

# THE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP IN TOUCH FOOTBALL: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF COACH AND ATHLETE PERCEPTIONS

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## **Introduction**

Athlete performance and sporting success are not merely related to natural ability, physical training, and mental toughness. One of the most influential factors is the coach-athlete relationship — the focus of this presentation. There has been limited research that specifically focuses on the key features of coach-athlete relationships and previous research has tended to concentrate on coach or athlete perceptions – not both – within individual sport settings. The present research explored the characteristics of coach-athlete relationships within one mixed sex (male and female) adult touch football *team* in Australia. The aim was to gain greater insight into the common experiences of elite team sport coaches and athletes and to provide a deeper understanding of the type and nature of coach-athlete relationships that exist within a unique team sport setting.

## **Methods**

A case study approach was used to examine perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship with regard to the interpersonal constructs of Closeness, Co-orientation and Complementarity (3C's; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). One representative touch football team was involved in the study and the participants included one coach and 11 athletes (male=7, female=4). An open-ended interview schedule was utilised to gain detailed and personalised information from the male and female participant group.

## **Results and Discussion**

The coach and athletes in this study explained that their coach-athlete relationship was characterised by personal feelings, such as trust, respect, belief and admiration. The participants also identified that technical communication or instruction offered by the coach, and the way in which this was communicated to the individual, were integral characteristics of their relationship. Finally, they described seeing the positives in one another, selflessness and respecting the roles and tasks assigned by the coach as important characteristics of the relationship. As such, the findings support the three interpersonal constructs of Closeness, Co-orientation and Complementarity.

## **Conclusion**

One major finding from this study was that the nature of the coach-athlete relationship in a team sport setting remained similar to that in an individual sporting context. This conclusion was surprising given the unique mixed environment of the elite team in the present study where a male coach worked with male and female athletes. Overall, this research builds on existing beliefs about coach-athlete relationships and demonstrates how positive coach-athlete relationships act as a major contributor to the satisfaction, self-esteem and performance of an athlete in various sport settings. This presentation will discuss specific examples from the current study in relation to previous literature and highlight various implications of the findings for coach education programs.

## **References:**

1. Jowett, S. and Cockerill, I. M. (2003), *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 4, 313-331.