

SPORTS COACHES' LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS IN A COLLEGIATE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract— This study explored the leadership behaviors of sports coaches as perceived by collegiate athletes at a university in Northern Philippines, utilizing the Polish adaptation of the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) by Walach-Bista (2013). Using a descriptive research design, student-athletes from four different sports disciplines participated by completing a validated questionnaire that assessed five dimensions of coaching leadership: training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback. Results revealed that coaches were highly regarded for their emphasis on technical skill development, structured practice, and the provision of constructive reinforcement. Athletes also perceived their coaches as offering significant emotional support and frequently involving them in decision-making processes, reflecting strong participative and supportive leadership. While coaches maintained authority and set clear expectations, this was balanced with encouragement and open communication, indicating an adaptive leadership style. These findings highlight the importance of a well-rounded approach to coaching, where technical expertise is complemented by mentorship, positive reinforcement, and shared responsibility. The study underscores the value of coach education programs that promote both instructional competence and interpersonal skills. By providing empirical data on sports leadership in the Philippine collegiate context, this research addresses local gaps and suggests that effective coaching behaviors contribute to athlete satisfaction, motivation, and team cohesion. Further research is recommended to examine how these leadership behaviors influence long-term athlete outcomes across different sports and institutional settings.

Keywords— *sports coaching, leadership behavior, collegiate athletes, Leadership Scale for Sports, training and instruction, positive feedback, social support, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior*

I. INTRODUCTION

The leadership behavior of sports coaches is a complex and influential factor that significantly shapes athletes' performance, motivation, and overall satisfaction in sports. Research has shown that various leadership behaviors—such as democratic, authoritarian, training guidance, social support, and positive feedback—each uniquely affect athletes' technical skills, psychological well-being, and emotional development, ultimately impacting their performance (Wang et al., 2025; Frontiers in Psychology, 2025). Democratic leadership, which promotes athlete participation and autonomy, has been linked to reduced burnout and increased intrinsic motivation. In contrast, authoritarian leadership may provide necessary structure for some athletes but can also restrict autonomy and yield mixed results in performance (Wang et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2024). Training guidance is essential for skill development and engagement, while social support enhances athletes' sense of belonging and emotional health, further supporting their performance (Cai & Wu, 2013; Cai, 2016). Additionally, positive feedback serves as a powerful incentive, psychologically engaging athletes and encouraging them to exceed their usual performance levels (Wang et al., 2025).

In the Philippine context, studies on sports coaching leadership are emerging but remain limited in both scope and depth. Researches conducted indicate that Filipino coaches predominantly employ training and rewarding behaviors, with transformational and situational leadership styles proving effective in motivating athletes and fostering team success

(Rosario, 2023; Lomibao, 2024). Athletes from UAAP schools report that a balanced combination of authoritarian and democratic coaching styles contributes to their satisfaction, especially when accompanied by social support and a positive training environment (Micua et al., 2024). However, these studies also highlight challenges such as the limited adaptation of coaching methods to diverse sports and athlete demographics, resource constraints, and a lack of continuous professional development for coaches (Lomibao, 2024; Micua et al., 2024).

A relevant theoretical framework for understanding coach leadership is the mediational model of leadership, which suggests that coach behaviors influence athlete outcomes indirectly through athletes' perceptions and evaluative reactions (Smith et al., 1977; Zenko & Jones, 2025). This model emphasizes that the effectiveness of leadership depends not only on the coaches' actions but also on how athletes perceive and internalize these behaviors. Individual and situational factors such as age, gender, sport type, and competitive level shape these perceptions (Smoll & Smith, 1989). Consequently, effective leadership interventions should address both the modification of coach behaviors and the shaping of athlete perceptions to optimize performance and satisfaction (Cotterill, 2012).

