Journal of Coaching Education

Evaluating Coachability in Prospective Female College Athletes

Judy K. Favor, Ph.D.
Baker University

Abstract

College coaches cite a number of personality attributes they desire in prospective athletes. One of the most commonly cited attributes is coachability, although each coach may have a unique way of describing what this means. The coachability construct is not well understood in the literature, and links between coachability and personality traits have not been adequately explored. As a result, strategies to help coaches better evaluate coachability and personality traits during the recruiting process are limited. This paper describes specific behaviors that may best distinguish more coachable from less coachable female college softball athletes. It also identifies important personality traits that appear to be associated with whether an athlete may be more coachable or less coachable and proposes ways coaches can use this information to better evaluate coachability and personality during the recruiting process.

Keywords: Softball, Coachability, Coaching, College Athletics, Personality, Recruiting

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

Journal of Coaching Education

Evaluating Coachability in Prospective Female College Athletes

This article describes how coaches can distinguish more coachable from less coachable athletes. Coach Wooden, like all coaches, paid particular attention to cues regarding an athlete's coachability and personality traits during the recruiting process:

"I once interviewed a very talented young man who wanted to attend UCLA on a basketball scholarship. I was even prepared to offer him a scholarship during our meeting. His mother was there and at one point she politely asked me a question. Her son immediately looked over at her and snapped, 'How can you be so ignorant? Just keep your mouth shut and listen to what the coach says.'… If he couldn't respect her, how could he possibly respect me when things got tough? I politely ended the meeting and excused myself. The scholarship was never offered."

Introduction

Opportunities for female athletes to continue their sport participation in college have increased significantly in the last 33 years. In 1968, only 16,000 female athletes participated in intercollegiate athletics; in 2010, that number has grown to over 180,000 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). Along with increased opportunities and financing for women's programs has come an increased expectation to consistently perform at a high level while creating and maintaining a satisfactory environment for athletes. Meeting these expectations often creates quite a challenge for college coaches because in addition to recruiting talented athletes, it requires successfully managing the individual personalities of 15-24 female athletes.

Coaches understand that personalities of team members and coaches impact team dynamics, or the way a team develops, interacts, and behaves (Carron, Hausenblas, & Eys, 2005). They also understand that personality compatibility between each team member's and coach's attitudes, personalities, or abilities, increases athlete and coach satisfaction and team effectiveness (Carron et al., 2005). Conversely, incompatible personalities may lead to conflicts between athletes and coaches and can wreak havoc on a team as Shaw (1981) points out:

> …*when group members have personality attributes which predispose them to behave in compatible ways, the group atmosphere is congenial, the members are relaxed, and group functioning is more effective. On the other hand, when member attributes lead to incompatible behaviors, members are anxious, tense, and/or dissatisfied and group functioning is less effective*. (p. 238)

Thus, personality traits of team members influence team relationships and dynamics in positive or negative ways. Specific personality traits like dependability, responsibility, and emotional stability, for example, tend to enhance group effectiveness (Carron et al., 2005), while irresponsibility, dishonesty, and immaturity typically damage relationships and disrupt team dynamics.

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

College coaches understand the consequences of failing to get compatible personalities on their teams (Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Summitt & Jenkins, 1998). As a result, in addition to athletic skill, college coaches routinely cite a variety of personality attributes they desire in athletes including positive attitude, integrity, low anxiety, positive reactions to failure, and positive interactions with others (National Fastpitch Coaches Association, 2009; Solomon & Rhea, 2008). One attribute identified frequently is coachability. Coaches at all levels and in nearly all sports want athletes who are coachable (Becker & Solomon, 2005; Giacobbi, 2000; Giacobbi, Roper, Whitney, & Butryn, 2002; McClendon, 2009; National Fastpitch Coaches Association, 2009; Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Summit & Jenkins, 1998).

Even though college coaches understand the importance of personality compatibility and specific attributes like coachability, few coaches can clearly articulate how they evaluate an athlete's coachability or personality during the recruiting process. However, coaches can often recall instances where they failed to accurately assess an athlete's personality or coachability and may painfully remember the impact that recruiting mistakes had on team dynamics and effectiveness (Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Summit & Jenkins, 1998). Failing to accurately assess these two important attributes often results in unpleasant experiences for everyone – the athlete, other team members, and coaches.

Evaluating intangible attributes like coachability and personality during the recruiting process is difficult for at least three important reasons. First, coachability is a complex construct and specific behaviors that most clearly delineate more coachable from less coachable athletes have not been clearly identified. As a result, coaches may ask the broad question, "Is she coachable?" rather than specific behavioral questions that might provide more detailed and reliable information.

Second, despite the huge strides made in organizational psychology linking individual and group personality to group processes like social cohesion, positive interactions, and performance (Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, & Mount, 1998; Halfhill, Nielson, Sundstrom, & Weilbacher, 2005; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998; Van Vianen & De Dreu, 2001), sport scholars have not yet examined these potential relationships in sport teams. Consequently, even though sport coaches know personality traits impact group processes, there is little practical information available to help them identify and select athletes who may be more likely to contribute to positive team processes.

