

Creating the Next Generation of Leaders:
A Study of Leadership Development at Higher Education Institutions Among
Student-Athletes

Zachary Brunner

Marywood University

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CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Abstract

Leadership plays a pivotal role in one's life. Throughout an individual's life, he or she may be exposed to certain life-changing decisions. At some point, that individual will most likely have to serve as a leader to someone, including his or her own family, a friend, a co-worker, or serve as a leader to themselves. Leadership is not limited to formal positions or titles. Leadership embodies a mindset and a set of behaviors that enable individuals to navigate life, allowing them to embrace opportunities and inspire others.

Leadership is important because it provides direction, motivation, and guidance. Good leadership can positively impact the society and the community we live in. Bad leadership can destroy the future of society and cause negative change. This paper will examine the leadership development of student-athletes, along with different factors that can influence leadership development among student-athletes. There are many beliefs and theories on how an individual can improve their leadership skills. Whether academic-related, mental benefits or long-term outcomes, there are many ways that student-athletes can benefit from playing sports. Many factors can influence the leadership development of student-athletes, including the role of a coach, the leadership style used, the belief of leadership development, or gender-related. This paper highlights the benefits and issues in leadership development at intuitions. Many institutions value leadership development but fail to take the necessary steps to make sure it is promoted within college athletics.

Keywords: Leadership, Leadership Development, Leadership in Sports, Student-Athletes

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Creating the Next Generation of Leaders: A Study of Leadership Development at Higher Education Institutions Among Student-Athletes.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	7
Academic Performance and Leadership Skills	7
Balancing Academic and Athletics	8
The Impact of Sports Participation on Leadership Development.....	10
Factors Influencing Leadership Development	12
Gender Differences in Leadership Development.....	15
Long-Term Outcomes	17
Analysis.....	19
Trait Theory	20
Behavioral Theory and a Student Athlete’s Perspectives	21
Contingency Theory and the Institutions Perspective.....	23
Transactional Theory and a Coach’s Perspective.....	24
Ethical Implications	25
Tension Between Amateur/Professional Status of Athletes	28
Tension Between Winning and Winning Fairly	29

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Allowing the Mistreatment of Athletes 29

Policy Recommendations..... 30

Summary 33

References 38

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

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Introduction

Historically, there have been many challenges to higher education at different institutions in the United States, including its purpose (Astin & Astin, 2000). Recently, many students have decided not to attend college or a university and pursue other interests or the workforce. Astin (1985) claims that the higher education system's purpose is to develop the talents of its students. At most higher education institutions, student leadership development is a valued goal because institutions value alums who effect positive change in and around the communities (Astin & Astin, 2000). Most higher education mission statements have highlighted the importance of leadership development. However, most institutions give little attention to the concepts of leadership and the higher education goals of leadership development (Astin & Astin, 2000).

All college students must develop and learn some leadership development skills throughout their time at the institution. Leadership is a fundamental skill that is pivotal in personal and professional development (Silva, 2016). Leadership is essential for helping individuals and teams work toward a common goal. According to McElroy (2005), leadership helps with collaboration, effective communication, decision-making, and is highly valued in many aspects of life, including career positions and social settings. There are many definitions and opinions on what leadership is. According to Silva (2016), leadership can be defined as "the process of interactive influence that occurs when, in a given context, some people accept someone as their leader to achieve common goals".

Leadership is something that can occur in many forms and many ways. Astin and Astin (2000) claim that leadership can occur in and outside the classroom. Many colleges and

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

universities may offer their students a leadership course or activities that promote leadership development among all students. More specifically, student-athletes may receive extra leadership development activities through alums who have played a sport or through funding from the athletic department. These activities provide opportunities for all students to learn and develop leadership skills if promoted by the institution (Astin & Astin, 2000).

Many resources are available to learn more about leadership, but does this translate to gaining more leadership skills or mean that an individual becomes a better leader? Many people will argue that being a student-athlete will help individuals learn more about leadership and improve their leadership skills over time (McElroy, 2005; Jiang & Espeso, 2023). Student-athletes often juggle the demands of playing their sport while also having academic responsibilities. This commitment may give them unique opportunities to develop their leadership skills but may also present challenges that impact their leadership potential (Caulfield et al., 2023).

According to Caulfield et al. (2023), at many institutions, student-athletes may be the driving force in why the institution is still in business and able to function. In times where athletics can be used to generate money for the university or athletic department, there are often enormous expectations placed on student-athletes (Caulfield et al., 2023). Higher education institutions must ensure that leadership development is still valued and promoted to all students, including student-athletes. This paper will examine the leadership development benefits of being a student-athlete, how student-athletes can develop leadership skills, and obstacles in college athletics. Recommendations will be presented to aid in encouraging and supporting leadership development at higher education institutions. These findings can be used to improve leadership practices in higher education institutions as they are interested in developing leaders and

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

promoting leadership development among all students. These findings may help the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as their mission is to “provide a world-class athletics and academic experience for student-athletes that fosters lifelong well-being” (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021) and promote college athletics.

Literature Review

The interdisciplinary literature reviewed in preparation for this research study centered around five main themes, including academic performance and the influence on leadership skills, the impact of sports participation on leadership development, factors influencing leadership development, gender differences in leadership development, and long-term outcomes. Each of these areas will assess the leadership development of student-athletes. Leadership is an essential skill that may impact an individual’s personal and professional life.

Academic Performance and Leadership Skills

According to the NCAA, college sports have a great potential to exercise and bolster leadership abilities (Huntrods, 2014). In partnership with colleges and universities, the NCAA often showcases their student-athletes in marketing materials and promotes them on online platforms such as the institutions’ website, social media, and much more. In other cases, colleges and universities sometimes showcase injured student-athletes and use the injuries to grow and develop as leaders (Huntrods, 2014). Most student-athletes have the preconceived notion that they are leaders because they play a sport, leading others to believe this, but most have not seen any data or evidence to support these claims. In 1997, a study focused on 73 freshman student-athletes at the Division I level where The Sport Leadership Behavior Inventory (SLBI) was used to define and measure leadership skills among the athletes. It was found that higher leadership scores in student-athletes translated into higher academic performance (Eiche et al., 1997). This

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

study showed that the higher the leadership scores in student-athletes, the higher the grades in the classroom. It shows these student-athletes could be considered leaders in the classroom, which concludes there is a positive correlation between sports participation and academic performance in the classroom.

