



## SERVANT-LEADERSHIP IN SPORT: A CONCEPT WHOSE TIME HAS ARRIVED

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As we enter the year 2007, more and more organizations are beginning to see that traditional, autocratic, and hierarchical models of leadership are failing to provide the framework necessary for productive work environments. According to McGee-Cooper and Trammell (2002), servant-leadership is one model of leadership that can help turn those traditional notions of leadership and organizational structure upside down and provide the needed context for a more satisfied and productive workforce. The servant-leader model (Greenleaf, 1977) is one based on teamwork and community, one that seeks to involve others in decision making, one strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and one that enhances the personal growth of subordinates while improving the caring and quality of our institutions (Spears, 1998). One such institution, intercollegiate athletics, and more specifically the leadership methods of athletic coaches operating within that institution, should be well suited to the application of the servant-leader model. However, the academic fields that influence the practices of athletic coaches, most notably physical education, sport psychology, sport philosophy, and exercise science, have been slow to adopt this new paradigm (Westre, 2003). Further, athletic coaches are a group of leaders who could



benefit greatly from the servant-leader model because of their strong potential to influence the emotional, social, and moral development of young sport performers. While coaches' role in enhancing athletes' motivation and satisfaction is well known (e.g., Amorose & Horn, 2000), the relationship between servant-leader behaviors and these performance-based psychological variables is not. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine how servant-leader coaching behaviors impact collegiate athletes' intrinsic motivation, sport satisfaction, and athletic coping skills.

#### SERVANT-LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

According to Greenleaf's model (1977), servant-leaders put other people's needs, aspirations, and interests above their own; their deliberate choice is to serve others because they believe that nurturing their subordinates is the best way to achieve organizational goals. Greenleaf captured the essence of servant-leadership when he explained, "The servant-leader is a servant first. . . it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then the conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13). Leadership bent on satisfying the ego, acquiring material possessions, or wielding abusive power would only further suppress the followers and leave them feeling used and underappreciated (Greenleaf, 1977).

Since Greenleaf's landmark work first appeared in 1977, the further refinement and conceptualization of the specific components and characteristics of servant-leaders has been a work in progress. However, a number of leadership experts (Batten, 1988; Buchan, 1998; Page & Wong, 2000; Patterson, 2003; Quay, 1997; Spears; 1995, 1998; Spears & Lawrence, 2002) have recently begun to converge conceptually regarding the characteristics that define servant-leaders. For example, Spears (1998) has identified ten major attributes of servant-leadership, including listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to people's growth, and building community. Likewise, Batten (1988) summarized the concept of servant-leadership by noting that ser-



vant-leaders should make a promise to engage in the following: exemplify a passion for excellence; ask, listen and hear; provide an example of accountability, commitment, and integrity; follow a path of empowerment for the self and others; look for strengths rather than weaknesses in subordinates; cultivate optimum physical, mental, and spiritual fitness; lead as you would like to be led; savor each moment; and dare to be all you can be.

Similarly, Patterson (2003) defines servant-leaders as those who serve with a focus on the followers, where the followers are the primary concern and the organizational concerns are peripheral. The foundations of servant-leadership, for Patterson (2003), are not behaviors or leadership styles, but “virtues.” Patterson defines virtues as the good moral quality in a person or the general quality of goodness or moral excellence one possesses. According to Patterson (2003), the servant-leader leads and serves with the following virtues: a) love; b) humility, c) altruism, d) vision, e) trust, f) a heart for serving, and g) the ability to empower others.

Finally, Kouzes (1999), reflecting on the writings about servant-leadership, suggests that individuals who employ this type of leader behavior are engaging in “exemplary” leadership. Exemplary leaders challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, and enable others to act. These leaders model the way and “encourage the heart.” Encouraging others includes setting clear standards, expecting the best, paying attention, giving personal recognition, telling the story, celebrating together, and setting an example (Kouzes, 1999).

### *Measuring Servant-Leadership*

To date, few studies have explored the efficacy of the servant-leader model. This is somewhat surprising, considering how widely the servant-leader concept has been accepted in applied business and educational leadership circles. Although there are numerous recommendations in the literature calling for more qualitative research, servant-leadership in sport has received little attention to date (e.g., Chelladurai, 1993; Cote, Salmela, & Russell, 1995; Horn, 1985; Peshkin, 1988; Smoll & Smith, 1989; and



Strean, 1998). More recently, Westre (2003), utilizing a qualitative, multiple case research method, explored the experiences of six college coaches who were identified as possessing many of the characteristics of servant-leadership. Through his research, Westre discovered that servant-leadership was a viable leadership style for these coaches, although this approach to coaching had its share of costs and challenges. Westre recommends future qualitative research in this area.

A contributing factor to the scarcity of quantitative research is the lack of a well-established quantitative measurement tool. However, two instruments, Laub's Organizational Leadership Assessment (1999; 2003) and Page and Wong's (2000) Servant Leader Profile are noteworthy, if not fully complete, attempts to fill this void.

Page and Wong (2000) identified twelve distinct servant-leadership categories in their Servant Leader Profile (SLP). The SLP categories include: integrity, humility, servanthood, caring for others, empowering others, developing others, visioning, goal-setting, leading, modeling, team-building, and shared decision making. Page and Wong viewed the first three categories, integrity, humility, and servanthood, to be the characteristics most descriptive of servant-leaders, but their initial work stopped short of conducting factor analysis. Dennis and Winston's (2003) subsequent factor analysis of the SLP confirmed only 3 of the original 12 characteristics, which they labeled empowerment, service, and vision. More recently, Wong (2004) revised the Servant Leadership Profile (RSLP) to enhance its psychometric properties and identified a seven-factor solution with each tapping separate dimensions of servant-leadership, including empowering, developing, and serving others, as well as participatory, inspirational, visionary, and courageous leadership.