Third, the primary methods coaches use to evaluate athletes – observing them in competitions or talking to people who know the athletes – do not always provide adequate or accurate information (Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Summitt & Jenkins, 1998). Prospective athletes know when college coaches are observing and are generally on their best behavior. Likewise, high school and youth coaches, counselors, parents, and others who are familiar with the athlete usually also have a vested interest in helping the athlete secure a college scholarship and may speak quite purposefully and selectively in order to help the athlete secure a scholarship.

For these reasons, college coaches often have difficulty collecting enough meaningful information during the recruiting process to glean quality insights about an athlete's personality and coachability. The

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

coachability construct itself is not well understood and potential relationships between coachability and personality traits have rarely been examined. Giacobbi and colleagues (2000; 2002) suggested that coachability is a complex construct that includes intensity of effort, trust, and respect for coaches, openness to learning and change, working with teammates, reaction to feedback, being motivated, responding positively to negative reinforcement and criticism, being flexible, and displaying low frustration. In one of the few studies exploring links between personality and coachability, Piedmont, Hill, and Blanco (1999) found that Neuroticism was negatively related to coachability (-.31), while Conscientiousness (.33) and Agreeableness (.26) were positively related. Giacobbi (2000) suggested that coachability is likely related to Agreeableness and Conscientiousness but called on other researchers to explore these relationships.

Some scholars may refute the usefulness or appropriateness of even trying to evaluate personality or coachability in the recruiting process. In sport, most prior research examining personality traits and athletic performance failed to produce consistent or useful results, leading many current sport scholars toward a more dispositional-environmental approach to personality research (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). From this perspective, the behaviors an athlete displays are governed as much or more by environmental situations and factors as they are by innate biological traits. Thus, attempts to glean insights about a prospective athlete's personality or coachability would be useless because the athlete would be in a different environment and surrounded by different people and situations once they got to college. Other scholars believe cognitive processing plays a critical role in the establishment of attributes, behaviors, and attitudes. Dweck's (2006) thought-provoking work about *mindset*, for example, suggests that personality, beliefs, and attitudes are malleable and can be changed or controlled cognitively by adopting a *growth-oriented* mindset rather than a *fixed* mindset.

Unfortunately, college coaches cannot thrust potential athletes into the high-pressure environment of college athletics to evaluate how they will respond in specific situations. Nor can coaches repeatedly observe potential athletes in a variety of different situations and contexts due to NCAA recruiting restrictions. Instead, college coaches gather as much information as they can from limited observations and conversations and hope they select coachable athletes whose personalities will fit their teams.

Solomon and Rhea (2008) challenged sport scholars to recognize that personality factors are important to college coaches and work to establish methods of identifying relevant personality attributes in athletes. The reality is that many college coaches value and attempt to evaluate attributes like coachability and personality during the recruiting process (Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Summitt & Jenkins, 1998). In fact, Solomon (2010) recently found that junior college coaches value coachability above all other factors – even athletic ability. Since personality traits appear to be primarily stable during the college years (Roberts, Caspi, and Moffit, 2001; Robins, Fraley, Roberts, & Trzensniewski, 2001), a better understanding of behaviors that comprise the coachability construct as well as possible relationships between these behaviors and personality traits could be valuable to coaches as they evaluate and select athletes for their teams.

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

This paper outlines results from a study examining relationships between personality traits and coachability in NCAA Divisions I and II female softball athletes and discusses ways coaches might use these findings to better evaluate coachability and personality during the recruiting process.

Methods

Subjects

One hundred NCAA Division I and II head softball coaches who are members of the National Fastpitch Coaches Association were contacted by email and invited to participate in this study. Thirty-six head coaches agreed to participate and solicit participation from their athletes. Head coaches rated 211 more coachable and less coachable athletes; 190 of these athletes participated in the study. All participants received an Informed Consent Statement as required by the institutional review board prior to participating.

Measures

Coaches' perceptions of athlete coachability were measured with an 18-item instrument generated for this study. First, a list of 34 potential items designed to distinguish more coachable from less coachable athletes was generated primarily from qualitative interview statements from coaches reported by Giacobbi and colleagues (2000; 2002) and from the author's personal experience as a college head coach. Next, 10 veteran NCAA Division I and II head coaches were invited to evaluate and provide feedback on the items. Expert coaches were selected based on three criteria: 1) a minimum of 15-years experience as an NCAA Divisions I or II head softball coach; 2) success as an NCAA head softball coach reflected through wins and losses; and 3) previous professional coaching affiliation with the author. Eight of the 10 expert coaches, including three who are members of the National Fastpitch Coaches Association Hall of Fame, participated in the expert coaches' panel. These coaches (three males; five females; six NCAA Division I and two NCAA Division II) had coached at the college level 16 - 42 years and accumulated between 472 and 1,000 wins. Coaches used a 5-point Likert scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree* to evaluate each of the 34 original items, each of which began with the stem "As compared to less coachable athletes, more coachable athletes …" Coaches were also invited to list additional behaviors that were not included in the 34 items.

