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Nadina Ayer

University of Waterloo

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Nadina Ayer

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

University of Waterloo

Abstract

The purpose of this paper was threefold: 1) to provide an understanding of interpersonal dynamics, namely the coach-athlete relationship and its key elements, 2) to identify vital issues and debates of past research, and 3) to present implications for practice and future research. Nine propositions were developed. The literature review revealed that successful relationships consist of communication, collaboration, and empathy. Past research showed cooperative coaching style to be effective and desired by athletes. The main issue of past research included a one-sided view of the relationship. Future research utilizing various methodological and theoretical approaches in understanding the relationship at different stages is needed. Cross-cultural and longitudinal research on the topic in various contexts is also recommended. Practically, it is recommended that national sport organizations offering coaching courses provide education on achievement of effective relationships.

Keywords: interpersonal dynamic, coach-athlete relationship, tennis

Address Correspondence to: Nadina Ayer, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G1. E-mail: nimamovic@uwaterloo.ca

Interpersonal dynamics dominate any human endeavor. Sport participants develop many interpersonal relationships ranging from those with their coaches, friends, parents, other participants, and front desk staff. The most important encounter may be the one between the athlete and their coach. This interpersonal dynamic can be unique and yet, complex (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; Philippe, Sagar, Huguet, Paquet, & Jowett, 2011; Poczwardowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002). The complex nature lay in that the coach, who possesses knowledge necessary for skill performance based success, is usually hired by the athlete, who, on the contrary, knows the least but needs it the most. Here, the relationship role becomes reverse in that of employee versus employer. One could view coaches as “employees” who hold the “knowledge” and “power” to success regardless of athlete’s (“employer’s”) compensation. To Philippe et al. (2011), this relationship is a complex phenomenon that simultaneously influences and is influenced by a number of variables. When considering influences, Luke Jensen, a winner of the French Open Doubles Title in 1993, had no interest in coaching juniors due to control and parental power in decision making. He also had no interest in coaching professionals because of the coach-player dynamic to which he noted, “The coach is the employee...Can you tell your boss to run five miles?” (Wertheim, 2010, p.22). Instead, he believed that in college he can make most difference (Wertheim, 2010). The tennis context can serve as fruitful arena for exploring this complexity due to time and nature of the coach-player interaction (Prapavessis & Gordon, 1991), and the “no coaching” rule during performance with the limited exception of team competition (International Tennis Federation, 2012) and select Women’s Tennis Association events (WTA, 2013). These examples show a very limited time of coaching available to tennis players during performance making the context the one of interest.

The relationship importance lies in its influence on the athletes’ training processes and performance outcomes (Poczwardowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002). For instance, harmonious relationships have a positive effect on perceived satisfaction and psychological well-being (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). More specifically, the relationship athletes have with their coaches can shape their entire sport experience, quality of practice, and ongoing participation and performance (Poczwardowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002). The effect is also reciprocal when athletes’ talent, energy, and creativity influences coaches, allowing them to live vicariously through them (Poczwardowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002). This two-way interactional relationship is central to the development of sport and the fulfillment of individual potential (Philippe et al., 2011; Yang & Jowett, 2012). Generated knowledge from the research on interpersonal dynamics can help coaches develop student focused relationships allowing athletes to become independent, self-reliant, and successful (Jowett, 2005b). Enhanced understanding of these experiences and their processes can help researchers conceptualize the phenomenon better. Increased knowledge of its meaning can help those involved (e.g., coaches, parents, therapists) provide support before, during, and after competition and to actively engage in the decision-making process regarding practice, pre-post tournament training, and travelling.

