar collective sets named categories, in a comparable manner to the creation of properties. When grouping categories together, a higher

and more abstract level of analysis was required (Côté et al., 1993). The data was examined until saturation of understanding was reached and no new tag/property/category emerged at each level of classification from the inductive analysis (Côté et al., 1993).

Trustworthiness

Prior to the interviews, the researcher gained interviewing knowledge by reading qualitative research material (e.g., Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and acquired interviewing skills by conducting two pilot interviews under the supervision of an experienced interviewer. These pilot interviews allowed the researcher to enhance his interview skills and to validate the effectiveness of the interview guide. Prolonged engagement was enhanced by the interviewer in many ways. For example, the interviewer competed at elite levels of hockey including at the university level, coached at elite levels of youth hockey, and was aware of the culture and vocabulary of hockey. In addition, the researcher has worked at various training camps and hockey schools with experienced coaches from Major Junior and Midget AAA levels.

Peer review involves an impartial party examining the data analysis to ensure its credibility (Côté et al., 1993). The peer reviewer was a graduate student in sport psychology who played hockey at an elite level for several years, including Major Junior. He was randomly presented with 25% of the meaning units (MU) and was asked to place each MU with one of the 41 tags that were previously generated by the research team. The peer reviewer successfully placed 80% of the MU under the appropriate tag. A brief discussion between both parties led the peer reviewer to agree that the researcher's tags were appropriate and that the diversity of misplaced MU's were attributed to a lack of context. The same procedure took place when the properties were created. The peer reviewer classified the 41 tags into eight properties. A 93% reliability rate was attained. Three tags were discussed between the peer reviewer and the researcher until agreement was reached. In the end, no changes were made. In the final stage, the peer reviewer grouped the eight properties into three categories with a reliability rate of 100%. This peer review process helped diminish researcher bias and ensured that an accurate representation of the coaches' knowledge and experience was formed (Sparkes, 1998).

Member checks are an essential technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, member checks occurred on three different occasions. The first occurred at the end of each interview where all the participants were given the opportunity to add or modify any response or idea communicated during the interview. The second check consisted of sending the participants a full verbatim transcript of the interview. The participants were given the opportunity to add, clarify, or eliminate any comments made during the interview. The final check consisted of sending the participants a three-page summary of the results where they were asked to state any concerns, questions, or comments with regard to the findings. All six participants approved the summary and provided positive comments with respect to the study.

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to understand ice hockey coaches' perceptions of athlete leaders. The data selected for the current study represents 584 or 69% of meaning units taken from a larger data base on coaches' perceptions of athlete leadership. The additional information related to personal experiences and characteristics of these coaches, typically involving their athletic careers and coaching background and experiences. This information was not central to the research question guiding this study and, thus, was not included. The focus of this study is based on four properties: selecting an athlete leader (27%), coach-athlete

leader relationships (17%), developing athlete leadership (13%), and athlete leader responsibilities (12%). The order of presenting the results was purposefully selected so that it followed a natural progression of how coaches selected their athlete leaders, how they cultivated a relationship with them, how they developed athlete leadership in them, and lastly how they viewed the assignment of responsibilities to their athlete leaders.

Selecting an Athlete Leader

This property discussed the criteria, methods, and information coaches gathered prior to selecting the formal athlete leaders for their team. This property was the largest containing 227 meaning units. Coaches talked about the different aspects of athlete leadership identification including getting to know players, player characteristics, and evaluating potential athlete leaders.

All coaches discussed the importance of athlete leadership. It involved team captains sharing similar values with them and with the rest of the coaching staff. Each of the participants felt that team captains were an extension of the coaching staff and that fitting within the team's identity was a requirement to wearing the "C" on their jerseys:

I really try to observe the players whose values are similar to those of the entire coaching staff, not only mine since we are three coaches here in [name of city]. We try to identify the players whose values closely match ours; values, such as work ethic, respect, and honesty because these players are a reflection of the coaching staff. (C1)

The values that we instill in our team stem from the fact that I have been here for several years. Players like [name of player] and [name of player], we grew together. They learned as much from me as I learned from them. These players knew exactly what it took to play for the [name of team]. A player who would join the [name of team], who brought lots of leadership, but who would not fit within our team trademark, would not fit in our locker room. (C5)

Coaches also looked at an athlete's age prior to ascribing a leadership position to a player. Five of the six coaches selected older athlete leaders for reasons including maturity and playing experience in the league:

