

ATHLETE SATISFACTION AT UNIVERSITIES IN GAUTENG

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ABSTRACT

One of the most frequently studied sectors of sport management is university sport which, in the South African context, includes the overall experiences of student-athletes of higher education institutions in relation to the sport department/ bureau, their personnel, activity programmes and offerings. In countries outside South Africa the issue of athlete satisfaction has been studied from several research perspectives such as coach behaviour, athletic trainer and medical cover, leadership behaviour, role ambiguity, holistic university experience and stakeholder satisfaction with selected goals and processes. One of the conclusions reached was that critical to athlete satisfaction was the sport department's emphasis on student development over the performance of the sport department. The purpose of this study was to determine what contributed to the satisfaction of athletes at universities in South Africa. The participants in this study consisted of 400 student-athletes at universities in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The instrument that was used in the study was a validated athlete satisfaction questionnaire (ASQ) developed by Riemer and Chelladurai (1998). The present study has identified support, individual performance, personal treatment by the coach, team task contribution and strategy as important indicators of athlete satisfaction. The findings of the study have important implications for universities as a whole as it can influence the reputation and image of the institution, the financial and other resources being made available for the institution, the number of quality athletes that can be attracted to the institution and the culture of the institution.

Key words: Athlete; Satisfaction; Universities; Coach.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most frequently studied sectors of sport management is university or collegiate sport (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997). University sport in the South African context includes the overall experiences of student-athletes - the heart and soul of every participating organization (Bebetso & Theodorakis, 2003) - of Higher Education Institutions in relation to the sport department/bureau, their personnel, activity programmes and offerings, as well as the sport related support services provided by their institutions.

Traditionally, numerous researchers have expounded on the personal and cultural benefits accruing to students from participation in university sport, particularly personal fitness, character building, sportsmanship and fair play, improved academic achievement, and entertainment (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). More recently, however, researchers have also

proposed arguments regarding university-wide benefits of student participation in sport. These range from providing a positive influence on the general welfare of a university, institutional loyalty and unity, increasing revenues, increasing prestige to the institution's reputation, and in turn, to enhanced student applications, enrolment, fundraising and sponsorship (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Smart & Wolfe, 2000).

Higher education institutions in South Africa have undergone major changes in terms of their structure and functioning as they have been subjected to the demands and competition of the market in which they function. There has been a steady increase in the level of competitiveness of the higher education sector because of factors such as increased globalization, internationalization, technological innovation and integration, and commercialization. Quality service and customer care have assumed heightened importance not only in commercial organizations, but also in the higher education sector. In order to retain and expand their market share, a high quality service must be offered by all organizations (Liebenberg, 2005). Liebenberg observed a relationship between corporate culture of a university and learner satisfaction. From this observation he deduced that a positive corporate culture could contribute to learner satisfaction (Liebenberg, 2005). This view supports the work of Smart & Wolfe (2000), who conducted an exploratory case study of the Pennsylvania State University (PSU) Football programme to examine the sources of their inter-university sport programme successes and to determine what gave them a sustainable competitive advantage. They reviewed the Resource-Based View (RBV), a recent development in strategic management literature and addressed appropriate success criteria for inter-university sport programmes. The resources they identified responsible for success included the university's history, relationships, trust, and organisational culture developed within their coaching staff. They added that an organisation with such resources may sustain competitive advantage by exploiting its human and physical resources more completely than other institutions. They concluded that PSU's competitive advantage was tied to the organisational resources of its coaching staff.