Despite these valuable insights, several research gaps remain, particularly within the Philippine setting. First, most studies focus on limited geographic areas or specific groups such as university athletes, which restricts the generalizability of findings across the country's diverse sports environment. Second, there is insufficient exploration of how Filipino cultural values, socioeconomic conditions, and institutional support systems influence coaching leadership and athlete responses. Third, the effects of resource limitations, such as inadequate facilities and outdated equipment, as well as the lack of formal coaching education, on leadership effectiveness are not well understood. Fourth, there is a need for more research on how coaches adapt their leadership styles to different sports, athlete ages, and competitive levels to maximize athlete satisfaction and performance. Lastly, few studies employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs that could better capture the evolving nature of coach-athlete relationships and the long-term impacts of leadership behaviors.

Addressing these gaps through comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and methodologically diverse research will deepen the understanding of effective sports coaching leadership in the Philippines. This will provide valuable insights to develop targeted interventions aimed at improving athlete development, satisfaction, and competitive success nationwide.

II. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive research design to assess the leadership behaviors of sports coaches as perceived by student-athletes. The descriptive method was chosen to

systematically describe the prevailing leadership behaviors exhibited by coaches in a naturalistic setting, without manipulating any variables.

The research was conducted at a university located in Northern Philippines. The institution offers a range of sports programs and actively participates in regional and national collegiate competitions. The respondents of the study were student-athletes from four different sports disciplines offered by the university. These athletes were selected as they possess direct and regular interactions with their respective coaches, making them well-positioned to assess coaching behaviors. Inclusion criteria required that respondents be officially recognized members of their respective university sports teams during the academic year of the study.

Data were gathered using the "Leadership Scale for Sports" (LSS) questionnaire, specifically the Polish adaptation developed by Walach-Bista (2013). The LSS is a validated instrument designed to assess athletes' perceptions of their coaches' leadership behaviors across five dimensions: training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback. The questionnaire uses a Likert-type scale to measure the frequency of observed coaching behaviors. The Polish adaptation has demonstrated strong psychometric properties and is suitable for cross-cultural research contexts.

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the university's administration and athletic department. The researchers explained the study's purpose to the student-athletes and distributed the questionnaires during scheduled team meetings. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure a high response rate and data integrity. This study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent was secured from all respondents, who were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Data confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the university's Research Ethics Committee.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and interpret the perceived leadership behaviors of sports coaches as reported by the athlete respondents.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Leadership Behavior of Sports Coaches

Leadership Behavior	Mean	Qualitative Description
Training and Instruction	4.55	To a very great extent
Democratic Behavior	4.25	To a great extent
Autocratic Behavior	4.18	To a great extent
Social Support	4.47	To a great extent
Positive Feedback	4.52	To a very great extent

The findings of this study, using the Polish adaptation of the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) by Walach-Bista (2013), provide a nuanced understanding of how student-athletes in a Northern Philippine university perceive their coaches' leadership behaviors. The LSS, as validated by Walach-Bista, measures five core dimensions of coaching leadership: training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback. The high reliability and cross-cultural applicability of this tool ensure that the results reflect genuine athlete perceptions of coaching effectiveness.

The high mean score for the Training and Instruction dimension (4.55, "to a very great extent") highlights that athletes view their coaches as highly effective in providing technical and tactical guidance. This dimension, as described in the Polish adaptation of the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) by Walach-Bista (2013), encompasses the coach's ability to organize practices, teach sport-specific skills, and ensure that athletes are physically and mentally prepared for competition. The emphasis on training and instruction is fundamental in sports leadership, as it directly relates to athlete development and the achievement of both individual and team goals. Athletes' strong recognition of their coaches' training and instructional behaviors suggests that coaches are not only knowledgeable in their sport but also skilled in communicating complex techniques in a way that is understandable and motivating. According to Walach-Bista (2013), such qualities are essential for fostering a learning environment where athletes feel supported in their growth. This is further echoed by Wang et al. (2025), who found that when athletes perceive their coaches as competent instructors, they are more likely to experience increased motivation, higher engagement in training sessions, and improved performance outcomes.