In most cases, I believe that 19 is a perfect age for becoming a captain in junior hockey. We never want to limit ourselves to age since at some point it may happen that a 17-year-old player is named captain. However, there is such a big difference in terms of life experiences between a 16 and 20-year-old player. (C2)

In addition, all coaches talked about specific characteristics they looked for in their athlete leaders both on and off the ice. The following quote supports the opinions expressed by all coaches in terms of on-ice qualities of their leaders: "He must be a player that leads by example, who is always ready to work, who follows the plan, and who is willing to play with bumps and bruises all the time." (C4)

Although the on-ice characteristics were a fundamental component in identifying team leaders, coaches also felt that leadership qualities outside the rink were equally important. For instance, being generous, honest, taking care of teammates, and setting the example off the ice for teammates were discussed by all the coaches:

You look at their behaviors. You can't only look at his game, you must understand the way he thinks. I believe a leader checks his ego at the door. He wants all of his teammates to be

happy. He takes care of them at school, on the bus, at team meals. Does he sit with different teammates during meals? I constantly observe them. I love to watch them in action. (C3)

Leaders are unselfish, cooperative, and look to share with their teammates. I believe that it is important to look at those individuals who are unselfish. I realize over the years that individuals who sincerely care about others, who are generous in every sense of the word, and who pay attention to their teammates are often the best leaders because they do not have any enemies on the team. These players are also able to be hard on their teammates, as well as discuss both the positive and negative realities without their teammates holding a grudge. (C1)

Coach-Athlete Leader Relationships

This property described coach-athlete leader interactions designed to address team matters, including team cohesion and player attitudes, as well as establishing an individual rapport/connection between the athlete leaders (both formal and informal) and the coach. This property was mainly comprised of the topics discussed during coach-athlete leader meetings and the factors that contributed to positive and negative relationships. It should be noted that although coaches' target of reference was athlete leaders, they did at times refer to them as simply players.

All of the coaches felt that meeting with their athlete leaders was an essential component for team progress. The majority of coach-athlete leadership meetings focused on individual or team performance, and team goals:

We often speak about team objectives, how to find solutions together, and how to achieve our goals. We can talk about objectives until tomorrow morning, but if our players don't buy into our objectives, then there are no objectives. Objectives must come from them and they must accept them. Ultimately, we set our objectives with the players. (C2)

Coaches also mentioned the factors that led to successful and unsuccessful coach-athlete leader relationships. Three of the five coaches who discussed this topic felt that a poor relationship with their athlete leaders occurred when the athlete leader put his personal objectives ahead of the team's goals:

Personal objectives that became more important than team objectives. I can't say that I have ever coached a bad person. However, I've coached players that had different goals and objectives that I thought were unrealistic. A player thinks he is a 50-goal scorer but in fact, it is not the coaching staff's opinion. Sometimes this difference in perception created sparks between players and I, which made our interactions difficult. (C2)

Interestingly, although the majority of coaches felt that a difference in expected goals by both parties led to a bad relationship, one coach stated that his inability to accept certain behaviors from his athlete leaders is what caused a poor coach-athlete leader relationship:

There are certain things that I didn't accept. I was never able to understand, accept, and listen to a pretender. A player who tells a teammate to act a certain way but pretends to act the right way is unacceptable. This type of behavior bothers me in life and in coaching. I can't understand that a player can ask others to be physical, intense, and work hard when he misses two practices per week because he is pretending to be hurt. It is not only me who notices these behaviors,

the players see it as well. My relationship with players has always been good, but was a little more distant with these types of players. (C5)

In contrast, common themes emerged in the positive relationships coaches shared with their athlete leaders. Specifically five of the six coaches attributed their successful relationship to a mutual respect and openness between them and their athlete leaders:

My philosophy is to treat them like I want to be treated. Treat me like you would like to be treated. I treat them like pros. The best relationship is one where you can treat the player like a pro. We don't hide anything from each other. You tell me what you think, and I'll tell you what I think. I am there to give them the necessary tools. (C3)

The best relationship is when a player is not afraid to open up with you, to the point where. . .not in front of the group, but in a one-on-one meeting to challenge certain decisions, and not be afraid to tell you that he disagrees with it. When this happens, a good discussion arises where you can share and validate your reasoning. (C1)

Furthermore, all coaches believed that caring about and trusting their athlete leaders helped foster their relationship. For instance, one coach referred to his relationship with his leader as one of a big brother:

