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COMMUNICATION BETWEEN COACH AND ATHLETE

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Abstract: The coach and athlete relationship is interaction in which the thoughts, feelings and behavior of the coach and athlete are causally linked. The quality of the relationship between coach and athlete affects the achievement and psychological well-being of athlete. It is desirable that the relationship between coaches and athletes is based on respect, understanding, acceptance, tolerance and cooperation. The quality of the relationship between coach and athlete affects interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes through communication. Communication is a process that depends on its participants. It implies a circular process of influence. The athlete's behavior affects the coach's behavior, and the coach's behavior in turn affects the athlete's behavior. The article presents guidelines for improving communication and constructively resolving conflicts between coaches and players.

Keywords: communication, conflicts, coach-athlete relationship

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Introduction

Sport is a significant factor in personality development (Zubić, 2023). Sports activities can help in building a positive self-image (Mitrović, et al., 2013), good work habits, developing communication skills (Nenadić, et al., 2021) and emotional competence (Zubić, Todorović, Mitić, 2013). Numerous authors agree that coach-athlete relationship is a significant factor in overall development of athlete (Horn, 2008, Davis, Jovett, 2014). The coach-athlete relationship can be defined as an interaction in which the coach's and athlete's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are causally related and change over time (Jowett, Lavallee, 2007). Mutual respect and effective communication between coach and athlete are important aspects of their successful relationship (Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura, Baldes, 2010; Poczwadowski, Barott, Henschen, 2002; Shipherd, Wakefield, Stokowski, Filho, 2019).

The subject of this paper is a comprehensive presentation about topic of relationship and communication between coaches and athletes. The aim of this paper is to describe importance and elements of relationship and communication between coach and athlete, as well as recommendations for more effective communication. The first part of the paper highlights great importance of relationship and communication between coach and athlete and presents a number of studies that confirm this. The paper also explains factors of coach-athlete relationship, types and process of communication, the model of communication strategies, recommendations for effective communication and difficulties in communication. A special part of the paper, which refers to conflicts in communication between coaches and athletes, describes a model for understanding conflicts and recommendations for their management.

Relationship between coach and athlete

Over the past two decades, the quality and functions of the coach-athlete relationship have been studied (Jowett, Meek, 2000). A significant contribution to this topic was made within the 3+1C model (Jowett, 2007). In this model, the coach-athlete relationship is represented as a social situation through the model. Namely, there are three plus one factors of the coach-athlete relationship:

1. The closeness of the coach and the athlete (an emotional connection reflected in trust and respect),
2. commitment (motivation to maintain closeness)
3. complementarity (responsiveness and cooperation) i

4. co-orientation (refers first to the athlete's perception of the coach and then the coach's perception of the athlete). Co-orientation contains two perspectives: the direct perspective reflects how the athlete/coach feels, thinks and behaves towards the other party (e.g. "I trust my coach/athlete"), while the meta perspective reflects how the athlete or coach perceives others thinks, feels and behaves (eg 'My coach/athlete trusts me').

The coach-athlete relationship is the essence of the entire coaching job (Jowett, 2017). Research has shown that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship is related to athlete performance and satisfaction with their relationship (Lorimer, Jowett, 2009; Davis, Jowett, 2014), athlete motivation (Adie, Jowett, 2010; Felton, Jowett, 2013), team cohesion (Jowett, Chaundy, 2004), collective efficiency (Hampson, Jowett, 2014), indicators of well-being (Felton, Jowett, 2013). On the other hand, studies have established a connection between a bad coach-athlete relationship and conflict between them (Wachsmuth, Jowett, Harwood, 2018), antisocial behavior of athletes (Rutten et al., 2007; Rutten et al., 2008) and athlete burnout (Isoard-Gautheur, Trouilloud, Gustafsson, Guillet-Descas, 2016; Davis, et al., 2018). An important factor that determines the quality of the coach-athlete relationship is the athlete's personality traits (Aşçi, Keleşek, Altıntaş, 2015).