Moreover, the prominence of training and instruction in athlete perceptions may reflect the competitive expectations within university sports, where athletes are often striving to refine their skills and achieve peak performance. Coaches who excel in this area are likely to set clear goals, provide detailed feedback, and tailor their instructional strategies to the unique needs of each athlete. This individualized approach not only enhances skill acquisition but also contributes to athletes' confidence and self-efficacy, as supported by recent studies in collegiate sports settings (Micua et al., 2024). It is also

important to note that a strong focus on training and instruction can positively influence team cohesion. When all athletes understand their roles and are consistently challenged to improve, it fosters a sense of shared purpose and collective responsibility. This environment, as described by Walach-Bista (2013), encourages athletes to support one another, further enhancing team dynamics and overall satisfaction.

The positive feedback dimension received a notably high mean score (4.52, "to a very great extent"), suggesting that athletes perceive their coaches as consistently providing praise, constructive criticism, and recognition for their efforts and achievements. According to the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) as adapted by Walach-Bista (2013), positive feedback is a critical component of effective coaching, as it directly influences athletes' self-esteem, motivation, and willingness to persist in training and competition. This finding aligns with broader research in sports psychology, which highlights the central role of positive reinforcement in athlete development. For instance, a study by Amorose and Anderson-Butcher (2015) found that athletes who frequently receive positive feedback from their coaches report greater intrinsic motivation and are more likely to exhibit a growth mindset—an orientation toward learning and self-improvement rather than simply focusing on winning or external rewards. Positive feedback helps athletes interpret mistakes as opportunities for growth, fosters resilience, and encourages them to set higher personal goals (Duda & Appleton, 2016). In the context of team sports, positive feedback also contributes to a supportive and collaborative team environment. When coaches regularly acknowledge effort and improvement, athletes are more likely to feel valued and respected, which in turn enhances group cohesion and collective efficacy (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). This is particularly important in high-pressure situations, where constructive encouragement can help athletes manage stress and maintain focus. Furthermore, cultural factors play a significant role in how positive feedback is perceived and its impact on athlete behavior. In collectivist societies, such as the Philippines, positive feedback from authority figures like coaches is often seen as a form of social support and affirmation, reinforcing harmonious relationships within the group (Kim & Park, 2020). This cultural dimension makes positive feedback not only a tool for individual motivation but also a means of strengthening team unity and mutual respect.

Meanwhile, the high mean score for the social support dimension (4.47, "to a great extent") indicates that athletes perceive their coaches as providing significant emotional and interpersonal support. Within the framework of the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS), as adapted by Walach-Bista (2013), social support refers to the extent to which coaches demonstrate concern for the welfare of their athletes, both in and out of the sporting context. This dimension goes beyond technical instruction, emphasizing the coach's role as a mentor and source of encouragement, empathy, and understanding.

Social support from coaches is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of athlete well-being. When athletes feel that their coaches are approachable, genuinely care about their personal and academic lives, and are available during times of stress or difficulty, they are more likely to experience lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of satisfaction (Freeman & Rees, 2010). This support can manifest in various ways, such as offering a listening ear after a tough loss, providing guidance on balancing academics and sports, or simply showing appreciation for effort regardless of the outcome. Recent research highlights the protective effects of coach social support on athletes' mental health. For example, a study by Yang, Peek-Asa, and Lowe (2020) found that collegiate athletes who perceived high levels of coach support reported fewer symptoms of burnout and psychological distress. This is particularly important in high-pressure environments where athletes are vulnerable to stress, performance anxiety, and even dropout. Coaches who excel in this area foster a sense of belonging and trust within the team, which can buffer the negative effects of competition and setbacks. Moreover, the value of social support is amplified in collectivist cultures, such as in the Philippines, where interpersonal relationships and group harmony are highly valued (Kim, 2021). In such settings, the coach's ability to build strong, supportive relationships is not only beneficial for individual athletes but also enhances team cohesion and collective morale. The LSS, as validated by Walach-Bista (2013), underscores that effective coaches are not only skilled tacticians but also compassionate leaders who nurture the holistic development of their athletes. This means recognizing athletes as whole persons, supporting their goals beyond sports, and helping them navigate personal challenges. The strong rating for social support in your findings suggests that coaches at the studied university are fulfilling this broader leadership role, contributing to a positive and nurturing sports environment.