The issue of athlete satisfaction has been studied from several research perspectives, predominantly in the US, and to a lesser extent in Canada and Europe. Some of these studies focussed on athlete satisfaction with regard to: coach behaviour (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Baker *et al.*, 2003); athletic trainer and medical cover (Unruh, 1998); leadership behaviour (Riemer & Toon, 2001; Bebetos & Theodorakis, 2003); role ambiguity (Eys *et al.*, 2003); holistic university experience (Berty *et al.*, 2002); and stakeholder satisfaction with selected goals and processes (Trail & Chelladurai, 2000). Trail & Chelladurai (2000) concluded that critical to athlete satisfaction was the sport department's emphasis on student development over the performance of the sport department.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is thus clear that for institutions to offer quality services in the modern higher education environment, it is essential for them to ascertain the level of satisfaction of their primary clients, namely the students. In the context of university sport, these primary clients would be the student-athletes. There has been a vacuum in the South African sport management literature regarding student-athlete satisfaction with services offered to them. In the past there has been a reliance on theoretical extrapolation from the more general literature on job satisfaction, rather than research related to athlete satisfaction in particular. It was against this

background that the present study was undertaken to ascertain the satisfaction levels of student-athletes with their overall experience of university sport. The findings may prove beneficial not only to the sport departments/bureaus at universities, but also to student-affairs departments, marketing and recruitment departments, as well as academic departments of sport.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study comprised a convenient sample of 400 student-athletes from four Universities in the Gauteng province of South Africa. For purposes of this study the athlete is regarded as the individual who is a skilled performer who participates competitively in sport. These athletes were eligible to participate in inter-university sports under the auspices of the South African Student Sport Union. The response rate for the questionnaires was 69% (n=276). Forty seven percent (47%) of the respondents were male and 48% were female. Five percent of the respondents did not indicate their gender.

The Instrument and Procedures

Relevant literature on Athlete Satisfaction was reviewed. In addition, an empirical investigation involving the administration of 400 athlete satisfaction questionnaires (ASQ) developed by Riemer and Chelladurai (1998) was undertaken. Participants were requested to indicate the extent of their satisfaction on each item on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 7 (extremely satisfied). In addition athletes were also requested to indicate their gender. The returned questionnaires were subjected to editing and coding for input into the statistical programme for the social sciences (SPSS – version 12).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the items. The responses from the ASQ were subjected to principle axis factor analysis. Using a minimum eigenvalue of 1.0 and a varimax rotation, a total of five first order factors were identified. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the factors are illustrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1. CRONBACH ALPHA RELIABILITIES OF THE FIRST ORDER FACTORS PER NUMBER OF ITEMS

Factor	Cronbach Alpha	Number of items
Support	0.929	13
Individual performance	0.924	14
Personal treatment by coach	0.924	14
Team task contribution	0.899	8
Strategy	0.874	5

The Cronbach alpha values ranged from 0.874 to 0.929 which were much higher than the value of 0.7 suggested by Nunally (1978). Thus the extracted factors are deemed reliable.

Athlete satisfaction factors

In the tables that follow, the scales from 1–7 reflect the extent of satisfaction experienced by athletes and range from very dissatisfied to very satisfied.

TABLE 2. ITEMS, MEANS AND FREQUENCIES (PERCENTAGES) WITH REGARD TO SUPPORT

Item description	mean	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The medical personnel's interest in the athletes	3.64	23.5	11.6	10.4	17.5	14.9	11.2	10.8
The fairness with which the medical personnel treats all players	3.82	21.4	10.3	8.9	18.1	16.6	16.2	8.5
The promptness of medical attention	3.23	28.1	9.3	20.7	15.2	13.0	8.1	5.6
The personnel of the academic support services	3.77	20.0	11.9	12.2	17.8	13.3	14.8	10.0
The amount of money spent on my team	3.48	20.6	16.5	12.5	14.7	18.0	10.7	7.0
The local community's support	3.18	23.2	16.2	20.6	15.4	11.8	9.9	2.9
The media's support of our program	3.18	22.4	19.9	18.4	15.4	11.8	7.7	4.4
The supportiveness of the fans	3.67	17.6	13.2	14.3	19.9	15.4	11.4	8.1
The fairness of the team's budget	3.52	17.5	17.9	13.8	17.5	15.7	10.4	7.1
The funding provided to my team	3.36	19.8	21.2	15.0	10.3	17.6	8.4	7.7
The competence of the medical personnel	3.51	18.9	17.4	13.7	17.4	15.9	10.7	5.9
The academic support services provided	4.15	11.0	7.3	13.9	21.2	19.8	16.1	10.6
The support from the university community	3.76	15.4	14.0	17.3	16.2	17.3	12.5	7.4