The NCAA reports that college student-athletes graduate at higher rates than regular college students (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2014). Since student-athletes have to focus on their sport and academic performance, this may increase their time management skills (Grimit, 2014). This could have a direct effect as student-athletes must plan time to study for their academic courses. Grimit (2014) reported in his study that sixty-six percent of student-athletes at South Dakota State University felt that athletic involvement affected their motivations to attend classes regularly quite a bit or a great deal and that seventy-five percent of student-athletes either agreed or strongly agreed that athletic involvement motivated them towards credit completion and persistent towards graduation. Three percent of student-athletes participating in this study were below a 3.0 grade point average (GPA). At the same time, non-student athletes at South Dakota State University had an average GPA of 2.75, showing a positive correlation between being a student-athlete and being successful academically (Grimit, 2014).

Balancing Academic and Athletics

Many arguments have debated whether student-athletes are as competent in the classroom as non-student athletes. Arguments have been double-sided, and existing research has supported both sides. Throughout time, there have been many beliefs that “jocks” and those that participate in sports only attend school because they are required to participate in sports. Other research has claimed that student-athletes are more than likely to be just as academically successful as non-student athletes (Bradley et al., 2013). Students must have time management

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

skills to be succeed in the classroom and in extracurricular activities. All students at colleges and universities must manage their time and have different strategies. In this case, we will examine how student-athletes manage their time compared to non-student athletes.

Students prioritize what is important to them and decide how to balance their time based on their values and future goals. Most student-athletes must fulfill specific GPA requirements to be allowed to participate in their sport (Hollis, 2001). Metrics and scores motivate students to do well in the classroom. Student-athletes are considered a disadvantaged group because of the significant time restraints and time commitments they face compared to those who do not play a sport (Hollis, 2001). Time restraints and time commitments for student-athletes include the physical demand of attending practice and conditioning sessions, games throughout the week, and travel time for games which may mean missing class. A study that was conducted in 2006-07 looked at academic adjustments between freshman and sophomore student-athletes and non-student athletes. It was found that student-athletes scored higher on academic adjustment than the non-athletes (Melendez, 2006). This study shows that student-athletes can balance their time and adjust to the academic demands better than non-student athletes, who may have more free time. This same study also showed that student-athletes have higher graduation rates than the general student body (Melendez, 2006). According to Caulfield et al. (2023), most student-athletes have access to academic resources that non-student athletes may not have “forced upon” them and usually have access to team tutors, required study halls, and the institution’s extra support programs. Non-student athletes may have access to tutors and extra support programs. However, attending or using these resources may be optional if student-athletes are required to have study halls and tutor sessions that also puts them on a tighter time restraint (Caulfield et al., 2023).

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

They most likely will not have as much free time due to these academic sessions on top of practices, games, and travel.

Even though non-student athletes, in most cases, would have more time on their hands than student-athletes, that does not mean that all non-student athletes take advantage of this free time. A study compared the free time of student-athletes and non-student athletes and found that the student-athletes averaged eight to eleven hours per week on coursework, while non-student-athletes reported, on average, four to seven hours per week on coursework (Miles, 2015). According to Ensign and Woods (2014), being involved with extracurricular activities like athletics promotes academic motivation. Non-athletes who have obligations outside of the campus community, such as working full-time or having a family, were found to be less focused on academic achievement.

The Impact of Sports Participation on Leadership Development

There are many positive impacts of participation in sports. Sports can teach many different lessons, including goal setting, working with others, and teamwork. One study found a significant relationship between participation in the athletes of men's soccer, men's baseball, women's softball, and track and field and the development of leadership skills (McElroy, 2005). In another study conducted by Dupuis et al. (2006), which interviewed former university team captains, it was found that team captain experiences developed interpersonal characteristics, verbal interactions, and task behaviors. All of the characteristics found in this study are elements of leadership. A study conducted by Aries et al. (2004) compared athletes and non-athletes at different colleges. The study reported that high-commitment athletes had a higher perception of themselves as socially skilled, outgoing, confident, and good leaders when compared to non-athletes. Participating in sports can have many benefits when looking at a person's leadership

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

development. When looking at the benefits of participating in a sport, “it gets college students to challenge themselves, explore their own potential, cultivate perseverance, and courage, and help to cultivate college students’ firm faith, strong confidence and brave and tenacious will quality” (Jian & Espeso, 2023).

According to MacNeil (2006), many college students will develop better leadership qualities throughout their years in school. College students may become more knowledgeable of a subject, more confident in themselves, and able to interact with others, which improves their communication skills, all of which helps their leadership development and helps them become better leaders. There is no denying that participating in sports helps leadership development and helps shape individuals to be better leaders as “extra-curricular sports participation enhances the potential individual development, helps develops students’ interpersonal skills, and promotes their personality growth and self-development” (MacNeil, 2006).

Outside of the physical benefits of participating in sports, there has also been research on the mental benefits of participating in sports. One benefit of sports participation is that it promotes coping skills, teamwork, self-worth, social skills, and a good work ethic (Richards & Aries, 1999). All of these qualities are needed to make a good leader. A leader must be able to work among a team, handle adversity, have social skills to motivate others, communicate with others, and be disciplined to lead by example (Richards & Aries, 1999). In 2014, a study was conducted looking at the effects, during college and after college, of participating in athletics in college. A survey on leadership competence asked participants to report the quality of relationships with faculty members, multicultural experiences, and relations with teammates and peers. It was reported that for student-athletes, multicultural experiences during college positively influenced leadership skills after college (Comeaux et al., 2014). In today’s world, for

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

a leader, it is important to be diverse in working among people of many different cultures. Student-athletes can experience working with diverse people as their teammates have different backgrounds and views. Participating in sports allows student-athletes to work with multicultural people and help in other ways (Jian & Espeso, 2023). Ewing et al. (2002) claim that sports contribute to learning skills and values that are necessary to succeed in education, the workforce, and throughout life. This study shows that athletics can play a major role in leadership development in many different ways and can impact leadership development in many different fields like education or the workplace.