The primary purpose of the expert coaches' panel was to improve validity of this new instrument by identifying which behavioral items best distinguish more coachable from less coachable female athletes. Thus, means, standard deviations, and variances for each item were calculated. Items with higher mean scores and lower variances represent a higher degree of agreement among expert coaches regarding which behaviors best represent being more *coachable*. Based on an analysis of means and variances along with a phone interview with one participating Hall of Fame coach, 13 of the 34 potential coachability items had mean scores of 4.25 or above and were retained. Additionally, one new item representing displaying a positive attitude was added based on the author's judgment of expert coaches written comments and feedback. Four new items closely related to items that received the highest mean scores from expert coaches, but written with reverse language, were also generated. For example, *wants to learn and is open to changing to improve* received a 4.75 mean score from expert coaches, so the item *is stubborn and resistant to change* was also added to the final

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

instrument. The final 18-item Athlete Coachability Survey (N = 211) yielded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .97.

Athlete personality traits were measured with a 60-item instrument developed from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP, 2009). The IPIP appears to offer a reliable alternative to a proprietary personality instrument (Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006; Ehrhart, Roesch, Ehrhart, & Kilian, 2008; IPIP, 2009) and includes 10-item scales proposed to parallel constructs measured by Costa and McCrae's (1992) popular NEO-IP-R instrument (see http://ipip.ori.org/newNEOFacetsKey.htm). However, since keeping this instrument concise enough to be completed in 10-15 minutes was an important aspect of enhancing team-level participation, this study was limited to traits that comprise the Emotional Stability (Anger; Anxiety; Depression; Self-Consciousness; Immoderation; Vulnerability) and Agreeableness (Trust; Morality; Altruism; Cooperation; Modesty; and Sympathy) domains and included only five items for each of the 12 traits. Agreeableness and Emotional Stability are most often associated with relationship-oriented group processes like social cohesion, positive interpersonal interaction, teamwork, and viability in the organizational literature (Barrick et al., 1998; Mount et al., 1998; Van Vianen & De Dreu, 2001). Thus, it seems reasonable to expect that a construct like coachability, which often impacts coach-athlete relationships, might be most closely affiliated with traits from these two domains.

Thirty of the 60 items selected were used in a pilot study preparatory to this study, and six scales (Anxiety; Anger; Vulnerability; Trust; Cooperation; and Modesty) included at least three items used in the pilot study. For example, the items "*rarely get irritated; hold a grudge*, and *am calm even in tense situations*" were retained from the pilot study for the Anger, Cooperation, and Vulnerability scales respectively. The additional 30 items were selected directly from the 10-item IPIP scales proposed to measure constructs parallel to the NEO-PI-R (based on the author's judgment of items most applicable to college students) to improve reliability of less reliable facet-level scales.

In this sample (N = 190), Cronbach's reliability coefficients for the 30-item Agreeableness and 30-item Emotional Stability scales were .82 and .86 respectively. At the facet-level, reliability coefficients for the 12 personality trait scales were as follows: Trust (.82); Morality (.65); Altruism (.67); Cooperation (.61); Modesty (.71); Sympathy (.52); Anxiety (.73); Anger (.83); Depression (.66); Self-Consciousness (.66); Immoderation (.60); Vulnerability (.56).

Procedures

Head coaches and athletes completed surveys toward the end of the fall 2009 non-traditional season. The 36 participating head coaches were asked to identify up to three more coachable and three less coachable athletes from their current teams and use a 5-point Likert scale to rate each athlete on 18 behavioral items. Head coaches returned their surveys directly to the author via United States mail.

Athletes completed a 60-item survey assessing 12 personality traits. Athletes used a 5- point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; and Strongly Agree) to indicate how well each short personality

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

phrase described them. Each athlete sealed their survey in an individual envelope and a team captain returned the envelope containing all athlete surveys to the author via United States mail.

Research Design and Analysis

A cross-sectional survey design was used to begin exploring potential relationships between coachability and personality. Because head coaches were asked to identify up to three more coachable and three less coachable athletes on their current teams, in rank order, two distinct groups of female athletes were created: more coachable (n = 97) and less coachable (n = 93). To evaluate coaches' perceptions of behavioral differences between more coachable and less coachable athletes, independent t-tests were conducted on each item and Cohen's *d* effect sizes were calculated. Using the Bonferroni approach to control for Type I errors across the 18 survey items, a *p* value of less than .003 (.05/18) was required for significance.

Relationships between personality traits and coachability were evaluated with two Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficients analyses. The first analysis examined relationships between the six personality traits from the Emotional Stability domain (Anger; Anxiety; Depression; Self-Consciousness; Immoderation; Vulnerability) and Coachability. The second analysis examined relationships between the six personality traits from the Agreeableness domain (Trust; Morality; Altruism; Cooperation; Modesty; and Sympathy) and Coachability. Using the Bonferroni approach to control for Type I errors across the six correlations, a *p* value of less than .008 (.05/6 = .008) was required for significance.

Because there was no a priori hypothesis regarding which personality variables might help predict coachability, a simple multiple regression analysis was conducted. All 12 personality traits served as independent predictors in the model and coachability (more and less) served as the criterion variable.

Two, one-way MANOVA procedures were conducted at the .05 significance level to determine whether the personality traits of athletes coaches identified as more coachable were different from athletes coaches had identified as less coachable. In each test, coachability served as the independent variable and the six personality traits served as dependent variables. Using the Bonferroni approach, follow up ANOVAs were tested at the .008 (.05/6) significance level.

