

COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AMONG ATHLETE AND COACHES

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Abstract

This study examines how managers and coaches manage communication with athletes in team and individual sports. Communication is a process that requires a wide range of skills. We develop verbal and non-verbal communication in various ways. Communication is a critical element in the relationship between coaches and athletes in team and individual sports, and also between managers, referees, scorers, and other officials, yet there is little extant research in sport management that involves direct measures of Development Communication Management (DCM). In this study the researcher is looking for the process of communication which makes message interpretation more reliable.

The researcher surveyed over 200 athletes and 14 head coaches in the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) to find some foundations for DCM. To aid the development of communication management with team sports, individual sports, coaches, referees, scorers, and others to enhance the management performance of communication. We looked at ways in this study to increase and make progress in the DCM. The researcher found ways to improve the management of communication before, during and after the sport events. DCM needs to be organized inside the team, so the coaches and managers can communicate effectively with athletes, colleagues, referees, scorers and other officials. Data was collected using two questionnaires designed by the researcher – one for coaches and one for athletes -- that employed a 5.0 Likert scale. The researcher used MANOVA models to test for significant differences between coaches and athletes, between genders, team, and individual sports. The significance level was set at $p^{.05}$.

This study found a significant difference between male and female athletes in terms of their use of special gestures or signs during games or competition. On average males were neutral to slightly in agreement regarding the use of special gestures or signs while females were in slight disagreement. With the results related to communication styles, on average female athletes indicated that visual communication is their fastest mode of communication. On the other hand, they indicate that they were in slight disagreement regarding the use of special gestures or signs. This apparent inconsistency was a potential opportunity for DCM. A natural recommendation is to increase the use of special signs and gestures for female athletes. The results from the present study indicate that there are marked differences in communication practices of coaches and athletes and between team and individual sports. The results suggest that to aid in the development of communication management within team sports, coaches and athletes should determine what the fastest mode of communication is. Rather than watching for a visual sign, an athlete may instead be listening for a verbal cue if their coach finds verbal communication to be faster than visual. In this way, the coaches and athletes can progress in DCM. Knowing the best time to communicate will lead to DCM as a coach or manager uses DCM whenever it is necessary and beneficial for the athletes to encourage and motivate the athlete to do their best during their event.

There is a significant difference between team and individual athletes in terms of who they communicate with most frequently (p-value < .001). Athletes of team sports agreed that they communicate most with their coaches while athletes of individual sports agreed that they communicate most with their teammates (Turman, Paul; D 2008). However, there are no significant differences between male and female athletes in terms of who they communicate with the most.

The researcher found that knowing the best communication development, style and timing between managers and coaches with athletes and officials in the WIAC can serve as a foundation for DCM principles and recommendations and can help promote the NCAA Division 3 conference.

Keywords:Coaches, communication, management

Introduction

Communication is a process that requires a vast repertoire of skills. We develop verbal and non- verbal communications in various ways. It is a critical intermediary of performance between coaches and athletes in team and individual sports, yet there is little extant research in sports that involves direct measures of communication. In this study the researchers looking for the model of communication which perhaps makes message interpretation more reliable.

This study investigated player-coach communication – specifically we were interested in the impact that coaches’ use of Development Communications Management (DCM) before, during, or after the game. We wanted to find out the most effective way that coaches communicate with players, and if coaches and players prefer the same kind of communication.

Literature of review

The processes involved in communications are listening, observing, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating. Therefore, that means through communication, cooperation may occur (Wark, M., 1997). This study explored a new theory of the Development of Communication Management (DCM) In order to know what style of communication is the most frequently used by coaches (Dale, G. A., Wrisberg, C.A. 1996). Winning teams communicate twice as many messages as losing teams (Smith, F., Ethigton, and Li, 2005). In this study researchers investigated the athletes and coaches styles of communication. Specifically, we were interested in the impact of coaches’ uses of DCM which occur before, during, and/or after the game. We were also interested in determining the best style for coaches to use to communicate with their athletes, so the athletes would understand their coaches and increase performance.

The participants were college undergraduate students who had competed in the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC). The students completed a questionnaire related to development of communication, communication styles, and communication timing. The researchers measured the differences between the team and individual athletes and coaches. Results of the questionnaire were used to describe the best communication styles used between athletes and coaches. While DCM has allowed better understanding of actual and preferred coaching behaviors across a number of sports settings, the process nature of communication between between coaches and athletes has remained largely overlooked.