Factors Influencing Leadership Development

A coach of a team can influence leadership development among student-athletes or their team (Duguay et al., 2022). A coach of a team not only recruits what student-athletes he or she wants at the collegiate level but can also promote a positive environment among the team where leaders are developed over time. Although a coach's job is to develop different strategies throughout the sport, a coach must also be able to help student-athletes make decisions outside of sports and help them become more prepared for life after graduation. Being more prepared for life after graduation includes helping student-athletes become better leaders. Coaches can have different strategies, learning activities, and beliefs on how to develop better leaders among their teams. All of which directly impact on the leadership development of student-athletes on the team (Day, 2000).

In a study by Duguay et al. (2022), coaches developing leadership skills among their student-athletes were studied. They found that coaches were able to help produce better leaders among the team in four different themes. The first theme centered around the significance of empowering their athletes. The coaches noted that to develop better leaders among the student-

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

athletes, it was critical to be athlete-centered, and this required the student-athletes to be involved in the decision-making around team matters (Duguay et al., 2022). The second theme revolved around how coaches utilized the concept of team leadership. The coaches believed the team's leadership was too large of a responsibility for just one athlete. Coaches preferred using a leadership group that included veteran student-athletes on the team and coaches. Leadership groups varied from having one to two captains and other promising student-athlete leaders. Certain athletes had different leadership roles, such as academic weight room captains (Duguay et al., 2022). The third theme is that coaches were able to promote leadership development among their student-athletes by having a positive team culture for leadership to flourish. The coaches believed in having a team environment that eliminated status differences among each player (starters vs bench players, upperclassmen vs underclassmen, etc.). This ensured that all student-athletes on the team had a voice through open communication and developing trust through team-building activities (Duguay et al., 2022). The final theme that the coaches discussed was the importance of internally discussing and developing the leadership capabilities of the student-athletes on the team. The coaches believed in having learning opportunities for student-athletes to show effective leadership in different activities, providing leadership books to their team, and having leadership workshops which helped to develop better leaders on the team and promoted leadership development among student-athletes (Duguay et al., 2022).

According to Day (2000), mentoring has been considered a major part of many sports and an increasingly important element of successful teams. In a mentoring approach, the more experienced leader (the coach or upperclassmen athlete) trains a protégé by consistently interacting and sharing ideas (Day, 2000). A study by Mead and Gilson (2017) looked at the impact of coach mentoring on student-athlete leadership development. The coach allowed

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

student-athlete leaders to use their voices and delegate leadership tasks to other team members to help promote leadership development among the team (Mead & Gilson, 2017). Mentorship can also depend on the relationship between the mentor and the protégé. The better relationship between the mentor and protégé, the more likely leadership development can be passed down to the protégé (Riggio, 2015).

Another mentorship approach many teams use is student-athletes mentoring other student-athletes or peer-athlete mentoring. This occurs when a more experienced student-athlete serves as a role model or mentor to another student-athlete and assists them in achieving their goals and supporting their personal growth and development (Hoffmann et al., 2017). Two strategies can be used within peer athlete mentoring: informal mentoring relationship and formal mentoring. Informal mentoring relationships are developed informally and are preferred because they occur naturally between the mentor and mentee (Hoffmann, 2019). The second approach, formal mentoring, is when a coach formalizes the peer mentoring relationship by assigning a mentee to a mentor. A mentor and mentee mutually agree to engage in a mentoring relationship, or the compatibility between mentor and mentee is derived through an assessment tool like a personality questionnaire (McCrae, 1992). With a student-athlete mentoring another student-athlete, the more experienced student-athlete can mentor the mentee and help them with not only sport-related issues or questions but also help them with non-sport-related issues (Hoffmann, 2019).

Overall, a coach can have a major impact on leadership development among student-athletes and a team. A coach decides what approaches can be used to help develop better leaders and can help many student-athletes grow as leaders over time (Duguay et al., 2022). If a coach does not want to incorporate specific leadership strategies, then those student-athletes on the

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

team may fail to become better leaders over time. Any coach can play a crucial role in developing student-athletes by promoting leadership among each student-athlete. Coaches can help by empowering student-athletes to make team-related decisions and giving leadership responsibilities to multiple team members (Day, 2000). Other helpful ideas include having a leadership group within the team, having a positive team culture, discussing the importance of leadership with the team, giving them resources such as leadership books and mentoring student-athletes or having more experienced players serve as mentors to team members (Duguay et al., 2022).

Gender Differences in Leadership Development

There have been debates on the question of whether gender influences leadership development. Numerous studies show that leadership styles differ according to gender. According to van Engen et al. (2001), male student-athletes are more accustomed to a leadership style associated with instrumental, dominating, and task-oriented qualities. In contrast, female student-athletes were associated with charisma, earning, and nurturance leadership styles (van Engen et al., 2001). If male and female student-athletes receive different leadership styles from their coaches, this could impact leadership development among student-athletes.

A study was conducted by Mak and Kim (2017) examining the effects of sports participation and leadership skills among male and female student-athletes. Male and female student-athletes had to fill out two leadership questionnaires in which different leadership indicators were measured, including management of attention, meaning, trust, self, risk management, and management of feelings. Each category represents a skill set that a leader would need to be considered a successful leader. It was found that female student-athletes outscored male student-athletes in transformational leadership scores. Female student-athletes

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

also scored higher in terms of management of trust and management of self. It was found that females scored higher than males in the management of feelings. It was also found that female student-athletes possess a higher ability to convey messages and have better overall communication skills than male student-athletes, which is critical to be a great leader. Lastly, it was found that female student-athletes had a superior ability to communicate ideas and get their message across to coworkers (Mak & Kim, 2017). These characteristics are vital for great leaders because they constantly communicate with others and must motivate others. These scores indicate that there is a difference in leadership development among genders. This study showed that female student-athletes scored higher in transformational leadership skills and in the management of trust, self, and feelings, all of which play a role in being a great leader.

