

## Ice Hockey Coaches' Perceptions of Athlete Leadership

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The purpose of this study was to identify ice hockey coaches' perceptions of the factors influencing athlete leadership. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with six high performance ice hockey coaches of elite 16- to 20-year-old athletes. The results indicated how coaches selected and developed their athlete leaders, how they fostered the coach-athlete leader relationship and the responsibilities of their athlete leaders. These results provide coaches with new information on how to identify and develop their athlete leaders, as well as how to cultivate positive relationships with them.

The role of the coach is to deliver quality coaching and a positive learning and performance environment, which is accomplished by teaching athletes sport (e.g., technical, tactical), social (e.g., cooperation, responsibility), and leadership skills (e.g., perseverance, hard work; Bloom, 2002; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995). Given its relevance in sport, it is not surprising that leadership has been assigned great importance by both athletes and coaches (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998) and effective leadership has been identified as a crucial factor in achieving team success (Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001). Most of the research examining leadership in sport has primarily focused on the coach. However, the presence and importance of athlete leadership within teams has recently received some attention (Loughead, Hardy, & Eys, 2006). For example, Loughead et al. (2006) defined an athlete leader as an individual occupying either a formal or an informal leadership role within a team who influences team members towards the achievement of a common goal. Based on this definition, there are two types of athlete leaders. On the one hand, formal athlete leaders are those who have been designated as a leader by their team, such as, a captain or assistant captain. On the other hand, informal athlete leaders are those who emerge as a leader based on their experience and interactions with other team members.

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