The main limitation of the past research conducted on the coach-athlete interaction seems to be its “one-sided” approach of the leadership (Philippe et al. 2011; Poczwardowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002; Poczwardowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002). This approach is limited because the leadership should be a shared process between the coach and the athlete (see Jowett, 2005b). Further, research focusing on behavior (Cumming, Smith, & Smoll, 2006) and leadership styles (Riemer & Toon, 2001) failed to approach the relationship from a

“holistic perspective” resulting in a heavy focus on athletes’ technical development (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002). The holistic approach is believed to be essential to understanding the relationship as a whole rather than dividing the behavior into smaller parts (e.g., athlete vs. coach perspective). This simultaneous and shared nature of the relationship requires research attention to achieve the comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. More recently there has been an increased effort to address this gap (Lafreniere, Jowett, Vallerand, & Carbonneau, 2011; Lorimer & Jowett, 2011; Philippe et al. 2011; Yang & Jowett, 2012) through model development using various research methods. This research however, is based on a ten year time period and needs expanding.

The purpose of this paper is threefold: 1) to provide an understanding of interpersonal dynamics, namely the coach-athlete relationship, 2) to identify key issues and debates of the past literature, and 3) to present potential direction for future research and implications for practice. The paper is the first to offer a set of propositions rooted in the literature to help guide sport researchers in conceptualizing and hypothesizing the coach-athlete relationship. Although the negative outcomes of the coach-athlete relationship are present in the literature and the media, the overall focus of this paper in particular is on the positive aspects of the behavior and the relationship. Here, the assumption is made that the ultimate goal of the coach-athlete relationship is always to be a positive one.

Background

To understand the interpersonal dynamics between coach and athlete one needs to examine the meaning of the relationship and its key concepts. To increase our understanding further, the nature of past research (e.g., how it was conducted) and the theoretical perspectives used to guide in interpreting the phenomenon (e.g., social exchange theory) are explored.

The coach-athlete relationship is defined as “a situation in which a coach’s and an athlete’s cognitions, feelings, and behaviors are mutually and causally interrelated” (Jowett & Poczwadowski, 2007, p. 4). The relationship between an athlete and their coach can be “effective/ineffective” and/or “successful/unsuccessful” (Jowett, 2005b; Jowett & Poczwadowski, 2007). An effective relationship is holistic in nature, focusing on positive growth and development. This relationship rests on empathetic understanding, honesty, support, liking, acceptance, responsiveness, friendliness, cooperation, caring, respect, and positive regard (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). An ineffective relationship consists of lack of interest, remoteness, and sometimes antagonism, deceit, exploitation, and physical or sexual abuse (Jowett, 2005b). These ineffective relationships are at “risk of breaching ethical and professional issues associated with the code of conduct formulated to protect coaches and athletes” (Jowett, 2005b, p. 413). One example that shows an ineffective relationship and its complexity in tennis is that of former World No. 14 German tennis player, Ana-Lena Grönefeld, and her coach, Rafael Font de Mora. At the same time the coach severed the relationship Grönefeld also lost her doubles partner, who at the time was her coach’s girlfriend. Two years after the relationship dissolved; Grönefeld accused her former coach of giving tips to other players on how to beat her (Ford, 2008). According to Jowett (2005b), a successful relationship consists of “tangible achievements” such as wins, while an unsuccessful (limited achievements) relationship can still be “effective” if it includes positive outcomes for the athlete and coach (e.g., technical advancements, psychological health, and wellbeing). Jowett (2005b) concluded that a desirable relationship is both successful and effective.

For the purposes of this paper, the literature search began with sport related studies that did not specifically focus on the interpersonal dynamic between the coach and athlete but did provide some

insight into understanding the relationship. The search was then narrowed down to only include studies that directly examined the coach-athlete relationship where the term appeared in the title of the study or as one of the keywords. These studies presented conceptual models and theoretical frameworks in attempt to help explain the coach-athlete dynamic. Specifically, studies focusing on tennis coach-athlete relationships were sought. A small number of studies were returned in the search resulting in five tennis specific studies dealing with some aspect of the coach-athlete relationship and their dynamics. The review of the literature revealed communication, collaboration, and empathy as the three key concepts needed for a successful and effective relationship. The decision to include these three concepts as the key ones was based on the sound arguments and support of the chosen studies rooted in empirical data. Also, the majority of these studies were conducted by leading researchers on the topic (e.g., Sophia Jowett).