In another study conducted by Misasi et al. (2016), student-athletes at Division I and Division II universities completed three questionnaires regarding their leadership scale, relationship with their coach, and coaching behavior. Two themes emerged in the study. One theme involved the gender of the student-athlete and their coach's support, which could impact the leadership development of student-athletes. It was found in the study that female student-athletes felt that their coaches were more likely to help them with conflicts within the team compared to males. It was also found that female student-athletes believed that their coach was more likely to encourage informal relations with student-athletes (Misasi et al., 2016). A coach's support can play a vital impact in the leadership development of a student-athlete (Duguay et al., 2022). Suppose a coach provides support to their student-athletes. In that case, student-athletes are more likely to approach them during a time of conflict, and that student-athlete will hopefully be able to learn and become a better leader. This study also examines the difference in how coaches treat male and female student-athletes.

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

A second theme in this study was that male student-athletes believed their coaches were more likely to monitor an athlete's progress and help identify target dates to meet those goals (Misasi et al., 2016). It was also found that male student-athletes felt their coaches were more approachable about personal problems. A coach providing positive feedback to their student-athletes about goal setting can help them achieve their goals and will help set them up for the future, as they can go through the goal-setting process and achieve their goals. (Misasi et al., 2016). In leadership, there is a common goal in mind, and if these student-athletes know the goal-setting process, this will help them. Having a coach to talk to about personal problems will be helpful in leadership development as that coach can advise the student-athlete on how to approach and deal with these problems and help in problem-solving. Student-athletes may face problems and may approach their coach about these problems. A coach may be able to help student-athletes with these problems or be familiar with problem-solving skills to help student-athletes.

Long-Term Outcomes

Sports are considered to have long-term effects on values, attitudes, and behaviors in the early stages of life (Jian & Espeso, 2023). Weinberg and Gould (2023) found that participating in sports can help student-athletes in two different areas that are needed in leadership, initiating structure, and consideration. Within sports, a student-athlete must be able to develop friendships, gain mutual trust, and have communication skills (Jian & Espeso, 2023). In a study conducted by Pratt and Eitzen (1989), it was found that nonathlete executives fail to take into consideration and initiate upon reaching a realistic goal structure. Sports can help develop these skills in initiating structure and consideration, which can have a significant effect later in life. In this case,

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

if these executives participated in sports, they would better understand initiating structure and consideration and potentially be more successful in their leadership roles.

Through sports, the participant can learn many life lessons that they will be able to take with them. They will also develop many friendships that will continue through life. Through sports participation, many long-term benefits relate to a person's health. A study conducted by Yazicioglu et al. (2012) looked at the influence of sports on the quality of life and life satisfaction of people with physical disabilities. This was a cross-sectional control study where the World Health Organization Quality-of-Life Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale were compared between the two groups. It was found that physical, psychological, and social domain scores were significantly higher for the people with physical disabilities who participated in sports and had a significantly higher quality of life and life satisfaction score compared to people with physical disabilities who were not involved in any sports (Yazicioglu et al., 2012).

A study conducted by Jewett et al. (2014) looked at sports participation during adolescence and the mental health effects in early adulthood. During this study, adolescents who participated in sports were examined to see if participating in sports affected their mental health in early adulthood. It was found that the adolescents who participated in sports reported lower depression symptoms, lower perceived stress, and higher self-related mental health in young adulthood (Jewett et al., 2014). A similar study conducted by Easterlin et al. (2019) also looked at whether sports participation during adolescence was associated with better long-term mental health outcomes among individuals exposed to adverse childhood experiences. It was found that those individuals who participated in sports and experienced adverse childhood experiences had lower odds of receiving a diagnosis of depression, anxiety, or having current depressive symptoms when compared to other adolescents who experienced adverse childhood experiences

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

and did not participate in sports (Easterlin et al., 2019). Both studies show the long-term benefits of playing sports and its impact on an individual's mental health.

Analysis

Leadership is a very popular topic of research. Over time, much research has been done on different perspectives of leadership. Because there are so many forms of leadership, it can be challenging to define and give one direct example of what leadership is (Abbasialiya, 2010). At most higher education institutions, student leadership development is a valued goal because institutions value alums who effect positive change in and around the communities (Astin & Astin, 2000). Most higher education mission statements have highlighted the importance of leadership development. However, most institutions give little attention to the concepts of leadership and the higher education goals of leadership development (Astin & Astin, 2000). Leadership is also valued in the field of most businesses and organizations. There is a leader or leadership team in every organization. These leaders or leadership teams make many daily decisions that impact the people around them.

This literature analyzed various theories on how someone can become a better leader or improve their leadership development. Leadership is one of the Earth's most observed yet least understood phenomena (Abbasialiya, 2010). Over time, researchers have found many different leadership styles, and that there is no correct style of leadership that is considered good in all situations. Each situation may require a different leadership style and leader (Bass & Bass, 2009). Another issue is that leadership is constantly changing and constantly evolving. Leadership might change in the future, and more leadership styles may emerge. To many, leaders are not born but made. To others, leadership is developed through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training, and the accumulation of relevant experience (Bass & Bass, 2009).

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

With all the research that has been conducted throughout this study, four major theories emerged on how individuals can improve their leadership development. These theories are the trait theory, the behavioral theory, the contingency theory, and the transactional theory of leadership. Three perspectives will be identified through the trait, behavioral, contingency, and transactional leadership theories, including the student-athletes, the coaches, and the institutions.

Trait Theory

One theory on how to improve leadership development is the trait theory. This suggests that personality traits influence leaders' emergence and effectiveness (Colbert et al., 2012).