Table 2 illustrates the extent of satisfaction experienced by athletes with regard to support. This factor is concerned with satisfaction with medical support, financial support, community support, media support and academic support. Athlete satisfaction can originate from the support structures that the organization provides. According to Table 2, athletes experienced moderate satisfaction with medical support, academic personnel support, financial support, community support, media support and fan support (the means of all the items with the exception of “the academic support services provided” being below 4). They experienced least satisfaction with the support of the local community and media. The community,

inclusive of students, staff and fans, are not directly involved in the affairs of the team (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997) yet they play a significant role on how well the team or athlete performs through their implicit and explicit support for the team. This support, in turn, affects the level of satisfaction experienced by the team or athlete. The vital role that fans play in the performance of a team has been demonstrated in the findings of extensive research by Courneya and Carron (1992). If the performance of the team is good, the team is buoyed by the fans to perform better. This ultimately increases the satisfaction experienced by the athletes both with their own performance as well as with the fans. The media brings the athletes under public scrutiny, thus exerting pressure on them to succeed. This has an influence on the levels of stress and anxiety experienced by the athletes. Consequently this affects their performance which determines the level of satisfaction experienced by the athlete.

The medical support in terms of injury prevention, injury rehabilitation and illness prevention provided by the organization influences the level of satisfaction experienced by athletes. Traditionally, the prevention of injuries and illness had been the responsibility of the athletic coach (Unruh, 1998). Today that responsibility lies with trained medical personnel which is either provided by the organization or contracted by the organization. How competent and professional the medical staff is perceived to be by the athlete influences their level of satisfaction.

The support that the organization provides in terms of monetary resources to the athletes is a source of the athlete's satisfaction (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1998). The satisfaction that athletes experience with the financial support that they receive is analogous with the satisfaction that employees experience with their pay. If the pay is in accordance to the output and performance of the employees, it is highly likely that the employee will be satisfied. Similarly, athletes are likely to be satisfied with monetary rewards that reflect their outputs or performance. Most universities provide scholarships or bursaries, particularly for members of the less-privileged social classes, that make attending a university possible (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). This helps provide a desirable social status and identity to assume when they are faced with unfamiliar settings of a university where athletes have an accepted and a relatively high status in the student body. This source of identity influences their level of satisfaction. This supports the finding of Riemer and Chelladurai (1998) that the support that the organization provides in terms of monetary resources to the athlete is the source of the athlete's satisfaction. Research conducted by Ryan (cited in Amorose & Horn, 2000) indicated that scholarships, in some instances, resulted in increased motivation. It can be concluded that increased motivation leads to better performance resulting in greater satisfaction. On the other hand, scholarships can be perceived as a controlling factor which binds athletes to the organization (Amorose & Horn, 2000). This may result in dissatisfaction experienced by athletes.

The highest level of satisfaction was experienced with regard to academic support services. Beyer and Hannah (2000) comment that athletes may be among the most powerless students on the campus, having a strict regimen that dictates almost every activity of their day. In the eyes of non-athlete students, athletes may appear as pampered with special privileges such as better accommodation, meals and tuition. This is not necessarily true since athletes are "answerable" to their bursars, coaches, the media and their families. According to Leland (cited in Trail & Chelladurai, 2000), the goal of the coach, which is results-driven and the goal of the university, which is revenue-driven are over-emphasized and impact on the academic