Sport related studies on leadership styles and performance (Trninić, Papić, & Trninić, 2009), coaching outcomes (Gearity & Murray, 2011), athletes' motivation (Zomermaand, 2010), and perception of coaches' support (Zourbanos, Hatzigeorgiadis, Goudas, Papaioannou, Chronid et al., 2011) served as a guiding framework to understanding the desired and undesired aspects of the coach-athlete relationship. These studies found that 1) coach's leadership behavior must be synchronized with athlete's characteristics (Trninić, Papić, & Trninić, 2009), 2) motivation is individual, and the coach's role is to guide and encourage it by provision of opportunities for success (Zomermaand, 2010), 3) coach's feedback and support contributes to flow experience during the game, which can lead to athlete's positive performance self-ratings (Bakker, Oerlemans, Demerouti, Slot, & Ali, 2011), 4) athletes see "poor coaching" (e.g., unfair and uncaring) as distracting, engendering self-doubt, demotivating, and dividing the team up (Gearity &

Murray, 2011), and 5) athletes' perception of coach's support is related to self-talk (e.g., positive versus negative) (Zourbanos, Hatzigeorgiadis, Goudas, Papaioannou, Chronid, et al., 2011). Due to the potential coaching influences on athletes' performances and life in general, the broad message is that coaches need to take careful steps when training and interacting with their athletes to ensure an effective and successful relationship.

Coach-athlete relationship based studies revealed three noteworthy conceptual models on the relationship. First, Wylleman (2000) defined relationships using dimensions of "acceptance-rejection" (e.g., attitudes), "dominance-submission" (e.g., adaptation of positions), and "social-emotional" (e.g., taking of stance). This model fails to explain "when," "how," and "why" behaviors occur (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Second, Poczwardowski, Barott, and Henschen (2002) and Poczwardowski, Barott, and Peregoy (2002) outlined interactional influences during "pre-relational," "transition and conclusion," and "post-relational" phases. The main downside of this model lies in its foundation on two qualitative studies. Third, Jowett (2005a) outlines that "closeness" (trust, respect), "commitment" (intentionality to maintain the relationship), "complementarity" (cooperation), and "co-orientation" ("being on the same page") help measure relationships. The model includes aspects of "affiliation or bond," "power," and "co-operation," and some researchers believe that the conflict in a relationship arises from differences in one of these dimensions (Philippe et al., 2011). Therefore, the sustainability of relationships depends on "mutual" agreements on the intentional (acceptance of goals) and instrumental (conditions of interactions) aspects of it (Philippe et al., 2011).

These studies also offered insight on the potential uses of theories in further explaining the relationship. Some researchers believe that "reversal theory" with its focus on the "manner" in which an athlete interprets and structures their motivations and

emotions can provide a “comprehensive framework” (Shepherd & Kerr, 2006). Others believe that Goffman’s “negotiated-order theory” and its assumption that people have to work (negotiate) to keep their relationships stable can provide such framework (Poczwadowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002). However, the use and testing of these two theories, just like the previously mentioned models, needs further exploring. For instance, although the models were successfully applied within their respective studies, there is no commonly agreed upon model or “theory” that best describes the nature of the relationship. Instead, more research utilizing these and other theoretical perspectives (e.g., social exchange theory in Poczwadowski, Barott, & Jowett, 2006), as well as developing new and testing currently available models is needed. The application of social exchange theory (SET) to studying coach-athlete relationship proves beneficial (e.g., coaching passion and relationship quality in Lafreniere et al., 2011; relationship meaning in Poczwadowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002). Using this perspective to study tennis related coach-athlete relationships would fill in the gap of no previous study utilizing such perspective. When doing so, considering SET’s focus, assumptions, and variations (Blau, 1964; Cook, Cheshire, Rice, & Nakagawa, 2013; Dainton, 2004; Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958) and the major critiques of SET’s interpretations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) can increase our knowledge on the relationship maintenance and satisfaction from both perspectives. Application and comparison of SET variants in specific contexts, individual training exchange (Homans, 1958) and small group exchange (e.g., interdependence theory in Jowett, 2007; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) can enrich the depth of the study.

