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# Preferences of Collegiate Volleyball Players Regarding Leadership Style

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## Keywords

Leadership, female athletes, volleyball, coaching style

## ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this study was to determine the coaching style preferences of Division II and III female collegiate volleyball athletes. Five hundred and nine female student-athletes from 41 colleges/universities expressed their preferences using the Revised Leadership Scale for Sport (RLSS) (Zhang et al., 1997). The preference version of the RLSS included six behavior dimensions: autocratic, democratic, positive feedback, situational consideration, social support, and training and instruction behaviors. Descriptive statistics were used to determine training and instruction behaviors and situational consideration were the most preferred coaching styles for all athletes. Autocratic was the least preferred coaching style. Independent t tests and ANOVA were used to address whether gender of the coach, athlete's gender preference of the coach, division of the university, and/or athlete's year in school affected the coaching style preference. The results showed that across all the independent variables investigated, athletes most preferred training and instruction and situational consideration coaching styles and least preferred the autocratic style. The only difference for any demographic was that athletes with female coaches preferred social support and positive feedback more than athletes with male coaches.

## Palavras-Chave

Liderança, atletas femininas, voleibol, estilo do treinador

## Preferências das jogadoras de voleibol em relação ao estilo de liderança

### RESUMO:

O objetivo deste estudo foi determinar as preferências de estilo de treino das atletas de voleibol da Divisão II e III. Quinhentos e nove estudantes-atletas de 41 faculdades/universidades expressaram as suas preferências usando a Revised Leadership Scale for Sport (RLSS) (Zhang et al., 1997). A versão de preferência da RLSS incluiu seis dimensões comportamentais: feedback autocrático, democrático, positivo, consideração situacional, apoio social e comportamentos de treino e instrução. Estatísticas descritivas foram utilizadas para determinar comportamentos de treino e instrução e consideração situacional foram os estilos de treinamento mais preferidos para todos os atletas. Autocrático era o estilo de treino menos preferido. Testes independentes e ANOVA foram utilizados para abordar se o sexo do treinador, a preferência de gênero do treinador, a divisão da universidade e/ou o ano do atleta na escola afetaram a preferência do estilo de treinador. Os resultados mostraram que em todas as variáveis independentes investigadas, as atletas preferiram mais estilos de treino e instrução e consideração situacional e preferiram menos o estilo autocrático. A única diferença para qualquer demografia foi que atletas com treinadoras preferiam apoio social e feedback positivo mais do que atletas com treinadores masculinos.

**Preferences of Female Collegiate Volleyball Players Regarding Leadership Style**

Coaches influence athletes in numerous ways, including an athlete’s technical, cognitive, strategic, and psychosocial developments (Smith & Smoll, 2017). A team’s win-loss success is greater when the coach displays a coaching style that aligns with the athletes’ preferred coaching style (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). While not all players have the same preferences, considering the athlete’s preferred coaching style is imperative in order to enhance the coach’s ability to increase the productiveness and success of his or her team (Horn et al., 2011).

Because a coach plays such an important role and can greatly influence an athlete (Ehsani et al., 2012),

having information about the coaching style preference of athletes (which helps coaches adapt and adjust their coaching to individual players and teams) is critical. The Revised Leadership Scale for Sports (RLSS) (Jambor & Zhang, 1997) can provide information to coaches about their athletes’ preferred coaching styles. The athletes’ preferences version of the survey was used and consists of sixty questions. Likert scale items ranged from Never=1 to Always=5. The RLSS was developed to measure six dimensions of leader behavior specific to the area of sports. The dimensions within the scale address aspects related to coaching styles (see table 1 below).

Table 1.

