Team Captains’ Perceptions of Athlete Leadership

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The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the leadership behaviors exhibited by formal athlete leaders. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with six former university male ice hockey team captains. The results of the analysis revealed three higher-order categories: (a) interpersonal characteristics and experiences, which included elements related to their personal make-up and previous leadership experiences; (b) verbal interactions, which included interactions with teammates and coaches; and (c) task behaviors, which included responsibilities and behaviors relating to administrative matters and to improving team climate, norms, and functioning. The results revealed the importance of formally designated athlete leaders (e.g., team captains) by describing the nature of their experiences, the behaviors they displayed, how the behaviors were manifested, and when and where their leadership behaviors were exhibited.

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The results in Table 6 show that only 1% of the participants perceived their captain as the best leader on all four leadership roles. In addition, almost half of the participants (43.6%) reported that the team captain is not the best leader on one of the four domains, neither on the field, nor off the field. The fact that half of the participants indicated no external leader on their team corresponds with the perception of the external leader as the least important leader on the team. A possible alternative explanation is that this external function is not fulfilled by players but by the coach or club management. Being a sports team captain is a great opportunity to develop the leadership traits that will help you succeed in your future career, whether this is as a sports athlete or in another field of work. But how can you know that you are providing good leadership? Here are some tips to help coaches gain confidence in you and help you lead your team to success: Take charge — don’t just rely on the coaches. Specifically, formal leaders such as team captains function as a key role in an athletic team's social network by serving in a leadership capacity that influences the attitudes and behaviors of other team members (Dupuis, Bloom, & Loughead, 2006). Team captains typically can exert greater influence in the team because they are viewed as an extension of the coaching staff (Brgoch, Lower-Hoppe, Newman, & Taylor, in press). To determine the athlete leaders within a team, we extended the existent classification by including an additional leadership role, namely the role of motivational leader on the field.