Laub (1999; 2003) developed the 60-item Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) as an attempt to (a) better define the concept of servant-leadership, (b) determine the characteristics of servant-leadership, and (c) determine whether servant-leader characteristics within organizations can be assessed through a quantitative process. Factor analysis of the OLA



revealed a two-factor structure composed of organization assessment items and leadership assessment items. The leadership assessment items included questions about how the leader values and develops people, builds community, displays authenticity, and provides and shares leadership. The organizational assessment items are of similar design and assess how the servant-leader concepts are displayed, valued, and practiced throughout the organization (Laub, 2003). While the two-factor structure was clearly identified, Laub also found a strong correlation between the factors which has led to the recommendation that only the overall score for the OLA be used for research purposes.

#### SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND SPORT

To date, virtually no empirical studies exist that examine the efficacy of the servant-leader model in sport settings. However, the sport leadership literature has seen emerging trends identifying the utility of many of the characteristics of the servant-leader model. For example, in reviewing the sport leadership literature, Chelladurai (1993) identified two emerging developments. First, athletes increasingly preferred coaches who were democratic in addition to autocratic. Second, the coaches perceived most effective by their athletes were ones who considered players' opinions and feelings. Scott (1997), in his recommendations for developing a positive organizational culture, encouraged the following leadership behaviors: (a) collaborate with athletes to establish vision and goals, (b) involve all team members when determining values for team and individual behavior, (c) approach conflicts with the idea of empowerment and social justice, and (d) utilize a reward system that recognizes individual achievement and effort toward accomplishing team goals. Further, in a study of former athletes training to become coaches, Stewart (1993) identified the characteristics that best differentiated the favorite and least favorite coaches. Characteristics of favorite coaches included honesty, approachability, interest in the athletes beyond sport, a tendency to welcome and use athletes' input, and efforts to make each team member feel valued and important. Their least



favorite coaching characteristics included stressing winning at any cost, lying, being impersonal, and using fear and degradation as motivators.

Contemporary leadership writers (Bass, 1985, 2000; Bennett, 2001; Covey, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 1999) have encouraged the development of models that are congruent with the patterns Chelladurai, Scott, and Stewart identified. These new leadership models should emphasize athlete empowerment and democratic coaching behaviors, and focus less on the traditional autocratic, fear-based coaching methods. Athletes seem to prefer coaches who seek their input regarding decisions related to the team, provide positive feedback and recognition, exhibit sincere sensitivity to their needs both in and out of sport settings, and demonstrate an athlete-centered coaching philosophy (Westre, 2003).

Simply stated, modern-day athletes are no longer satisfied with autocratic leadership styles and a top-down hierarchical structure. It is obvious that leadership paradigms in the sport domain are in flux and in need of change (Westre, 2003). The servant-leadership model appears well suited to meeting athletes' needs, even though research supporting such a leadership paradigm shift is scarce. Thus, the purpose of this investigation is to assess the impact and viability of servant-leadership in sport settings by examining how a servant-leadership style impacts the motivation, satisfaction, and athletic coping skills of collegiate athletes.

## METHODS

### *Participants*

The sample for this study was comprised of 251 collegiate athletes (3 no responses) at two universities in the Pacific Northwest. The mean age of the participants was 19.76 years ( $SD = 1.40$ ). Approximately 40% of the participants were on athletic scholarship and 60% were walk-ons, with 26% of the sample consisting of freshmen, 28% sophomores, 24% juniors, 18% seniors, and 2% graduate students. Sports represented included football, basketball, soccer, golf, tennis, swimming, track and field, and volleyball.



## *Instruments*

Seven instruments were employed to measure key constructs in this study, including the Revised Servant Leader Profile, the Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire, the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory, the Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire, the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28, the Sport Confidence Inventory, and the Respect Inventory.

*Revised Servant Leadership Profile (RSLP).* The RSLP was developed by Wong (2004) as a revised version of the Servant Leadership Profile (Page & Wong, 2000). The RSLP consists of 62 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and includes both positive and negative characteristics of servant-leadership. Factor analysis conducted by Wong (2004) identified a seven-factor structure to the RSLP, including empowering and developing others, power and pride, serving others, open and participatory leadership, inspirational leadership, visionary leadership, and courageous leadership. Although validation of the RSLP is preliminary, its factor structure appeared more congruent for use with athletic populations than did competing instruments such as Laub's OLA (Laub, 1999; 2003). The RSLP's seven factors were deemed more appropriate, and likely more insightful, for use with the study sample than the highly correlated two-factor structure of the OLA.

*Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ).* The Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (Duda, 1989) is a 13-item instrument that measures athletes' dispositional motives for involvement in sport. Two subscales measure task- and ego-involvement. Task involvement is characterized by personal improvement and comparison against a self-referenced standard, whereas positive social comparison and outcome-based standards (e.g., winning) describe ego involvement. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores representing higher levels of task or ego involvement. The task subscale consists of 7 items while the ego subscale contains 6 items, so subscale scores are reported as means to facilitate comparison.



Alpha reliability coefficients have been reported to average .79 and .81 for task and ego subscales respectively across a variety of samples (Duda & Whitehead, 1998), and acceptable factorial, concurrent, and predictive validity have been demonstrated by Duda and colleagues (Duda, 1989; Duda, Fox, Biddle, & Armstrong, 1992; Duda & Whitehead, 1998).

*Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI).* The Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) was designed to assess participants' intrinsic motivation in sport domains (Ryan, 1982). The IMI is comprised of four subscales, including interest/enjoyment, perceived competence, pressure/tension, and effort/importance. Participants indicate their agreement with each of five statements on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The IMI's psychometric properties have been successfully documented by McAuley, Duncan, and Tammen (1989), who reported alpha reliability coefficients of .78 for interest/enjoyment, .80 for perceived competence, .84 for effort/importance, and .68 for the pressure/tension subscale.

*Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ).* The Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ) is a multidimensional scale containing 56 items which comprise 15 subscales designed to measure various dimensions of athletes' satisfaction in sport domains. This investigation utilized 5 of the 15 subscales: training and instruction (3 items), personal treatment (5 items), team performance (3 items), individual performance (3 items), and personal dedication satisfaction (4 items). The ASQ has demonstrated solid psychometric properties in sport domains, with alpha reliability estimates ranging from .78 to .95 (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1998; Riemer & Toon, 2001).

*Athletic Coping Skills Inventory (ACSI-28).* Smith, Smoll, Schutz, & Ptacek (1995) developed the ACSI-28, which measures the use of coping skills during athletic performance (e.g., "I tend to play better under pressure because I think more clearly"). The ACSI-28 consists of 28 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale 1 (almost never) to 4 (almost always), with its seven subscales measuring coping with adversity, coachability, concentration skills, goal setting and mental preparation, confidence and achievement





motivation, peaking under pressure, and freedom from worry. Psychometric data for the ACSI-28 is extensive, including test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from .47 to .87 and alpha coefficients ranging from .62 to .86 (Smith et al., 1995).

*Sport Confidence Inventory (SCI).* The SCI (Vealey, 2002) is a 14-item, self-report questionnaire developed to assess three types of sport confidence. Athletes are asked to assess their athletic abilities in relation to their perceptions of success. A standard stem for each question asks, "How certain are you that. . ." and responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (can't do it at all) to 7 (totally certain). The SCI is comprised of three subscales, including physical skills and training, cognitive efficacy, and resilience (Vealey, 2002). Each type of sport confidence has been shown to be related to competitive anxiety and athletic coping skills, supporting the multidimensionality of the SCI. Vealey (2002) has also demonstrated solid preliminary validity for the SCI, which also has acceptable internal consistency, with alpha reliability coefficients ranging from .84 to .87

*Respect Inventory (RI).* The RI was designed specifically for this study to assess the esteem athletes have for their coach. Items are rated on a 4-item Likert-type scale 1 (not at all true) to 7 (extremely true), and they assess the amount of respect athletes have for their coaches' ability to use their knowledge and skill to enhance athletes' development and enjoyment (e.g., "I respect my head coach's knowledge of my sport." "For reasons other than his position, my head coach has earned my respect"). Internal consistency for the RI in this investigation was deemed acceptable, with an alpha coefficient of .86.

### *Procedure*

Following Institutional Review Board approval, coaches at the two universities were contacted about the research project and asked to volunteer. Interested teams completed the questionnaire battery after a team practice session. Almost all athletes then signed informed consent state-



ments and completed surveys, a process that took approximately 30 minutes.

In an effort to provide a theoretical rationale for making predictions about the strength of relationships between servant-leadership and key dependent variables, a modified multi-trait, multi-method approach was employed in this study. First, a variety of dependent variables was used in this investigation to better assess convergent and divergent validity with model predictions. Variables were then divided into two categories—primary and secondary variables—based on the predicted strength and consistency of expected relationships. Primary variables were those dependent measures that were expected to be most influenced by servant-leadership, whereas secondary variables were predicted to be somewhat less responsive to this leadership approach.

Investigation hypotheses predicted that satisfaction and intrinsic motivation would be the primary variables in this study because effective leadership should quickly enhance both athletes' satisfaction levels and their intrinsic motivation. Conversely, coping skills, motivation orientation, and self-confidence were considered secondary variables because of the necessity of having extensive exposure to servant-leaders before changes on these measures should become evident. Developing athlete coping skills and changing motivational orientation is a long-term process, requiring the acquisition and automation of numerous new behaviors. Similarly, athletes must accumulate an extensive success history and internalize those successes before confidence is elevated, often a lengthy process. Thus, we expected stronger and more consistent relationships for primary compared with secondary variables in this study due to time and learning factors.

## RESULTS

### *Data Screening and Preparation*

The 251 cases were examined for multivariate outliers by calculating Mahalanobi's distances based on centroids of the twelve original subscale



scores (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Ten cases exceeded the critical chi-square value of  $.001X^2_{12} = 32.91$ . Follow-up analysis of these cases indicated these patterns of multivariate responses were atypical of the data set as a whole. Therefore, the cases were removed from subsequent analysis, resulting in a final sample size of 241, including 131 males and 110 females (M age = 19.73, SD = 1.36).

### *RSLP Factor Analysis*

Because of concerns about the stability of the factor structure of the RSLP, two separate factor analyses of the 241 athletes in this study were conducted. Since moderate correlations have been hypothesized to exist between the RSLP subscales, and because of the desire for orthogonal factors, both principal axis and maximum likelihood factor analyses were conducted on the RSLP. Instead of predetermining a particular number of factors, an eigen-value of 1.0 was established as the minimum for extraction. The rotated factor solutions from these analyses were then subjected to a search for simple structure using an iterative item elimination strategy aimed at retaining items with: (1) a loading above .40 on one factor, and (2) no cross-loadings above .30 on any other factor(s). However, one item with a cross-loading of -.37 was retained on the trust/inclusion subscale (i.e., "My head coach inspires team spirit by communicating enthusiasm and confidence") due to its theoretical relevance.