and social development of the student-athlete. Student-athletes, who have problems that stem from heavy demands of their athletic role, are forced to sacrifice attention to academic, social and leisure needs to participate. Astin (as cited in Berty *et al.*, 2002) found that measures contributing to the student-athlete's level of satisfaction with academic experience to be the quality of the academic institution, degree of faculty interest in students, relationship with the college administration, curriculum and contacts with faculty and fellow students. Previous research by Trail and Chelladurai (2000) found that student athletes rated academic achievement as the most important goal. Therefore, there was a need for academic goals to be the focus of the athletic department. The findings of the current study are contrary to the findings of previous studies by Coakley (1994) and Sage (cited in Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997) which found that the athletics programme violated the cardinal principle of Higher Education in that the educational interests of the athletes are overlooked. In this study, the high level of satisfaction experienced by the athletes leads to the conclusion that the academic interests of the athletes are catered for in the South African context.

TABLE 3. ITEMS, MEANS AND FREQUENCIES (PERCENTAGES) WITH REGARD TO INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE AND RECOGNITION

Item description	mean	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The degree to which I have reached (reached) my performance goals during the season	4.57	4.0	4.4	15.7	22.3	24.5	18.6	10.2
The coach's choice of plays during competitions	4.43	6.2	5.5	14.7	24.2	21.2	16.5	11.7
The degree to which my abilities are (were) used	4.58	3.6	5.1	15.7	22.3	24.5	18.6	10.2
The training I receive (received) from the coach during the season	4.73	7.7	5.8	10.9	15.7	20.1	21.2	18.6
The recognition I receive (received) from my coach	4.55	5.9	7.3	13.9	17.6	24.2	16.8	14.3
My social status on the team	4.68	2.2	6.2	14.6	17.9	28.1	20.4	10.6
The team's win/loss record this season	4.58	7.7	4.4	12.8	24.5	15.8	16.5	18.3
The tutoring I receive (received)	4.44	9.2	5.5	12.1	20.1	22.3	18.3	12.5
How the team works (worked) to be the best	4.48	2.9	10.6	13.9	20.1	26.4	13.2	12.8
The extent to which teammates provide (provided) me with instruction	4.54	4.1	4.5	15.6	23.0	23.8	17.8	11.2
The extent to which all team members are (were) ethical	4.24	4.8	8.1	15.4	27.9	25.0	12.1	6.6
The degree to which I do (did) my best for the team	4.98	1.5	3.6	10.2	19.7	27.4	19.0	18.6
My teammates' sense of fair play	4.94	1.8	2.2	10.6	19.3	28.8	25.2	12.0
My dedication during practices	5.43	0.4	1.8	6.2	15.3	23.4	27.4	25.5

The athlete's level of satisfaction with regard to individual performance and recognition is illustrated in Table 3. With regard to this factor, it is evident from Table 3 that athletes were satisfied with their individual performance and the recognition that they received. Bebetos and Theodorakis (2003) found that the more practices per week in which the athletes engaged, the more satisfied they were with their personal performance. Performance is a major outcome in athletics (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997). Athletes may set themselves individual performance goals. The extent to which these goals are attained will determine the extent to which athletes experience satisfaction. In setting goals for themselves athletes may pursue excellence and the closer to excellence that they get, the more positive feelings they have about themselves. In addition, athletes are interested in the contribution that they make to a team. Any positive contribution would result in raised feelings of satisfaction in the athlete. With regard to recognition, there are various ways in which athletes receive recognition. For example, they may receive recognition from the coach, team mates, fans, community and media. The recognition may be for successful performance or contribution to the team and can motivate the athlete, leading to increased satisfaction.