One commonality that was apparent with all my good leaders was that, 'I really do feel for them and they feel it back.' I think it is what the players feel the most. I feel for them. These players call me later on even though they are not on my team anymore. They call me to talk, ask for advice, or help. The more I coach, the more that big brother connection is present. (C6)

Coaches also discussed that listening to their leaders was one way of establishing trust and respect in their relationship. In particular, all coaches felt that it was necessary to show their leaders that their door was always open for questions, concerns, or to simply talk:

The door is always open. If a player knocks at my door, I will conclude that he needs to talk to me. He may not know how to tell me, but he wants to talk to me. I have never discouraged a player from coming to see me. I am very careful with these situations. There is no such thing as a bad question. (C5)

Finally, coaches were attentive to the suggestions and opinions offered by their athlete leaders. They felt it was crucial to let their athlete leaders know that their opinions would be well-received and applied when necessary.

It's also important to make them feel like their opinions are important if you want them to share their ideas with you. You have to prove to them that their opinions are not only important but that you will consider them. Otherwise, what is the use of asking them to share their thoughts and ideas. (C4)

Developing Athlete Leadership

This property described how coaches worked with and developed the leadership skills with all athletes on their team. Coaches talked about how they gave their athletes opportunities to

become better leaders, as well as how they worked to develop leadership throughout the entire team.

Coaches cited that to develop athlete leaders, they needed to empower players through responsibilities and give them opportunities to make their own decisions:

If I want to control everything, I am not developing anything. They must learn to fly on their own, they must develop initiative. I am there to guide them and to give them the tools to help them achieve tasks a, b, and c. . . . When I give them responsibilities, they develop leadership. When I give them responsibilities, they must be accountable for them. (C3)

I am convinced that we can help players develop leadership, because if you want to train leaders, you must give them the opportunity to become leaders. How do you do that? You must put them in situations where they must make decisions. After analyzing the situation, you must sit down with the player to evaluate what worked well, what didn't, and why. (C4)

I often choose a moment that is perfect for a specific player to demonstrate leadership. I tell him: 'I have confidence in you and it is time for you within your leadership style to talk to the players.' Use this tone of voice, talk to them about these three things, and it should have this effect on the group. Usually, the players are always a little uncertain. It's my job to reinforce the point that it takes guts to do this task and that I know he has it in him. The player feels like he is acting as the coach, the coach believes in me, and I have the power. Once he delivers his message to the team and we obtain the desired result, I reinforce his actions by telling him that he was responsible for our success, and that he had a direct impact on the outcome. Eventually the players recognize situations where they can act as leaders. (C6)

Coaches shared thoughts about collective or team leadership. Specifically, five of the six coaches believed that leadership did not solely rely on team captains and assistants, but rather on a leadership group:

On certain teams, you listen to the players with letters on their jerseys. Here, it doesn't work that way. We have a leadership group. Before the holidays our leadership group was composed of five players. Post trades, we have increased our group to seven leaders and things are going very well. (C5)

I believe that everybody is a leader. I don't believe in one leader. All 20 players must become leaders. For me, everyone must become a leader and everybody can be influenced by everybody, by the way an individual acts, and by the way he practices. (C3)

I like for each player to be a leader within his strength. So I ask that each person be a leader. If a player is not vocal, it's ok, and I will say: 'You are here because you are outstanding at something. You tell me what that is or I'll tell you what it is and you make sure you are a leader in that area.' This aspect of leading with your strength is applicable to each team member. (C6)

We ask all of our players to bring their own leadership style to the team. For some players being vocal in the dressing room is not their preferred leadership style, but they lead in other ways, perhaps with their actions on the ice or how they interact with their teammates. (C2)

Furthermore, one coach selected a leadership group that had complementary leadership skills with the intention of having individuals that were able to take the lead in different situations:

There is a big difference between these two leadership styles [name of two players], but they need each other. If you let [name of player] lead, you will have a type of respectful leadership where the players follow the norms. However, when it's time to step outside the norm, time to shake things up, time to be a little more daring, or when the team isn't doing so well and needs to wake up, then you need [name of player] who is there to complement the other leader. (C6)

Athlete Leader Responsibilities

This property encompassed coaches' expectations of athlete leaders on and off the ice, as well as the outcomes that arose from effective leadership. This included the responsibilities attached with a leadership role and how athlete leader behaviors and character impacted the team.

