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COACHING PRACTICES AND ATHLETES' BEHAVIOR TOWARD SPORTS

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Abstract:

The coach-athlete relationship in sports is one of those areas affected by the sudden shift in paradigm caused by the pandemic. The coaches' ability to interact with their athletes has changed after the pandemic crisis. Using the self-determination and behaviorism theories, the study's primary purpose is to identify the level of coaching practices, the level of athletes' behavior towards sports, and the significant relationship between these two variables. The participants of this study were 186 varsity athletes from different sports at the college level of the University of Mindanao. This study used a descriptive quantitative correlation study to describe the relationship that naturally occurs between and among them. The study's overall result shows no significant relationship between coaching practices and athletes' behavior toward sports, specifically on the antisocial behavior of athletes. However, the result also revealed that coaching practices have a significant relationship and are related to the athletes' prosocial behavior. The findings indicate that coaching practices did not affect athletes' antisocial behavior, but did affect the athletes' prosocial behavior with the sport. Future studies could focus on including other aspects of coaching practices as it shows a significant effect on the prosocial behavior of the athlete.

Keywords: coaching practices, athletes' behavior, sports

1. Introduction

Around the world, many other types of job-integrated professional development programs appear to have been replaced globally by mentoring and coaching. Coaching entails giving athletes targeted support that will develop their skills and attitudes

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(Vikaraman *et al.*, 2017). However, two celebrated coaches from the University of the Philippines have been reported and punished because of the complaints by the athletes due to verbal and physical abuse issues (Chi *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, four athletes reportedly died in a suicide. They examined the background of the situation, and it turns out that it is because of stress and anxiety caused by pressure and bad coaching (Eckstein *et al.*, 2022). Some coaches appear to be the ones who decide how to utilize their athlete's talent (Roberts *et al.*, 2019). There are instances that coaches' decisions also affect athletes' well-being. Poor coaching is a primary factor affecting athletes psychologically regarding their engagement with the sport (Ruth, 2021).

In recent studies, athletes' anxiety and stress were examined and found that among all of the respondents interviewed, 80% of them are common in terms of having sport as the primary source of this existing problem. Bad coaching practices such as verbal abuse, playing time, forcing athletes to play or participate through injuries, and overt racism are common reasons student-athletes experience anxiety (Eckstein et al., 2022). Verbal abuse is a known tool coaches use to bring out the best in their athletes, but it will harm athletes to work beyond their limits (Martinez, 2019). Risk factors and injury mechanisms are also influenced by various behaviors, such as those of the coach, referee, physical therapist, or sports organizations. These studies suggest that coaching practices effects on athletes are a severe problem (Verhagen et al., 2010). However, when athletes experience formal training and education from coaches, they will experience positive behavior, such as higher motivation, greater self-esteem, and likeliness toward teammates and coaches (Ruth, 2021). Good coaching practices help athletes connect with the sport for fun, enjoyment, and achievement as individuals or teams. Aside from helping athletes, these practices also help coaches promote their professional image (Indeed, 2022).

In addition, an athlete's responsibility is to put themselves in a better condition and win. Meanwhile, the coach's job is to maintain a good relationship with the athlete and provide necessary plans for the athlete's wellness (Gels, 2017). According to Quinn (2021), a positive mental attitude is vital for athletes as it can affect cognitive functioning, energy level, and overall physical performance. Elite or good athletes are more vulnerable to abuse from coaches and co-athletes than novice athletes, as they are more exposed to unique environments, especially when they play far away from their parents, family and peers during international competition (Willinsky & Macabe, 2020).

Along with this, two theories emphasize a connection between the motivation factor from the coach and the athlete factor. First, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influences a person's behavioral regulation while engaging in a social context. This study used this theory to explain coaches' practices as the determinants of athlete's behavior. When the sports setting is appropriately organized, and coaches or instructors, and peers foster a favorable developmental environment, participants and players are said to develop positive life skills using their own experiences (Dunn & Zimmer, 2020). The coach is the first practitioner to be involved in an athlete's ongoing development in their sport. The success of the athletes is determined by their skills and expertise in their sport, but still

one of the determining factors is the coaches' ability to coach or direct his or her athletes (Park & Kim, 2020)

Second, B. F. Skinner's Behaviorism Theory. It suggests that a person's behavior is acquired through conditioning or social interaction. Athletes' interaction with the coaches' practices generates their behavior. A key obstacle for coaches in high-level athletic situations concerns how to assist athletes in modifying behaviors to handle emergent problems during the competitive performance. This issue might be addressed by designing and incorporating competitive performance training models that bring athlete-environment interactions at the core of the learning process, coordinated by an ecologically dynamic framework. The rule of coaches has changed from a constant solution provider to a learning context designer who supports local athlete-environment relations (Zarei *et al.*, 2021).