Communication between coach and athlete

Interpersonal communication is a key factor in the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2007). Communication is a mechanism that transfers the effects of the quality of the coach-athlete relationship to interpersonal (eg, relationship satisfaction) and intrapersonal outcomes (eg, sports satisfaction, motivation, sports performance) (Jowett, 2007; Lorimer, Jowett, 2014). Communication refers to the exchange of messages that transfer competences, knowledge and skills.

There is a difference between verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication takes place through words used to convey messages, and non-verbal communication takes place in parallel with verbal communication. Non-verbal communication does not convey messages, but it contains information. It contains behaviors that can be conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional, more or less automatic. Namely, non-verbal messages are information that we convey with conscious or unconscious gestures, body movements or facial expressions (Morris, 1998). Non-verbal communication consists of (Rot, 2002): paralinguistic (speech intonation, color, volume and pitch of voice), proxemic (personal space that exists between two interlocutors), haptic (frequency and type of touch that people

exchange) and kinesthetic signs (body movements) or faces: body position, gestures, facial expressions).

This type of communication is important in transmitting and receiving information. Usually, people are unaware of their non-verbal cues. Psychologist Albert Mehrabian (Mehrabian, 1981) studied the importance of non-verbal communication. Namely, he established that 55% of the speaker's impression is determined by his body language, 38% by intonation, and only 7% by the content of what is said.

Communication is the basic tool through which coaches show athletes skills, convey significant information about technique and tactics, and provide feedback on the success of their performances. Communication is a significant source of satisfaction, but often dissatisfaction of coaches and athletes. It is the starting point for developing a good, stable, supportive relationship between coaches and athletes because it shows mutual attention, care, respect and trust. The origin, maintenance, development, changes, but also the termination of the relationship between coach and athlete, take place through communication.

The communication process contains basic steps. First, a person decides to send a message to someone. Then, the sender converts (encodes) their thoughts into a message. Third, a verbal or non-verbal message is channeled to the recipient. Then, the receiver interprets (decodes) the message. Finally, the receiver deciphers the message based on the content and emotions it conveys and responds internally (Weinberg, Gould, 2020).

Communication is a process that depends on both parties. Namely, the athlete's behavior affects the coach's behavior, and then the coach's behavior in turn affects the athlete's behavior. And so a circular process of influence is created. In order for the message conveyed through communication to be properly understood, it needs to be adapted to the age, personality traits, way of expression and abilities of the athlete. Also, if the coach sends the same message to two athletes, they will interpret that message in their own way.

The COMPASS model (Rhind, Jowett, 2012) brings together communication strategies that coaches and athletes use to maintain a relationship in a certain state. This COMPASS model (Rhind, Jowett, 2012) contains seven key communication strategies:

1. Conflict management reflects the efforts of coaches and athletes to identify, discuss, resolve and monitor potential areas of disagreement;
2. Openness includes efforts to communicate openly and clearly;

3. Motivation emphasizes the efforts of both coach and athlete to develop a partnership that is rewarding for both parties and provides reasons for each member to stay in the relationship;
4. Preventative emphasizes efforts to discuss expectations, rules, roles and consequences if they are not met;
5. Advice is defined as giving one's opinions on problems encountered by the coach or the athlete, as well as giving and receiving feedback in a positive and open way. Advice consists of three themes: sport communication, reward feedback and constructive feedback.
6. Support is reflected in the fact that coaches and athletes help each other in difficult and challenging times; and
7. Social networks reflect communication strategies that create opportunities to develop strong relationships with significant others (eg parents, friends, club management, managers).

Coach-athlete communication is a complex, dynamic process that depends on context (Lyle, 2005; Jones, Turner, 2006; Nash, Collins, 2006). In particular, communication between coach and athlete can be educational, emotional, verbal or non-verbal and can be influenced by circumstances of the situation such as winning or losing and whether it takes place during training or competition. There are two key situations for coach-athlete communication, defeat in competition and making mistakes during training (Sagar, Jowett, 2012). In these situations, athletes had a positive perception of communication when coach provided analysis and constructive and corrective feedback on their performance. And athletes had a negative perception when the coach showed hostile reactions.

