

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFECTIONISM AND PERCEPTION OF COACHES' BEHAVIOR IN MALE ATHLETES

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## SUMMARY

The aim of our study was to determine the relationship between perfectionism and perception of coaches' behavior in male adolescence athletes. The final sample of respondents (67 athletes, mean age 20.28±.92 years) is selected from the initial sample of 130 subjects, students at the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education in Niš. They completed the two questionnaires: Leadership scale for sport (LSS) and Competitive perfectionism Scale (CPS). The results showed a significant relationship between striving for perfection and training instructions (.47), social support (.44), and positive feedback (.46), and also negative striving for perfection and autocratic behavior (.40). This study provides valuable insight into understanding the dynamics of sports leadership and perfectionism in athletes. Research on the coach-athlete interactions, and also perfectionism from the perspective of an athlete need to be continued.

**Keywords:** team sports, democratic behavior, positive feedback

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## INTRODUCTION

Perfectionism is commonly conceived of as a personality style characterized by striving for flawlessness and setting of excessively high standards for performance accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations of one's behavior (Hamidi & Besharat, 2010). Two major dimensions of perfectionism were differentiated (Stoeber, Otto, Pescheck, Becker, & Stoll, 2007). The first dimension has been described as positive striving perfectionism and captures those facets of perfectionism that relate to perfectionistic striving, having perfectionistic personal standards, and setting exacting standards for one's performance (Hamidi & Besharat, 2010). Earlier studies had shown that this dimension had positive correlations with indicators of good psychological adjustment such as positive affect, endurance, academic achievement, and test performance (Dunn, Dunn, & Syrotuik, 2002; Ghahramani, Besharat, & Naghipour, 2011; Stoeber, 2011).

The second dimension has been described as self-critical perfectionism and captures those facets of perfectionism that relate to critical self-evaluations

of one's performance, feelings of discrepancy between expectations and results, perfectionistic concern over mistakes and other high expectations, and fears that the others' acceptance is conditional on one's being perfect (J. G. H. Dunn, Dunn, & Syrotuik, 2002; Hamidi & Besharat, 2010; Stoeber et al., 2007). This dimension has shown positive correlations with indicators of maladjustment such as negative affect, low self-esteem, and low self-efficacy (Stoeber, 2011; Stoeber et al., 2007). However, perfectionism is multidimensional and multifaceted, and only some dimensions and facets are clearly negative, harmful, and maladaptive whereas others are positive, benign, and possibly adaptive (Hamidi & Besharat, 2010; Stoeber et al., 2007).

The relationship between coach and athlete is a very complex phenomenon which is affected by many variables. Also, this relationship influences the development of athletes and their sports career. The way athletes notice their coaches' behavior affects all included, as well as the sports achievement, and it is influenced by many psychological variables (attitudes, emotions, goals). The aim of this study was to determine relationship between perception of

coaches' behavior and perfectionism in male collage athletes.

## METHODS

### Subjects

The population of this study included 67 college athletes engaged in different team sports (basketball,

football, and volleyball). Participants were asked to fill Competitive Perfectionism Scale (CPS; Besharat, 2009) and Leadership scale for sport (LSS). Total mean score for the athletes' ages was  $20.28 \pm .92$  ranging from 19 to 25.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for general data of athletes

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Age	19.00	25.00	20.28	.92
Sports experience	2.00	15.00	8.82	3.69
Beginning of sports activity	5.00	17.00	9.22	2.88
Time with coach (per week)	1.00	12.00	3.97	3.39
Hours of training (per week)	1.00	35.00	9.43	6.15

### Procedure

**Competitive perfectionism Scale (CPS)** - The CPS is a 10-item test designed and standardized by Besharat (2009) to assess the positive and negative dimensions of competitive perfectionism. Items tap the two dimensions of perfectionism, i.e. striving for perfection and negative reaction to imperfection on a 5- point Likert Scale ranging from 1(very low) to 5 (very high). The psychometric properties of CPS have been confirmed across several studies (Dunn et al., 2006; Martinent & Ferrand, 2006; Stoeber et al., 2007). According to preliminary findings, Cronbach alpha levels of each of the subscales, for a sample consisting of 133 athletes of different athletic levels and different sport majors, were estimated at .93 and .90 for items of the subscales respectively, which indicate a high internal consistency for the test (Hamidi & Besharat, 2010).

**Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS)** - The LSS is commonly used questionnaire to examine sport specific coaching behaviors (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Cruz & Kim, 2017; Loughhead & Hardy, 2005). The LSS is one of the most commonly used questionnaires for assessing sport leadership, which comprises five subscales representing different features of coaching behavior: (1) training and instruction behavior, which describes the sport skill and tactical instructional style of the coach, which are aimed at improving athletes' performance; (2) democratic and (3) autocratic behaviors, which refer

to the decision-making style of the coach; and (4) social support and (5) positive feedback, which characterize the motivational style of the coach (Cruz & Kim, 2017).