A highly consistent factor structure was evident across these techniques, with a three-factor solution emerging that accounted for 66.74% of the variance in the original items. Factor analysis of the 62-item RSLP revealed three major dimensions of servant-leadership (see Table 1). Factor 1 included 11 items that were a mix of the RSLP subscales of "participatory leadership" (e.g., "My head coach is willing to accept others' ideas, whenever they are better than his/her own"), "inspiration" (e.g., "My head coach is able to bring out the best in others"), and "courage" (e.g., "My head coach has the moral courage to do the right thing, even when it hurts him/her politically"). Thus, Factor 1 was labeled "trust/inclusion." The second



Table 1.  
Factor Loadings and Alpha Coefficients for the Revised Servant-Leadership Profile for Sport.

<i>Factor name</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Factor 1 loading</i>	<i>Factor 2 loading</i>	<i>Factor 3 loading</i>
<i>Trust/Inclusion</i>	<i>The Head Coach . . .</i>			
	1. inspires team spirit by communicating enthusiasm and confidence	.49	.02	-.37
	2. listens actively and receptively to others	.69	-.07	-.09
	3. practices plain talking (means what he says and says what he means)	.81	.04	-.03
	4. always keeps his promises and commitments to others	.91	-.03	.05
	5. grants all players a fair amount of responsibility	.89	.03	.11
	7. is willing to accept others' ideas whenever they are better than his own	.55	-.07	-.23
	8. promotes tolerance, kindness, and honesty	.61	-.09	-.22
	10. creates a climate of trust / openness to facilitate participation in decision making	.85	.03	.08
	12. wants to build trust through honesty and empathy	.69	-.07	-.15
22. devotes a lot of energy to promoting trust, mutual understanding, and team spirit	.64	.09	-.17	
32. has the courage to assume full responsibility for his mistakes	.47	-.20	-.27	
<i>Humility</i>	<i>The Head Coach . . .</i>			
	9. believes the leader should not be front and center	.14	.76	-.04
	14. is not primarily concerned with always having full authority	.14	.74	.18
	15. doesn't have to have his name attached to every initiative	-.09	.75	-.09
	18. doesn't look at his position as one of power	-.01	.71	.02
	56. allows his subordinates to have some control	-.04	.71	-.05
60. doesn't have to be seen as superior to subordinates in everything	-.01	.66	-.02	
<i>Service</i>	<i>The Head Coach . . .</i>			
	50. serves others and does not expect anything in return	-.02	-.06	-.66
	51. is willing to make personal sacrifices in serving others	.02	.03	-.83
	57. finds enjoyment in serving others in whatever role or capacity	.08	.06	-.81
	58. has a heart to serve others	.06	.02	-.84
59. takes great satisfaction in bringing out the best in others	.20	.04	-.70	



factor consisted of 6 of the original 8 items found on the RSLP “power and pride” subscale (e.g., “My head coach believes that to be a strong leader, he/she needs to have the power to do whatever he/she wants without being questioned”). The items on this subscale were subsequently reverse scored, thus prompting this factor to be termed “humility.” Finally, Factor 3 included 5 items that were related primarily to the “serving others” subscale (e.g., “My head coach finds enjoyment in serving others in whatever role or capacity”), and was subsequently labeled “service.” Alpha coefficients for

Table 2.  
*Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Coefficients for RSLP-S, ASQ, IMI, TEOSQ, SCI, RI and ACSI-28*

Variables	M	SD	Alpha coefficient
Dependent Variables			
Trust/Inclusion	5.57	1.0	.94
Humility	3.79	1.3	.85
Service	5.63	1.1	.90
Predictor Variables			
ASQ Indiv	4.79	1.2	.84
ASQ Team	4.95	1.3	.90
ASQ Treatment	5.52	1.3	.94
ASQ Training	5.36	1.4	.91
ASQ Dedication	5.89	0.8	.82
IMI Interest	5.77	0.6	.84
IMI Competency	5.39	0.9	.84
IMI Effort	6.23	0.9	.77
IMI Tension	3.77	1.0	.64
Respect	6.19	1.0	.86
TEOSQ Ego	3.52	1.0	.85
TEOSQ Task	2.34	1.1	.94
ACSI Coping	2.86	0.6	.72
ACSI Peaking	3.08	0.6	.66
ACSI Goals	2.71	0.7	.71
ACSI Focus	2.97	0.5	.65
ACSI Free/Worry	2.54	0.7	.73
ACSI SC	3.09	0.6	.72
ACSI Coachable	3.08	0.6	.66
SCI Physical	5.65	1.3	.94
SCI Cognitive	5.69	1.7	.93
SCI Resilience	5.49	1.2	.92



the 3 factors ranged from .85 to .94, with a mean of .90 (see Table 2). While our 3 factors are somewhat different from Wong's (2004) original 7-factor solution, they are similar to Page and Wong's (2000) first three categories of integrity, humility, and servanthood, which were viewed as the characteristics which best describe a servant-leader. Interestingly, our factor analysis findings seem congruent with those of Dennis and Winston (2003), who identified a 3-factor solution for the SLP (i.e., empowerment, service, and vision). This revised instrument was renamed the Revised Servant Leadership Profile for Sport (RSLP-S).

#### *Canonical Correlation Analysis*

In order to determine the multivariate relationship between dimensions of servant-leadership and a host of psychological variables, a canonical correlation analysis was performed between the set of variables comprised of the three dimensions of servant-leadership represented by the subscales of the RSLP-S and a second variable set consisting of the remaining variables, including the ASQ, IMI, TEOSQ, SCI, and the ACSI-28. Means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients for the revised subscales are displayed in Table 2.

With all three canonical function pairs included,  $X^2(60) = 89.95$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Because of interpretability issues, only the first two canonical correlations were retained in this study. The first canonical correlation,  $R = .832$ , indicated 69% of variance overlapped between the two variable sets. The second canonical correlation,  $R = .51$ , indicated 26% of variance overlapped between the variable sets. Results for each interpretable canonical function appear in Table 3.