Meaning that leaders have certain traits or characteristics that they are born with that make them a natural born leader. Research and tests of the trait theory of effective leaders began in the first half of the twentieth century and dominated leadership research (Colbert et al., 2012).

Throughout this research, the trait theory suggests that all individuals already have certain leadership characteristics or traits that impact their leadership development. The trait theory implies that student-athletes cannot not improve their leadership development and be born a good or a bad leader. This would suggest that being a student-athlete would not impact improving leadership development. In this theory, higher education institutions would not have to promote or have leadership courses, as leaders are born and unable to develop certain leadership skills.

Sorcher and Brant (2002) reported that much of leadership is hardwired in people before they reach their early or mid-twenties. A challenge to the trait theory is that traits only predict behavior in some situations. It was found that even though the average leader differed in traits from the average group member, situations and working relationships were the basis of traits, not passive states (Stogdill, 1948). Another issue with the trait theory is that if particular traits are

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

key characteristics of individuals, how do we explain people who possess those traits but are not leaders? Inconsistencies in the relationship between leadership traits and leadership effectiveness eventually led scholars to shift paradigms in search of new explanations for effective leadership (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Another issue with the trait theory is defining what traits make a great leader. Modern trait theories have adopted one of the organizing frameworks for characterizing traits, the Big Five model of personality. The Big Five model of personality encompasses five trait dimensions for a good leader: emotional stability, extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness (McCrae, 1992). The Big Five model of personality can be questioned by many as people argue that there are good leaders who do not have all or some of these traits. In contrast, some good leaders have more than just five traits that make them good leaders.

Behavioral Theory and a Student Athlete's Perspectives

The behavioral theory is a theoretical framework from a student-athlete's perspective that helps explain the positive impact of leadership development among a student-athlete. The behavioral theory originally evolved from the trait theory and claims that leaders are made rather than born, and particular behaviors can be learned to ensure effective leadership (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). From a student-athlete perspective, a student-athlete can develop leadership behaviors over time through certain experiences and learning from other leaders. This would mean that sports participation may help a student-athlete become a better leader throughout his or her life. Because a student-athlete is getting coached and learning leadership lessons by participating in a sport, he or she may pick up on certain leadership behaviors. Through the behavior theory, institutions could play a role in developing leadership development skills for all students by offering leadership courses and activities.

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

The behavioral theory perspective also looks at the type of leadership style a student-athlete receives from their coach, as they can acquire certain leadership behaviors through coaching styles. A leader's or coach's behavior would have a formal and informal effect on the student-athletes. The coach who would serve as the team leader would set the informal norms for how other people within their team behave, act, and model particular behaviors for followers and set the tone for their team's overall logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1983). If a coach sets the wrong informal norms for their team, student-athletes may develop bad leadership behaviors over time. On the other hand, if the coach sets the correct informal norms for their team and promotes leadership development, student-athletes would have improved their leadership development skills.

Playing sports can help develop transferable skills such as better communication skills, ambition, teamwork, work ethic, and sacrifice. Transferable skills are skills developed in one area that can be used in other areas of life, such as helping a student-athlete become a better employee (Migliaccio, 2023). The behavioral theory would apply to student-athletes, as student-athletes can gain life lessons from playing sports and develop transferable skills that help them in areas of life. Athletics are essential to an institution because they help student-athletes advance professionally and socially (Caulfield et al., 2023). The NCAA and higher education institutions can promote these student-athletes in marketing materials and online platforms. Without going to that particular institution and playing a sport at the NCAA level, that student-athlete may have not developed the transferable skills through the behavioral theory that has helped them in different areas of life after graduation (Huntrods, 2014).

Contingency Theory and the Institutions Perspective

A third theory found in this study is the contingency theory. The contingency theory perspective means no best or unique leadership style transcends all situations (Blanchard, 2008). The contingency theory is based on the amount of direction a leader gives, the amount of socio-emotional support a leader provides, and the “readiness” level that followers exhibit on a specific task, function, activity, or objective that the leader is attempting to accomplish (Blanchard, 2008). This would mean that even though the leader plays a vital role in this theory, the follower would also be key to accomplishing the task at hand, as their level of readiness would be a factor. The contingency theory would also look at different leadership styles, and the leader would have to decide on the best leadership style for a certain situation.

From the institution’s perspective, the contingency theory would fall into place as the institution would hope that all students become better leaders over time through many on-campus activities. These include sports, clubs, classroom activities, and campus events. All students will interact with different leaders in these activities and see different leadership techniques. This could be very helpful for all students because they will experience and see different leadership strategies based on their participation. To determine what leadership style a student needs, the leader must first determine the student-athlete’s readiness level regarding the task to be accomplished (Blanchard, 2008). If a student is not ready or is just learning how to be a good leader, the leader may walk through the situation with the student. However, if a student is more prepared and possesses more leadership qualities, then that student may be able to make his or her own decisions regarding the situation because he or she has more leadership experience.

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

According to Chan (2016), one of the purposes of higher education is for students to acquire new knowledge and to prepare for the workforce. For higher education institutions to achieve this goal, students must be exposed to different leadership styles and experiences. The contingency theory is about possessing the knowledge, skills, and abilities to respond to a changing situation (Deckard, 2009). To prepare students for the workforce, higher education institutions must value the contingency theory's perspective. The contingency theory must be applied to all students to ensure that they will be able to possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be ready for the workforce.

Transactional Theory and a Coach's Perspective

Lastly, the transactional theory of leadership focuses on the exchanges between leaders and followers (Bass & Bass, 2009). The transactional theory is applied from a coach's perspective; the coach can accomplish required tasks, motivate the team, direct the team, and focus on organizational efficiency. The transactional theory allows followers to fulfill their own self-interest and concentrate on team objectives (Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012). In this theory, there are many exchanges between the leaders and followers or the coach and student-athletes on the team. These exchanges are intended to provide benefits to both parties (Bass & Bass, 2009). Leaders can influence followers through contingent rewards and negative feedback or corrective coaching.