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

Results

Independent *t*-tests showed significant behavioral differences between less coachable and more coachable athletes on all 18 items. Cohen's *d* calculations indicated large effect sizes ranging from 1.11 – 2.90.

Results of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficients analyses revealed significant statistical relationships between Coachability and three personality traits: Cooperation (.22), Anger (-.25), and Immoderation (-.21).

Multiple regression analysis indicated that the linear combination of Anger and Immoderation was significantly related to an athlete's Coachability score, F (2, 187) = 8.51, p = .000. This combination of personality variables produced a multiple correlation coefficient of .29 indicating that approximately 8% of the variance in Coachability scores can be accounted for by the linear combination of Anger and Immoderation.

Significant differences were found between more and less coachable athletes' for two personality traits from the Emotional Stability domain, Wilks's $\Lambda = .93$, F (6, 183) = 2.21, $p = .04$. The multivariate η^2 based on Wilks's Λ was .07. Follow up ANOVAs tested at the .008 significance level showed that Anger, F (1, 188) = 8.56, $p = .004$, $\eta^2 = .04$ and Immoderation were significant, F (1, 188) = 8.06, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .04$.

In the second MANOVA, there were no significant differences between more coachable and less coachable athletes on personality traits from the Agreeableness domain according to Wilks's Lambda, Wilks's $\Lambda = .94$, F (6, 183) = 1.94, $p = .08$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .06$. Since Wilks's Λ approached .05 significance and a priori hypotheses proposed specific differences between more coachable and less coachable athletes in personality traits from the Agreeableness domain, follow-up ANOVAs were conducted using the Bonferroni approach at .008 to control for Type I errors across the six variables. This analysis indicated that Cooperation was significantly different between more coachable and less coachable athletes, F (1, 188) = 9.43, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .05$.

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

Discussion

Unraveling the Coachability Construct

Since college coaches want coachable athletes and have the luxury of selecting athletes for their teams, it might be reasonable to expect that high-performing teams in terms of wins and losses would have fewer athletes perceived as less coachable than lower-performing teams. As a general observation, however, this does not seem to be the case. College softball teams at all performance levels in this study (high-achieving, middle-achieving, and low-achieving based on wins and losses for the previous season) had athletes who coaches perceived as more and less coachable. This observation suggests that coaches may be less astute at evaluating coachability during the recruiting process than they would like and highlights the need for improved methods or better evaluation techniques.

Results on the 18 coachability items indicated significant behavioral differences between more and less coachable female NCAA Divisions I and II softball athletes on each item in the survey, as shown in Table 1. These 18 items could be grouped into six primary areas: 1) willingness to listen, learn, and change; 2) emotional maturity; 3) determination and commitment; 4) trust and respect for coaches; 5) reaction to feedback and instruction; and 6) positive interactions with teammates and coaches. The following sections detail these behavioral differences.

Willingness to listen, learn, and change. The item *"Wants to learn and is open to changing to improve"* yielded the largest behavioral differences between more coachable and less coachable athletes. "*Is stubborn and resistant to learning new techniques"* and *"Is open to trying new ways of doing things"* also demonstrated significant differences. Being willing to listen, learn, and change are critical to an athlete's continued athletic development, which is probably why these behaviors are cited by coaches more often than any other descriptor of coachability (Becker & Solomon, 2005; Giacobbi, 2000; Giacobbi et al., 2002; Solomon & Rhea, 2008). Less coachable female softball athletes appear to be much more resistant to learning new techniques and changing previous methods and skills to improve than are more coachable athletes.

Emotional Maturity. The second largest significant behavioral difference between more and less coachable athletes in this study was demonstrated with the item *"Takes responsibility for mistakes."* According to head coaches, less coachable athletes are much less likely to take responsibility for their mistakes and more likely to make excuses, complain, and blame others than are more coachable athletes. Athletes who demonstrate the preceding types of behaviors can negatively impact coach-athlete relationships, distract other team members, and erode team dynamics. Giacobbi et al. (2002) suggested that emotional maturity, responsibility, and accountability are important developmental aspects contributing to sport success, but did not link these characteristics directly to coachability.

Determination and commitment. Head college coaches indicated more coachable athletes are more "*determined to master new skills or techniques*" and "*more committed to improving her game"* than are less coachable athletes. Since mastering a new skill and improving one's game requires diligent and consistent

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

effort, these behaviors may provide at least some insight about an athlete's overall work ethic, one of the most valued behaviors desired by college coaches (Becker & Solomon, 2005; Giacobbi et al., 2002; National Fastpitch Coaches Association, 2009). Like coachability, work ethic is a broad construct that has not been well defined. However, work ethic generally encompasses behaviors like intensity of effort, self-discipline, and determination, and even though long-term participation in sport demands a certain level of effort, self-discipline, and determination, there are differences in how consistently athletes display these behaviors.

Trust and respect for coaches. Coaches perceived significant differences between more and less coachable athletes in their ability to "*Trust coaches' expertise."* More coachable athletes were also more likely to "*do whatever coaches ask,"* and "*exhibit a genuine respect for coaches"* than were less coachable athletes. Studies and interviews with coaches consistently indicate that coaches want athletes who trust and respect others, and trust is undoubtedly important to building solid relationships in sport teams (Becker & Solomon, 2005; Janssen, 1999; National Fastpitch Coaches Association, 2009; Solomon & Rhea, 2008).