Based on a .30 cut-off loading (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), the predictor variables of trust/inclusion and service (but not humility) in the first variable set were correlated with: (a) the ASQ variables of team satisfaction, personal treatment, training and instruction, and personal dedication; (b) interest and enjoyment, intrinsic motivation; (c) respect, and (d) the ACSI-28 variables of coping with adversity and coachability. Interpretation



Table 3.  
*Canonical Correlation Loadings for Servant-Leader Coach Behavior Versus Athlete Satisfaction, Intrinsic Motivation, Self-Confidence, Motivational Orientation and Athletic Coping Skills.*

Subscales	Function 1 canonical loading	Function 2 canonical loading
Predictor Variables		
RSLP-S Trust/Inclusion	.97	-.09
RSLP-S Humility	.07	-.92
RSLP-S Service	.74	.14
Dependent Variables		
ASQ Individual Performance	.25	-.06
ASQ Team Performance	.25	-.06
ASQ Personal Treatment	.80	-.09
ASQ Training	.72	-.004
ASQ Dedication	.38	.21
IMI Interest	.35	.29
IMI Competency	.29	.49
IMI Effort	.16	.57
IMI Tension	.03	.65
Respect	.80	.05
TEOSQ Ego	-.04	.21
TEOSQ Task	.25	-.30
ACSI Coping	.44	.05
ACSI Peaking	.08	-.06
ACSI Goals	.06	.36
ACSI Focus	.18	-.05
ACSI Freedom from Worry	.17	-.48
ACSI Self-Confidence	.21	.09
ACSI Coachability	.32	-.43
SCI Physical	.28	.11
SCI Cognitive	.11	.08
SCI Resilience	.27	.20
R	.83	.51
R <sup>2</sup>	.83	.51

of the first canonical variate suggests that athletes with coaches who are trusting, inclusive, and service-oriented: (a) were highly satisfied with their team's performance, their personal treatment, their training and instruction, and their personal dedication; (b) were interested in and enjoyed their sport



experience; (c) respected their coach; and (d) coped well with adversity and deemed themselves to be coachable.

For the second canonical function, the RSLP-S variable of humility correlated inversely with (a) the IMI variables of competency, effort, and pressure-tension and the ACSI-28 goal-setting variable and (b) correlated positively with ACSI-28 subscales of freedom from worry and coachability and the TEOSQ task orientation. Interpretation of the canonical loadings suggests that athletes who perceive their coach to be indifferent on trust/inclusion and service and strongly lacking in humility also reported (a) feeling intrinsically motivated to be competent and give good effort, (b) high levels of tension and pressure, (c) a weaker task orientation, (d) frequent goal-setting, and (e) a lot of worrying and lower coachability (see Table 3).

*Cluster Analysis to Assess Differential Coach Leadership Profiles and MANOVA Follow-up to Examine Differences Across ASQ, IMI, TEOSQ, ACSI-28, and SCI Subscales*

Cluster analysis was employed to assess the existence of differential servant-leader profiles by separating the overall sample into homogeneous subgroups that maximized between-group variance while minimizing within-group variance. Prior to clustering, all variables were standardized by converting them to z-scores to allow for easier interpretation of results. A nonhierarchical k-means clustering procedure (SPSS Quick Cluster, 2005) was then used, with squared Euclidean distance serving as a similarity measure (see Figure 1).

Cluster analysis results revealed four distinct coach groups based on their servant-leader profiles (see Figure 1). Cluster 1 (i.e., benevolent dictators;  $n = 60$ ) were perceived by their athletes as being .5-1.0 standard deviations above the mean on trust/inclusion and service, but almost 1.0 standard deviation below the mean on humility. Cluster 2 (i.e., servant-leaders;  $n = 44$ ) scored consistently high (.8 SDs above the mean or higher) on all three RSLP-S subscales. Cluster 3 (i.e., average leaders;  $n = 79$ ) scored slightly below the mean on all three subscales. Finally, Cluster 4 (i.e., weak lead-



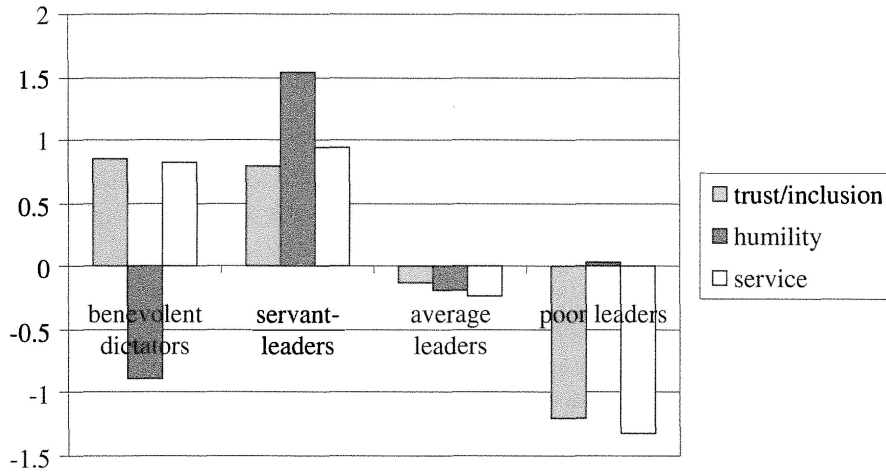


Figure 1. Bar graph demonstrating standardized scores on RSLP-S variables for the four Coach Leadership clusters.

ers;  $n = 55$ ) scored lowest of all clusters on trust/inclusion (1.0 SDs below the mean), even lower on service (1.5 SDs below the mean), and average on humility.