How coaches communicate with their players is similar to how players communicate with their coaches from the perspective of training and motivating their teams to high performance. Turner and Schrodt (2004) stated that “instilling and appreciation for organized

team activities, sportsmanship and a sense of satisfaction in their athletes through communication are goals equally worthy of coaching (p. 131). They investigate the relationship between coaches' leadership behaviors and athletes' affective learning. (Bain & Wendt, 1983; Chelladwai, Kuga & O'Bryant, 1999; Turman, 2001, 2003). By studying how coaches communicate with their players the potential exists to identify how coaches can adapt their communication in order to be more effective, given that how coaches communicate has a direct influence on how players perform and behave (Horn, 2002).

Smith, Fry, Ethrington and Li (2005) found that when coaches provide positive feedback to their players, the players are more willing to work harder and sacrifice for the team, while negative feedback was related to less teamwork amongst the players on the team. Positive and supportive feedback from coaches also leads to greater player self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and team cohesion (Horn, 1985, 2002). These findings provide support to the claim by Bain and Wendt (1983) and Haselwood et al. (2005) that communication skills are the most important skills for coaches to possess.

The purpose of this study is to indicate development of communication, the communication style, and communication timing, of coaches and athletes in both team and individual sports to guide the principles for DCM that can lead to success. DCM needs to be organized inside the team, so the coaches can communicate effectively with their athletes. Several previous studies related to communication in sports focused on attitudes and perceptions between coaches and athletes for team sports. On one hand, for individual events, the previous research focused on the athletes as individuals and overlooked the importance of teamwork and intra-team communication. However, in this current study the results show that in an individual sport, swimmers rely on their teammates more often than on their coaches.

The coaches' styles of communication were similar to those of the athletes. However, coaches and athletes differed in their perception of training and motivation. It has been reported by Mensch, J., Crews, C., Mitchell, M. (2005) and Schubiger, (1993) that college and high school athletes perceived their coaches to use significantly more social support and training. (Hastie, 1993) found no effects of athletes' satisfaction with communication, and Schliesman, (1987) found athletes' perceptions of democratic and social support behaviors to contribute to significant variance, while Chelladureir, (1984) identified perceptions of training and instruction and positive feedback to be significant predictors of satisfaction among athletes. Gardner, L., Light B., and Bostrom (1996) and Westre and Weiss (1991) similarly concluded that teams with high level of cohesion or consistency were likely to perceive their coaches as using relatively high levels of training and instruction. No significant differences in athletes' perceptions were found when comparing male and female athletes (Eichas, 1993) male and female coaches (Tastie, 1993), type of sport (Lpnmorot, 2002) or nationality. To explore coaches self-perceptions of their styles of communication (Bennett & Manne Val, 1988); (Dwyer, Fisher, 1988, 1990; Lam 1995) male coaches saw themselves using more positive feedback while coaching male teams than when coaching female teams (Mondello ,J. 2001).

While communication has allowed better understanding of actual and preferred coaching behaviors across team and individual sports settings, the process nature of communication between coaches and athletes has remained largely overlooked Hastie, (1993).

Methods and procedures

To assist in the collection of data, we had the approval from the Internal Review Board at the University of La Crosse, on December 22nd, 2008. The coaches filled out a questionnaire related to the coach's development of communication, the communication style, and communication timing. Each coach conducted an initial meeting with their athletes

to describe the purpose and rationale for this study. Those athletes who agreed to participate were asked to return a parental consent statement signed by a legal guardian. Athletes completed the questionnaire one time during their season. Questionnaires were enclosed in envelopes, which were sealed to ensure confidentiality for the athletes. The athletes were then asked to return the questionnaire to their coaches.

A 28 item questionnaire was completed by 14 coaches. (See Appendix A) The coaches included nine males and five females; eight coaches of team sports and six coaches of individual sports. A similar 27-item questionnaire was completed by 208 student athletes. (See Appendix B) This sample included 110 male and 98 female athletes; 106 team athletes and 102 individual athletes. All questionnaire responses were given on a 5.0 Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The male team athletes were from football teams, the female athletes were from volleyball teams, and the individual athletes were swimmers. The items on the questionnaire given to the athletes and the coaches fall into three categories: development of communication, communication style, and communication timing. Statistical Method and analyze the data, Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) models were used to test for differences between types of sport (team and individual), genders, and roles (coach and athlete). A separate MANOVA model was applied to each subset of questionnaire items – those related to the development of communication, communication styles, and communication timing. The MANOVA models included the questionnaire responses as dependent variables. The questionnaire items related to communication styles and communication timing were common to both coach and athlete questionnaires, so the MANOVA models applied to these items included gender, type of sport, and role (coach or athlete) as independent variables. The questionnaire items related to the development of communication were different for coaches and athletes, so separate MANOVA models were applied to the coach and athlete responses with gender and type of sport treated as independent variables. The models tested for main effects and for two-way interactions.

