

# THE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP IN BASKETBALL. ANALYSIS OF THE ANTECEDENTS, COMPONENTS AND OUTCOMES

**José M. Sánchez\*, Pablo J. Borrás\*, Nuno Leite\*\*, Otavio Battaglia\*  
& Alberto Lorenzo\***

KEY WORDS: Coach-athlete relationship, dyad, basketball.

ABSTRACT: The aim of the study was to examine the coach-athlete relationship by analyzing the determinants of the quality of that relationship, the components emerged from previous constraints and the outcomes of the relationship. We accomplished a qualitative study using semistructured in-depth interviews with a total of 4 dyads (2 coaches and 4 players) selected deliberately. The data obtained suggested that the coach-athlete relationship in basketball is organized into three layers: a) relationship antecedent variables (coach's and athlete's behaviour and values wanted), b) components (behaviours, feelings, cognitions, improvement and maintenance strategies, and management of differences) and c) the consequences or outcomes (the coach and the player). In conclusion, we found that the different antecedents determine the components of the relationship, generating, in the case of positive relationships, satisfaction, wellbeing and performance, representing a personal and professional growth in both members of the dyad.

---

D. José Manuel Sánchez, C/ Santa María del Naranco, 1, 28229, Villanueva del Pardillo, Madrid, España.  
Teléfono: +34687810309

E-mail: [sanchezgalan@gmail.com](mailto:sanchezgalan@gmail.com)

\*Facultad de Ciencias de la Actividad Física y del Deporte-INEF. Universidad Politécnica de Madrid.

\*\*Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro

## Introduction

One of the most decisive factor in the quality of the physical activity is the coach-athlete relationship (Rosado, Palma, Mesquita, & Moreno, 2007) and it has a high potential positive or negative on his personal life (Poczwardowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002). As a result, the dynamic of the coach-athlete relationship has been identified as one of the main aspect of influence for the sport participants from one side or another (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007).

Coach-athlete relationship has been going studied from an analytical or holistic point of view. The first approach focuses on individual components or on one or another agent (coach or athlete) developing several studies about the coach's behavior (e.g., Sousa, Cruz, Torregrosa, Vilches, & Viladrich, 2006), the cognitive components (e.g., Becker, & Solomon, 2005), the psychosocial component (e.g., Chelladurai, & Saleh, 2007) and interactions (e.g., Carron, & Hausenblas, 1998). In contrast, the holistic approach analyzes all components and it incorporates both the coach and the athlete, developing three conceptual models in the last years: Model Jowett (e.g., Jowett, 2007), Model LaVoi, (e.g.; LaVoi, 2007) and Model Poczwardowski (e.g.; Poczwardowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002). After an extensive review of previous models, Poczwardowski and Jowett (2007) developed the Integrated Research Model wich presents the coach-athlete relationship in three interrelated layers: antecedents, components and outcomes. The model argues that the variables of the first layer such as age, gender or experience of coaches and athletes affect the quality of the relationship affecting the level of closeness or commitment perceived. Jowett and Poczwardowski (2007) affirm that

a better knowledge of the interaction between coaches and young athletes would allow us to avoid problems such as conflicts, excessive involvement by parents, lack of support or burn out.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to analyze the coach-athlete relationship in basketball, knowing their antecedents, components and outcomes.

## Method

Participants were 4 coach-athlete dyads, consisting of 4 players with a mean age of 19 years (SD = 1.29) and 2 coaches. The relationship between coach and player lasted two years at least and it must be close. The athletes played in male teams wich contest in national competitions and coaches had to satisfy 3 of the following requirements (Jiménez, 2008): a) have an academic background related to sport; b) have the highest basketball coach certificate, c) be a prestigious coach in his work context, d) have at least 10 years of coaching experience, e) train or have trained players who are in national teams.

The instrument used was a semi-structured interview and in depth (Patton, 2002). The design of the interview was conducted using the following process: a) selection of the main issues from the literature review, b) developing the first version, c) the first outline was submitted for expert opinion d) conducting pilot study; e) modification and preparation of the definitive outline. For the data analysis used a mixed inductive-deductive process, putting units of meaning into groups around labels, properties and categories. The answers, interpretations and conclusions of the data analysis were controlled by the participants to enhance credibility.

## Results

The outstanding values and behaviours desirables in a coach is to know how to explain the reason for the errors, varying the types of tasks, adapt to different situations or have an active attitude. On a personal level, it emphasizes the ability to give trust and take care of the personal situation of the players. The players are expected to own working capacity, performance, ability to sacrifice his individual interest in favour of the team and have other interests and activities outside of basketball. "Then, being short and focused, leaving many things out, I'd say these three things: commitment to work, committed with the group and commitment to life out of basketball" (ENT1).