Coaches use the transactional theory of leadership as it allows coaches to focus on the more significant tasks at hand. In contrast, student-athletes can focus on certain individual goals they may have. Coaches can reward or punish student-athletes based on certain decisions and provide feedback to student-athletes that may promote leadership development. Coaches can develop relationships with student-athletes and, through this relationship, can learn their goals.

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Coaches can provide feedback based on what goals they have in mind. For individual athletes in the transactional theory, it is the leader's job to create structures that clarify what is expected of followers and the consequences of meeting or not meeting expectations (Lamb, 2013). Leaders could influence non-student athletes by giving them rewards or punishments to help determine their actions and leadership skills.

The transactional theory can be very beneficial from a coach's perspective. Research shows that the transactional theory allows the leader to focus on bigger goals, while followers can focus on individual goals (Bass & Bass 2009; Lamb, 2013). While the role of a college coach is to oversee the team, they also have many other responsibilities. They are often juggling many other duties besides coaching the team and student-athletes. In a survey completed by college football coaches, it was found that multiple coaches work at least 15 hours a day once a week, and nearly every coach in the survey said that it was impossible or difficult to succeed by working eight-hour days (Autullo, 2018). The additional duties of a coach include fundraising for the program or attending charity events, recruiting, organizing sports camps, hiring staff, assisting with the admissions team, overseeing development initiatives, and other administrative duties (Lens, 2018). From a coach's perspective, the transactional theory can be beneficial as they can focus on other duties besides coaching the team. In contrast, student-athletes focus on individual goals, such as becoming a better player or studying for exams. Coaches can use the transactional theory to provide positive or negative feedback to the student-athletes while focusing on other duties.

Ethical Implications

The college athletics environment within the United States is ethically complex and usually controversial. From a competitive standpoint, coaches want to win and get the most out

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

of student-athlete's athletic abilities, which can help the coach with his or her career (Caulfield et al., 2023). However, there is a bigger purpose. Coaches should want to help develop leadership skills and promote leadership development among their student-athletes to get them prepared once they are finished playing their perspective sport. In some cases, promoting leadership development and helping student-athletes develop leadership skills can translate to better performance on the field or the court.

To understand the importance of leadership development, student-athletes' leadership should be assessed. Student-athletes are often seen as role models and leaders in the community. If student-athletes are the driving force of some higher education institutions in being able to function as a business, then institutions must make sure they are playing their part in helping them become better leaders (Caulfield et al., 2023). If most higher education institutions value leadership development, this must remain true even if there are large expectations on student-athletes and coaches. Athletic departments and coaches must not forget the importance of developing better leaders on the team because they are more distracted from winning or making money for the university.

If higher education institutions are not promoting or helping students become better leaders, we can expect a less well-rounded society. Leadership development has to be essential for college students because it promotes personal growth, equips students with valuable skills, enhances their careers, and fosters civic engagement (Caulfield et al., 2023). If a student-athlete does not grow as a person and become a better leader through his or her time as a student-athlete in college, we cannot expect them to reach their full potential as a leader. This can have a domino effect and could impact certain decisions that student-athletes make later in life, including in the workplace, community, or at home (Caulfield et al., 2023). Since many student-athletes serve as

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

role models within the community, especially to the younger generations, it is crucial to ensure they reach their leadership potential to make a bigger impact on others. Because of this, it is imperative to review the leadership development of student-athletes to gain a better understanding of leadership development among student-athletes.

It is best to view the leadership development of student-athletes through a humanistic approach. The humanistic approach would help coaches and student-athletes in an ethically complex and universal environment by balancing the desire to achieve or win games and the desire to be ethical (Caulfield et al., 2023). Coaches have a great opportunity to set an example for their student-athletes, promote leadership development, and show that they are there to help them progress through life and become better leaders. If coaches take a humanistic approach, their highest aspiration is to achieve a level of well-being and flourish (Caulfield et al., 2023). Coaches need to promote leadership development in their teams and help student-athletes become better leaders to flourish in the future.

Many challenges and pressures come with being a coach in college athletics, which can ultimately change a coach's perspective and affect a student-athlete's leadership development. According to Caulfield et al. (2023), college athletics face three major challenges that can change a coach's values and priorities towards their student-athletes. The first challenge deals with the tension between generating revenue for the institutions and athletic departments by defining college athletes as amateurs or compensating student-athletes. The second challenge deals with winning and winning fairly. Where expectations set by athletic directors or other collegiate leaders shape ethical expectations and can either support or ruin the leadership development of a student-athlete, the third challenge is the insatiable drive to win, which could result in mistreatment or misguidance of student-athletes in the process (Caulfield et al., 2023).

Tension Between Amateur/Professional Status of Athletes

In the phrase student-athlete, the word student comes first. The reality is in many universities' student-athletes are not students first and spend more time being athletes as athletics takes priority at their school (Caulfield et al., 2023). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), universities, and colleges are part of a business that generates billions of dollars for the participants and is considered a monopoly. Most athletic departments will become isolated from the university and the academic standpoint, which can lead to moral failures (Caulfield et al., 2023). Like any business, higher education institutions must make money to survive. Most universities and colleges will rely on some type of revenue from sports to help their university financially.

In most cases, universities and colleges rely on basketball and football to generate most of their revenue from sports (Caulfield et al., 2023). The more a team wins, the more financial gain they may receive due to increased television time, apparel sales, or ticket sales. In the last twenty-three years, the NCAA's total revenue has increased significantly due to corporate sponsorships, including \$680,000,000 from the Association's new rights agreement with CBS Sports and Turner Broadcasting (Woods, 2013). The NCAA markets student-athletes as amateurs as they are student-athletes, not athlete-students. However, the NCAA, universities, and colleges can profit off student-athletes. This leads to a power imbalance between schools and student-athletes as sports are put first, and athletic departments are more focused on generating revenue (Longman, 2012). Coaches can feel pressure from their school leaders, leading to coaches having a "win now" mentality. This can result in coaches not being concerned about the goal of helping student-athletes become better leaders and be more prepared for life after graduation. This type

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

of unbalanced environment increases the likelihood of people engaging in, ignoring, or not recognizing behaviors that are harmful to student-athletes (Whitehead & Senecal, 2020).