Results

Development of Communication

There is a significant difference between team and individual athletes in terms of who they communicate with most frequently (p -value $< .001$). Athletes of team sports agreed that they communicate most with their coaches while athletes of individual sports agreed that they communicate most with their teammates Turman, Paul; D (2008). However, there are no significant differences between male and female athletes in terms of who they communicate with the most.

Athletes of both types of sports, team and individual, and both genders agreed on average that communication enhances performance (p -value = .879).

There is a significant difference between male and female athletes in terms of their communication with the scoring table or referee. On average, females tend to agree that they communicate most with the scoring table or referee while males tend to disagree slightly on average (p -value $< .001$).

Both males and females disagree on average that communication affects winning or losing, however females tend to disagree significantly more strongly (p -value = .011). There is a significant difference between male and female athletes in their use of special signs and gestures. Males agree slightly on average that they use special signs while females disagree slightly on average (p -value $< .001$).

There are no significant differences in average responses between male and female coaches on questionnaire responses that deal with development of communication (p -values $> .073$). There is a significant difference between coaches of individual and team sports in

tracking of communication and in beliefs that communication enhances performance. Coaches of individual sports agree that they track communication during competition while coaches of team sports tend to slightly disagree (p-value = .011). Coaches of team sports agree that communication enhances performance and coaches of individual sports are more neutral (p-value = .006). All coaches agree on average that their communication at away games is effective, that their communication is different depending on whether they are calm or nervous, that they use special signs, and that they would rather communicate with one athlete during competition. All coaches are neutral or in slight agreement that they would rather communicate with the whole team during competition.

Figure 3 Average level of agreement for athletes to DCM questionnaire items related to the development of communication.