Reaction to corrective feedback. More coachable athletes are also more likely to be "*attentive and listen to instructional feedback*" and less likely to "*get upset or angry when given corrective feedback"* than are less coachable athletes. An important part of coaching and developing athletes is providing corrective feedback and instruction, and there are times when feedback is not always positive. In fact, instructional feedback to athletes during competition is often short, blunt, and corrective (Janssen, 1999). Athletes who take feedback and criticism personally rather than constructively may respond with anger or other negative behaviors that inhibit the coaching process and often impact relationships as well (Yukelson, 2001).

Positive interactions with others. Although still significantly different, the smallest perceived behavioral differences between more and less coachable female athletes in this study were demonstrated with the items "*gets along well with all coaches and teammates";* and *"argues with coaches and teammates."* This finding is interesting because softball coaches, in particular, have indicated that positive interactions with others is important (McClendon, 2009; National Fastpitch Coaches Association, 2009). It is possible that differences may have been smaller since data were collected in the non-traditional fall season when all team members typically get significant playing time in scrimmage games that do not count in NCAA standings, the focus is more on team development, and the overall atmosphere is more congenial and less competitive.

In summary, head college softball coaches perceive distinctive behavioral differences between more and less coachable NCAA Divisions I and II athletes in several areas: willingness to listen, learn, and change; emotional maturity; determination and commitment; trust and respect for coaches; reaction to feedback and instruction; and positive interactions with teammates and coaches.

The Link between Personality Traits and Coachability

In addition to more clearly delineating specific behaviors that may best distinguish more coachable from less coachable athletes, this study found significant statistical relationships between coachability and some personality traits. Specifically, female athletes identified as less coachable were more likely to possess higher

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

levels of Anger and Immoderation and lower levels of Cooperation than were athletes identified as more coachable. More importantly, the combination of two traits, Anger *and* Immoderation, were the strongest predictors of coachability. In other words, an athlete who possesses high levels of Anger *and* Immoderation *combined* was more likely to be perceived as less coachable than an athlete who possesses lower levels of either of these traits.

Anger. Discovering the negative relationship between Anger and coachability is no surprise. Athletes who possess high levels of Anger become upset, mad, or annoyed more easily than athletes who are more even-tempered, often leading to behaviors that damage coach-athlete relationships and the coaching process. For example, providing corrective feedback and instruction and changing mechanics, technique, or skills to improve performance are critical aspects of coaching. Athletes who are high in Anger typically get frustrated more easily when trying to learn new skills or techniques, often take corrective feedback personally, and spend time being mad rather than improving their skills. These athletes may also lash out verbally at coaches or others more quickly than athletes who are more even-tempered.

Coaches know athletes who get angry easily inhibit the learning process so vital in coaching, so most coaches attempt to evaluate behaviors associated with Anger during recruitment. Typically, this evaluation occurs by closely observing the athlete's behaviors in response to coaching feedback, mistakes, or situations that do not go the athlete's way during games. However, as previously noted, observational assessment can be extremely difficult because prospective athletes usually display their best behaviors when college coaches are observing. Additionally, some sports provide fewer opportunities for behaviors commonly associated with Anger to surface. For example, in softball or baseball, a prospective athlete has only two or three at-bats each game and may field the ball only once or twice the entire game. Thus, there are often few opportunities to observe how an athlete reacts to receiving corrective feedback from coaches, making mistakes, or dealing with situations that do not go their way. Conversely, a basketball player typically handles the ball many times, takes numerous shots, and receives more coaching feedback and instruction during a game, thus providing more opportunities to observe behaviors typically associated with Anger.

Immoderation. While most college coaches try to learn about an athlete's temper during recruitment, few, if any, would report attempting to evaluate behaviors associated with Immoderation. However, in this study, female athletes who reported difficulty resisting temptation along with a greater tendency to go on binges, spent more than they could afford, and did things they regretted later were also more likely to be rated by coaches as less coachable. A close examination of the preceding items reveals that these behaviors are closely related to a lack of impulse control.

Even though coaches seldom attempt to evaluate behaviors associated with Immoderation or Impulsivity during recruitment, it makes sense that high levels of this trait could quickly impede the coaching process and damage the coach-athlete relationship. Athletes with high levels of Immoderation have trouble resisting temptation and are more likely to make decisions based on short-term gratification rather than long-term outcomes; and athletes who make reactive decisions without thinking through the potential ramifications of

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

those decisions can easily impede team processes. Nearly all sport teams have specific rules, policies, and behavioral expectations, and athletes are expected to adhere to team rules and policies and consider the effects their decisions and behaviors could have on the teams and institutions they represent. The inability to resist temptations could cause an athlete to be late for practice, break team rules, miss curfew, or engage in other behaviors the coach and teammates deem inappropriate. Athletes who display these types of behaviors are generally perceived as lacking respect for coaches and teammates, which nearly always damages coach-athlete relationships and disrupts team dynamics as well.