*Explanation of the dimensions of the Revised Leadership Scale for Sports (RLSS) (Jambor & Zhang, 1997).*

<b><i>Autocratic Behavior</i></b>	Autocratic behavior includes making independent decisions and using commands and punishments.
<b><i>Democratic Behavior</i></b>	Democratic behavior involves encouraging the involvement of the athletes, admitting mistakes, and confronting problems.
<b><i>Positive Feedback Behavior</i></b>	Positive feedback behavior encourages an athlete after he or she makes a mistake and corrects the behavior rather than blaming the athlete.
<b><i>Situational Consideration Behavior</i></b>	Situational consideration behavior sets up individual goals and clarifies ways to reach goals. It differentiates coaching methods at different maturity stages and skill levels.
<b><i>Social Support Behavior</i></b>	Social support behavior is defined as behavior that helps athletes with personal problems and makes sports part of enjoyment of an athlete’s life.
<b><i>Training and Instruction Behavior</i></b>	Training and instruction behavior is defined as planning training practices and evaluating the performance of the athletes, in addition to having knowledge and being responsible.

Athletes may respond differently to coaches who incorporate these dimensions to different degrees, therefore Chelladurai (1978) argues that it is important for coaches to have some idea about the coaching style preferences of their athletes in order to gain maximum effort and performance. Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) explain the successful coach/athlete relationship as “the situation in which coaches’ and athletes’ emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are mutually and causally inter-connected” (p. 245). This view of the coach/athlete relationship is grounded in a theory called the Multidimensional Model of Leadership. The Multidimensional Model of Leadership defines effective leadership as the unity between a coach’s actual coaching style, the preference of the athletes in regard to coaching style, and the responses determined by the situation (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995). The coach/athlete relationship can influence the ability, motivation, performance, and self-confidence of the athlete. According to Riemer and Chelladurai (1995), the athletes’ perceptions of coaches and the coach/athlete relationship tends to be more positive when the coach exhibits a similar attitude style to the athlete. Since

the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of both the athlete and coach are part of the coach/athlete relationship, and because effective leadership is defined as the cohesion of the coaching style and athlete’s preference of coaching style, the coaching style preferences of the athlete are relevant to coaches seeking to realize a player and team’s maximum potential.

Some researchers believe that coaching style preference may be linked to several factors, such as the sport in which the athlete participates (Hensen, 2010) and gender of the athlete (Beam, et al., 2004). Windsor (2005) found collegiate female soccer players preferred a more democratic style, where the coach encourages athlete involvement, provides positive feedback for behavior, and encourages and makes corrections for athletes after mistakes. Lam’s (2007) research found female collegiate basketball players preferred a higher degree of positive feedback and situational consideration, meaning that the coach differentiates behavior based on maturity stages and skill level.

A meta-analysis of coach-leadership behavior and athletic satisfaction found that female teams show an

increase in players' satisfaction when coaches display a high frequency of positive behavior (Hyun-Duck & Cruz, 2016). Surujlal and Dhurup (2012) report that females prefer training and instruction, democratic, and positive feedback coaching styles. Gillett and Rosnet (2008) found that females participate in athletics for more intrinsic reasons like the enjoyment they get from playing, and use the coping strategies of venting emotions, positive reinterpretation, dissociation, and emotional social support more often than their male counterparts (Hammermeister & Burton, 2004). Coaches need to take these differences into consideration when instructing players because each situation may require a different coaching style. When the coach's leadership style matches the athlete's preferred leadership style, it results in team cohesiveness, athlete satisfaction, and a higher rating of coach effectiveness by athletes (Kao, 2004; Laughlin, 1994; Smith, 2003). Thus, it is important for a coach to consider the sport and gender of the athlete when considering his or her coaching style. Coaching Style Preferences Based on Competition Level is another factor to take into consideration. The NCAA consists of three levels of college athletics: Division I, II, and III. The divisions differ in sports sponsorship, minimum contests and participation rates, financial aid, and scheduling. Athletes participating in Division I sports have been known to have different coaching style preferences than athletes who participate in Division II sports (Hensen, 2010). For example, Division I soccer players preferred training and instruction and autocratic behavior more than Division II and III soccer players. Division III players, the least competitive of all the divisions, preferred the democratic coaching leadership style more than Division I and II athletes (Griffin, 2009). Athletes in more competitive divisions tend to prefer a more authoritarian coach.

### Statement of the Problem

There is a lack of primary research that investigates the preferences of collegiate female athletes regarding coaching style. Given that the current literature suggests that female participation in collegiate sports is at an all-time high (Acosta & Carpenter, 2016), it is important to assess the coaching style preferences of collegiate female volleyball athletes.

