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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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. The relationship between athlete leader and coach has been identified as a crucial one (Dupuis et al 2006, Loughead et al 2006). Woodward (2004, pp. 308) describes how, as coach to the England rugby union team, he didn’t want one leader in a team of followers, but to have an exceptional leader in a team of great leaders and describes how he encouraged athletes to take on leadership roles. Dupuis, M., and Bloom, G.A. and Loughead, T.M. (2006) Team Captains Perceptions of Athlete Leadership. Journal of Sport Behaviour. 29(1). pp. 60-78. Glenn, S.D. and Horn, T.S. (1993) Psychological and personal predictors of leadership behavior in female soccer athletes. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology. 5. pp. 17-34.