The above examples demonstrate how possessing high levels of Anger or Immoderation alone might impede the coaching process, damage coach-athlete relationships, and disrupt team dynamics. However, the combination of Anger *and* Immoderation appears to offer the most valuable insight into how coachable an athlete might be. For example, possessing high levels of Anger alone may not necessarily inhibit the coaching process, but expressing that anger behaviorally usually does. Some athletes with higher levels of Anger may have learned to cognitively control expressing their anger. Thus, even though corrective feedback or being asked to do things differently may upset or frustrate these athletes, they seldom visibly express anger in ways that damage relationships and impede the coaching process. Consequently, these athletes may be perceived as being more coachable because they have learned how to control their anger, rather than express it in damaging ways. However, it seems reasonable to expect that athletes with high Anger *combined* with high Immoderation might experience more difficulty *controlling* behavioral expressions of their anger. The inability to control urges might increase the likelihood these athletes would express their anger through emotional outbursts, disrespectful remarks, or other inappropriate behaviors that can quickly cause severe damage to relationships and the coaching process.

Cooperation. Cooperation was the only trait from the Agreeableness domain that differed significantly between more coachable and less coachable athletes. According to the way female athletes responded to survey items, athletes perceived as less coachable were more likely to hold grudges, have a sharp tongue, get back at others, and enjoy a good fight. Less coachable athletes perceived themselves as more difficult to satisfy than did more coachable athletes.

It seems intuitive that Cooperation is an important personality trait in team sports that would be positively related to being more coachable. Maintaining positive relationships with teammates and coaches is critical in team sports and since women are often highly relationship-oriented, it may be even more important in female sport teams (Carron, Colman, Wheeler, & Stevens, 2002; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 2005). From this perspective, female athletes who hold grudges, have sharp tongues, and get back at others are more likely to engage in confrontations that can cause damage to relationships with coaches and team members. Thus, it is not surprising that athletes who were less cooperative were also perceived by coaches as less coachable.

To summarize, female athletes perceived as less coachable possess higher levels of Anger and Immoderation and lower levels of Cooperation than did athletes perceived as more coachable. Thus, it appears

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

that coaches could gain valuable insight about how coachable a prospective female athlete might be by better identifying and evaluating these three traits during the recruiting process.

Evaluating Coachability in Prospective Athletes

One of the most important antecedents to success in college team sports is selecting the right team members. In addition to seeking highly skilled athletes, most coaches want athletes who are a good fit for their teams and contribute to positive team dynamics. Solomon and Rhea (2008) found 55 different sources of information NCAA Division I coaches use to evaluate athletes categorized into six primary themes: coachability, work ethic, team qualities, mental strategies, character, and confidence. Thus, selection of athletes often becomes a complex equation comprised of a variety of athletic skills and personality attributes. Solving the athletic side of the equation is easy for college coaches as most can easily assess athletic talent, but solving the personality side of the equation is challenging.

One important piece of the personality side of the equation is coach-athlete compatibility. Coach-athlete compatibility is an important component of satisfaction, cohesion, and team dynamics (Carron & Dennis, 2001) and may be especially important in women's teams since some scholars believe women tend to measure their identities based on relationships and connections formed with others (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 2005). Recent advancements in neuropsychology have even led some researchers to attribute differences in the way men and women perceive and value relationships to differences in hormones and brain structure (Brizendine, 2006).

Among female athletes, perceptions of the degree of compatibility athletes have with their coaches influence how they evaluate coaching behaviors (Kenow & Williams, 1997). Specifically, female athletes who believed they were more similar to their coaches in goals, personalities, and beliefs evaluated coaching behaviors more positively than did athletes who perceived they were less compatible with their coaches. Likewise, cohesion, which is based on relationships with others, has a stronger relationship with performance in women's sport teams than in men's teams (Carron et al., 2002). Thus, it appears that coach-athlete relationships and compatibility may be especially important in female teams.

Identifying which specific behaviors demonstrate the largest differences between more and less coachable athletes and which personality traits may be most closely linked to being more coachable has practical implications for college coaches as they attempt to evaluate and select athletes who will be a good fit for their teams. Coaches who understand these behavioral differences and relationships can make a more concerted effort to learn about these behaviors and traits during the recruiting process, possibly by purposefully and strategically incorporating specific questions into their evaluations.

College coaches typically spend a significant amount of time on the telephone with prospective athletes, high school coaches, youth coaches, counselors and parents and could easily and strategically integrate specific personality-oriented and coachability-oriented questions into their conversations. For example, a college coach could ask a prospective athlete specific questions designed to gain insights about an athlete's level of Anger. More coachable athletes in this study reported they rarely get irritated or mad, are not easily annoyed, and do

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

not get upset easily. Thus, to gain insight about an athlete's overall level of Anger, college coaches might ask a questions like *"What kinds of things really annoy or irritate you?* or *What kinds of things really make you mad?"* When combined with probing questions and requests for specific examples, these types of questions might provide useful information. Similarly, asking an athlete whether they tend to hold a grudge or forgive and forget may yield meaningful insight into their level of Cooperation. Or, asking an athlete whether they tend to act spontaneously or plan everything out may provide important insight about their level of Immoderation.