### Statistical analysis

For data analyses, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were used. The statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 20 and the level of significance was set at .05.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of positive and negative dimensions of competitive perfectionism and athletes' coaching behavior preferences. Mean and standard deviation scores for perfectionism and dimensions of coaching behaviors were as follows, respectively: 25.12 & 4.14 for striving for perfection; 18.45 & 5.87 for negative reaction to imperfection;  $3.94 \pm .50$  for training and instruction behavior;  $3.53 \pm .52$  for democratic behavior;  $3.10 \pm .72$  for autocratic behaviors,  $3.48 \pm .58$  for social support and  $4.03 \pm .54$  for positive feedback. Results of Pearson's correlation test are shown in table 3. The results showed significant relationship between striving for perfection and training instructions (.47), social support (.44), and positive feedback (.46), and also negative striving for perfection and autocratic behavior (.40).

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for CPS and LPS dimensions

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
TRAINS	2.77	4.85	3.94	.50
DEMBEH	2.67	4.56	3.53	.52
AUTOOCR	1.80	4.80	3.10	.72
SOCSUPP	2.25	4.63	3.48	.58
POFEED	2.60	5.00	4.03	.54
PERF	10.00	30.00	25.12	4.14
NEGPREF	5.00	30.00	18.45	5.87

**Table 3.** Correlations of variables

	TRAINS	DEMBEH	AUTOOCR	SOCSUPP	POFEED
PERF	<b>.45**</b>	.17	.04	<b>.44**</b>	<b>.46**</b>
NEGPREF	-.12	.05	<b>.40**</b>	.02	-.03

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to determine the relationship between perfectionism and perception of coaches' behavior in male athletes. The results showed significant relationship between striving for perfection and training instructions, social support, and positive feedback, and also negative striving for perfection and autocratic behavior in male athletes. There are no previous studies on this topic, and also behaviors limited strictly to the emotional side of the coach-athlete interactions were appreciated to a greater extent by females than by males in earlier studies.

The earlier studies in athletes investigated the relationship between perfectionism and different behaviors in athletes such as goal orientations (Dunn et al., 2002), fear of failure (Sagar & Stoeber, 2009), anxiety and disordered eating (Haase, Prapavessis, & Glynn Owens, 2002), self-esteem (Gotwals, Dunn, & Wayment, 2003), motivational climate (Nordin-Bates, Hill, Cumming, Aujla, & Redding, 2014) etc.

When examining perfectionism in sport it is important to differentiate perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns because of that the perils of perfectionism in sport are mainly restricted to perfectionistic concerns. In contrast, perfectionistic strivings are often associated with positive characteristics, processes, and outcomes, particularly when the overlap between perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns is controlled. Perfectionism is a "double-edged sword" that may have benefits (perfectionistic strivings) but may also carry significant costs and risks (perfectionistic concerns) for athletes (Stoeber et al., 2007). Our investigation showed that coaches'

behavior can be connected with perfectionism in their athletes.

Striving for perfection, as a positive aspect of perfectionism, allows a perfectionist to enjoy and take pleasure in their onerous and tiresome efforts. The athletes' experience of satisfaction at and pleasure in their personal performance, help them perform sport skills and techniques with a higher concentration and accuracy and hence increase the likelihood of their success. This condition will both enhance the self-confidence of the athlete, and lower the usual anxieties and worries inherent in a competitive situation down to a controllable point (Dunn et al., 2002).

Unlike positive aspects of perfectionism, negative reaction to imperfection which is one negative dimension or aspect of perfectionism increases one's worries over failure to meet their high standards, for its highly maladaptive and abnormal characteristics (Koivula, Hassme, & Fallby, 2002). The main product and result of such condition is the athletes' helplessness and inability to appropriately utilize their athletic skills and techniques. Such feelings of helplessness and inability not only increases competitive anxiety (cognitive and somatic), but also has a debilitating effect on the athletes' self-confidence (Hamidi & Besharat, 2010).

The dissatisfaction distracts the athletes' concentration and lowers their accuracy which, in turn, increases the likelihoods of failure and frustration for them. Under such circumstances, anxieties and worries within the competitive situation increase, which will damage both the athletes' self-confidence and their feelings of self-competence (Hamidi & Besharat, 2010).

Many factors could affect the athlete's understanding of the coach's behaviors. It could

result, for example, from the athletes' self-assessment, which in turn influenced their interpretation of messages, which the coach sent about him or her as a person. Males, more often than females, indicated control and error correction as the coach favoured more talented athletes. At the same time, individualization of training sessions was for male athletes the factor, which improved their athletic development. Furthermore, contrary to Konter's results (2007) it was found that male athletes paid more attention to expert's competence than female athletes (Siekanska, Blecharz, & Wojtowicz, 2013).

Siekanska et al. (2013) concluded that high-expectancy athletes may perceive the coaching behavior as inhibiting (rather than enhancing) their athletic progress. It is commonly known that false assumptions on the athlete's performance potential may bring negative effects on the actual performance outcomes. It could mainly concern exerting too great pressure and demands on athletes. The behavior from the category of leniency and favouring, which works on the assumption of reducing pressure and facilitating development, has been assessed by the competitors as a developmental inhibitor. Clearly, research on the coach-athlete interactions from the perspective of an athlete needs to be continued.

## CONCLUSION

Recommendation for further research is to provide longitudinal studies about perfectionism and coaching behavior during the competitive season considering the differences between types of sports, for example aesthetic, combat or power sports.

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