Tennis specific studies dealing with the coach-athlete relationship directly or indirectly are scarce, demonstrating the need for inclusion of such context in the future. The search returned only five studies

with the focus on psychodynamic theory in professional tennis (Huguet & Philippe, 2011), leadership behavior, gender, and ability (Riemer & Toon, 2001), player’s satisfaction with coach created atmosphere (task oriented or ego involved) (Balaguer, Duda, & Crespo, 1999), the relationship compatibility (Prapavessis & Gordon, 1991), and the effects of coach-athlete interpersonal beliefs (Jackson & Beauchamp, 2010). The latter two provide direct insight into the coach-athlete relationship dynamics from both perspectives and serve an adequate basis for proposition development. Prapavessis and Gordon (1991) utilized three scales (e.g., sport adapted versions of Schutz’s 1996 fundamental interpersonal relations orientation behavior and Fiedler’s 1967 least preferred co-worker scale, and Chelladurai & Saleh’s 1980 leadership scale for sport) to predict coach-player compatibility among 52 elite Canadian tennis players. Their analysis revealed “autocratic behavior” as the significant predictor of dyadic compatibility. They concluded that incompatible dyads included players who were dissatisfied with their coach’s “dictatorship” style, further discussing how players “wanted their coach to encourage them to make decisions and to appreciate and value their opinions regarding their tennis development” (p.233). This suggests an athlete-centered approach evident in cooperative coaching style (Crespo & Miley, 2002). The first proposition emerged from the analysis of this literature.

Proposition 1: The effectiveness of authoritarian coaching style is inversely proportioned to athletes’ skill levels.

Although it has been over two decades since Prapavessis and Gordon’s (1991) study’s conduction, its recommendations are still valid. These authors outlined that coaches need to be aware of potential problems of authoritarian coaching style (Crespo & Miley, 2002) and therefore, future research should include a multi-instrumental approach, utilization of multiple data sources like

interviews, audio-visual taping during training, and longitudinal studies.

Similarly, Jackson and Beauchamp (2010) utilized various scales (e.g., 10-item tennis self-efficacy instrument by Barling & Abel, 1983; 24-item coaching efficacy scale; intrinsic motivation inventory) to study the effects of interpersonal beliefs in relation to coach-athlete relationship commitment, satisfaction, and effort. This study of 58 junior players and their coaches revealed that: 1) players had more confidence in their coach's abilities than coaches did in their player's abilities, and 2) those confident with the other were also satisfied and committed to the relationship. Given the demonstrated importance of confidence, the following can be proposed:

Proposition 2: Athletes' confidence in their coaches is directly related to the athletes' commitment to the relationship.

Proposition 3: Coaches' confidence in their athletes is directly related to the coaches' commitment to the relationship.

Furthermore, studies by the leading researchers that provided the strongest arguments and sound methodology revealed three core concepts for a successful and effective coach-athlete relationship. First, "communication" helps promote "shared knowledge" and understanding of goals, beliefs, values, and opinions (Jowett, 2005b). It serves as the basis for initiation, maintenance, and termination of the relationship (Jowett, 2005b). Spontaneous conversations around activities help develop trust in the coach (Jowett, 2005b). Therefore, coaches who create opportunities for talk and disclosure are more likely to have a trustworthy relationship (Jowett, 2005b). Based on the importance of communication and trust development, one can propose:

Proposition 4: Increased communication on daily activities and training among coaches and athletes should lead to an increased trust level, which in turn should lead to a trustworthy relationship between them.