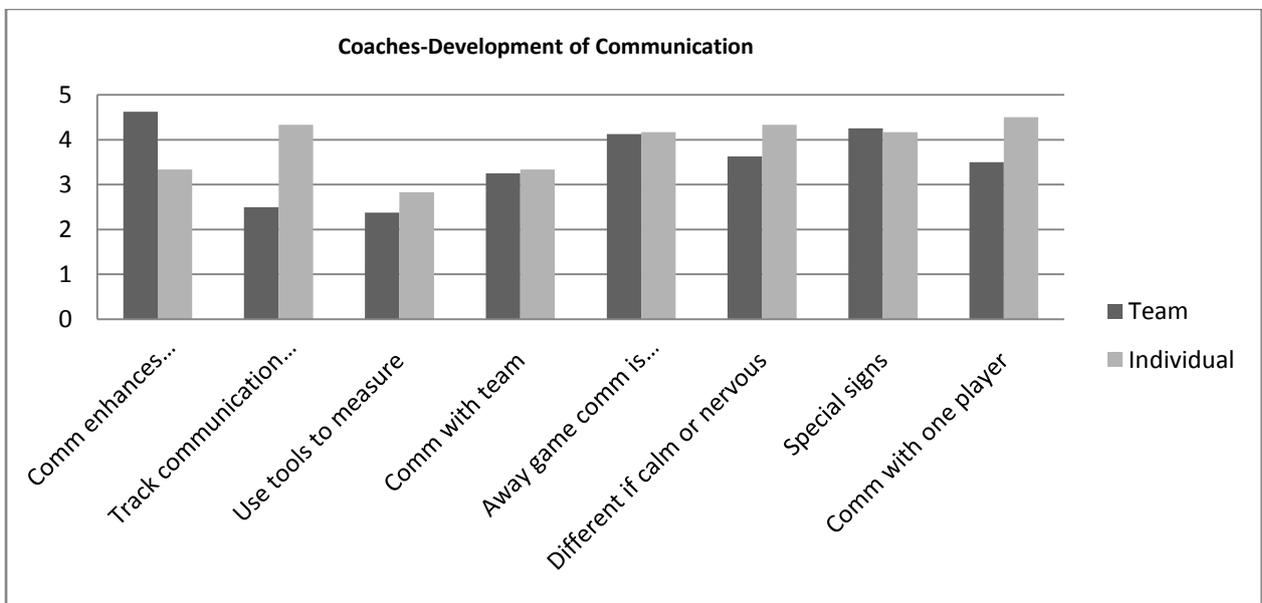
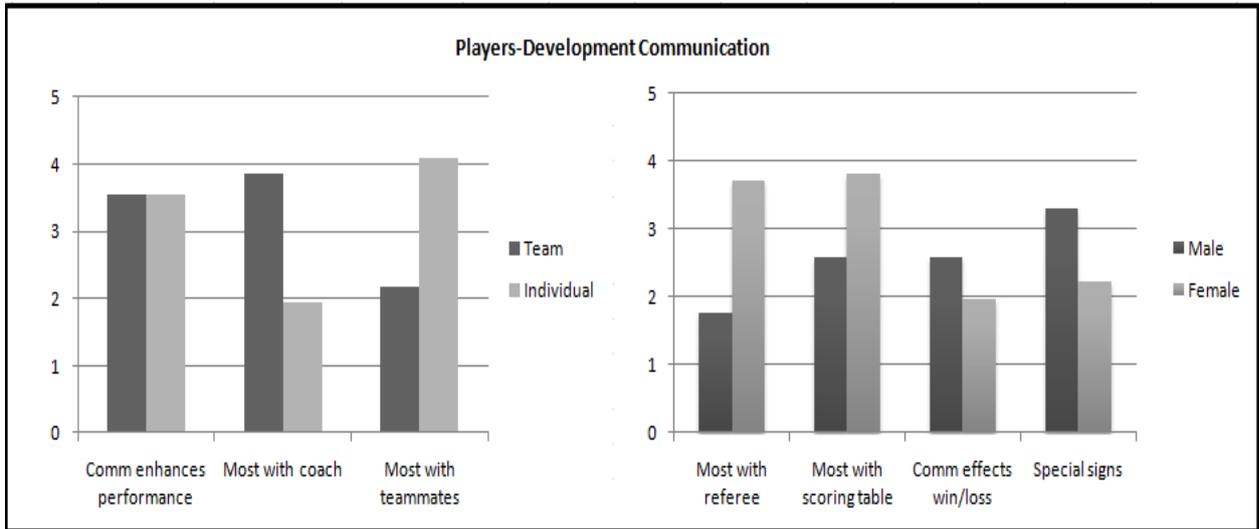


Figure 3 Average level of agreement for coaches to DCM questionnaire items related to the development of communication.

Communication Styles

Regarding communication styles, there are some significant differences between males and females and between coaches and athletes. However, no significant differences were detected between team and individual sports.

Athletes and coaches on average agreed that their communication styles were visual and verbal. There is a significant interaction between gender and role (coach or athlete) in terms of nonverbal communication. On average, male coaches disagreed that their communication style is non-verbal, while female coaches and athletes of both genders were more neutral regarding non-verbal communication ($p = .026$). All groups agreed that they used more than one communication style during competition ($p\text{-value} = .163$).

Regarding the fastest mode of communication during competition, coaches showed a preference for verbal communication, followed by visual or non-verbal. Male athletes showed equal preference for visual and verbal communication as being the fastest mode over non-verbal communication. Female athletes preferred visual communication as fastest, followed by verbal and non-verbal communication. This difference in preferences for males and females is statistically significant ($p\text{-value} < .001$).