Conversations not related to the training process is the most distinguished behaviour. "We talked about everything, in fact i took P.L. home every day and that meant talking a lot out of training" (ENT1). The relationship is characterized by the co-orientation expressed in behaviours such as giving the player responsibilities in decision-making team. "You have your reasons for saying something, you can make your own decisions, you can take even the opposite of something without going over, but you can have another relationship, not as teacher-students, but co-workers" (JUG3).

Closeness is considered an essential feeling for the successful development of the relationship. On the other hand, the relationship is emphasized to be considered over the sporting field, being especially personal and human. Confidence is the most pronounced cognitive component. "To have confidence to tell him your

views, or what you agree or you disagree is always good" (JUG2). The differentiation of roles or the balance between closeness and authority, and management of personal differences within the team are another important aspects in the coach-athlete relationship in basketball.

Finally, the positive interaction between players and coaches have an impact on the effectiveness of the training sessions, which is related to obtaining a higher performance. "Then you can agree with the coach in his ideas and his point of view for basketball, and then you get fun with that coach and that is transmitted on the court" (JUG1).

## Discussion

The teaching principles or intervention guidelines expected by the player is one of most important antecedents of relationship (Chelladurai & Saleh, 2007). Referring to values and behaviours expected in the player, the results obtained by Becker and Solomon (2005) show that the performance or the own working capacity is a determinant of the quality of the relationship.

As in other studies, it has been found behaviours as talks on other issues not related to training (Sousa, Cruz, Torregrosa, Vilches, & Viladrich, 2006) being this component one of the most appreciated by players. The co-orientation is understood as one of the key factors in the motivation for the practice, being one of the behaviours listed in the recommendations for an effective workout (e.g., Smoll & Smith, 2009). Closeness is emphasized as the most important feeling for the development of the relationship (Lavoie, 2007; Jowett, 2007). Confidence is

the most prominent cognitive aspect, being the positive approach to teaching the best way to get it (Smoll & Smith, 2009).

Referring to the consequences of the relationship, the close and positive relationships result in an increase in sports

performance by improving the effectiveness of training and the personal development by satisfaction with the work done. Researchers as LaVoi (2007) underline the importance of improving the skills which help us to develop positive relationships.

## References

- Becker, A.J. & Solomon, G.B. (2005). Expectancy Information and Coach Effectiveness in Intercollegiate Basketball. *The Sport Psychologist*, 19, 251-266.
- Carron, A.V. & Hausenblas, H.A. (1998). *Group Dynamics in Sport*. Morgantown: Fitness Information Technology.
- Chelladurai, P. & Saleh, S. D. (2007). Dimensions of leader behavior in sports: development of a leadership scale. En: D. Smith & M. Bar-Eli (Eds.) *Essential readings in Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Champaign: Human Kinetics. Pp.185-189.
- Jiménez, S. (2008). *El desarrollo de la pericia en los entrenadores expertos en baloncesto. Etapas en la formación del entrenador a partir del estudio de su itinerario vital*. Tesis doctoral inédita. Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
- Jowett, S. (2007) Interdependence Analysis and the 3+1Cs in the Coach-Athlete Relationship. En S. Jowett y D. Lavallee (Eds.) *Social Psychology in Sport*, Champaign IL, Human Kinetics. Pp. 3-14.
- Jowett, S. & Poczwardowski, A. (2007). Understanding the Coach-Athlete Relationship. En S. Jowett y D. Lavallee (Eds.) *Social Psychology in Sport*, Champaign IL, Human Kinetics. Pp. 3-14.
- LaVoi, N. M. (2007). Expanding the Interpersonal Dimension: Closeness in the Coach-Athlete Relationship. *International Journal of Sport Sciences and Coaching*, 2(4), 497-512.
- Montero, A., Ezquerro, M. & Buceta, J. M. (2005). Variaciones de las conductas de los entrenadores infantiles a lo largo de la competición. *Kronos: revista universitaria de la educación física y el deporte*, 4(2), 52-56.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods (3rd ed)*. Newbury Park. CA: Sage Publications.
- Poczwardowski, A., Barott, J.E. & Henschen, K.P. (2002). The Athlete and Coach: Their Relationship and its Meaning. Results of an Interpretive Study. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 33, 116-140.
- Rosado, A., Palma, N., Mesquita, I., & Moreno, M. P. (2007) Percepción de los jugadores de fútbol, de distinto nivel, sobre sus entrenadores. *Revista de Psicología del Deporte*, 16(2), 151-165.
- Smoll, F. L., & Smith, R. E. (2009). *Claves ara ser un entrenador excelente*. Barcelona: Inde.
- Sousa, C., Cruz, J., Torregrosa, M., Vilches, D., & Viladrich, C. (2006). Evaluación conductual y Programa de Asesoramiento Personalizado a Entrenadores (PAPE) de deportistas jóvenes. *Revista de Psicología del Deporte*, 15(2), 263-278.