### Purpose of the Study

This study uncovered the female collegiate volleyball players' preferences of coaching style. It also investigated other variables such as gender of current coach, preferences of coach's gender, division, and year in school to determine if any affect the coaching style preference. Volleyball in particular is the focus of this study because of the large sample size the researcher is able to secure. Previous studies have researched several sports (Beam, 2003; Henson, 2012) or both genders in one specific sport (Hahm,

2008; Windsor, 2005), but in this study the sport of volleyball will be held as a constant to eliminate it as a variable. At the time of the research, this study has the largest sample size of studies that investigated athletes' coaching style preferences.

### Method

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate female collegiate volleyball players' preferences of coaching style using a survey research design. The procedures used comply with international standards for experimentation on humans. To conduct the research, a cross-sectional survey design was implemented. Female volleyball athletes from 60 teams, including 30 Division II teams and 30 Division III teams, were surveyed to find their preference in coaching style. The athletes were 18-21 years of age and ranged from freshmen to seniors. During the season, the surveys were mailed to each head coach, who then dispersed them to each athlete on the team at the beginning or end of practice. Coaches were instructed to leave the room, but before doing so were asked to assign one player the duty of collecting the surveys and sealing them in the provided, addressed envelope. Once the surveys were collected, the student was directed to put them in the outgoing mail. The surveys were mailed to each team at the same time and given two weeks to complete and return. The surveys were mailed to each head coach, who then dispersed them to each athlete on the team who is over the age of eighteen. The first section of the survey consisted of demographic questions (the school's division, the athlete's academic year, etc.). The next section of the survey contained 60 questions from the athlete preferences section of the RLSS. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics about the coaching preference, and reliability coefficients for each subscale and correlation coefficient between the subscale scores were computed. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and independent samples t tests examined relationships between gender of the coach, age of the athlete, coaching style, and NCAA division. Responses to qualitative items were coded and summarized.

### Responses

Surveys were sent out to 974 volleyball players from 60 colleges and universities. The estimate of 974 athletes came from the online roster from each institution, creating a potential for error if the rosters were incorrect. Two respondents were not 18 years of age and five respondents had incomplete data and were excluded from analyses. Responses were considered incomplete if more than two questions were not answered. A total of 509 female athletes returned completed surveys, denoting a 52% response rate for individual players. Surveys from 41 colleges and universities were returned, denoting a 68% return rate for teams. The final set of participants

represented women’s collegiate volleyball players from ten athletic conferences in the Midwest and Eastern United States. The high percentage of responses resulted in the largest number of participants in a study related to coaching style preference at the time of the research. Several demographic variables were collected from the respondents and recorded in Table 2.

Table 2.  
*Responses by Demographics*

Demographic	Number of Responses	Percentage
Division II	298	58.5
Division III	211	41.5
Scholarship	246	48.3
Non-Scholarship	263	51.7
Public College	203	39.9
Private College	306	60.1
Red-Shirt Athlete	7	1.4
Freshman	191	37.8
Sophomore	130	25.7
Junior	98	19.4
Senior	79	15.6

**Research Question One**

Research question one uncovered coaching style preferences by having the collegiate female volleyball players fill out the RLSS. The responses of the student athletes indicated how often they would prefer their coaches demonstrate the specific behavior

associated with each coaching style. Preferences for each behavior were derived by summing the item-level scores associated with each subscale and then dividing by the number of questions in that particular subscale. Responses were made on a five-point Likert scale that consists of: 5 = always (100% of the time), 4 = often (75% of the time), 3= occasionally (50% of the time), 2= seldom (25% of the time), and 1= never (0% of the time). Table 3 displays the subscale means and Cronbach’s alpha values for each coaching style. These results were consistent with reliability values reported by Zhang and colleagues (1997), who acknowledge limitations with lower reliability associated with the items representing the autocratic coaching style. Overall reliability across all items on the scale was 0.895.