*ASQ results.* MANOVA analyses comparing coach leadership clusters across ASQ subscale scores demonstrated significant cluster differences, Wilks' lambda  $F(15, 616) = 11.95$ ;  $p < .0001$ . Follow-up ANOVA results revealed cluster differences on individual performance, team performance, personal treatment, training and instruction, and dedication. Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons revealed that athletes coached by weak leaders were significantly less satisfied with their individual performances than were benevolent dictator- and servant-leader-coached performers, but not than athletes led by average leaders. Post hoc comparisons for team performance, personal treatment, and training and instruction revealed that athletes coached by weak leaders were less satisfied in these three areas than were those in the other clusters, while the average leader-coached competitors were less satisfied than were performers led by benevolent dictators and servant-leaders. Athletes coached by poor leaders were also less satisfied



with their personal dedication than were all other clusters except average leaders, while average leader-coached performers were less satisfied than were athletes playing for benevolent dictators.

*IMI results.* MANOVA analyses comparing the four coach leadership clusters across IMI subscale scores also demonstrated significant cluster differences, Wilks' lambda  $F(12, 609) = 5.69$ ;  $p < .0001$ . Follow-up ANOVA results revealed significant cluster differences on interest/enjoyment, competence, effort, and tension/pressure. Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons for interest/enjoyment revealed that athletes led by weak leaders were lower on interest/enjoyment than were the other clusters, while the athletes coached by average leaders were also significantly lower on interest/enjoyment than were performers led by benevolent dictators. Athletes coached by weak leaders also felt less competent than did servant-leader- and benevolent-dictator-coached competitors, whereas players with benevolent dictators as coaches also felt more competent than did athletes whose coaches were average and servant-leaders. Athletes led by benevolent dictators were more intrinsically motivated to put forth high effort than were all other clusters. Finally, performers coached by servant-leaders experienced less pressure and tension than did their counterparts who played for benevolent dictators.

*ACSI-28 results.* MANOVA analyses comparing the four coach leadership clusters across ACSI-28 subscale scores also demonstrated significant cluster differences, Wilks' lambda  $F(21, 638) = 3.20$ ;  $p < .0001$ . Follow-up univariate analysis of variance results revealed cluster differences on coping with adversity, freedom from worry, self-confidence, and coachability. Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons revealed that athletes coached by servant-leaders and benevolent dictators were better at coping with adversity than were athletes coached by average or weak leaders. Similarly, servant-leaders produced athletes who worried less than did athletes coached by average leaders. Servant-leader-coached athletes also scored significantly higher on self-confidence than did weak leader-coached competitors. Finally, players led by servant-leaders were significantly more



coachable than were all other clusters, while athletes coached by benevolent dictators also were more coachable than were weak leader-coached performers.

*TEOSQ results.* MANOVA analyses comparing the four coach leadership clusters across TEOSQ subscale scores demonstrated significant cluster differences, Wilks' lambda  $F(6, 466) = 2.38$ ;  $p < .0001$ . Follow-up ANOVA results revealed cluster differences on the task orientation subscale. Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons revealed that athletes who played for servant-leaders were more task oriented than were weak leader-coached performers.

*SCI results.* MANOVA analyses comparing the four coach leadership clusters across SCI subscale scores also demonstrated significant cluster differences, Wilks' lambda  $F(9, 562) = 2.46$ ;  $p < .009$ . Follow-up univariate analysis of variance results revealed cluster differences on physical self-confidence and resilience confidence. Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons confirmed that servant-leaders and benevolent dictators produced athletes with higher physical and resilience confidence scores than did poor leaders.

*RI results.* Finally, analysis of variance results conducted on the RI comparing the four coach leadership clusters also revealed significant cluster differences,  $F(3, 232) = 61.16$ ;  $p < .0001$ . Tukey's HSD post hoc comparison demonstrated that players coached by weak leaders had lower respect scores than did all other clusters, and average leaders also had athletes with lower respect scores than did servant-leaders or benevolent dictators (see Table 4).



Table 4.  
*Descriptive Results for Four Cluster Groups on the RSLP, ASQ, IMI, TEOSQ, SCI and ACSI*

Subscales	Benevolent dictator (n=60)		Servant-leaders (n=44)		Average leaders (n=79)		Weak leaders (n=55)		Significance values	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
RSLP										
Trust/Inclusion	6.46	0.5	6.38	0.5	5.44	0.5	4.11	0.6	248.18	.0001
Humility	2.66	0.9	5.79	0.7	3.55	0.7	3.84	0.8	140.81	.0001
Service	6.50	0.5	6.61	0.5	5.36	0.5	4.22	0.6	233.71	.0001
ASQ										
Indiv Performance	5.01	1.1	5.20	1.2	4.69	1.1	4.32	1.2	5.49	.001
Team Performance	5.48	1.0	5.60	1.3	4.84	1.2	4.03	1.1	19.12	.0001
Treatment	6.24	1.0	6.32	0.7	5.42	0.9	4.20	1.4	45.24	.0001
Training	6.21	1.0	6.13	0.8	5.16	1.1	4.13	1.4	39.64	.0001
Dedication	6.30	0.5	6.0	0.7	5.87	0.7	5.48	1.1	11.00	.0001
TEOSQ										
Ego	2.47	1.0	2.35	0.8	2.56	1.0	2.47	1.0	0.47	.701
Task	3.48	1.0	3.85	0.7	3.48	0.8	3.25	0.7	4.36	.005
IMI										
Interest	5.10	0.6	4.94	0.4	4.83	0.5	4.55	0.6	5.98	.001
Competence	5.22	0.9	4.82	0.8	4.67	0.8	4.37	0.7	11.29	.0001
Effort	4.71	0.6	4.27	0.4	4.41	0.5	4.27	0.5	8.74	.0001
Tension	4.10	0.9	3.57	0.7	3.81	0.7	3.82	0.8	3.92	.009
Respect	6.75	0.5	6.70	0.3	6.23	0.8	5.06	1.0	61.16	.0001
ACSI-28										
Coping w/Adversity	3.06	0.5	3.06	0.5	2.79	0.6	2.58	0.5	9.67	.0001
Peaking	3.03	0.7	2.99	0.6	3.05	0.7	2.91	0.7	0.52	.667
Goal Setting	2.83	0.7	2.63	0.6	2.77	0.7	2.55	0.6	1.92	.127
Focus	3.03	0.6	3.09	0.4	2.93	0.6	2.86	0.5	1.83	.143
Freedom Worry	2.59	0.8	2.81	0.6	2.38	0.7	2.51	0.6	3.87	.010
Self-Confidence	3.16	0.6	3.24	0.5	3.06	0.5	2.92	0.6	2.78	.042
Coachability	3.13	0.7	3.41	0.6	3.05	0.6	2.78	0.5	8.66	.0001
SCI										
SCI Physical	5.86	1.6	6.07	0.9	5.54	1.2	5.18	1.1	5.14	.002
SCI Cognitive	5.77	1.6	5.99	0.9	5.49	1.2	5.60	2.8	0.89	.445
SCI Resilience	5.73	1.5	5.88	1.0	5.35	1.2	5.14	0.9	4.27	.006