Studies conducted on successful Olympic athletes have found that trust, friendship between coaches and players, and constructive feedback are factors that positively influence athlete performance (Greenleaf, Gould, Dieffenbach, 2001). Lack of trust between them and disrespect are factors that negatively affect the coach-athlete relationship, as well as the athlete's subjective well-being (Blanchard, Amiot, Perreault, Vallerand, Provencher, 2009, Burke, 2001, Jowett, 2003).

Effective communication

Effective communication is key to a positive relationship between two people. Effective verbal communication involves the characteristics of sender and receiver of the message. Characteristics related to sender of the message include the way the message is formulated.

It is recommended that messages should be directly expressed and formulated in the "I" format ("me", "my" instead of "you"). Also, messages should be complete, specific, clear and consistent, directly spoken and coordinated with non-verbal communication. Messages should not contain hidden meaning, but should authentically express attitudes, perceptions, needs and feelings. It is important that there is a distinction between fact on one hand and perception and experience on the other. The message should be adapted to person to whom it is intended, so that he can fully understand and accept it and so that its purpose is clearly conveyed. Key points in communication are emphasized and highlighted by repetition. The communication skills of the sender of the message are essential. Martens (Martenes, 2004) lists the following eight communication skills of successful coaches: communicating with credibility, positive approach, providing messages with sufficient information, consistency, listening skills, non-verbal communication, instructional communication and applying the principle of reinforcement.

Characteristics related to recipient of a message include the skill of active listening. Active listening is one of the key elements of successful communication. The goal of active listening is for listener to understand what the sender wanted to say, as well as for sender to know that his message was correctly understood or at least that an other party tried to understand it. Active listening includes feedback from the listener on how he interpreted the message. A listener is interested in the content of the message and the feelings of sender. Active listening improves communication because speaker feels heard, accepted and given appropriate feedback.

Recommendations for effective communication between coach and athlete:

1. The messages sent by the coach should be clear, concise without unnecessary details, accurate and true, complete and complete, kind, constructive, that is, positive while avoiding unconstructive criticism and negativity.
2. The exchange of views and suggestions between the coach and the athlete should be constant, especially when designing training programs. This leads to better mutual understanding, greater appreciation, and enrichment of knowledge about sports and training.
3. A way to improve communication (especially in a group or team) is to organize team meetings. These meetings should be scheduled regularly (you should not wait for a problem to happen and then make an appointment), focus on the difficulties in the team and provide a constructive assessment of the situation. Before each meeting, the coach should set rules of behavior and communication for that occasion. The proposed rules include the following:

- a) Everyone in the team should be open to the opinions of others regardless of how much they disagree with them (ie team members should not be defensive or hostile towards a different opinion than theirs).
 - b) Team members should be constructive, not destructive (eg behavior is criticized, not the person).
 - c) Everything discussed in the meeting stays there (ie the information is confidential).
 - d) Everyone should have the opportunity to speak.
 - e) Each team member should have at least one positive thing to say about everyone else.
4. Conversations with the athlete must not take form of threats, punishments, blackmail, or aggressive behavior. A coach with authority can have a great influence on the psychological state of an athlete through suggestive actions. The conversation should take the form of a suggestive tone with a benevolent, calm, but confident and convincing voice and content. Also, conversation should have a soothing effect on athlete, increase his self-confidence, security and faith in success.
5. The conversation about the reasons for success and failure should have a constructive and evaluative character. This kind of conversation should not contain fault-finding, blaming, finger-pointing, and giving reasons for justification. Reasons for poor performance should be sought among those causes that are solely under the athlete's control. Therefore, it is necessary to review whether enough effort and work was invested, whether the trainings were inadequate for developing functional and physical abilities, etc.
6. In order for athlete to progress in his performance, in situations where he makes mistakes, it is necessary for the coach to give constructive negative feedback or criticism. Many people perceive criticism as a threat to their self-esteem and focus their attention on defense rather than on the content of the message. It is important that a message be delivered with the positive intention of improving the athlete, and not with the aim of belittling and denying. Constructive criticism can be expressed through the assertive "sandwich approach" technique, which contains three elements:
- a) a positive statement about a person or his behavior,
 - b) a clear future-oriented instruction on how to implement a certain element and
 - c) praising a person or his behavior.
7. Developing empathy can improve team communication (Beauchamp, MacLachlan, Lothian, 2005). Empathy is developed by teaching athletes to approach interactions from another person's point of view, including through role-