Ratings of five suggest that the respondents preferred to see the behavior 100% of the time, ratings of four 75% of the time, and ratings of three or less, 50% of the time or less. On average, respondents preferred to see the coaching behaviors associated with the coaching styles of training and instruction, and situational consideration most often, and also preferred the behaviors associated with positive feedback and social support to occur often. Respondents also preferred behaviors associated with the democratic coaching style occur more often than those associated with an autocratic style.

Table 3.  
*Mean Subscale Scores, Reliability, and Correlations between Subscale Scores Measuring to Preferred Coaching Style*

	Training & Instruction	Situational Consideration	Positive Feedback	Social Support	Democratic	Autocratic
<b>Mean</b>	4.39	4.29	3.80	3.61	3.40	2.87
<b>Cronbach</b>	.744	.732	.875	.721	.811	.589
<b>Training and Instruction</b>	1					
<b>Situational Consideration</b>	.624**	1				
<b>Positive Feedback</b>	.466**	.457**	1			
<b>Social Support</b>	.331**	.388**	.507**	1		
<b>Democratic</b>	.360**	.510**	.450**	.488*	1	
<b>Autocratic</b>	.027	-.001	.038	.115*	.136**	1

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at  $\alpha = 0.01$ ; \*Correlation is significant at  $\alpha=0.05$ .

The frequencies and percentages of each response the athletes gave for each item on the RLSS, along with the mean and standard deviations of the responses, were analyzed. Most of the questions within each leadership behavior have similar means. However, the data suggest that there are some questionnaire items that may be questionable for determining preferences for that specific leadership style. The training and instruction coaching style was the most preferred style for this group of respondents. The

mean range for the questions in this coaching style concludes that the volleyball players in this study often or always prefer coaches to correct mistakes as they occur, use a variety of drills for practice, and make complex things easier to understand and learn. In addition, the means indicated that athletes also prefer coaches to coach to the level of the athletes on the team, set goals compatible with the ability of the athletes, and use alternative methods when the efforts of the athletes are not helping reach individual or

team goals. Fifty eight percent of the items in the social support, positive feedback, and democratic coaching behaviors had means that meant the athlete occasionally preferred that specific coaching behavior. The social support coaching style is one in which a coach encourages close and informal relationships with players and prioritizes the well-being of the athletes. A coach who demonstrates the positive feedback coaching style congratulates athletes on good plays and encourages them when a mistake is made. The democratic coaching style involves such behavior as asking for the opinions of the athletes, encourages athletes to give input on how to run practices, and allows athletes to set their own goals. The autocratic coaching style was the least preferred coaching style by the athletes in this study, which indicated that they rarely preferred a coach who disregarded the fears and dissatisfactions of athletes, refused to compromise on a point, and failed to explain his/her actions.

**Research Question Two**

In order to answer research question two, “Is coaching style preference of female college volleyball players related to gender of coach, athlete’s preference of the coach’s gender, division of the school, year of the athlete, and whether or not the athlete is on scholarship” were examined by separate t-tests or analyses of variance. The subscale means were compared in order to examine significant differences based on participant and university demographics.

**Gender of coach.** Of the 509 responses received, 374 female volleyball players currently had female head

coaches (73.6%) and 134 (26.4%) had male head coaches. Significant differences in the coaching style preferences of the student athletes currently having male and female head coaches were determined by independent Welch t’ tests. Because multiple tests were run using the same instrument, an alpha equal to .01 was utilized for all statistical tests. Table 4 shows the order of preferred coaching styles from most to least, for the subgroups of volleyball players who currently have male and female college coaches, respectively. The average subscale scores indicate that female volleyball players with male or female head collegiate both want a coach who exhibits a relatively high level of training and instruction behaviors, and the difference based on gender of the current coach was not statistically significant. Autocratic was the least preferred coaching style of players despite the coach’s gender being male or female and again, the degree of preference for autocratic coaching style was not different based on whether athletes currently had a male or female head coach. Results indicated that there were statistically significant differences on two subscales between respondents who currently have male and currently have female coaches. Specifically, those with female coaches preferred the positive feedback and social support coaching behaviors more than those with male coaches. Generally, the gender of the current coach did not seem to be a significant factor of coaching style preference, because for the most part, athletes with coaches of both genders prefer the same coaching style behaviors.