Coaches could also include questions designed to better evaluate specific behaviors associated with being more coachable. For example, rather than asking the broad question, *"Are you coachable?"* coaches might ask more targeted behavioral questions like *"What has your coach asked you to do differently and how did you respond to that request?, What happens when you make a mistake during practice or a game?, What is a new skill you have learned and how did you learn that skill?, What kind of corrective feedback does your coach give you?, How do you respond to this feedback?, What happens when you fail?"* Listening carefully to how the athlete responds to these questions and asking probing follow-up questions requesting specific examples could help coaches glean insights that may not be evident from observations alone and should provide more meaningful information about an athlete's coachability in several behavioral areas that appear to be components of coachability.

In addition to talking with athletes, college coaches routinely solicit information from others who are familiar with the athlete. Since the predictive validity of any type of personality assessment is enhanced when combined with assessments from others (Weiner & Greene, 2008), coaches could undoubtedly improve the quality of their assessment by using a systematic recruiting approach that includes asking the same set of personality-oriented and coachability-oriented questions to the athlete, high school coach, youth coach, counselor, or parent. A more systematic approach would likely provide the most useful insights about a prospective athlete's personality traits and behavioral tendencies – and it would provide an opportunity to compare responses and identify inconsistencies. As an alternative to verbal inquiries, coaches could easily develop a checklist or short survey and distribute it to the athlete as well as those closely affiliated with the athlete.

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

Summary

Coaches at all competitive levels and in all sports report wanting athletes who are coachable. Athletes who are not coachable often have a tenuous relationship with coaches and may have a negative impact on team dynamics. NCAA Divisions I and II head college softball coaches in this study reported striking behavioral differences between more and less coachable female athletes in the following areas: willingness to listen, learn, and change; emotional maturity; determination and commitment; reaction to feedback and instruction; trust and respect for coaches; and interactions with teammates and coaches. Additionally, athletes perceived as less coachable had higher levels of Anger and Immoderation, and lower levels of Cooperation than athletes perceived as more coachable. Furthermore, the combination of Anger and Immoderation may provide additional insight regarding how coachable a prospective athlete might be.

This study helps delineate behaviors that comprise the complex coachability construct. Coaches who better understand the scope and specificity of behavioral tendencies between more and less coachable athletes can develop better strategies and methods of evaluating these behaviors. Likewise, this study provides some initial insight into which personality traits may be most closely related to being perceived as more or less coachable. It is important to note that coaches should never base recruiting decisions on personality traits alone as many situational and contextual factors can influence the way any given athlete behaves. The small-to-medium relationships between Coachability and Anger, Immoderation, and Cooperation in this study clearly indicate that many other factors also influence how coachable an athlete might be. Furthermore, additional studies and improvements to the new instruments used in this study are needed. Nonetheless, this study provides coaches with some additional knowledge about how personality traits may influence behavioral tendencies associated with coachability, thus providing an opportunity to develop methods to glean additional insights about these behaviors and traits during the evaluation and selection process.

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, t-scores, and Effect Sizes for Items on Coachability Survey

Athlete Coachability Survey Item	More Coachable		Less Coachable		Effect Sizes	
	M	SD	M	SD	*t*	*d*
Willingness to listen, learn, change						
Wants to learn and is open to changing to improve	4.76	.43	2.69	.91	20.88	2.90
Is stubborn and resistant to learning new techniques	1.26	.73	3.47	1.06	-17.57	-2.43
Is open to trying new ways of doing things	4.50	.69	2.70	.89	16.30	2.25
Emotional maturity						
Takes responsibility for mistakes	4.64	.50	2.71	.92	18.81	2.61
Makes excuses, complains, blames others	1.25	.74	3.31	1.12	-15.64	-2.16
Displays a positive attitude or outlook	4.61	.51	3.11	.92	14.62	2.03
Determination and commitment						
Is determined to master new skills or techniques	4.74	.48	2.82	1.01	17.52	2.42
Is genuinely committed to improving her game	4.84	.42	3.36	1.08	13.13	1.82
Trust and respect for coaches						
Trusts coaches' expertise	4.68	.52	3.02	.92	16.01	2.21
Is willing to do whatever coaches ask	4.79	.47	3.12	.98	15.67	2.18
Exhibits a genuine respect for coaches	4.83	.44	3.47	.90	13.83	1.93
Reaction to feedback and instruction						
Is attentive and listens to instructional feedback	4.69	.48	2.95	.99	16.00	2.24
Gets upset or angry when given corrective feedback	1.30	.66	3.01	.98	-14.81	-2.05
Gets angry or pouts when given corrective feedback	1.38	.77	3.17	1.03	-14.27	-1.98
Positive interactions with others						
Engages in honest communication with coach	4.48	.62	3.04	1.02	12.31	1.71
Provides honest and open feedback to coach	4.36	.73	2.99	1.03	11.02	1.52
Gets along well with all coaches and teammates	4.75	.50	3.64	.98	10.23	1.43
Argues with coaches or teammates	1.21	.66	2.28	1.18	- 8.07	-1.11

Note. Head coaches rated 211 athletes (N = 107 more coachable; N = 104 less coachable) using a 5-point scale with 1 = Almost Never; 2 = Seldom; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Usually; and 5 = Almost Always. Personality surveys were completed by 190 of these athletes.