Apart from this, athletes' perceptions of their coaches' communication styles affect the environment of training sessions, their ability to participate, and athlete performance (Choi *et al.*, 2020). Conditioning and training methods should be appropriate for the athlete's age and sport. Coaching methods must maintain and permit safety while assisting the athlete in physical development. Athletes should be encouraged by their coaches to take the necessary steps regarding their health and general condition. Lowrisk exercises should be guided (Kuhlin *et al.*, 2020). The study showed how widespread and significant technical skills are in Talent Identification and Development (TID); almost all investigations (93%) reported discriminative, explanatory, and predictive benefits for evaluating technical skills in athletics (Koopmann *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, prosocial and antisocial athletes display different behaviors toward the game. Prosocial behavior is the behavior that helps or benefits another individual, such as your teammates or opponents. In contrast, antisocial refers to an individual's behavior that may cause harm to another person. Athletes' developmental experience and behavior were influenced by the sports environment and other contextual factors (Bruner & Benson, 2018). Meanwhile, athletes' behavior may have positive and negative consequences for the opponents and teammates. More so, it depends on the situation their environment provides to them and the coaches that create that environment for them (Kayussanu & Al-Yaarbi, 2021).

A recent study, "The Effect of Coaches' Leadership Behaviors on Athletes' Emotion Regulation Strategies," showed a positive connection between coaches' behavior and athletes' emotions. It was proven that the coach's leadership behavior could also affect the athletes' actions and behavior coming from their emotions. This simply implies that the leadership of the coach can determine athletes' behavior (Solakumur et al., 2023). However, a study titled "Factors that Affect Athlete's Perception and Evaluation of Coaching Behaviors" shows a different result. The amount of time spent by the athletes with their coach did not affect their perception and behavior. This means that coaching strategies did not affect their behaviors while interacting with their athletes (Matthews, 2019).

The pandemic's effects on a person's psychological aspect provide a serious change in decision-making and handling situations. Coaches' ability to engage in physical activity with their athletes is minimized (Santi, 2021). Compared to the other

related studies, the advantage of conducting this study today is that it examines how the pandemic has affected a person's physical, mental, and emotional aspects. Thus, this study provides new knowledge unique from the other studies about the coach-athlete relationship. Furthermore, conducting this study should be urgent since the shifting in model type may have affected the athletes and coaches.

Besides, the result of the study will benefit student-athletes, coaches, society, and the school. Student-athletes' awareness about how they are supposedly treated as athletes and students could help them adjust their actions towards the sport. Coaches are the most significant benefit of this study as they are the main focus in exploring how they handle their athletes. They need to understand how their practices affect athletes' capability to play a particular sport. Lastly, the institution could benefit from this study as it is where the general context of the study takes place. Coaches and athletes usually exist in the institution because the school has a sports program for athletes that constantly promotes the mental and physical betterment of students.

Generally, this study seeks to understand the relationship between coaching practices and athletes' behavior toward sports. It will measure the level of coaching practices regarding physical conditioning, technical skills, goal setting, mental preparation, and competition strategy. It will also measure athletes' behavior towards sports regarding their prosocial and antisocial behavior with the team and their opponents. Furthermore, the study will determine specific coaching practices that may positively and negatively affect the athlete's behavior.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Research Respondents

The participants in this study are all college varsity athletes of the University of Mindanao Main, Davao City. To be eligible, participants should be current varsity members of any college-level organized sport. Only official varsities in S.Y. 2022-2023 are invited to participate since there have been no varsities from the last two or three years due to the pandemic. Participants who choose not to participate before and during the survey can freely decline.