Importance of communication was also highlighted in Poczwadowski, Barott, and Henschen (2002) as a meaningful component of the coach-athlete relationship. During interactions, these authors found coaches and athletes reinforcing their belief in the relationship through reassurance and stressing of its importance. Expression of trust, respect, and belief in the other and sharing (effort, stories/narratives, feelings, and information about oneself) was also observed. To them "a positive relationship occurred when both athlete and coach interacted intentionally with each other" (p. 129). This study's findings further reinforce the importance of effective communication (Jowett, 2005b; Lorimer & Jowett, 2011; Philippe et al., 2011). Based on these findings, the following can be proposed:

Proposition 5: The more coaches and athletes engage in a positive and supportive manner (e.g., constructive feedback, joking/teasing to ease the tension), the more care (e.g., trust, respect, belief) they should have for each other and their relationship.

Second, coach-athlete relationships develop through collaboration. Collaboration in a relationship commonly occurs over time and through increased skill acquisition (Philippe et al., 2011). In collaboration, decisions are made together, and when it happens "athletes" are motivated and autonomous (Philippe et al., 2011). The authors noted change in "power relations" over time when the coach's role and behavior changes from authoritative to supportive and athletes change from being dependent to more independent (autonomous) of their coach. Similarly, a shift from a functional (activity based) to a personal (friendship based) relationship may be due to affect and behavior (Philippe et al., 2011). Affect deals with gradual development of interpersonal feelings of growth, confidence, appreciation, and respect, while behavior deals with athletes' adaptations to better fit requirements (Philippe et al., 2011). According to

these authors, athletes who develop performance skills may need coaches for the friendship, support, and personal closeness rather than for their professional expertise. These findings overlap with the balance of coaches' leadership behavior with athletes' characteristics in Trninić et al. (2009). Based on the importance of personal relationship development the following propositions may apply:

Proposition 6: The more skill the athlete gains, the less controlling behavior during training should be exercised by the coach and more joint cooperation in decision making processes should be encouraged by the coach.

Proposition 7: The less skill the athlete possesses, the more control (power) regarding on-court decisions and training practices should be exercised by the coach.

Proposition 8: The more time coach and athlete spend together, the more skill the athlete should gain, which in turn should result in less control exercised by the coach and more joint cooperation by the athlete and the coach.

These propositions, however, may not work with the authoritarian leadership style as the cooperation may be difficult to achieve. An authoritarian coaching style is based on win centered philosophy, task oriented goals, coach based decisions/judgments, one sided communication, coach dependent athletes, extrinsic motivation, inflexible training structures, and little or no trust in the player (Crespo & Miley, 2002). Instead, a cooperative coaching style is desirable (Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996) because it is athlete centered, resting on skill development, shared decisions and judgment of success, open communication, trust, flexible training structure, and use of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Crespo & Miley, 2002). To Salminen and Liukkonen (1996), coaches who take care of their athletes' opinions and feelings have the best relationships. Caring coaches develop

autonomy-supportive relationships, which are preferred by athletes because they provide them with a sense of general happiness (Lafreniere et al., 2011).

Third, being empathetic and able to understand others leads to effective relationships (Lorimer & Jowett, 2011). Lorimer and Jowett (2011) examined empathic accuracy: the capacity to accurately perceive others' psychological conditions such as thoughts and feelings. These authors found that coaches and athletes can use their own reactions for inferring the thoughts and feelings of one another but are often "inaccurate in their inferences about each other's thoughts and feelings" (p. 53). Based on the empathy importance, the following could be proposed:

Proposition 9: The increased ability between the athlete and coach to accurately perceive each other's thoughts and feelings should lead to improved decision making in training and performance, which should then result in a more satisfied relationship.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

This paper's literature review provides a summary of the athlete-coach interpersonal dynamic. Based on the focus, methodological approaches, and the origin of the studies under review a number of tennis specific future recommendations and practical implications are compiled.