Four of the coaches felt their athlete leaders played a big role in communicating the coaching staff's message to the team:

The captain is often the one who delivers messages to his teammates. It's his responsibility to ensure that team activities and curfew guidelines are respected. Last year, I wanted certain issues to be resolved. These issues were put in the hands of my captain, and he made sure [with the help of his assistant captains] that the message was understood by the entire team. (C4)

We often ask our leaders to make sure that every player is on time for team activities and that each player is in his room when we are on the road. We can also ask our captains and assistants to double-check that the guidelines are respected, as well as inform players with messages that come from us. (C2)

Additionally, three coaches talked about how their athlete leaders served as role models. One coach provided an example that pertained to being a role model to other teammates, while the other two described how their players needed to be role models for community members: "I always say that you need to have a role model. It's fine to talk about it as a coach and to put values in place, but they need to see it. They need to see it!" (C6)

Being a role model was often off the ice. It is a way of being, living, for us in [name of city]. Playing for a junior team is a privilege and responsibilities are attached with that privilege. We want to be perceived as role models in our community. Telling our players that they need to be role models is fine, but young players want to know what it is to be a role model, what needs to be done in order to be a role model. We put the criteria on paper for them. (C2)

Although acting as a liaison between coaches and teammates, as well as being a role model were important leader responsibilities, all coaches spoke about the importance of an athlete leader's influence on his teammates. The following quote is representative of the influence athlete leaders had on teammates:

I think [name of player] has the best of both worlds. He is very considerate, a great teammate, and at the same time he'll pull with his energy and take charge. If we're losing he'll say to the guys, "I want that puck, I'm gonna make the difference"; everybody has to follow, they don't have much of a choice. He also has that push from behind, where he can really be in your face. So he's got the complete package; pull [lead from the front], care [from the side-support], and lead from the back, where he can push you hard. (C6)

Interestingly, one coach stated that although a player sets the right example, is a good teammate, and acts like a leader, it doesn't mean that others will necessarily follow, as shown in the following quote:

It's good to be a good example for your teammates to follow, to listen to your peers, but it doesn't have any impact if you don't have the prestige or necessary leadership. I don't think that everybody can become a leader. If you act like a leader, it doesn't necessarily mean that others will want to follow you. (C2)

Finally, C1 described the influence a leader can have on the team by sharing his desire to win, and dedication to accomplish something big with his teammates:

Our leader was enthusiastic. He was extremely dedicated to our goal. It was his last year in junior hockey and he found a way to rally the team around him. He told his teammates: I had 4 great junior years where I accumulated many points but never won. This year, I want to win! I don't mind getting fewer individual points than the previous years, but I want to win. The result was that the players really bought in and worked together for this guy. (C1)

DISCUSSION

The majority of research on athlete leadership has focused on characteristics and behaviors as rated by the self or teammates. In fact, very little research has investigated the role that a coach plays in the development of athlete leaders. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify ice hockey coaches' perceptions of the factors influencing athlete leadership. In particular, this study examined how coaches selected and developed their athlete leaders, how they fostered the coach-athlete leader relationship, and the responsibilities of their athlete leaders. These results will be discussed as they relate to previous research on coaching and athlete leadership. As well, recommendations for future research and practical and theoretical implications of this study will be addressed.

The importance of coach-athlete leader meetings was a frequently cited theme in this study. These meetings served to discuss the team's climate, as well as how individual and team objectives could be achieved (Dupuis et al., 2006; Giacobbi, Roper, Whitney, & Butryn, 2002). Interestingly, the current results found that coaches preferred to acquire this information from more than one athlete leader. In fact, Loughead et al. (2006) found that athlete leadership within a team was widespread with numerous athletes serving different leadership functions. Furthermore, Loughead and Hardy (2005) found that two-thirds of athletes in their study indicated that both team captains and teammates provided peer leadership to their teams. Results from this study are in agreement with Loughead and colleagues in that none of the coaches from the current study felt that leadership came solely from their formal leaders (i.e., captains, assistant captains). They all indicated relying on a group of athletes to provide leadership to the team. Although coaches viewed leadership as a collective responsibility, they did not specify the exact number of leaders representing this group, which suggests that an ideal number of athlete leaders on a team may vary. In fact, one coach stated that each team member influenced the team by the way he worked and interacted with others. Thus, it appears that athlete leadership within a team is widespread, allowing both coaches and athletes to rely on several leaders to guide and influence each other.