The sample consisted of 186 athletes from the college level as it is the total population of varsities in the university. This number is within the qualifications and the selection of the number of participants, which is also supported by the standard of having more than 30 and less than 500 participants using Roscoe's rule of thumb (Memon, 2020). Quota sampling is used; it allows researchers to select participants with similar characteristics (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021).

2.2 Research Instrument

The data-gathering tool used in this study is a modified survey questionnaire derived from two adapted sources: the *Coaching Behaviors* and *Athlete's Behavior questionnaires*. Part 1 determines the coaching practices with five indicators: physical training and conditioning (7 items), technical skills (8 items), mental preparation (5 items), goal setting

(6 items), and competition strategy (7 items). Part two 2 of the questionnaire is set for the dependent variable with 20 items divided into four indicators: Antisocial Behavior with the Rivals (ABWR), Antisocial Behavior with the Team (ABWT), Prosocial Behavior with the Rivals (PBWR), and Prosocial Behavior with the Team (PBWP). Every indicator is composed of five (5) items.

A range of means is used: 6.16-7.00 (Very high), which shows that the IV and DV are manifested to a great extent; 5.30-6.15 (Rather high), which shows that the IV and DV are usually manifested; 4.44-5.29 (High), this shows that the IV and DV are frequently manifested; 3.58-4.43 (Moderate), this shows that the IV and DV are sometimes manifested; 2.72-3.57 (Low), this shows that the IV and DV are occasionally manifested; 1.86-2.71 (Rather low), this shows that the IV and DV are rarely manifested; and 1.00-1.85 (Very low) this shows that the IV and DV are never manifested. To ensure the validity of the questionnaires, the researchers submitted the modified questionnaires for validation to two expert validators, which has a mean value of 4.71. Then, it underwent pilot testing, which yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.938, implying an acceptable internal consistency.

2.3 Research Design/Procedure

This is a quantitative study using a descriptive correlational design. This study measures the relationship between coaching practices and athletes' behavior. It is appropriate to use a correlational design because it focuses on comparing the relationship between two variables and could be a negative or positive correlation (Curtis *et al.*, 2016).

The researcher's first step in gathering the data is asking permission from the dean by sending a letter signed by the adviser. Then, the researchers also sent a letter to the sports director, allowing them to conduct the study with varsity athletes as respondents. After approval, the researcher uses two modes of administering the questionnaire. One, utilizing the Google Form, where the link was sent to the sports director, who facilitated the link distribution. Two, printed materials were given to the Sports Development Center for distribution to all the qualified participants. After the respondents answered, the researchers gathered and kept all the data for the participants' privacy and to assure them that any information they filled in would be dealt with confidentiality. The data were tabulated and analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's r.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of Coaching Practices

Table 1 below shows the respondents' assessment of the level of coaching practices in terms of the different strategies that athletes have experienced. The overall mean is 6.45, with a standard deviation of .790, which is described as very high. The indicator with the lowest and highest mean rating is mental preparation, with 6.39, SD=.192, and goal setting, with 6.49, SD=1.221, respectively, but all indicators had a mean value described as very high. This means that coaching practices are significantly manifested, and most coaching strategies are given to the athletes at a high frequency.

In support, goal-setting helps athletes stay focused, keeps their motivation firm, and leads to reasonable changes in their progress, direction, realistic outlooks, and happiness from the satisfaction of achieving their desired outcomes (Webber, 2023). Some coaches usually employ motivating strategies when creating training schedules for their players. As Locke and Latham stated in their goal-setting theory, they emphasized how effective goal-setting is in preparation for athletes. After developing it for almost four decades, they have also discovered some positive impacts of goal setting on athletes, such as its implications for the development of athlete's skill, nutrition, behavior, injury prevention, and overall performance (Aarts, 2019). Feedback, support, and setting goals are some of the methods that have been used to encourage commitment, tenacity, dedication, and effort to develop the athlete's long-term self-motivation (Berg & Surujlal, 2020).

Nevertheless, mental preparation had the lowest value, meaning the strategy received less attention from the coaches. A recent comparative study comparing mental practice and mental preparation to strength tasks shows that mental preparation and mental practice are less adequate than strength tasks or activities (Biddle, 2015).

