

# Coaching Leadership Traits Preferences of University and College Athletes

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**Abstract**—This study examined coaching leadership traits as preferred by athletes of universities and colleges of education located in Lagos State, South West Nigeria. Athletes from two universities (n=99) and two colleges of education (n=92) were involved as study sample. The Leadership Trait Preference Questionnaire (LTPQ) was used to measure athletes' preferences. Mean and Spearman rank order statistics were used to analyze collected data. Results showed that the traits of friendliness and happiness, sense of humour and cheerfulness, and cooperation were most preferred irrespective of type of institution. College of education athletes were found to have higher mean preferences (M=34.54; SD=9.42) of leadership traits than their university counterparts (M=33.64; SD=9.46). A significantly strong relationship ( $\rho=.81; *p<0.05$ ) was found between preferences of university and college of education athletes. It was recommended that coaches as leaders should from time to time exhibit emotive aspects of themselves to inspire athletes to higher performance.

**Keywords**—Coaching behavior, coach-athlete relationship, interscholastic games, leadership traits.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE purpose of training in sports is to improve performance, and the personnel directly involved are the coach. The coach provides his expertise in imparting skills, tactics and strategies for the athletes as part of many other efforts at improving performance. Not only is a coach an expert in a particular area, but he is also a manager, friend, planner and motivator to his athletes. Therefore the functional capability of the coach is dependent largely on both psychological and administrative principles. The administrative aspect centres on human resource management while the psychological aspect is concerned mainly with training principles which are functions of leadership traits.

The emotional bonding in the coach-player relationship can be claimed to be strong [1]. The time the athlete spends with the coach for practices, travelling, and competition and in cooperative goal endeavour is significant. The coach serves as a model for his athletes in demonstration proper behaviours as his personality and traits rob-off on the athletes. As suggested by [2], coaches as leaders are the people responsible for the performance of organisations and teams, and they need to exhibit emotive aspects of themselves which will inspire everyone to follow. The form of leadership traits exhibited by the coach does not go unnoticed by the athlete who seeks out the coach to talk about things outside of university and college

sports that may be affecting their lives and self-esteem.

The most important factor of a coach is to help athletes improve their athletic skills in a wide range of tasks from sequential development and mastery of basic skills to the more specialized physical, technical, tactical and psychological preparation. Coaching is an important leadership competency because it has been found to have important effects in performers' attitude.

Factors of coaching leadership traits have been found to influence performance success of athletes [3]. However it does not seem surprising that studies of coaching leadership behaviour have failed to reflect an ideal personality trait for the coach [4]. Earlier approach to the study of leadership was to try to determine which characteristics or traits of coaches might be unwarranted but the evolution of leadership theories [5] had helped to explain the fundamentals of identifying positive traits that could influence the coach's roles and responsibilities. This, according to [6], implies that sport research must take into consideration situations of leadership in order to understand the leadership traits demonstrated by coaches towards their athletes.

Earlier studies on leadership had also focussed on independent variables such as the coach, athlete, environment, groups, situations and behaviour patterns which influence coaching behaviour [7], [8]. Review of literature suggests growing concerns for improved coach-athlete relationship prompted a new direction in measures of leadership behaviour and styles to investigate the interaction of these variables [9]. The Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML) developed by [10] emphasized that athletic performance and satisfaction are the results from the required, actual and preferred behaviours of coaching. The model postulated that the greater the degree of congruence between these three behaviours, the greater the athlete's performance. These behaviours are however influenced by some antecedents' characteristics or factors such as situational characteristics, coach characteristics and athlete characteristics [9]-[11]. As a follow up to the MML, [12] developed the Leadership Trait Preference Questionnaire (LTPQ), an inventory to measure the preferred aspect of the coaching leadership behaviour.

Preferences of the trait vary based upon gender, sport played, and the level of competition [13]. Athlete's maturity and skill level have also been found to affect leadership preferences [14]. It should be noted however that athlete's preferences can change throughout a particular period of time. Also, relationships shared among coaches and athletes can be impacted by personality disorders, similarities and differences in passion, success level, and the task dependence and

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variability of the sport [15].

Preferred coaching leadership traits are those behaviours which the athletes desired to be demonstrated by their coaches and which they perceive to impact performance. Athletes' perceptions of these behaviours, exhibited as traits, are related and crucial for their performance. Reference [16] affirmed that if the coaches' behaviours match the appropriate preferences of the athletes, they will feel satisfied and achieve their performance. The notion that congruence among preferred coaches traits, positive perception and exhibition of such traits by coaches leads to improved athlete performance is well established [17]. Reference [18] indicated that the behaviours demonstrated by the coach are important determinants of athlete satisfaction which is crucial to performance.