## DISCUSSION

This investigation was one of the first to examine the servant-leader model in a sport setting. The model suggests that truly effective and legitimate leaders place service to others ahead of personal power and control.



The question investigated in this study was how servant-leader characteristics influenced athletes' psychological profiles, particularly in terms of satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, motivational orientation, coping skills, and self-confidence.

### *Athlete Satisfaction*

The servant-leader model, with its emphasis on serving others as opposed to personal power and control motives, is hypothesized to produce a more satisfied subordinate. That hypothesis was strongly confirmed in this study. Cluster analysis results revealed that athletes coached by servant-leaders demonstrated high levels of satisfaction. Athletes who perceived their coach to be a servant-leader were more satisfied with their individual performance and were more personally dedicated than were performers coached by weak leaders. Servant-leaders also produced athletes who were more satisfied with team performance, personal treatment, and training and instruction than did both the average and weak leaders. The essence of the servant-leader model explored in this investigation—trust/inclusion, humility, and service—seems to provide a solid platform for naturally enhancing the satisfaction of collegiate athletes.

The emergence of the “benevolent dictator” as one of the coach leader clusters in this study was somewhat surprising. Benevolent dictators were perceived by their athletes as being well above the mean on trust/inclusion and service, but well below the mean on humility. This profile describes a leader who emphasizes building trusting and inclusive relationships and is service-oriented, yet is also low on humility and high on power and control. Thus, the label “benevolent dictator” seems appropriate for this profile.

The benevolent dictator cluster also seems congruent with Stogdill's (1974) Likert System of Management, in which leadership styles are hypothesized to fall along a continuum ranging from exploitive autocracy (i.e., “You will do it”) on the far left of the continuum to participative (i.e., “What do you think we should do?”) on the far right. Stogdill suggests that “benevolent autocrats” fall to the right of exploitive autocrats on the Likert



continuum and can be characterized by the message, “Do it, please.” This style is also defined by a paternalistic attitude that is directive, but in which the motivation is in the best interest of others, rather than self (Stogdill, 1974).

Benevolent dictators also were successful at enhancing the satisfaction of their athletes. For example, performers coached by weak leaders were significantly less satisfied with their individual performance than were players led by benevolent dictators. Athletes coached by poor and average leaders were less satisfied with team performance, personal treatment, and training and instruction than were their counterparts coached by benevolent dictators, whereas results also demonstrated that athletes led by poor and average leaders were less satisfied with their personal dedication than were performers directed by benevolent dictators.

While “dictators” embody only two of the three positive dimensions of the RSLP-S, the lack of humility does not appear to significantly dampen the positive regard that athletes have for them. One explanation may be that athletes in this investigation may have perceived items related to humility as a sign of weakness or lack of confidence, which may have contributed to players’ high satisfaction with benevolent dictators, even though they were somewhat controlling.

Canonical correlation results also confirmed the strong association between the RSLP-S dimensions that best described benevolent dictators and athlete satisfaction. On the first canonical variate set, the predictor variables of trust/inclusion and service (but not humility) were strongly related to four of the five ASQ subscales, and the ASQ personal treatment subscale demonstrated the most powerful loading among dependent variables. It also appears that benevolent dictators’ emphasis on a trusting and inclusive environment and on care and concern in serving their athletes contributed to players’ beliefs that the coaches cared about them personally. In addition, athletes who were coached by leaders who emphasized trust and service felt they were getting better training and instruction than did athletes who had coaches who were less trusting and less service-oriented. This is



an interesting finding because many of the “non-servant-leader” coaches in this study were highly trained in instructing and conditioning their athletes.

### *Intrinsic Motivation*

Because of its emphasis on serving others and nurturing a trusting and inclusive team climate, the servant-leader model is hypothesized to produce a more intrinsically motivated subordinate. These data strongly confirmed this prediction. Cluster analysis results showed that benevolent dictators produced athletes with more interest in and enjoyment of their sport than did average and weak coaches. Servant-leaders also produced athletes with higher levels of interest and enjoyment than did weak leaders. Additionally, benevolent dictators and servant-leaders scored higher on perceived competence than did weak coaches. Interestingly, athletes coached by benevolent dictators had greater perceived competence than did servant-leader-led performers. Similarly, athletes who played for benevolent dictators also scored higher on effort than did all other clusters, but they also felt more tension and pressure than did servant-leaders.