On the other hand, the democratic behavior dimension received a mean score of 4.25 ("to a great extent"), indicating that coaches frequently involve athletes in decision-making, encourage open communication, and value their input during training and competition. In the context of the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) as adapted by Walach-Bista (2013), democratic behavior reflects a participative leadership style where athletes are empowered to share their perspectives, contribute to planning, and provide feedback on coaching strategies and team dynamics. This participatory approach is increasingly recognized as a hallmark of effective coaching in contemporary sports. Democratic leadership has been shown to foster higher levels of athlete satisfaction, as it creates an environment where athletes feel respected and heard (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). A recent study by Jowett and Shanmugam (2016) found that when coaches adopt a democratic style, athletes report greater autonomy, enhanced motivation, and stronger commitment to both individual and team goals. This is particularly important in university and youth sports, where developing leadership skills and personal

responsibility among athletes is as crucial as achieving competitive success. Moreover, involving athletes in decision-making processes can help foster a sense of ownership and accountability. When athletes have a voice in setting goals, designing practice routines, or discussing strategies, they are more likely to be engaged and invested in the team's outcomes (Fransen et al., 2017). This sense of ownership has been linked to reduced burnout and increased resilience, as athletes feel more in control of their sporting experience and are better equipped to handle challenges and setbacks. In addition, the democratic style contributes to stronger team cohesion. Open communication and mutual respect between coaches and athletes help build trust, which is essential for effective teamwork and collective problem-solving (Cotterill & Fransen, 2016). In multicultural and diverse teams, such as those often found in Philippine universities, democratic leadership can also bridge cultural differences and promote inclusion. The high rating for democratic behavior in this study suggests that coaches at the university are successfully creating an environment where athletes are encouraged to participate actively in their own development. This aligns with current best practices in sports coaching, which emphasize the importance of athlete-centered approaches not only for performance but also for long-term athlete well-being and retention.

And finally, autocratic behavior dimension received a mean score of 4.18 ("to a great extent"), which, while the lowest among the five measured dimensions, still indicates a substantial presence of this leadership style among coaches. In the context of the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) as adapted by Walach-Bista (2013), autocratic behavior refers to a coach's tendency to make decisions independently, set clear rules, and maintain authority over team processes and discipline. This style is characterized by directive leadership, where the coach exerts control and expects compliance from athletes. The relatively high score for autocratic behavior suggests that coaches at the studied university are perceived as strong figures who provide structure, clarity, and direction. This can be particularly beneficial in competitive or high-performance sports environments, where discipline, quick decision-making, and adherence to strategy are essential for success (Kavussanu, Boardley, Jutkiewicz, Vincent, & Ring, 2021). Athletes may appreciate this leadership style when it leads to well-organized training sessions, consistent standards, and a clear understanding of roles and expectations. However, it is noteworthy that autocratic behavior was rated lower than more participative and supportive leadership dimensions. This balance is important, as excessive autocratic leadership can stifle athlete autonomy, reduce motivation, and hinder open communication (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010). The results indicate that while coaches maintain necessary authority, they do not do so at the expense of democratic engagement and social support. This balanced approach aligns with contemporary coaching recommendations, which suggest that a moderate degree of autocratic behavior—when combined with supportive and participative practices—can foster both discipline and a

positive team climate (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). In some sporting cultures, particularly in Asia, a certain level of autocratic leadership is often expected and respected, as it reflects the coach's expertise and commitment to team goals (Lee, Kim, & Love, 2019). Yet, the trend in modern sports is toward integrating this style with more athlete-centered approaches, recognizing that empowerment and involvement can enhance both performance and well-being.

V.CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall high ratings across all dimensions suggest that the coaches assessed in this study demonstrate a well-rounded leadership approach, effectively balancing technical instruction, positive reinforcement, emotional support, participative decision-making, and necessary authority. This leadership profile is consistent with contemporary coaching models that emphasize adaptability and athlete-centered practices. These findings are particularly relevant in the Philippine sports context, where recent studies have highlighted the importance of transformational and supportive coaching styles in enhancing both athlete satisfaction and performance. The results also indicate that the Polish adaptation of the LSS is a reliable tool for assessing coaching behaviors in diverse cultural settings, offering valuable insights for coach development programs.

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