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Indicators	x	SD	Description				
Physical Training and Conditioning	6.48	.770	Very High				
Technical Skills	6.48	.793	Very High				
Mental Preparation	6.39	.912	Very High				
Goal Setting	6.49	1.221	Very High				
Competition strategy	6.44	.845	Very High				
Overall	6.45	.790	Very High				

Table 1: The Level of Coaching Practices (n=186)

3.2 Level of Athlete's Behaviors Toward Sports

Table 2 presents the respondent's assessment of the level of athlete's behaviors toward sports. The overall mean is 3.06, SD=.573, which is described as low. This indicates that athletes' behavior is occasionally manifested. Thus, most of the common athlete's behavior stated in the questionnaire are not manifested most of the time. The result is due to the extreme responses of the respondents wherein the first two indicators, the ABWR and ABWP, have a mean value of 1.64 (SD=.781) and 1.53 (SD=.803), respectively. Moreover, the second two indicators, the PBWP and PBWR, have a mean value of 6.41(SD=1.172) and 5.58 (SD=1.453), respectively. Indicators ABWR and ABWP have a mean value with a very low description. At the same time, indicators PBWR and PBWP have a mean value with a description of very high and rather high, respectively.

This implies that the athletes exude more prosocial behavior with their opponents, which is positive rather than antisocial. This result is congruent with the study of Yildiz *et al.* (2018), that extraverted athletes will exhibit more prosocial and fewer antisocial acts as they develop a moral identity. The internalization of support that athletes are trained to embrace can increase prosocial conduct and decrease antisocial behavior. Being prosocial to the rival or the opponent is an automatic behavior because it shows how we respect them on and off the court with the sport. The result clearly shows that athletes

respect their opponents more compared to doing antisocial behaviors that might negatively affect teammates and opponents in the game.

Indicators	x	SD	Description
Antisocial Behavior with the Rivals (ABWR)	1.64	.781	Very Low
Antisocial Behavior with the Team (ABWP)	1.53	.803	Very Low
Prosocial Behavior with the Rival (PBWR)	6.41	1.172	Very High
Prosocial Behavior with the Team (PBWP)	5.88	1.453	Rather High

3.06

.573

Low

Table 2: The Level of Athlete's Behavior toward Sports (n=186)

Relationship of the Coaching Practices and Athletes' Behavior Toward Sports

Overall

Table 3 shows the relationship between coaching practices and athletes' behavior toward sports. The r-value of coaching practices and athletes' behavior toward sports is .127, with a p-value of .087, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance; this means that the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between coaching practices and athletes' behavior toward sports.

Further, the data shows that two indicators of athletes' behavior, specifically prosocial behavior with the team (.337**) and prosocial behavior with the rival (.350**), are significantly related to coaching practices. This implies that although the overall p-value shows no significant relationship between the two variables, some indicators still indicate a relationship between those factors or indicators. A similar result in a study conducted by Matthews (2019) on coaching behavior and athletes' perception and behavior, specifically the time coaches spent with athletes and athletes' perceptions or behavior, was emphasized, proving no relationship between them.

On the contrary, Wang *et al.* (2016) conducted a study determining the coaching styles that can affect the prosocial and antisocial behavior of the Chinese. The result shows that controlling coaching contributes to antisocial behavior, and a supportive coaching style contributes to prosocial behavior.

When a coach shows controlling action through his instructions, athletes develop antisocial behaviors, and when coaches implement supportive actions, athletes develop prosocial behavior (Navarro, 2020). This simply means that athlete's behavior depends on either the supportive or controlling actions of the coach.

Furthermore, the result specifically shows that coaching practices did not affect the athletes' antisocial behavior. However, the result also implies that coaching behavior is significantly related with athletes' prosocial behaviors towards the sport. This simply means that coaching practices has significant effects with athletes' prosocial behavior, but has no significant relationship with antisocial behaviors of the athletes. In support, a study conducted by Lee *et al.* (2022), indicated that autonomy-support coaching type is significantly related to athletes' behavior, as it reduces the level of moral disengagement of the athletes.