Table 4.  
*Coaching Style Preferences Based on Gender of Current Coach*

Behavioral dimension	Gender of current coach	n	M	SD	t	df	P																																																								
Training and instruction	Male	123	4.36	.416	-.998	225.961	.319																																																								
	Female	353	4.40	.444				Situational Consideration	Male	132	4.23	.515	-1.811	196.276	.072	Female	364	4.32	.416	Social support	Male	133	3.48	.554	-3.199	239.598	.002	Female	366	3.66	.569	Positive feedback	Male	131	3.65	.674	-2.951	221.455	.004	Female	371	3.85	.651	Democratic	Male	131	3.39	.626	-.157	218.266	.879	Female	364	3.40	.589	Autocratic	Male	121	2.82	.544	-.977	199.015	.330
Situational Consideration	Male	132	4.23	.515	-1.811	196.276	.072																																																								
	Female	364	4.32	.416				Social support	Male	133	3.48	.554	-3.199	239.598	.002	Female	366	3.66	.569	Positive feedback	Male	131	3.65	.674	-2.951	221.455	.004	Female	371	3.85	.651	Democratic	Male	131	3.39	.626	-.157	218.266	.879	Female	364	3.40	.589	Autocratic	Male	121	2.82	.544	-.977	199.015	.330	Female	348	2.88	.513								
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**Gender preference for coach of the athlete.** Participants were asked which gender of coach they preferred. The options included male, female, and no preference. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that regardless of the athlete’s preference of her coach’s gender, she wants a coach who exhibits a relatively high level of training and instruction

behaviors. There is no statistically significant difference between those who preferred male coaches, female coaches, or had no preference. Autocratic was the least preferred coaching style of players despite the player’s preference being male, female, or no preference. Results indicated that there is not enough evidence to conclude that there is a

difference in coaching style preferences between athletes who prefer male coaches, female coaches, or have no coaching preference. ANOVAs were calculated to determine whether there were significant differences in each average subscale rating, between volleyball players who preferred a male coach, female coach, or had no preference for their coach's gender. There were no significant

differences between the three groups for any of the subscales. Table 5 shows the order of preferred coaching styles from most to least, along with the F test statistic and p-value from the one-way ANOVAs. Overall, there were no differences in coaching preferences as measured by the five subscales on the RLSS based on athlete preference of the gender of the coach.

Table 5.  
*Coaching Style Preferences Based on Gender Preference*

Behavioral dimension	Group	n	M	SD	F	P
Teaching & instruction	Male	134	4.35	.461	.939	.392
	Female	56	4.42	.414		
	No Preference	286	4.41	.429		
Situational	Male	138	4.28	.441	1.296	.275
	Female	59	4.38	.328		
	No Preference	299	4.28	.466		
Positive	Male	141	3.86	.663	1.758	.173
	Female	61	3.88	.504		
	No Preference	300	3.75	.688		
Social	Male	138	3.60	.583	3.537	.030
	Female	60	3.79	.575		
	No Preference	302	3.61	.570		
Democratic	Male	139	3.41	.622	.214	.807

**Division.** Coaching style preferences of the student athletes who compete in Division II or Division III were determined by independent t tests. Table 6 shows the order of preferred coaching styles from most to least. The mean subscale scores indicate that volleyball players competing in Division II or Division III athletics both want a coach who exhibits a relatively high level of training and instruction behaviors, and the results are not statistically significantly different based on division of play of the athlete. Autocratic was the least preferred coaching style of players despite the athlete competing in

Division II or Division III, and again, differences between the athletes playing at different divisions were not statistically significant. Results of t tests for each subscale are presented in Table 6. These results indicated that there is not enough evidence to conclude that there is a difference in coaching style preferences of any subscale between athletes who compete in Division II or III. Coaching style preferences are similar for female volleyball players who play Division II and Division III, based on the sample in the current study.