Tension Between Winning and Winning Fairly

The second issue addresses winning and winning fairly where expectations from higher education leaders or other coaches can impact a student-athlete leadership development based on those expectations. Coaches want to avoid being fired and enhance their visibility, which is measured by how many NCAA championships they have won (Longman, 2012). To win more games, some coaches will develop a “win at all costs” mentality, in which they could make ethically wrong decisions. In an ethics class, a student-athlete who played football (Caulfield et al., 2023) explained how in a rivalry game that was tied, their coach instructed the student-athlete to cut block an opponent to slow him down. The student-athlete in the ethics class cut-blocked an opponent, resulting in a severe knee injury to the opposing player, and the opposing team lost the game. The coach missed out on an opportunity to teach this student-athlete a lesson in sportsmanship and strengthen his sense of integrity. Because of what took place, the team was rewarded by winning and misguided the student-athlete’s ethical priorities, which did not help them become better leaders. Collegiate coaches can feel this pressure to win at all costs, resulting in them making ethically wrong decisions that could hinder student-athletes’ leadership development.

Allowing the Mistreatment of Athletes

The third issue addresses the drive to win, which could result in mistreatment or misguidance of student-athletes. In 2021, a Google search was conducted, searching ‘abuse in college sports’, resulting in 195,000,000 results in 0.53 seconds (Caulfield et al., 2023), proving one major issue within college athletics. The pressures coaches may receive from their university

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

leaders, or the pressures they put on themselves may result in the coaches abusing student-athletes. Abuse or harmful actions may occur because there is the concept that this type of behavior by coaches is often considered effective coaching because it creates the mental toughness needed to win (Caulfield et al., 2023). When, in fact, these coaches are putting student-athletes at risk and are ethically making wrong decisions. Coaches committing abuse toward student-athletes can be part of a bigger issue as abuse is linked to mental health issues, including increased anxiety, depression, and lowered self-esteem (Lopez et al., 2020). All of which could have a severe negative impact on student-athletes leadership development.

Policy Recommendations

How can the continued lack of leadership development within student-athletes in college athletics be solved? To address the answer, each current challenge within college athletics must be studied. This paper highlighted five different aspects of leadership development, including academic performance and leadership skills, the impact of sports participation on leadership development, factors influencing leadership development, gender differences in leadership development, and long-term outcomes. Three major challenges have also been identified in this paper, including the tension between generating revenue for higher education institutions and athletic departments by defining college athletes as amateurs or compensating student-athletes, winning and winning fairly where expectations shape ethical expectations, and the insatiable drive to win, which could result in mistreatment or misguidance. This section will highlight policy recommendations that should be implemented to assist student-athletes in overcoming leadership development hindrances.

To address the tension between generating revenue for the school and athletic departments by defining college athletes as amateurs or compensating student-athletes, a recent

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

policy was implemented in college athletics to address this problem. As of July 1, 2021, some states have allowed student-athletes to receive compensation for their name, image, and likeness (NIL). Since then, many other states have passed laws that have allowed student-athletes to receive compensation (Clifton & Long, 2021). Because of the NIL policy that was put into place, power has shifted from the universities and athletic departments to the student-athletes. However, this could eventually cause a bigger issue, as some student-athletes will focus more on getting compensated rather than becoming better leaders.

Universities and student-athletes need to work together to significantly improve this policy, which will ultimately help student-athletes in the future. Since most higher education mission statements highlight the importance of leadership development and most institutions give little attention to the concepts of leadership and the higher education goals of leadership development (Astin & Astin, 2000), a policy should be put into place where a percentage of the athletic department's revenue goes towards student-athlete leadership development. Universities and colleges, along with their athletic departments, can collaborate with other businesses or alumni to help and make it mandatory for all student-athletes to attend. If this policy is implemented, it will show the value of leadership development emphasized in higher education and show that universities and colleges are focused on making better leaders in the world rather than just generating money for their schools.

To address the second issue of winning and winning fairly, where expectations from collegiate leaders or other coaches can impact student-athlete development based on expectations, there must be a shift in power and importance. Institutions cannot have a "win-at-all-costs" mindset because this eliminates the humanistic approach, and as a result, coaches may take advantage of student-athletes, and abuse may continue. Student-athletes must be willing to

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

speak up when coaches promote unfair play or actions that put student-athletes at risk. The NCAA must undergo an investigation if a coach impacts student-athletes negatively or has a win-at-all-costs mentality, then there must be consequences for those coaches. These consequences to coaches must be strict enough so other coaches realize the potential consequences and dangers. A more balanced environment would allow student-athletes ample opportunities to meet the drive to learn in the classroom and on the court or playing field, learning from experts in both areas (Caulfield et al., 2023).

Lastly, to address the insatiable drive to win, which could result in mistreatment or misguidance, college athletics need to practice a humanistic approach and align with the ultimate goals of higher education. The NCAA could enforce a policy that requires individuals employed by the NCAA to oversee sports teams. At the same time, keeping track of all sports teams at every university and college would be challenging. The NCAA could break this down by having one person assigned to each conference in the NCAA. This person would then rotate between sports in that conference each year. For example, one year, that individual may oversee and follow a basketball team and a volleyball team in one conference, then the following year would oversee and follow a football team and soccer team. Each year, a different sport would get rotated along from each university. This individual's duty would be to ensure that the athletics teams are practicing a humanistic approach. A humanistic approach would allow for a powerful learning experience for student-athletes (Caulfield et al., 2023). In addition, the individual overseeing the team would promote leadership development among student-athletes and allow college athletic programs to foster learning and development through athletic training methods consistent with a humanistic approach (Caulfield et al., 2023). This policy may also provide benefits to the coach and team. In one study that was conducted by Jenny and Hushman (2014), a

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

running coach was found to practice humanistic leadership toward the team consistently, and it was found that the players demonstrated confidence in making decisions that were best for the team and became more confident in independent decision-making. This policy would allow coaches to have someone else within the NCAA to help guide the coach and coaching staff in aligning with the university goals and help them allow student-athletes to flourish under a humanistic approach, eliminating the possibility of mistreatment or misguidance from the insatiable drive to win.

