

# The impact of humanistic coach training on youth athletes' development through sport

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of humanistic coach training on athletes' developmental outcomes. A sample of 148 high school student-athletes between 12 and 17 years old from low socio-economic communities completed questionnaires during their season. The student-athletes were divided into an experimental group composed of student-athletes of 11 head coaches who participated in a humanistic coach training session, and a comparison group composed of student-athletes of 8 untrained coaches. Four questionnaires were used to assess competence, confidence, connection to the coach, and character (prosocial and antisocial behaviours) of the participants. The effects of the humanistic coach training program were assessed using repeated measures analysis of variance models. Results showed that connection to the coach worsened for athletes of untrained coaches. Also, participants from both groups reported an increase in antisocial behaviours at the end of the season, but the athletes of trained coaches reported engaging less frequently in antisocial behaviours compared to athletes of untrained coaches. These findings suggest that teaching humanistic coaching may help practitioners foster positive developmental outcomes in youth sport participants and build positive coach-athlete relationships, while also raising awareness to the use of sport as a tool to promote personal growth and development.

## Keywords

Athlete development, coach-athlete relationship, positive youth development, youth sport

Sport is a highly desirable context to foster youth personal development.<sup>1</sup> It may be an intrinsically motivating activity that can engage young participants and be used by adult decision-makers advocating for youth development in various settings.<sup>2</sup> Researchers have shown that youth sport participation can help facilitate many positive outcomes such as increased enjoyment, self-esteem, emotional regulation, and ability to work with others.<sup>3–5</sup> Sport can also help youth athletes acquire life skills that are transferable to other settings, such as respect for others, perseverance, teamwork, and leadership.<sup>6</sup> Although the developmental benefits of sport participation are widely accepted, some studies have also associated sport participation to risky behaviours, such as increased aggression, substance abuse, and gang affiliation.<sup>7–9</sup> Moreover, these outcomes can be influenced by the attitudes and behaviours of the

coach.<sup>10</sup> Coaches' behaviours leading to positive developmental outcomes have been defined and conceptualized using various theoretical frameworks with underpinnings in leadership, life skills promotion, and

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