Table 6.  
*Coaching Style Preferences Based on Division*

Behavioral dimension	Group	n	M	SD	T	df	P
Teaching and instruction	Division II	275	4.40	.432	.532	425.806	.595
	Division III	202	4.38	.445	.532		
Situational consideration	Division II	293	4.30	.469	.236	469.093	.814
	Division III	204	4.29	.412	.236		
Social Support	Division II	293	3.78	.670	.020	413.719	.984
	Division III	210	3.83	.651	.020		
Positive feedback	Division II	296	3.61	.538	-.902	457.704	.367
	Division III	210	3.61	.613	-.902		
Democratic	Division II	290	3.42	.574	1.209	415.909	.227
	Division III	206	3.36	.629	1.209		
Autocratic	Division II	271	2.85	.510	-.560	412.177	.576
	Division III	198	2.88	.537	-.560		

Data in Table 6 shows no statistically significant difference in coaching style preference for collegiate volleyball players competing at the Division II and

Division III levels. Number 19 on the demographic open-ended questions asked respondents the difference was between Division II and Division III

volleyball and their responses varied. There was a total of 510 total responses and 210 (41%) felt that athletic scholarships were the biggest difference between the two divisions. In addition, 128 athletes (25%) replied that Division II has better competition and 22 athletes (4%) thought Division II has more skilled players. Twenty volleyball players (4%) thought that Division III puts academics before sports. While the athletes felt there was a difference between Division II and III schools as far as athletics is concerned, the differences in division did not relate to coaching style preferences.

**Year in school.** One-way ANOVAs were performed to compare differences between the coaching style preferences of athletes based on their year in school. The analysis revealed that much like the previous

variables, freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors all favored a coach who uses the training and instruction style of coaching, and the difference between groups was not significant. Autocratic was the least preferred coaching style of players despite the year in school, and again the difference based on year in school was not statistically significant. Results indicated that there is not enough evidence to conclude that there is a difference in coaching style preferences between freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors for any of the subscales, which means the athletes preferred the same type of coaching style regardless of their year in school. Table 7 shows the order of preferred coaching styles from most to least, including results of the ANOVAs for each subscale.

Table 7.  
*Coaching Style Preferences Based on Year in School*

Behavioral dimension	Group	n	M	SD	F	P
Training & instruction	Freshmen	176	4.40	.441	.095	.963
	Sophomore	125	4.40	.432		
	Junior	94	4.37	.452		
	Senior	71	4.40	.409		
Situational Consideration	Freshmen	187	4.31	.444	.413	.275
	Sophomore	125	4.29	.426		
	Junior	97	4.26	.472		
	Senior	77	4.33	.411		
Positive feedback	Freshmen	189	3.86	.633	.951	.415
	Sophomore	127	3.76	.622		
	Junior	97	3.80	.716		
	Senior	79	3.73	.722		

Demographic open-ended questions asked participants if they felt their preference for the way the coach leads the team has changed since freshman year or will change by senior year. A total of 500 responses were collected, but 72 were discarded as the responses did not answer the question and still referred to gender, perhaps because the previous questions related to gender. Of the 428 responses that did answer the question, (50%) student-athletes reported no, their preference for the way their coach lead the team would not change. Twenty-six participants (6%) responded that they expect to gain knowledge throughout their collegiate career and anticipate their coaches to change their coaching style to change with their abilities. Seventeen athletes (4%) answered that their coach's style should change to fit the personalities of the team each year. These responses support the data in Table 7 because half of the total number of responses in the demographic questions do not think their preference for coaching style will change based on academic year. They also provide additional insight into factors that could change athletes' coaching style preferences.

### Discussion

The means of each subscale revealed the preferred coaching style for the 509 female collegiate volleyball athletes to be training and instruction, which had the highest mean. This suggests athletes appreciate when a coach corrects mistakes and makes difficult tasks easier through instruction. The second most preferred coaching style was situational consideration. This result suggests athletes prefer coaches who adapt to the situation they are in and coach to the level of the athletes. It is also important to point at that the least preferred coaching style was autocratic, indicating that athletes do not prefer coaches who plan independently of the athletes and have little concern for their athletes' fears and opinions. This is consistent with previous research. Huyan-Duck and Cruz (2016), Surujlal and Dhurup (2012), and Hensen (2010) also reported that female athletes prefer training and instruction. This is likely because athletes are used to technology and receiving knowledge when they want it, so preferring a coaching style with a knowledgeable coach is not a surprise. Players also like to know why they are



getting playing time, or in some cases why they are not getting playing time. Coaches evaluate and give feedback to athletes when they implement the training and instruction coaching style.