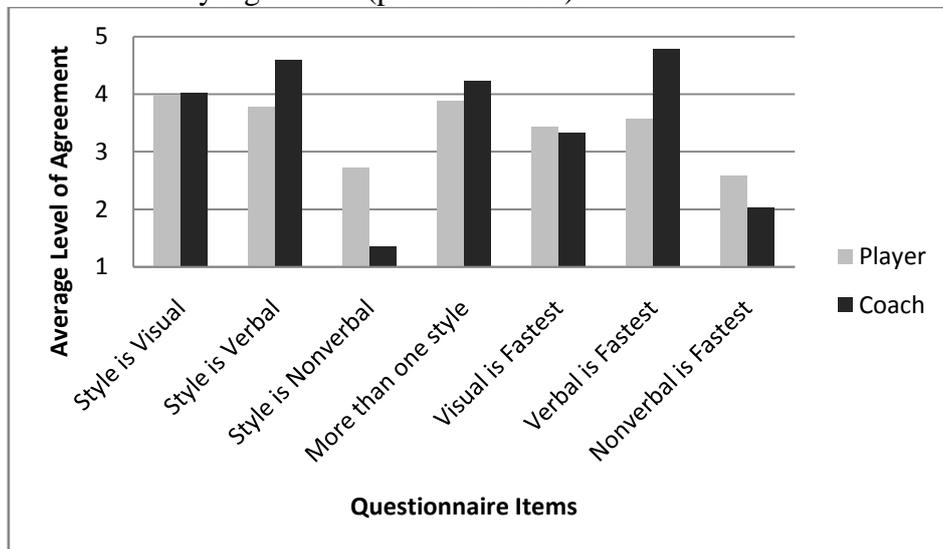


Figure 4 Average level of agreement for male coaches and athletes to DCM questionnaire items related to communication styles.

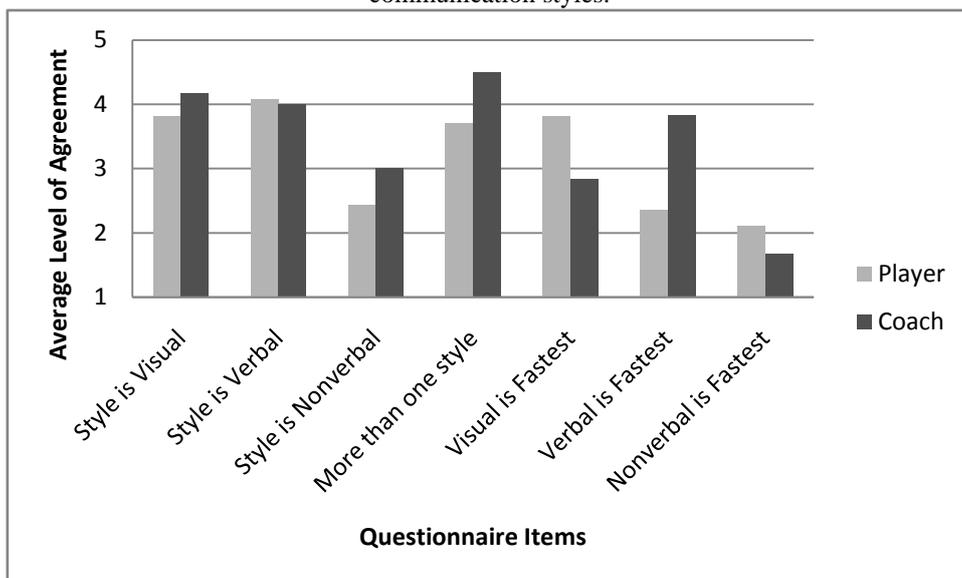


Figure 5 Average level of agreement for female coaches and athletes to DCM questionnaire items related to communication styles.

Communication Timing

On average coaches agreed significantly greater than athletes regarding the focus of their communication both before (p-value < .001) and after (p-value = .023) competition. On average, athletes and coaches of both team and individual sports were in slight agreement that they increased communication when winning. However, there is a significant difference between coaches of team and individual sports in terms of their use of communication when losing. When losing, coaches of team sports on average agreed slightly that they increase communication while coaches of individual sports disagreed slightly (p-value = .002). There is a significant interaction between team role and type of sport with regard to coaches and athletes contacting one another after competition. Athletes of both team and individual sports agreed on average that they contacted their coach after competition. The coaches of team sports agreed that they contacted their athletes after competition while coaches of individual sports disagreed (p-value = 0.043).