Future Research

Although unsuccessful sport leadership styles, abusive coach behavior and outcomes have been studied (Gervis & Dunn, 2004), more research on the coach-athlete dynamic prior, during, and post contract relationship is needed. In the individual sport context like tennis, some very successful coaches were also unsuccessful at retaining a relationship with their player. For example, Brad Gilbert successfully coached Andre Agassi, helping him reach a No. 1 ranking on the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) tour and winning six Grand Slam Titles (Buddell, 2011). Gilbert also

successfully coached Andy Roddick, helping him reach a No. 1 ranking, but was very unsuccessful coaching Andy Murray (Buddell, 2011). According to Buddell (2011), Agassi, who was coached by Gilbert for eight years, described him as “the greatest coach of all time” while both Roddick and Murray fired Gilbert. This further reiterates the complexity of the coach-athlete interpersonal dynamic as one could assume that termination of a relationship in sports is bad, but in fact it may be due to a player growing past a coach’s ability to teach them new skills or personality incompatibility. Research on post contract relationship could provide insight into the motivational factors behind relationship termination. Here, external factors such as a geographical move or transition from childhood to adolescence or adolescence to adulthood also need to be considered (Philippe et al., 2011). Logically, the interpersonal dynamic can be expected to differ at all levels of play, age, and sport context.

It is important to note that most of the current athlete-coach relationship studies originate from Europe, countries like France and Switzerland (e.g., Huguet & Philippe, 2011), Finland (Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996), Norway (Moen, 2014), with the most influence from the United Kingdom (Lorimer & Jowett, 2011; Jowett, 2005a, 2005b; Rhind & Jowett, 2011). A few originate from the United States (U.S.) (Poczwadowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002) and Canada (Jackson & Beauchamp, 2010). The North American studies tend to focus on using previous perspectives (e.g., Bandura’s Self-Efficacy Theory, Social Exchange Theory) to explain the relationship, while the British studies focus on developing new conceptual models (e.g., 3C’s + 1). Even though a cross-cultural focus is emerging (e.g., relationship questionnaire in Yang & Jowett, 2012), more research is needed. For example, future research could focus on addressing cultural differences that may or may not exist, such as comparing North

American mentality of athletes and their coaches to European mentalities.

Early study by Prapavessis and Gordon (1991) called for longitudinal research to measure, monitor and document coach-player dyadic compatibility “over a significant period of time to determine whether interpersonal relations between coach and athlete are static or dynamic” (p.233). Although Jowett (2005a) suggested that efforts are being made (e.g., motivational perspectives, conflict, relationship styles), this type of research continues to be absent (Lorimer & Jowett, 2011; Philippe et al., 2011). The topic began receiving more attention in the past decade; therefore, it is understandable that the field of knowledge is still growing. Although expensive and time consuming, future research on the coach-athlete relationship should also appear in the form of longitudinal research to help further our understanding and conceptualization of the phenomenon.

Others suggest future research to explore the essence of the relationship in various sport contexts (e.g., individual versus a team sport) (Philippe et al., 2011; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002; Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996). Although relationship quality analysis in individual and team sports is emerging (Rhind, Jowett, & Yang, 2012), research continues to be limited. If exploring the tennis context, only a few studies have dealt with some aspect of the interpersonal dynamics of the tennis player and coach (Balaguer et al., 1999; Huguet & Philippe, 2011; Jackson & Beauchamp, 2010; Prapavessis & Gordon, 1991; Riemer & Toon, 2001). Out of these five studies, only two (Jackson & Beauchamp; Prapavessis & Gordon, 1991) dealt with the perceptions of both parties rather than providing an indirect (Balaguer et al., 1999) or one-sided view of the relationship (Huguet & Philippe, 2011, Riemer & Toon, 2001). Future studies could focus on identifying interaction practices between coaches and athletes in training (e.g., communication),

defining/describing meaning attached to the relationship (e.g., phenomenological qualitative study), and clarifying some of the key concepts of the relationship dynamic using theoretical perspectives (e.g., SET). After the foundation of this relationship has been developed, studies could test and measure the key concepts allowing for comparisons between sports. This could help define whether context uniqueness and complexity found in tennis, for example, plays a role and is different from other individual sports with fewer restrictions on coaching during performance (e.g., boxing).