These results seem congruent with Bass’ (1985, 2000) work that emphasizes the need for modern-day leaders to go beyond merely satisfying the basic needs of their subordinates by inspiring and empowering them to a higher level of motivation. These findings also parallel Black and Weiss’ (1992) results indicating that coaches who were rated as engaging in more frequent bouts of encouragement plus feedback following poor performance were associated with swimmers who believed they were more successful and competent, preferred optimally challenging activities, put forth greater effort, and greatly enjoyed their sport experiences (Black & Weiss, 1992).

### *Task Orientation*

These results also supported the hypothesis that servant-leaders, with their emphasis on process goals related to trust, humility, and service, would produce athletes with a stronger task orientation than would non-



servant-leader coaches. Our findings revealed that athletes coached by servant-leaders scored higher on task orientation than did the athletes led by poor leaders, although the magnitude of difference was not as great as with other dependent variables. Interestingly, the benevolent dictator-coached athletes fared about as well on developing task orientation as did average leaders. One possible explanation for these results is the relatively long time that may be required to change motivational orientation compared with that required for enhancing satisfaction or intrinsic motivation. Developing a task orientation is likely the result of a long process of exposing athletes to process and performance goals and nurturing a task-oriented climate. Participants in this study varied in the length of time they had played for their coach, but we would predict that athletes in their freshman or sophomore years are likely to show weaker task orientations than juniors and seniors, assuming both groups have servant-leader coaches.

#### *Athletic Coping Skills and Self-Confidence*

These results confirmed that servant-leader coaches produced athletes who demonstrated stronger athletic coping skills and more self-confidence on some variables, but the magnitude and consistency of these findings are tempered by the lengthy interval required to change those variables. Skill development is a lengthy process, and self-confidence requires the development of an extensive success history necessary to change perceptions of competence. Thus, secondary variables (i.e., task orientation, athletic coping skills, and self-confidence) should take longer to change than primary variables, even when athletes are playing for servant-leaders, and they are likely to demonstrate fewer and weaker relationships with leadership. Thus, more satisfied and intrinsically motivated athletes are more likely to develop a task orientation and demonstrate a confident coping profile if they play long enough with the appropriate type of leader.

Even though athletic coping skills are a secondary construct, these data confirmed that they were impacted by servant-leader behavior. Specifically, athletes coached by servant-leaders and benevolent dictators were





better at coping with adversity than were athletes led by average or weak leaders. Players coached by servant-leaders were also significantly less worried than were average-leader-led performers. These results also revealed that athletes coached by servant-leaders scored significantly higher on coachability than did all other clusters, while benevolent-dictator-coached performers were also more coachable than were athletes playing for weak leaders.

These athletic coping skills results suggest that servant-leaders and benevolent dictators do impact athletes' mental skills profiles. Our primary tool for assessing athletic coping, the ACSI-28, measures the frequency with which athletes engage in these coping behaviors. Thus, athletes coached by servant-leaders reported being able to cope better with adversity, being less worried, and being more coachable than did athletes led by weak coaches. Servant-leader-led athletes do not appear to set goals more frequently, although the quality of goals may be different, especially when task orientation scores are taken into consideration. They also do not appear to peak under pressure more frequently or to concentrate better than their more poorly-coached peers. Because secondary variables dealt with quantity rather than quality, these less consistent findings do not detract a great deal from our general findings.

It is interesting to note that the servant-leaders and benevolent dictators were both better at producing athletes who are confident physically and in their resilience than were weak leaders. Because servant-leaders and benevolent dictators trust in their program and their athletes, it appears that a two-way street is created in which their athletes display higher self-confidence scores than do performers led by poor coaches. The development of trust as a team-wide attribute appears to enhance athletes' belief in both their coach and themselves, which in turn enhances their ability to cope with adversity and remain free from worry.

### *Respect*

Finally, the relationship between respect and leadership needs further



examination. While not a primary hypothesis, it seems that respect is strongly related to both athlete satisfaction and intrinsic motivation. Cluster results show respect to discriminate strongly between the servant-leaders/benevolent dictators and the average/poor coaching clusters. Athletes coached by servant-leaders scored much higher on respect than did other coaching clusters. Canonical correlation results also strongly suggest that athletes greatly respect coaches who are committed to the paradoxical approach of earning athletes' trust, being inclusive with all players, and serving and helping others.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND APPLICATION

This study simply represents a starting point in exploring this new leadership paradigm. Future research needs to more precisely explore the role that servant-leadership plays in athlete development. For example, only three dimensions of servant-leadership were explored in this investigation; future researchers may want to explore additional servant-leader dimensions. Thus, new instruments are needed to validly measure servant-leadership and capture all the characteristics of this leadership style and its impact on athletic development and performance.

Furthermore, this study did not directly assess athletic performance. Future researchers may want to examine the hypothesis that servant-leader coaches produce athletes who perform more effectively than do non-servant-leaders. Finally, the notion that athletes prefer servant-leader coaches was not directly examined in this study. Future studies need to test whether athletes prefer this "new school" approach over older models of coaching leadership.

#### SUMMARY

While popular leadership writers (e.g., Blanchard, 2002; Covey, 2002; Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1998) have championed servant-leadership as a valid, contemporary leadership theory, these results highlight the value this



model may have in sport. Although much work remains to be done before sport leadership is fully understood, the servant-leader model shows promise as a conceptual framework upon which to base future sport research. These results also confirm that the servant-leader model may be a useful athletic development tool, as documented by the strong relationships between servant-leadership and a variety of psychological variables such as athlete satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, task orientation, athletic coping, self-confidence, and respect. Finally, these results strongly suggest that the servant-leader model deserves more attention from sport researchers and supports our initial observation that “the time has arrived” for this model to be employed more extensively in sport.

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