playing exercises. The exercise is based on the fact that athlete assumes the roles and perspectives of others in a hypothetical scenario and thus gains an insight into the viewpoint of others. For example, a player puts himself in situations where his performance is critical (ie, he doesn't want to let his teammates down) or where he feels pressure from a coach (ie, the athlete is benched if he doesn't play well enough). This exercise can help athlete to more empathetically observe what their teammates are going through. In this way, communication and understanding of what a other person is experiencing is improved.

Effective communication requires skills and investment of all participants. Unfortunately, certain difficulties can arise in communication due to non-acceptance of responsibility and lack of trust. Often people do not see that they themselves bear part of the responsibility for the effectiveness of communication. That is why one of the key reasons for problems in communication is the attitude that the other party is ineffective, and not the person himself. Another common reason is a lack of mutual trust. The most common communication difficulties related to the sender are ambiguous and mutually contradictory messages. And the most common difficulties related to the recipient of message are misinterpreted messages and not listening.

Conflicts in sport

Conflicts are inevitable because coaches spend a lot of time with athletes both during the training process and during competition period when athletes are additionally exposed to stress. Timely reaction and adequate response to conflict can greatly contribute to improvement of coach-athlete relationship as well as sports results.

A three-component model for understanding interpersonal conflict in sport provides a framework for understanding and resolving conflict in sport (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). According to this model, conflict represents a situation in which people perceive that they have a disagreement about values, needs, opinions or goals, which is manifested through negative cognitive, affective and behavioral reactions. This implies that the conflict is more than a disagreement between two parties. It includes emotional reactions such as anger, rage, frustration. The model itself includes three main components:

1. Antecedents or determinants of conflict. It includes intrapersonal factors (e.g., self-esteem, ego vs. task orientation), interpersonal factors (e.g., poor communication patterns such as avoidance versus open discussion of di-

- fficult issues), and external factors (e.g., a coach from another culture who does not know how to recognize exactly the emotional states of athletes).
2. The nature of a conflict itself. It includes the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral content of conflict, as well as its descriptive characteristics (eg, duration, frequency, and intensity).
 3. Consequences of interpersonal conflicts. It includes intrapersonal outcomes (eg, lost self-confidence), interpersonal outcomes (eg, poor team cohesion), and performance outcomes (eg, reduced individual and team performance).

Understanding the causes of conflict (component 1) and the nature of conflict (component 2) can help athlete or coach develop conflict management strategies to resolve conflicts or prevent them from occurring. For example, ice dance partners who are increasingly frustrated by differences in their learning styles (component 1) have two options. They can schedule a meeting to discuss the problem and clarify their differences, or they can postpone the meeting. A possible outcome of postponing the meeting is continued frustration (component 2) that leads to arguments during training, leaving the ice, escalation of negative feelings and interruptions in training (component 3). As conflicts develop over time, becoming more frequent or intense (component 2), parties involved should make additional efforts to manage the conflict. This can be successful or unsuccessful. For example, parties may seek mediation from their coach or stop talking altogether. Understanding the process of interpersonal conflicts as a dynamic process involving multiple stages and influencing factors can help us better manage them when they arise or even prevent them in the first place.

Coach-athlete conflicts lead to reduced team cohesion, increased levels of competitive anxiety and other negative emotional outcomes (Partridge, Knapp. 2016), reduced athlete performance (Jowett, Cramer, 2010; Leo, González-PonceSánchez-Miguel, Ivarsson, García-Calvo , 2015).