The results of research question two also were not surprising. The variables involving the gender of the coach, division of the school, and the year of the athlete in school all produced the same outcomes. This is likely because it is the coaching style, not a coach's gender or division he or she coaches, that the athlete likes or dislikes. In addition, if an athlete's personality is one that appreciates a coach's knowledge and ability to plan and evaluate performance, that athlete's personality is unlikely to change over a four-year period.

Researchers have suggested that when the coach's leadership style matches the athlete's preferred leadership style, team cohesiveness and athlete satisfaction both increases, as do ratings of coach effectiveness by athletes (Kao, 2004; Laughlin, 1994; Smith, 2003). Results of the current study suggest that female collegiate volleyball players prefer coaches that provide training, instruction, and feedback; and coaches that give players input.

While there is a great deal of research regarding the differences of male and female athletes, there are very few that focus on strictly females (Hyun-Duck & Cruz, 2016). A majority of the literature on this topic combines male and female athletes or only focuses on males. However, female athletics continues to rise in popularity and deserves to be researched. This study aimed to help coaches of both genders to get a better understanding of what his or her athletes prefer as far as coaching style is concerned. Once a coach knows the preferred coaching style of players on his or her team, the coach-athlete relationship can strengthen, and the coach can adjust accordingly for maximum results. In addition, this study can potentially help athletic directors when hiring volleyball coaches in the future to know what type of coaching style the majority of female Division II and III volleyball athletes prefer.

Researchers have suggested that when the coach's leadership style matches the athlete's preferred leadership style, team cohesiveness and athlete satisfaction both increases, as do ratings of coach effectiveness by athletes (Kao, 2004; Smith, 2003). Results of the current study suggest that female collegiate volleyball players prefer coaches that provide training, instruction, and feedback; and coaches that give players input. These findings indicate that coaches should emphasize these particular leadership styles and continuously educate themselves to stay up to speed with the latest skills and techniques in the sport.

### Limitations

The study implemented a cross-sectional survey research design, and as such, results must be interpreted as preferences of athletes at a particular

time point. Additionally, the results from the study may not generalize to player preferences from other regions of the country. Lastly, a self-constructed instrument was used to measure gender preferences of the players, and therefore information about the reliability and validity of that aspect of the instrument was limited. However, an attempt to develop items that would not be misinterpreted was made. As with all studies that utilize self-report data, the quality of the results depends on the honesty of the respondents.

### Conclusions

Results of the open-ended questions from the demographic portion of the survey followed the analysis of each research question. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the first research question, which asked which coaching style preference, as identified by the RLSS, female college volleyball players preferred. Independent *t* tests and ANOVA were used to answer the second research question which addressed whether gender of the coach, athlete's gender preference of the coach, division, athlete's year in school, and/or an athlete's scholarship status affected the coaching style preference. The results showed that athletes most preferred training and instruction and situational consideration coaching styles and had least preference for the autocratic style. This was the case across all the independent variables investigated, with only athletes lead by female coaches preferring social support and positive feedback more than the athletes with male coaches.

While research question one revealed the coaching style preferences for the volleyball players involved in this study, the coaching styles that the athletes prefer in this study do not reflect the coaching style preferences for every athlete or every team. They represent the preferences across a sample of Division II and Division III female volleyball athletes in the eastern and midwestern parts of the United States. Teams change each year with new athletes and different personalities; however, the preferences of the athletes in this study may serve as a foundation for coaches to better understand the coaching styles presented in the study and how they may or may not apply to their athletes, teams, and the sport of volleyball. A coach can use the information provided in research question one as a starting point in determining the coaching style preferences the athletes on his team have. In addition, learning more about these coaching styles may help a coach determine which style he or she uses and may serve as motivation to try different styles, in order to increase the motivation and performance of the athletes.

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