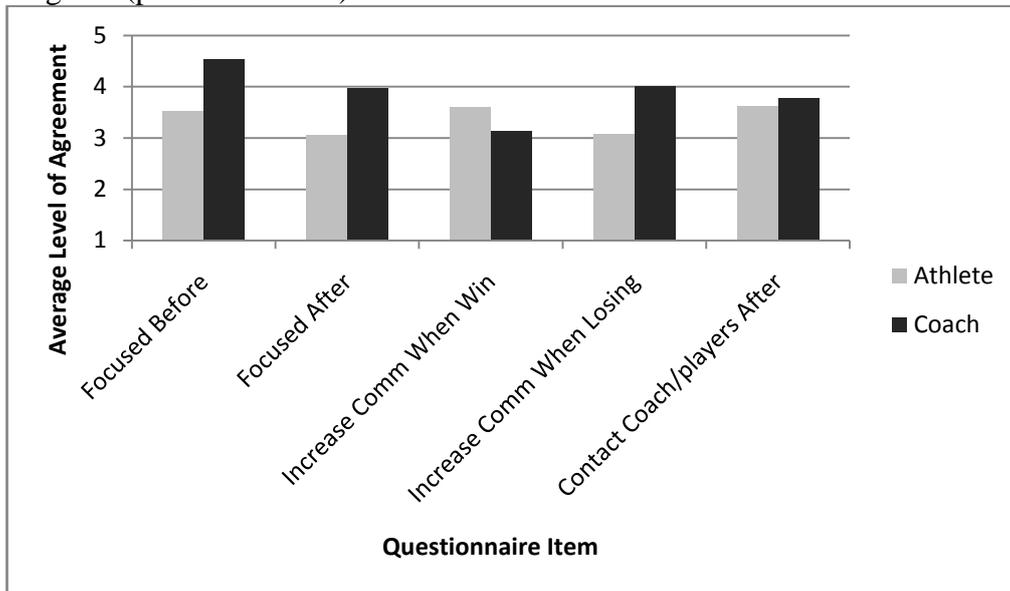


Figure 6 Average level of agreement for team coaches and athletes to DCM questionnaire items related to communication timing.

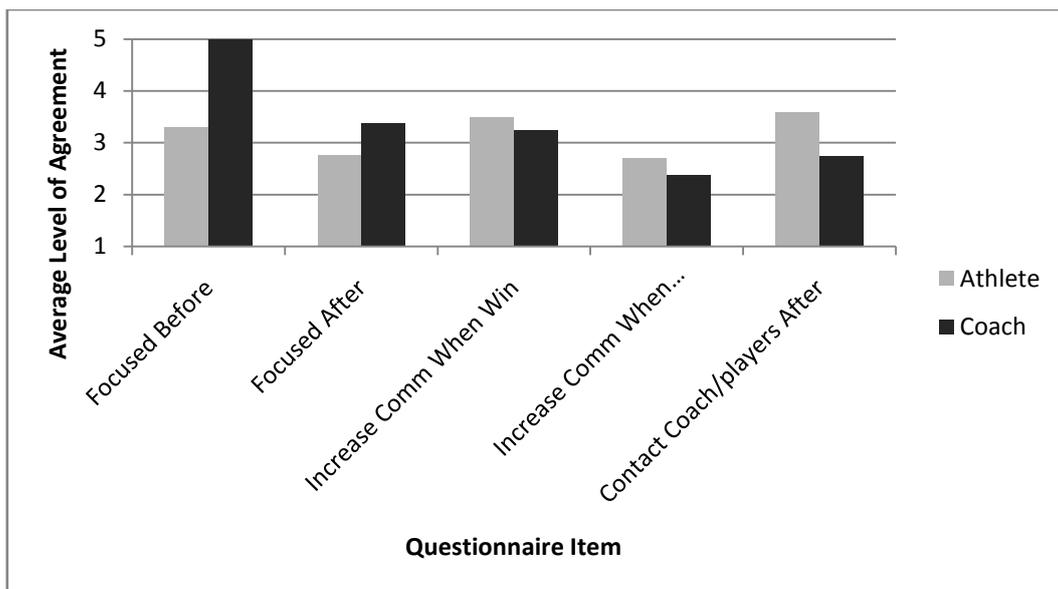


Figure 7 Average level of agreement for individual coaches and athletes to DCM questionnaire items related to communication timing.

Discussion

Development of communication

The study found that there was a significant difference between team and individual athletes in terms of who they communicate with most often during competitions. Team athletes agreed that they communicated most with their coaches rather than teammates, while individual athletes agreed that they communicated most with their teammates rather than their coaches (Donohue, Brad et al., 2007), (Weiss, Maureen R.; Fretwell, Susan D. 2005). Within team sports, the team had a plan set by the coach going into the game. It was not in the best interest of the team for athletes to discuss or change the plan set by the coach in the midst of competition. This structure promotes communication occurring primarily with coaches rather than between athletes in team sports. However, individual athletes had minimal contact with their coaches during competition. Communication between coaches and athletes in individual sports usually occurs well before competition rather than immediately before the competition. Thus individual athletes tended to rely on their teammates for encouragement and cheering as they went into competition. This present study found a significant difference between male and female athletes in terms of their use of special gestures or signs during games (or competition). On average males were neutral to slightly agreeing regarding the use of special gestures or signs while females were in slight disagreement.