In study (Mellalieu, Shearer, Shearer, 2013) were examined strategies used to resolve conflicts in sports. The most used strategy is to withdraw. And second used strategy is to resolve a conflict independently or with the help of others. Also, the literature indicates that conflict avoidance is a common strategy among athletes who have an unconstructive relationship with a coach (Gearity, Murray, 2011; Tamminen, Holt, Neeliy 2013). One of the reasons why athletes avoid conflicts is the perception of greater power of coaches in this dyad (O'Malley et al., 2017; Gearity, Metzger, 2017).

Guidelines and recommendations for preventing and managing conflict in the context of sports are (Wachsmuth, Jowett, Harwood, 2017): a coach should foster an

open door policy, set common goals with athletes, develop team cohesion, establish common expectations, detect conflicts in the early stages to prevent their escalation, and provides structured meetings with neutral facilitators to mediate the conflict.

The following are the assumptions on which constructive conflict resolution rests (Gerstein, Reagan, 1986):

1. All needs are legitimate, important and should be respected. When all needs are considered equally important, a focus becomes meeting all needs instead of meeting a needs of one party.
2. There are enough resources to meet all needs. The human potential for creating new ideas and resources has no limits. By working together, people can reach a constructive solution that satisfies both parties.
3. In every individual lies untapped power and capacity. Each person in conflict knows what they need. Coaches should not impose solutions based on their own ideas about what is wrong with the athlete. Imposing solutions without recognizing individual needs will create frustrated and dissatisfied athletes. Therefore, conflict participants should be encouraged to offer solutions to problems.
4. Process is as important as content because it provides direction and focus. A process is a flow of feelings, thoughts and events. Many times the listener gets caught up in the specifics of the content (and often rehearses the attack) while missing important cues and information about what is going on with a person communicating.
5. Dealing with a situation is different from solving a problem. Coping with a situation focuses on the symptom, and solving a particular problem on the cause. For example, punishing someone for persistent tardiness may alleviate the problem, but the causes of the tardiness still remain unresolved.
6. Everyone is right from their own perspective. It is important to see the situation from the other person's perspective. In conflicts, people spend a lot of time defending their point of view. There are always two sides to every story, and people need to be willing to listen to the other side.
7. Solutions and decisions are temporary states of equilibrium and are not absolute or timeless. Circumstances may change and therefore solutions may need to be modified and renegotiated to keep up with changing times. Many times it is important to establish a balance in the relationship, so it is important that the participants in the conflict be flexible and change as needed.

Conclusion

The coach-athlete relationship implies an interaction in which the thoughts, feelings and behavior of coach and athlete are causally connected. And a quality of the coach-athlete relationship is related to the athlete's success and psychological well-being. The origin, maintenance, development, changes, but also termination of a relationship between coach and athlete, take place through communication. It is desirable that a relationship between coach and athlete is based on respect, understanding, acceptance, tolerance and cooperation. The quality of coach-athlete relationship affects interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes (eg satisfaction with team relationships, motivation, sports performance) through communication. Through communication, coaches demonstrate skills to athletes, convey significant information about technique and tactics, and provide feedback on their performances. Communication is key to developing a good, stable, supportive relationship between coaches and athletes because it demonstrates mutual attention, care, respect and trust. Coach-athlete communication is a complex, dynamic process that depends on the context. Namely, the communication between coach and athlete can be educational, emotional, verbal or non-verbal and can be influenced by the circumstances of the situation such as victory or defeat and whether it takes place during training or competition. Trust, friendship between coach and player, and constructive feedback are factors that positively influence athlete performance.

Conflicts are inevitable in the coach-athlete dyad due to unequal distribution of power, time spent together, pressures and stress. Coach-athlete conflicts lead to decreased team cohesion, increased levels of competitive anxiety, and decreased athlete performance. The most used strategy in the communication between the coach and the athlete is withdrawal, and then resolving the conflict independently or with the help of others. Research has shown that communication skills can be improved. This paper provides guidelines and advice on how to improve communication between coaches and athletes.

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