The study of individual and group behaviour has been a varied and enlightening endeavour. But [19] had noted that in studying behaviour, the sport context allows for a somewhat structured and controlled setting without the need for a laboratory. Reference [20] examined the relationship between coaching behaviours in team and individual sport athletes and found significant differences in preferred coaching traits among fourteen different sports. They contended that interdependent and independent sports differ in the level of relevance among athletes and coaches leadership traits. Coaching traits of technical skills, goal setting, mental preparation, physical training, competition strategies, and personal support were found to positively correlate with athlete's performance satisfaction. This was in line with previous study [7] which identified relationships among coaches' traits and their athletes' performance. Reference [2] found that the traits of consistency and decisiveness were characteristics of leaders from both sport and business. However leadership behaviour and trait would be determined by the situation.

The rationale for the present study stemmed from the fact that coaches, as leaders, hold a unique position in respect of their influences in the lives of athletes. It becomes necessary to stress the need for leadership traits capable of impacting performance and success for both athlete and coach. Strengthening coach-player relationships towards achieving established goals could provide useful prescriptions for improving training and selection of athletes at the tertiary level of education in Lagos State. The onus of selecting and training athletes who would represent their institutions at various interscholastic games rests on the coaching leadership effectiveness. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the ten factors of coaching leadership traits [12] and the preferences of university and college of education athletes in Lagos State. Research has indicated that effective coaching leadership is required for a collegiate athletic program to be successful [21]. The study is delimited to university and college of education athletes representing the four institutions at interscholastic games. Generalisation of this finding was delimited to these participants or those who could be shown to be similar in composition.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. Participants

Participants from two universities [University of Lagos (UNILAG), Lagos State University (LASU)] and two colleges of education [Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education (AOOED), Federal College of Education (Technical) Akoka (FCETA)] who were in competition session were involved in this study. All the four institutions are located in Lagos State, Nigeria. Each of the universities and colleges of education was established by the Federal Government (UNILAG and FCETA) and Lagos State Government (LASU and AOOED). For the universities, all athletes that represented their institution at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Nigerian University Games Association (NUGA) in Benin City from 19<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2011 were part of the sample while for the colleges of education, all athletes who represented the colleges at the 17<sup>th</sup> National Conference of Nigeria Colleges of Education Games Association (NICEGA) in Omok, Port Harcourt from the 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2012 were selected. Representation at these games is not automatic as preliminary competitions are organized at the zonal level to select athletes and teams for the national games.

Based on the purpose of the study, these categories of athletes were considered relevant and representative since they represented their institutions at the highest level of interscholastic games. At the level of their institutions, every athlete aspires to feature in these games. Within the four institutions, a total number of 202 athletes represented the institutions at the two games and in fourteen sports of badminton, basketball, chess, cricket, handball, hockey, judo, squash racket, swimming, table tennis, taekwondo, tennis, track and field and volleyball. However, only 191 that volunteered to participate in the study and returned the questionnaire in usable form (94.55% return rate) formed the sample for the study. This was made up of 99 athletes (51.83 %) from the universities and 92 (48.17%) from the colleges of education.

By mere coincidence, the two universities have the largest and the smallest number of participating athletes. As shown in Table I, UNILAG has the largest number of participants (n=79; 41.36%) in 12 sports while LASU has the smallest number of participating athletes (n=20; 10.47%) in 4 sports. Across the two subgroups, male dominated representation at the games (n=137; 71.73%) with the majority of them from college of education (n=73; 53.28%). The university subgroup had the largest number of female participants (n=35; 64.81%) in 7 sports.

TABLE I  
ATHLETES REPRESENTATION BY INSTITUTION AND SPORT

| Sport        | University (n=99) |    |              |    | College of Education (n=92) |    |             |   |
|--------------|-------------------|----|--------------|----|-----------------------------|----|-------------|---|
|              | UNILAG<br>n=79    |    | LASU<br>n=20 |    | FCETA<br>n=59               |    | AOCOED n=33 |   |
|              | M                 | F  | M            | F  | M                           | F  | M           | F |
| Badminton    | 4                 | -  | -            | -  | 2                           | 2  | 2           | - |
| Basketball   | 10                | -  | -            | -  | 9                           | -  | -           | - |
| Chess        | 5                 | 5  | -            | -  | -                           | -  | -           | - |
| Cricket      | 13                | -  | -            | -  | -                           | -  | 14          | - |
| Handball     | -                 | -  | -            | -  | 11                          | -  | -           | - |
| Hockey       | -                 | -  | -            | -  | 17                          | -  | -           | - |
| Judo         | 1                 | -  | 2            | 9  | -                           | -  | -           | - |
| Squash       | 3                 | -  | -            | -  | -                           | -  | -           | - |
| Swimming     | 1                 | -  | 1            | -  | -                           | -  | -           | - |
| Table Tennis | 1                 | -  | 1            | 3  | -                           | -  | 2           | - |
| Taekwondo    | 4                 | 2  | -            | -  | -                           | -  | -           | - |
| Tennis       | -                 | 2  | -            | -  | 1                           | -  | -           | - |
| Track &Field | 9                 | 2  | 1            | 3  | 5                           | 3  | 10          | 5 |
| Volleyball   | 8                 | 9  | -            | -  | -                           | 9  | -           | - |
| Total        | 59                | 20 | 5            | 15 | 45                          | 14 | 28          | 5 |

