

Examining the Experiences of Peer Mentored Athletes Competing in Elite Sport

Matt D. Hoffmann and Todd M. Loughead

University of Windsor

Gordon A. Bloom

McGill University

The general objective of the current study was to explore the experiences of elite level athletes who reported being peer mentored by other athletes during their sporting careers. The primary purpose was to identify the mentoring functions provided by athlete mentors, while the secondary purpose was to examine the outcomes related to peer mentored athletes' (i.e., protégés) mentoring experiences. Individual interviews were conducted with 14 elite peer mentored athletes, and the data were analyzed using a hierarchical content analysis. The results indicated that athlete mentors provided a variety of specific functions that facilitated protégés' progression through sport and development from a personal standpoint. The findings also showed that protégés benefitted in terms of enhanced performance and confidence, and also demonstrated a willingness to provide mentorship to their peers. In sum, the results of the current study may be used to enhance the effectiveness of peer mentoring relationships between athletes.

Keywords: athlete mentoring, group dynamics, athlete relationships, team dynamics

The following quote from then rookie National Hockey League player Alex Chiasson illustrates a young athlete who viewed an experienced teammate as a valued peer mentor:

For me, Pevs (Rich Peverley) was someone I sat next to in the locker room, was someone that took care of me on the road and was the first one to text me to see if I wanted to go to dinner. For the young guys, it's always hard to open up and ask questions and he was the guy I leaned on for that type of thing throughout the year. (Heika, 2014, para. 10).

Despite anecdotal evidence emphasizing the importance of mentoring relationships between athletes (see quote above), empirical research investigating peer athlete mentoring is limited (Loughead, Munroe-Chandler, Hoffmann, & Duguay, 2014). Recent studies in this area have indicated there are benefits to being peer mentored (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2016a, 2016b), however little is known regarding what transpires in these athlete mentoring relationships. The present study sought to expand

upon our understanding of peer athlete mentoring by examining the experiences of elite level athletes who reported being peer mentored by other athletes during their sporting careers.

Mentoring is generally defined in organizational contexts as a process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person (the mentor) supports a developing individual (the protégé), serves as a role model to that individual, and guides him/her in their development (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999). Mentoring relationships can emerge informally and spontaneously or be formal in nature where the mentor and protégé are assigned to each other (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Regardless as to how mentors and protégés are paired, research by Kram (1980) showed that mentors in organizational contexts provided both instrumental (also referred to as career or vocational in the literature) and psychosocial mentoring functions to their protégés. Mentors provided instrumental mentoring by supporting a protégé's development, advancement, and goal attainment within an organization (Kram, 1980). In contrast, mentors used psychosocial mentoring to enhance a protégé's personal growth and perception of competence, and to clarify his/her identity within and outside of the organizational setting (Kram, 1980). Not surprisingly, mentors' use of these functions has been found to benefit protégés. For instance, the results of an interdisciplinary meta-analysis revealed that both instrumental and

Hoffmann and Loughead are with the Dept. of Kinesiology, University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Bloom is with the Dept. of Kinesiology and Physical Education, McGill University, Quebec, Canada. Address author correspondence to Matt D. Hoffmann at hoffmann@uwindsor.ca