Aside from the topics discussed between coaches and their athlete leaders, previous research has demonstrated that closeness in the coach-athlete relationship was important in successful performance and satisfaction in sport (Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; Jowett, 2003;

Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Philippe & Seiler, 2006). Jowett and Meek (2000) described closeness as an emotional interdependence by players and coaches in terms of liking, trusting, and respecting each other. Results from the current study revealed that elite ice hockey coaches developed an emotional attachment to their formal and informal leaders by caring, trusting, and listening to them. This is consistent with previous literature on the relationship between elite athletes and their coaches (Greenleaf et al., 2001; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

All the coaches in our study highlighted the characteristics they looked for in their leaders, both on and off the ice, including the impact they had on the team. Although coaches shared both positive and negative impacts that leaders had on their teams, one common element that emerged was that successful teams often had strong athlete leadership. Coaches indicated that athlete leaders helped their teams by fostering the team's culture that was established by the organization and coaching staff. These results strengthen the importance of coaches having a long-term vision and establishing a culture that athletes can commit to (Desjardins, 1996; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). It extends the literature by showing how coaches sell their vision to their athletes.

Aside from influence, coaches discussed the specific on-ice qualities that athlete leaders needed to demonstrate. All of the coaches in this study indicated that a strong work ethic, leading by example, and following the coach's instructions were essential requirements for their athlete leaders. This relates to the required leader components described in the MML (Chelladurai, 1978). One of the most important required characteristics was an athlete leader's work ethic. Previous studies considered work ethic to be an essential athlete leader characteristic at both the youth and varsity levels (Dupuis et al., 2006; Todd & Kent, 2004; Holmes et al., 2008). For example, Todd and Kent (2004) found that 75% of student athletes competing in interscholastic sports considered work ethic to be the most important characteristics for an athlete leader to possess. Similarly, at the varsity level, Dupuis et al. (2006) indicated that the best way university ice hockey captains felt they could provide leadership to the team was by working hard on the ice. The results of this study extend the MML as a useful theory in leadership research. Originally conceptualized within the context of coaching, it would appear that this theoretical framework is also useful when examining athlete leadership. Future research could examine how the required athlete leadership behaviors are related to the outcomes (e.g., performance) as described in the MML.

Coaches in the current study also emphasized that leadership qualities outside the rink were equally important for their athlete leaders. Generosity, honesty, taking care of teammates, and setting the right example were all mentioned by coaches. Specifically, coaches looked for players who had a sincere concern for their teammates' well-being. The notions of taking care of teammates and setting the right example have been illustrated in previous literature as a prominent responsibility of athlete leaders (Dupuis et al., 2006; Price & Weiss, 2011; Wright & Côté, 2003). Three coaches in the current study discussed how they required their athletes to act as role models to other teammates and community members. Similarly, coaches felt that it was their responsibility to inform their athlete leaders of the responsibilities that came with being a Major Junior Hockey League player, and that children in the community both looked up to them and needed to view them as positive role models. Taken together, these results signified that acting as a role model went beyond the confinements of the rink, and that coaches' helped their athletes refine their skills in this area.

Although the results of the present study advance the field of athlete and coach leadership on several fronts, a few limitations should be noted. To begin, the background of the lead investigator may be considered a limitation because no researcher enters a study *tabula rasa*. However, the research team was trained to acknowledge our biases and address them throughout

the entire interview process (cf. Krane, Andersen, & Streaan, 1997). Another point is these results may not be applicable to other sports because the sample consisted of coaches with a minimum of 5 years' experience at the Midget AAA or Major Junior Hockey League level and with international coaching experience. As such, there are several future directions researchers can consider. For instance, it may be interesting to replicate this study with individuals who are coaching professional athletes. Given the different constraints of professional sports (e.g., franchise players, salaries, team performance), it would be worthwhile to draw comparisons between professional coaches and the current sample of coaches. In addition, the current study can be replicated with other team sports including basketball, soccer, or volleyball to investigate potential differences because the nature of these sports is different than hockey (e.g., number of players on the team, duration of season). Also, by gathering the thoughts of female coaches, research on athlete leadership in ice hockey would cover both the men's and women's game. Finally, because this study was exploratory and the importance of role modeling emerged in a number of places, it might be interesting for future research to investigate this topic. That is, how critical is role modeling in terms of being an effective athlete leader?