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

References

Acosta, R. V. & Carpenter, L. J. (2010). Women in intercollegiate sport: A longitudinal, national study thirty three year update 1977-2010. Retrieved February 6, 2010, from http://www.acostacarpenter.org

Barrick, M. R., Stewart, G. L., Neubert, M. J., & Mount, M. K. (1998). Relating member ability and personality to work-team processes and team effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 83*, 377-391.

Becker, A. J., & Solomon, G. B. (2005). Expectancy information and coach effectiveness in intercollegiate basketball. *The Sport Psychologist, 19*, 251-266.

Brizendine, L. (2006). *The female brain.* New York: Morgan Road Books.

Carron, A. V., Colman, M. M., Wheeler, J., & Stevens, D. (2002). Cohesion and performance in sport: A meta analysis. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 24,* 168-188.

Carron, A. V., & Dennis, P. W. (2001). The sport team as an effective group. In J. M. Williams (Ed.), *Applied sport psychology.* (4th ed., pp. 120-134). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

Carron, A. V., Hausenblas, H. A., & Eys, M. A. (2005). *Group dynamics in sport*. Morgantown, WVA: Fitness Information Technology.

Costa, P. T. J., & McCrae, R. R. (1992). Revised NEO personality inventory (NEO-PI-R) and NEO five factor (NEO-FFI) inventory professional manual. Odessa, FL: PAR.

Donnellan, M. B., Oswald, F. L., Baird, B. M., & Lucas, R. E. (2006). The mini-IPIP scales: Tiny-yet-effective measures of the big five factors of personality. *Psychological Assessment, 18,* 192-203.

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success.* New York: Random House.

Ehrhart, K. H., Roesch, S. C., Ehrhart, M. G., & Kilian, B. (2008). A test of the factor structure equivalence of the 50-item IPIP five-factor model measure across gender and ethnic groups. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 90,* 507-516.

Giacobbi, P. R., Jr. (2000). *The athletic coachability scale: Construct conceptualization and psychometric analyses.* Unpublished Dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.

Giacobbi, P. R., Roper, E., Whitney, J., & Butryn, T. (2002). College coaches' views about the development of successful athletes: A descriptive exploratory investigation. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 25,* 164-180.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Halfhill, T., Nielson, T. M., Sundstrom, E., & Weilbacher, A. (2005). Group personality composition and performance in military service teams. *Military Psychology, 17,* 41-54.

International personality item pool: A scientific collaboratory for the development of advanced measures of personality traits and other individual differences. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from http://ipip.ori.org

Janssen, J. (1999). *Championship team building.* Tucson, AZ: Winning the Mental Game.

Josselson, R. (2005). Identity. In M. E. Wilson & L. E. Wolf-Wendel (Eds.), *ASHE reader on college student development* (pp. 191-199). Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.

Kenow, L., & Williams, J. M. (1997). Coach-athlete compatibility and athlete's perception of coaching behaviors. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 29,* 251-259.

McClendon, B. (2009). Digging deeper can give you insight into intangibles. *Fastpitch Delivery, 14(4),* 15.

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410

Mount, M. K., Barrick, M. R., & Stewart, G. L. (1998). Five-factor model of personality and performance in jobs involving interpersonal interactions. *Human Performance, 11*, 145-165.

National Fastpitch Coaches Association. (2009). The good…and the bad. *Top Recruit, 4,* 22-23.

Piedmont, R. L., Hill, D. C., & Blanco, S. (1999). Predicting athletic performance using the five-factor model of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences, 27*, 769-777.

Roberts, B. W., Caspi, A., & Moffit, T. E. (2001). The kids are alright: Growth and stability in personality development from adolescence to adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81*, 670-683.

Robins, R. W., Fraley, R. C., Roberts, B. W., & Trzensniewski, K. H. (2001). A longitudinal study of personality change in young adulthood. *Journal of Personality, 69*, 618-640.

Shaw, M. E. (1981). *Group dynamics: The psychology of small group behavior* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Solomon, G.B. (2010). The assessment of athletic ability at the junior college level. *International Journal of Sport Science & Coaching, 5,* 37-46.

Solomon, G. B., & Rhea, D. J. (2008). Sources of expectancy information among college coaches: A qualitative test of expectancy theory. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 3*, 251-268.

Summitt, P. H., & Jenkins, S. (1998). *Reach for the summit*. *The definite dozen system for succeeding at whatever you do.* New York: Broadway Books.

Van Vianen, A. E. M., & De Dreu, C. K. W. (2001). Personality in teams: Its relationship to social cohesion, task cohesion, and team performance. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 10*, 97-120.

Weinberg, R.S. & Gould, D. (2007). *Foundations of sport and exercise psychology.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Weiner, I. B., & Greene, R. L. (2008). *Handbook of personality assessment.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Yukelson, D. P. (2001). Communicating effectively. In J. M. Williams (Ed.), *Applied sport psychology* (4th ed., pp. 135-149). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

A publication from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)
1900 Association Drive • Reston, Virginia • 20191 • www.NASPEinfo.org • 703.476.3410