### B. Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study was a modified Leadership Trait Preference Questionnaire (LTPQ) which was developed by [12]. This was used to determine athletes' preferences of coaching leadership traits. The LTPQ is a standardised 57-item scale with 10 factors designed to measure the coaching leadership traits which the athletes prefer being reflected in the behaviour, actions and dispositions of their coaches. These traits are counselling, temperament, endurance, friendliness and happiness, rewards and encouragement, communication skills, dedication and goal attainment, sense of humour and cheerfulness, positive criticism and cooperation. The instrument describes each trait within a particular coaching leadership behavioural disposition.

*Counselling* - leadership trait characterised by provision of advice for athlete with unconditional support and undue pressure.

*Endurance* - leadership trait characterised by tolerance and accommodation of athlete' unpleasant situations and conditions.

*Temperament* - leadership trait demonstrated by good and positive emotional dispositions towards athletes.

*Friendliness and happiness* - characterised by friendly disposition and warmth towards the athletes.

*Rewards and encouragement* - leadership trait that reinforces an athlete by encouraging and rewarding good performance.

*Communication skills* - leadership trait characterised by ability to effectively communicate with the athletes and with less ambiguity but more understanding.

*Dedication and goal commitment* - leadership trait demonstrated by dedication and commitment to athlete's goal achievement.

*Sense of humour* - leadership trait characterised by good spirit and cheerful disposition towards the athletes.

*Positive criticism* - leadership trait characterised by positive

and objective feedback and criticism to correct mistakes and improve performance of athletes.

*Cooperation* - leadership trait demonstrated by direct and indirect teaching of necessary skills and characteristics considered important for goal attainment.

Based on these descriptions, athletes' responses on each item statement reflect their ratings of the ten traits. The scale consisted of three parts: Part I included the consent form, Part II included background questions on participant, sport, team and the coach, Part III included the 10 factors in which athletes describe the types of coaching behaviors they desire. Item responses are quantified by using a modified 4-point Likert scale. The derived score from the responses thus reflects athlete's order of preferences.

The internal consistency of the test items had been initially confirmed by experts in test construction. Test-retest reliability was carried out to further establish the consistency of the LTPQ and a Cronbach's alpha value for the instrument was established at 0.76. An introductory letter was attached to the instrument explaining the purpose and need for the study as well as why athletes' cooperation is required in completing the questionnaire.

### C. Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected with the administration of the LTPQ carried out separately at the two venues of the interscholastic games-NUGA and NICEGA. This was deliberate since the athletes had previously trained and prepared for the games with their coaches; they were therefore in competition mood at the venue of the games. The athlete-coach relationship that existed before and during the games was crucial to the purpose of this study. At each venue and under the approval of the director of sports of each institution, permission and cooperation of the officials attached to each institution's contingent were sought. The purpose of the study and modalities of administering the instrument were discussed with the coaches. Administration of the instrument was carried out in each institution with two research assistants who were non-technical officials attached to the athletes. The research assistants were tutored on the appropriate steps of informed consent and that participant is voluntary as all information would be treated with confidentiality.

Data were analysed by determining the mean values for each trait and across the two categories of athletes (university and college of education). Mean ranking were also calculated for the two categories of athletes on each of the leadership traits. Spearman rank order correlation was thereafter calculated to determine the coefficient and the significance of the rankings.

## III. RESULTS

Table II presents the means and rank difference correlation summary of university and college of education athletes' preferences of coaching leadership traits. Descriptive analysis shows that college of education athletes have higher mean preferences (M=34.54; SD=9.42) of coaching leadership traits than their university counterparts (M=33.64; SD=9.46).