Within the results related to communication styles, on average female athletes indicated that visual communication is their fastest mode of communication. On the other hand, they indicated that they were in slight disagreement regarding the use of special gestures or signs. This apparent inconsistency was a potential opportunity for DCM. A natural recommendation is to increase the use of special signs and gestures for female athletes.

Communication styles

According to the statistical results, of the present study there are some significant differences in communication styles between males and females and between coaches and athletes. However, no significant differences were detected between team and individual sports.

This study indicated that athletes and coaches on average agreed that their communication styles were visual and verbal. Male coaches indicated that they did not use non-verbal communication, while all other groups were neutral regarding the use of non-verbal communication. (Canal-Bruland, Rouwen; Strauss, Bernd 2007), (Haselwood, Joyner, Burke, Geyerman, Czech, Munkasy, Zwald, 2005), (Antonini Philippe, Roberta; Seiler, Roland 2006) The statistical analysis of the questionnaire indicates that all groups agreed that they used more than one communication style. Regarding the fastest mode of communication, coaches showed a preference for verbal communication. Male athletes showed equal preference for visual and verbal communication as fastest, while female athletes preferred visual communication over verbal as being the fastest. Chand, V. (2005)

Communication Timing

Coaches are more focused in their communication before and after competition than athletes Carter, Adam D.; Bloom, Gordon A. (2009) When winning, all coaches are in slight agreement that they increase communication. When losing, coaches of team sports tended to increase communication. In individual sports (such as swimming), there is not an opportunity to increase communication when losing (physically coaches and athletes are not near each other, swimming events short in duration so hard to have a “come-back”). (Antonini Philippe 2006).

The questionnaire suggested that athletes of both team and individual sports agreed that on average they contacted their coaches after competition. The coaches of team sports agreed that they contacted their athletes after competition while coaches of individual sports disagreed that they contacted their athletes after competition.

Practical Implications

Development of communication, Communication styles, Communication Timing

The results from this study indicate that there are marked differences in the communication practices of coaches and athletes and between team and individual sports. The results suggest that to aid in the development of communication within team sports, coaches and athletes should determine what the fastest mode of communication is. Rather than watching for a visual sign, an athlete may instead be listening for a verbal cue if their coach finds verbal communication to be faster than visual. In this way, the coaches and athletes can progress in DCM. What is best time to communicate? Knowing the best time to communicate will lead to DCM to communicate as a coach whenever it is necessary and beneficial for the athletes to encourage and motivate the athletes to do their best during their event.

Limitations and Future Research

While this research did provide many useful insights, it is not without limitations. The study included coaches and athletes from a relatively small geographic region, Division III athletes from the state of Wisconsin. Results of this study are limited to this population. Additionally, the team athletes in the study were volleyball (female) and football (male) teams and the individual athletes were all swimmers. Further research is necessary to determine if our results generalize to other types of sports such as soccer, golf or diving. The number of coaches who completed surveys for the study was somewhat small (n = 14). More insight could be gained with a larger sample of coaches in a future study.

Despite these limitations, the study is strong in that the coaches and athletes participating in the study from the WIAC may benefit from the recommendations for DCM. The current study provided many insights regarding communication between coaches and athletes that serve as a foundation for DCM principles and recommendations.

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Appendix A

Communication Management Questionnaire

Dear Coaches,

The purpose of this study is to indicate and observe the communication relationship between the players and coaches (P&C), coaches and referees (C&R), coaches and electronic recording (C&ER) to better understand the principals for Development Communication Management (DCM) for team and individual sports that could lead to enhance performance.

Please supply the demographic information requested below. In addition, please respond to the following statements as an individual by circling the appropriate number indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree using the scale below (1 through 5). There is no right or wrong answers. We are simply interested in your personal opinions.

Thank you.

