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## ***Coaching Style and the Effect Coaching Style has on an Athlete's Willingness to Self-Report Injuries***

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### **CONTEXT**

For most athletes their coach is the go to person when they are having a problem, but what happens when an athlete feels they cannot go to their coach for the support they feel they need? "Each year, an estimated 40% to 50% of collegiate athletes sustain an athletic injury in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sponsored sports."<sup>1</sup> (pg. 2148) Sports are characterized by high stress levels, extreme motivation, and intense training; which all require an extreme level of effort.<sup>2</sup> This atmosphere is a constant for collegiate athletes and can take a psychological toll on athletes raising the likelihood of injury. A coach is the first line of defense against the emotional and psychological distress an injury may place on an athlete. Depending on the coaching style athletes could be more or less likely to self-report. "Many athletes feel guilty about incurring an injury and 'letting down' the team, or they may feel ignored by teammates and coaches."<sup>3</sup> (p. 278) This is not always the coach's fault and the coach neglecting to provide the correct social support does not always mean bad coaching. A successful coach is defined as a coach focused only on the awards and prestige that accompanies winning with no regard to the needs of the athletes. An effective coach is a coach that is focused on meeting the athletes needs first and winning second. An effective coach typically raises athlete motivation, dedication, and enjoyment for the sport.<sup>4</sup> (p. 67) Though it is important for all coaches to have these skills in their arsenal, not all athletes appreciate social support from a coach. In one study done by Fabien Corbillon et al., some athletes view social support from the coach as insufficient

or inappropriate. But later in the same study they state that athletes found the lack of attention from their coaches unacceptable.<sup>5</sup> The coaching style that athletes respond to and appreciate varies from team to team. It is important that coaches have all of the tools because the athletes come first, and we need to make sure athletes feel comfortable self-reporting injuries.

### **OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect coaching style has on athletes' willingness to self-report injuries at a small Division III college.

### **DESIGN AND SETTING**

This study used a survey research design and was conducted at a small Division III college in Ohio. The independent variable was Division III athletes at one college. This study investigated the difference between gender, year in school, and sport. The dependent variable was the athletes' willingness to self-report injuries. This study also reviewed which type of injuries (musculoskeletal vs. head) gets reported more frequently than others.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

The return rate was 61.7% (n=171) with a convenience sample target population of N=277. Gender: 49.1% females (n=84), 50.9% males (n=87). Class Level: 39.2% freshmen (n=67), 27.5% sophomores (n=47), 15.2% juniors (n=26), seniors 18.1% (n=31). Sport: Volleyball 9.9% (n=17), Football 39.8% (n=68), 8.2% Men's Basketball (n=14), 8.2% Women's Basketball (n=14), 9.4% Women's Lacrosse (n=16), 3.5% Men's Swimming

(n=6), 7.6% Women's Swimming (n=13), 13.5% Softball (n=23).

### **INTERVENTIONS**

The research was approved by the College Institutional Review Board through expedited review. Content validity was established through the Table of Specifications. Face validity was established through a panel of experts. Descriptive statistics (% and frequency counts) were used for all applicable items. Chi Square Test was used for gender as the grouping variable. Kruskal Wallis Test was used for year in school and sport as the grouping variable. The alpha level was set at  $p=.05$  *a priori*. The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer version 24.0.

### **MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS**

The survey asked 15 questions. Questions 1-12 used a 4-point Likert scale. (Strongly Agree(4), Agree(3), Disagree(2), Strongly Disagree(1)). Questions 13-15 were demographic questions.

### **LIMITATIONS**

The limitations of the study were the return rate, only one institution was surveyed, there was a large disparity between female and male coaches participating in my study, and I only had a 15 week semester to complete the study.

### **RESULTS**

26.9% of athletes (n=46), either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "I am comfortable talking to my coach about my injuries," Volleyball (n=9), Men's Basketball (n=2), Women's Basketball (n=3), Football (n=20), Softball (n=11), Women's Swimming (n=1), the other sports (n=0) for both disagree and strongly disagree ( $H=22.281$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=.002$ ). More Underclassmen (n=19) strongly agreed with the statement as compared to Upperclassmen (n=5), "I am more likely to report a musculoskeletal injury over a concussion," ( $H=12.963$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.005$ ). 26% (n=44) of athletes disagreed or strongly

disagreed with the statement, "I am likely to report my injuries." Approximately 1/3 of each class: 31% sophomore (n=31), 31% junior (n=30.8), 32% senior (n=32) not including 8.8% freshmen (n=6) strongly disagreed or disagreed that their coach provides emotional support. Both male and female felt they were not negatively impacted by their coach's attitude toward injured players answering strongly disagree or disagree, 85.6% females (n=72) and 90.4% males (n=76). Both male and female disagreed or strongly disagreed that their coach did not deal well when presented with an injury 73.4% male (n=61) and 77.9% female (n=65). In general students felt coaches did not react negatively toward injury regardless of class level, the majority of each class answered disagree or strongly disagree, 93.9% Freshmen (n=63), 73.8% Sophomores (n=34), 92% Juniors (n=23), and 77.3% Seniors (n=24). A difference existed between sports as compared to their perceptions of the coach's ability to provide emotional support 76.3% (n=12) of volleyball players either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their coach provided emotional support as compared to 71.4% (n=9) of men's basketball and 92.8% (n=13) of women's basketball players that either agreed or strongly agreed that their coach provided emotional support ( $H=49.181$ ,  $df=7$ ,  $p=.000$ ).

### **CONCLUSION**

Athletes willingness to self-report injuries was seemingly not affected by the coaching style. But still at least a fourth of athletes felt they wouldn't report their injuries. This is unacceptable and we need to do more research to figure out why. In this study, the majority of coaches provided support across gender, class, and sport. It is important that we educate our coaches on the effects that injury has on athletes and their possible role in either helping or hindering the process. As athletic trainers we need to be the liaison between coaches and athletes to make sure

the athletes are comfortable coming to us with injuries regardless of the coaching style.

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**KEY WORDS:** *self-report, social support, injuries, coaching style*