TABLE II  
MEAN AND RANK DIFFERENCE CORRELATION SUMMARY OF UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE ATHLETES' PREFERENCES OF COACHING LEADERSHIP TRAITS

| Trait Items                     | University<br>(n=99) |            | College of Education<br>(n=92) |            | d  | d <sup>2</sup> |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|------------|--------------------------------|------------|----|----------------|
|                                 | Mean                 | Rank order | Mean                           | Rank order |    |                |
| Counselling                     | 38.5                 | 5          | 38.3                           | 5          | 0  | 0              |
| Temperament                     | 20.5                 | 9          | 21.8                           | 9          | 0  | 0              |
| Endurance                       | 20.6                 | 8          | 20.0                           | 10         | -2 | 4              |
| Friendliness and happiness      | 42.7                 | 1          | 42.3                           | 3          | -2 | 4              |
| Reward and encouragement        | 35.9                 | 7          | 40.4                           | 4          | 3  | 9              |
| Communication skills            | 38.5                 | 4          | 36.0                           | 7          | -3 | 9              |
| Dedication and goal attainment  | 20.1                 | 10         | 22.2                           | 8          | 2  | 4              |
| Sense of humor and cheerfulness | 43.5                 | 2          | 43.3                           | 1          | 1  | 1              |
| Positive criticism              | 36.0                 | 6          | 38.0                           | 6          | 0  | 0              |
| Cooperation                     | 40.1                 | 3          | 43.1                           | 2          | 1  | 1              |
| Total                           | 33.64                |            | 34.54                          |            |    | 32             |

$\rho=0.81$ ; \* $p<0.05$

University athletes mostly preferred the coaching leadership traits of friendliness and happiness, sense of humour and cheerfulness and cooperation from coaches while college of education athletes also mostly preferred the same three coaching leadership traits but in different order. The least preferred coaching leadership traits among the university athletes are also the same as the traits least preferred by the college of education athletes. These traits are those of dedication and goal attainment, temperament and endurance. The only difference is also in the order of preferences. Rank order correlation coefficient result indicates a significantly strong relationship ( $\rho=0.81$ ;  $p<0.05$  at  $df=10$ ) between the university and college of education athletes preferences of coaching leadership traits. Also, result shows that 66% (coefficient of determination) of the variability in the preferences of university athletes is due to college of education athletes' having different preferences of coaching leadership traits.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The finding of present study that college of education athletes' have higher preferences of coaching leadership traits supports the findings of [13] that preferences of the traits may vary based on situational factors. The skill level of this category of athletes equally impacts their preferences [14]. This finding could be explained by the various differences in the college of education athletes' personal characteristics which may have positively impacted the relationships shared between them and their coaches [15] relative to those shared by the university athletes.

Findings from this study also indicated that the coaching leadership traits of friendliness and happiness, sense of humour and cheerfulness, and cooperation are what the athletes needed for good performance. This suggests that the athletes preferred their coaches to be warm in their disposition

towards them; to be in good spirit and cheerful in their disposition to them; and be directly involved in the teaching of necessary skills to their performance. Whatever an athlete desires cannot evolve without a good relationship between the athlete and the coach. If a coach adapts his/her behaviour to be in tune with athletes preferred behaviours, the athletes may be more readily inclined to the coach through improved satisfaction and performance [11]. These findings are not surprising as the relationship shared by an athlete and the coach is one key factor to the athlete's successful performance [22]. Effective leadership is therefore the required platform for a good coach-athlete relationship to achieve the goals. This also lends credence to the notion that the type of relationship that coaches and athletes share is based on the coaching leadership trait which impacts performance [23].

#### V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Results from this study revealed the higher preferences of coaching leadership traits by the college of education athletes as well as the significant relationship between the preferences of university and college of education athletes. Findings indicated that the traits of friendliness and happiness, sense of humour and cheerfulness, and cooperation were mostly preferred. It does appear that athletes' peculiar personal characteristics as well as the coach-athlete relationship influence the athletes' preferences of the coaching leadership trait. Though the context of the sport situation and characteristics of the coach and the athletes themselves dictate appropriate leadership behaviour, coaches must be conscious of the traits preferred by their athletes. Further study should be conducted among participants in specific sport to determine whether the ten traits of the LTPQ capture the essential elements of the coaching leadership traits and to provide basis for comparison with results of present study. Future research may focus on the situational and athletes' characteristics to allow for a better understanding of the peculiarities and conditions surrounding their relationship. Therefore, investigation should examine coaching leadership trait preferences as impacted by sex, age, skill level and academic performance. On the basis that the relationship between the athlete and the coach is crucial for performance, coaches as leaders should from time to time, exhibit the emotive aspects of themselves as a way of inspiring and influencing athletes to higher performance.

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