Demographic Information:

1- Your gender (circle): Male Female

2- Number of years of experience:

Key				
1 Strongly disagree	2 Somewhat disagree	3 No opinion	4 Somewhat agree	5 Strongly agree
1. My communication style is visual.				1 2 3 4 5
2. My communication style is verbal.				1 2 3 4 5
3. My communication style is none-verbal.				1 2 3 4 5
4. I track communication during an event.				1 2 3 4 5
5. I used tools or equipment to measure communication.				1 2 3 4 5
6. My communication with the team for away games is effective.				1 2 3 4 5
7. When I communicate with the team right before a competition I am nervous.				1 2 3 4 5
8. I appear calm during communication right before a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
9. My communication right before a competition is focused.				1 2 3 4 5
10. When I communicate with the team right after a competition I am nervous.				1 2 3 4 5
11. I appear calm during communication right after the competition				1 2 3 4 5
12. My communication right after a competition is focused.				1 2 3 4 5
13. I increase communication during a competition when winning.				1 2 3 4 5
14. I increase communication during a competition when losing.				1 2 3 4 5
15. Communication during competition enhances athlete performance.				1 2 3 4 5
16. I contact other players after a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
17. I contact the referee before a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
18. I contact the referee after a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
19. I contact with the electronic time/ scoring table before a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
20. I contact with the electronic time/ scoring table after a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
21. I use more than one style to communicate during a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
22. My fastest way to communicate is visual.				1 2 3 4 5
23. My fastest way to communicate is verbal.				1 2 3 4 5
24. My fastest way to communicate is none-verbal.				1 2 3 4 5
25. The way I communicate is different depending on whether I am calm or nervous.				1 2 3 4 5
26. I have special signs, gestures, posture and body language for my communication.				1 2 3 4 5
27. I would rather to communicate with one player during competition.				1 2 3 4 5
28. I would rather to communicate with the team during competition.				1 2 3 4 5

Open-ended Questions

1. What tools and equipment you use when communicating with your team?
2. What is your personal opinion of special signs, gestures, posture and body language as a way of your communication?
3. Who do you rely on for communication during a competition?

Appendix B**Communication Management Questionnaire**

Dear players / swimmers

The purpose of this study is to indicate and observe the communication relationship between the players and coaches (P&C), coaches and referees (C&R), coaches and electronic recording(C&ER) to better understand the principles for Development Communication Management (DCM) for team and individual sports that could lead to enhanced performance.

Please supply the demographic information requested below. In addition, please respond to the following statements by circling the appropriate number indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree using the scale below (1 through 5). There is no right or wrong answers. We are simply interested in your personal opinions.

Thank you.

Demographic Information:

Your gender (circle): Male Female

Number of years of experience:

Key				
1 Strongly disagree	2 Somewhat disagree	3 No opinion	4 Somewhat agree	5 Strongly agree
1. My communication style is visual.				1 2 3 4 5
2. My communication style is verbal.				1 2 3 4 5
3. My communication style is non-verbal.				1 2 3 4 5
4. My communication right before a competition is focused.				1 2 3 4 5
5. My communication right after a competition is focused.				1 2 3 4 5
6. I increase communication during a competition when winning.				1 2 3 4 5
7. I increase the communication during a competition when losing.				1 2 3 4 5
8. Communication during competition enhances my performance.				1 2 3 4 5
9. Most communications during the game will be with- my coach.				1 2 3 4 5
10. Most communications during the game will be with my teammates.				1 2 3 4 5
11. Most communications during the game will be with the referee.				1 2 3 4 5
12. Most communications during the game will be with the electronic time / scoring table.				1 2 3 4 5
13. I contact the coach before a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
14. I contact the coach after a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
15. I contact other players before a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
16. I contact other players after a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
17. I contact the referee before a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
18. I contact the referee after a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
19. I contact the electronic time/ scoring table before a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
20. I contact with the electronic time/ scoring table after a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
21. I use more than one style to communicate during a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
22. My styles of communication depend on my performance at a competition.				1 2 3 4 5
23. My fastest way to communicate is visual.				1 2 3 4 5
24. My fastest way to communicate is verbal.				1 2 3 4 5
25. My fastest way to communicate is none-verbal.				1 2 3 4 5
26. The way I communicate effects on winning or losing of an event /game, etc.				1 2 3 4 5
27. I have special signs, gestures, posture and body language that I use in my communication with others.				1 2 3 4 5

Open- ended Question

1. What is your personal opinion of the best signs you use, is it gestures, posture, body language or another way communication that can help you winning?
2. Who do you rely on most for communication during a competition?