Finally, Poczwadowski, Barott, and Jowett (2006) recommend future research to utilize a variety of methodological and theoretical practices (e.g., social exchange theory, negotiated order theory, and symbolic interactionism) individually or in collaboration. This paper outlines propositions reflective of the previous research findings that could serve as a starting point. More attention on how they could be hypothesized, tested, further explored, and articulated to adhere to the research question (e.g., methodology and method) is needed. The propositions presented can also be tested on whether they are transferable to different contexts such as individual training (e.g., singles with 1:1 coach-athlete ratio), doubles training (e.g., with 1:2 coach-athlete ratio), and small team training (e.g., Canadian varsity or American college training with 1:6+ coach-athlete ratio). It may be interesting to see whether differences exist based on the type of training received. It is, however, important to note that when studying varsity athletes the training may be different in nature among countries with scholarships (e.g., U.S. NCAA college tennis) and those without (e.g., Canadian OUA varsity tennis).

Implications for Practice

Based on the importance of communication (Jowett, 2005b), personal relationship development among coaches and athletes (Philippe et al., 2011), cooperative coaching styles (Crespo & Miley, 2002; Prapavessis & Gordon, 1991; Salminen &

Liukkonen, 1996), task-oriented coaching (Balaguer, et al., 1999), and importance of care (Poczwadowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002) the key to a successful coach-athlete relationship is the development of “human relationships” by coaches (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett, 2005b; Philippe et al., 2011). According to this literature, the ideal “coach-athlete relationship” is the one that reflects a personal and humanistic side of coaching where care for athletes’ needs, welfare, interests, wishes, and preferences is evident (Crespo & Miley, 2002; Jowett, 2005b; Philippe et al., 2011). For example, to have a successful relationship, tennis coaches need to work on their interpersonal qualities such as ability to motivate and encourage, provide support, listen, and help their players solve problems (see cooperative coaching in Crespo & Miley, 2002). Similarly, research on the importance of empathetic accuracy suggests that both coaches and athletes need to maximize their ability to understand each other (Lorimer & Jowett, 2011). One way to achieve this is for coaches and athletes to focus on the topic of conversation and ask follow-up questions to ensure that the content is understood (Lorimer & Jowett, 2011).

The importance of the coach-athlete relationship effectiveness can further extend to the educational aspects of the sport at the national sport organizational level (e.g., Tennis Canada). Past research recommends that educational sport institutions offering coaching courses need to provide information to assist coaches in developing effective relationships with their athletes (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). The governing bodies, such as Tennis Canada need to engage in an ongoing evaluation and certification improvements serving as an addition to the currently used long-term athlete development model (Tennis Canada LTAD, 2012) by including the coach-athlete relationship as a key component to the overall growth and wellbeing of coaches and athletes. This will help provide the necessary resources to course conductors who need

to spend considerable time and effort educating potential coaches and subsequently their athletes along with their support network (e.g., parents) about the necessary steps in developing an effective coach-athlete relationship.

Conclusion

This paper provided a summary of the coach-athlete relationship. This relationship is viewed as a dynamic process that evolves and changes over time. It is developed through cooperation and collaboration. Some of its key elements include: communication, empathy, and care (e.g., trust, belief, respect). The literature revealed that cooperative coaching style is desired over authoritarian style. Past research recommends improved coaching education on importance and meaning of the relationship in practice. More research utilizing various methodological and theoretical approaches in understanding the relationship in different recreation and sport contexts at different stages of the relationship is needed. Cross-cultural and longitudinal based studies were also identified as the focus of future research.

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