Table 3: The Matrix for the Relationship between Coaching Practices and Athletes' Behavior Towards Sports

	Athlete's Behavior toward Sports				
Coaching Practices	Antisocial	Antisocial	Prosocial	Prosocial	Overall
	Behavior with	Behavior with	Behavior with	Behavior with	Overall
	Rival	Team	Rival	Team	
Physical Training	096	139	.272**	.327**	.098
and Conditioning	090				
Technical Skills	150*	153*	.283*	.345**	.071
Mental Preparation	078	124	.349**	.340**	.150*
Goal Setting	055	007	.254**	.201**	.129
Competition	110	168*	.334**	.360**	.110
Strategies	118				
Overall	113	125	.337**	.350**	.127

4. Recommendations

Although the overall findings show no significant relationship, some factors of coaching practices, notably goal setting, physical training and conditioning, and technical skills, reveal that they impact the prosocial behavior of the teammates and opponents. So, there is a need for development in enhancing and discovering other practices that can contribute to the prosocial behavior of athletes.

Schools may implement seminars and training for coaches and athletes. Seminars and trainings will develop the coaches' strategies and techniques on how to handle their athletes properly. A good facility and equipment for the coaches and athletes should also be provided so that other coaching practices can be discovered; this will help coaches facilitate practical training for the athletes.

The sports coordinator/director can also arrange events to help their coaches develop strategies to benefit athletes' skills, behavior, and attitude toward the team, the opponent, and the sport. The sports coordinator/director can also lead in proposing activities or actions to the school to enhance the facility and training environment.

Coaches can also discover unique techniques or approaches appropriate for the type of sport they handle and the kind of athletes they have. As the result also shows that physical training and conditioning, technical skills, mental preparation, goal setting and competition strategies, are effective for promoting athlete's prosocial behavior, the coaches should continue to manifest these coaching practices. Furthermore, good communication is also a better way to keep the coach-athlete relationship strong and develop a sense of belongingness between the group.

Athletes can also develop their coping mechanisms, skills, and behavior in sports by adjusting to the environment that their coaches provide for them. If they are scolded or receive criticism from the coach, they can consider it constructive criticism and use it as a motivation for improving and developing their sport. The result also revealed that coaching practices are essential for prosocial behavior. Therefore, they should interact

more with their coaches, especially when the five coaching practices mentioned are facilitated.

Furthermore, future researchers can use the results of this study as sources or empirical data for a study relating to this. They can also test out other subjects or specific demographics compared to other studies, which reveals different results.

5. Conclusion

The research findings revealed that the level of coaching practices is very high, meaning coaches implemented physical training and conditioning, technical skills, mental preparation, goal setting, and competition strategies. On the other hand, the level of athletes' behavior toward sports is low, meaning the behaviors are occasionally manifested. The indicators ABWR and ABWP are very low, meaning the antisocial behavior is never manifested. On the contrary, PBWR and PBWP are very high and rather high, respectively, meaning prosocial behavior usually manifests.

The result showed no significant relationship between coaching practices and athletes' behavior toward sports. It entails that the strategy or practices of the coaches did not contribute and affect the athlete's behavior particularly the athletes' antisocial behavior toward the sport. Although the Self-determination theory and the behaviorism theory did not support the result of the study, the researchers failed to reject the null hypothesis, and it proves some assumptions with these different factors. Firstly, the coaching practices with five indicators might not be the specific factors that directly affect the athletes and their behavior. Coaches might manifest other practices that affect the athlete's behavior but are not included in the indicator. Secondly, athletes are diverse individuals and coaches who manifest different behavior and are raised in different cultures. Lastly, culture develops from time to time. Innovation of coaching practices, styles, or strategies is happening globally. Some coaches discovered new techniques, and athletes will also adjust to the environment their coaches provide them.

The results clearly conclude that coaching, together with strategies and techniques, has an impact on the athletes' prosocial behavior. The more coaches facilitate the various coaching practices, the more it can contribute to the athletes' prosocial behavior in a positive way. Coaching styles, specifically democratic coaching, have a positive correlation in increasing the athletes' confidence, intrinsic motivation, and prosocial behavior (Leising, 2019). On the other hand, coaching practices did not contribute to athletes' antisocial behavior within the sport, as a result, states that there is no significant relationship between them.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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