Nonetheless, the results of the current study are of interest to a variety of members in the sport community, including coaches and athletes. The results provide current coaches with new information on how to identify their athlete leaders, cultivate positive relationships with them, and help develop their leadership skills. For example, recognizing that athletes are at the core of team success and that leadership belongs to all team members suggests that coaches should allocate time and effort to the development of leadership (Price & Weiss, 2011). Moreover, current and aspiring coaches may gain knowledge on how coaches influenced the team identity in a number of ways. For example, by implementing their own type of leadership within the organization, how their philosophies guided their thoughts on the required assets and behaviors of their leaders, how they fostered positive relationships, and how they enhanced the leadership skills of the formal and informal leaders on the team. With this new information, coaches may re-evaluate their own leadership behaviors, those of their athletes, as well as question the effectiveness of their actions in establishing the leadership direction of the team. By modifying their own behaviors, coaches may develop better athlete leaders, become better coaches, and ultimately enhance the level of member satisfaction and performance of the team.

The current study may also help athletes learn about the types of coach-athlete relationships that are required to develop into an athlete leader. As well, it was revealed that leadership opportunities are available to several team members and that coaches empowered leadership with their athletes. This information may allow athletes to better prepare for the leadership expectations set by their coach, and grasp the leadership opportunities that may arise as they progress in sport. Furthermore, from a sport administrator's perspective, the type of interactions held between coaches and their athlete leaders, as well as the attention attributed to the methods used to reinforce the leadership skills of their athletes, may help to refine and organize specific coach-athlete leader sessions within coach education programs, allowing the overall quality of the coach-athlete leader interactions to improve.

Finally, these results may be used to help researchers understand the knowledge and strategies used by coaches to obtain success with respect to athlete leadership. As stated earlier, little empirical research has gathered the thoughts of expert coaches with regards to athlete leadership. From a practical perspective, this knowledge can lead coaches to strengthen the leadership of the team by carefully identifying, developing, and utilizing their athlete leader's influence and aptitudes more effectively. From a theoretical perspective, the results discussed how athlete leadership was collective in nature, which reflects a fairly new leadership paradigm of shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003) where team members collectively lead each other. Also, it would appear that coaches in the current study asked their athlete leaders

to employ a full range of leadership behaviors (Avolio, 1999), such as serving as role models or communicating the coaching staff's message. These behaviors are indicative of aspects of both transformational and transactional leaders. For instance, serving as a role model would be indicative of the transformational leadership behavior of idealized influence (i.e., behaves in a manner that results in being viewed as a role model that will be emulated over time); while communicating the coaching staff's message is reflective of the transactional leadership behavior of contingent reward (i.e., knows what needs to be done and is rewarded for carrying out the assignment; Avolio, 1999). It is hoped that the results from the current study will encourage both applied practitioners and researchers to utilize these leadership paradigms when consulting or advancing knowledge in the areas of sport coaching and leadership.

FOOTNOTE

1. The new NCCP model is made up of three streams and a total of eight contexts, each with its own coaching requirements. Coaches in the competition stream usually have previous coaching experience or are former athletes in the sport. They tend to work with athletes over the long term to improve performance, often in preparation for provincial, national, and international competitions. http://www.coach.ca/eng/certification/nccp_for_coaches/nccp_model.cfm

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APPENDIX

Interview Guide

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1. Discuss your athletic career including previous leadership positions?
 - Relationships with coaches
 2. Can you describe your coaching experience and progression for me?
 3. Describe your coaching philosophy?
 4. How would you describe your leadership style?
 5. How does your leadership style influence the type of leader you look for with the teams you coach?
 6. How do you identify your team leaders?
 - What do you look for in a team leader?
 7. How does your vision of the team's potential influence the type of characteristics you look for in an athlete leader from year to year?
 - Age
 - Past leadership role
 - Leading by example
 - Bringing the team together
 - Leader potential
 - Skill level
 - Experience/Tenure
 8. What are some of the responsibilities and behaviors that you require/expect your team leaders to fulfill?
 9. What are the main topics of discussion that you share with the team leaders?
 - Team performance
 - Player attitude
 - Ice-related or off- ice related
 10. Looking back to the year where your team had the best record or success in the playoffs, how much of an impact did your team leaders play?
 - During the regular season
 - In the playoffs
 11. Describe the best relationship you have had with team leaders and what made your interactions effective.
 - Daily meetings
 - Pre-game and post game meetings
 - Monthly wrap-ups
 12. Briefly describe the worse team leaders you have coached and what went wrong.
 - Communication
 - Trust
 - Commitment
 13. From your experience, what are the key factors that differentiate great athlete leaders from average athlete leaders?
 14. Do you think a coach has any impact on their leadership development?
 - If a coach answer is "yes," how does a coach foster that development?
 15. If "no," why doesn't the coach foster that development? Would you like to add anything else related to our interview?
 16. Do you have any final question or comments?
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