Summary

Leadership is vital in an individual's life, regardless of background or job title (Abbasialiya, 2010). Various leadership studies have been performed on what is and how an individual can become a better leader or increase their leadership development. Leadership is a term that can be hard to define because there are so many ways leadership can be shown, and leadership styles are constantly evolving (Abbasialiya, 2010). The literature cited above has shown that there have been many leadership development benefits of being a student-athlete, including a significant relationship between participation in men's soccer, men's baseball, women's softball, and track and field and the development of leadership skills (McElroy, 2005). In other studies, conducted by Dupuis et al. (2006), it was found that team captains experience developed interpersonal characteristics, verbal interactions, and task behaviors. In the study conducted by Aries et al. (2004), it was reported that student-athletes had a higher perception of themselves as socially skilled, outgoing, confident, and good leaders when compared to non-athletes. Other benefits of being a student-athlete and the influence of leadership development have also been noted in higher leadership scores in student-athletes, which translated into higher academic performance (Eiche et al., 1997). In addition, student-athletes are more likely to be just

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

as academically successful as non-student athletes (Bradley et al., 2013). This literature has also shown that there are long-term outcomes of participating in sports, including initiating structure and consideration (Weinberg & Gould, 2023).

While these studies demonstrate the benefits of being a student-athlete and how student-athletes can develop leadership skills, many other factors can impact leadership development among student-athletes. In this paper, it was mentioned that coaches can have a major impact on promoting leadership development among the team. Duguay et al. (2022) found that coaches can help produce better leaders among the team in four different themes. These themes included the significance of empowering athletes on a team, utilizing the concept of team leadership, promoting leadership development among the team, resulting in a positive team culture for leadership to flourish, and discussing the importance of developing leadership capabilities for the student-athletes on the team. Mentoring has also been another approach that has been popular among coaches to help promote leadership development among their players.

Another factor of leadership development in a team setting mentioned in the literature is gender differences in leadership development. Specifically, male student-athletes are more accustomed to an instrumental, dominating, and task-oriented leadership style. In contrast, female student-athletes prefer a leadership style that is more charismatic or an earning and nurturing leadership style (van Engen et al., 2001). Mak and Kim (2017) found that female student-athletes outscored male student-athletes in transformational leadership scores regarding the management of trust or self and the management of feelings. In addition, it was also found that female student-athletes have a higher ability to convey messages and have better overall communication skills. Another study that was conducted by Misasi et al. (2016) found two themes among the gender of student-athletes: the feelings and relationships towards their coach.

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

The two themes included that female student-athletes felt their coaches were more likely to help them with conflicts than males. In addition, male student-athletes believed their coaches were more likely to monitor a student-athlete's progress towards their goal and felt their coaches were more approachable about personal problems. This shows that the gender of a student-athlete can influence leadership development and the relationship between their coach.

The analysis shows four major themes on how an individual can improve their leadership development. These theories are the trait theory, the behavioral theory, the contingency theory, and the transactional theory of leadership. Within the behavioral, contingency, and the transactional theory of leadership, we look at three different perspectives, including the student-athletes, the coaches, and the institution's perspective. In the trait theory, leaders have certain traits that they are born with that influence their leadership effectiveness (Colbert et al., 2012). This would suggest that student-athletes could not improve upon leadership development. The behavioral theory claims that leaders are made and that certain behaviors can be learned over time to ensure effective leadership development (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). From a student-athlete perspective, leadership skills can be learned and developed through different experiences, including sports. The contingency theory claims that there is not one exact way that an individual can become a better leader. It may depend on the styles of leadership they participate in, as it would be different in all situations (Blanchard, 2008). From an institution's perspective, this would relate to the fact that all students are involved in different activities on campus and can learn leadership techniques across all activities. This implies that students would become better leaders by being in different clubs and exposed to different leadership styles. Lastly, the transaction theory of leadership focuses on the exchanges between leaders and followers (Bass & Bass, 2009). From a coaches' perspective, this would be beneficial as coaches can focus on other

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

tasks while student-athletes can fulfill their own self-interest and concentrate on team objectives (Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012). Coaches can reward or punish followers based on what they want them to accomplish and their beliefs.

Leadership development of student-athletes should be addressed as they are the next generation of leaders. Even though higher education values leadership development, it is losing its importance. Student-athletes serve as important role models for the youth and should serve as leaders in the community. However, issues within collegiate athletics hinder the promotion of leadership development. Some issues include the tension between generating revenue for the school and athletic departments by defining college athletes as amateurs or compensating student-athletes, expectations set by athletic directors or the institution leaders that can impact if a team is not winning fairly that can shape ethical expectations and ruin the leadership development of student-athletes, and the insatiable drive to win by coaches, which could result in mistreatment or misguidance of student-athletes in the process (Caulfield et al., 2023).

Several recommendations were presented to address these issues. One recommendation included regulation on recently introduced NIL policies. Another suggestion included that universities and student-athletes work together to make a larger impact with the revenue they can create from sports to promote leadership development. There must be an even shift in power and importance within the NCAA. The NIL policy has helped begin the shift of this power to reduce the “win at all costs” mindset. However, if they have this mindset, student-athletes must be willing to speak out against coaches. The NCAA must address these issues by penalizing or suspending coaches with a “win at all costs” mentality or taking advantage of student-athletes. The last recommendation included the NCAA having someone oversee a particular conference and team to ensure that coaches and programs practice a humanistic approach and promote

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

leadership development to the student-athletes. Through these changes, adjustments can be made to collegiate athletic programs. Hopefully, society at large will realize the importance of leadership development for not only student-athletes but for all individuals attending college and universities.

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