TABLE 4. ITEMS, MEANS AND FREQUENCIES (PERCENTAGES) WITH REGARD TO PERSONAL TREATMENT BY COACH

Item description	mean	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The extent to which the coach is (was) behind me	4.58	4.7	8.0	15.7	18.2	18.2	20.4	14.6
The manner in which coach combines (combined) the available talent	4.69	5.1	8.8	12.8	17.5	16.1	20.4	19.3
My coach's loyalty towards me	4.97	1.8	5.8	8.4	17.9	26.3	23.7	16.1
Coach's game plans	4.56	4.8	5.9	12.5	23.1	25.3	19.0	9.5
How the coach makes (made) adjustments during competitions	4.73	4.8	5.5	8.8	22.4	23.5	22.4	12.5
The degree to which my role on the team	4.60	2.6	5.2	13.3	27.7	18.5	25.1	7.7
The level of appreciation my coach shows (showed) when I do (did) well	5.01	5.5	5.9	7.7	14.3	20.6	22.4	23.5
The coach's teaching of the tactics and techniques of my position	4.93	4.4	4.8	10.3	16.5	23.8	20.1	20.1
The amount of time I play (played) during competitions	4.93	3.6	4.4	9.9	18.6	21.5	23.0	19.0
The extent to which teammates play (played) as a team	4.94	3.3	1.8	11.3	19.0	25.9	23.7	15.0
Coach's choice of strategies during games	4.75	3.3	4.4	11.4	24.5	23.8	17.9	14.7
The friendliness of the coach towards me	5.11	2.6	2.9	10.3	18.8	19.9	22.4	23.2

Table 4 illustrates the level of satisfaction experienced by the athletes with regard to personal treatment by the coach. This factor is concerned with those coaching behaviours that directly affect the individual, yet indirectly affect team development. Athletes were overall satisfied with regard to the personal treatment that they received by the coach (the means of all items in the scale were greater than 4). In South Africa, relatively little research has been conducted in the sport setting to investigate coaching behaviour as a factor affecting collegiate athletes' motivation. However, there is evidence from other fields that coaching behaviour may, in fact, influence athlete satisfaction. For example, research in the academic sector (Amorose & Horn, 2000) indicates that the behaviour of the teacher influences the behaviour and performance of students. The coach, whose functions are multi-faceted (Surujlal, 2004) can be, among others, viewed as a teacher. Athletes interact constantly with the coaches and these interactions are likely to result in numerous outcomes (like winning/losing, improved/diminished performance) which can influence the level of satisfaction experienced by the athlete. The relationship between the athletic coach and the student-athlete has been identified as being of fundamental importance (Unruh, 1998), and most coaches are in agreement that it is important to develop a strong rapport with their athletes. Coaches can have a profound impact on the life of the student-athlete, regardless of the levels of sport involvement (Baker *et al.*, 2003). Previous research by Terry (as cited in Baker *et al.*, 2003) on elite athletes and Riemer and Toon (2001) have effectively indicated that coach behaviour is an important determinant of athlete satisfaction. Athletes hold the coach accountable for clarifying their role responsibilities (Eys *et al.*, 2003). Therefore it can be concluded that the personal treatment that the athletes get from the coach may influence their level of satisfaction.

TABLE 5. ITEMS, MEANS AND FREQUENCIES (PERCENTAGES) WITH REGARD TO TEAM TASK CONTRIBUTION

Item description	mean	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Team member's dedication to work together toward team goals	4.84	3.7	1.8	11.4	20.2	28.7	20.2	14.0
The constructive feedback I receive (received) from my teammates	4.78	4.0	4.0	7.7	22.8	28.7	20.2	12.5
My teammates' sportmanlike behaviour	5.00	3.0	1.8	7.7	21.4	26.2	25.8	14.0
The degree to which my teammates accept (accepted) me on a social level	4.97	2.6	2.2	11.1	17.7	28.8	21.0	16.6
The extent to which the team is meeting (has met) its goals for the session	4.64	5.6	4.1	13.3	20.0	22.6	22.6	11.9
My enthusiasm during competitions	5.11	0.7	2.2	7.7	18.7	30.0	26.7	13.9
The team's overall performance this season	4.87	2.9	3.3	15.8	16.8	24.2	17.6	19.4
The degree to which teammates share (shared) the same goal	4.67	3.3	4.0	12.1	24.5	25.6	17.2	13.2

Table 5 illustrates the level of satisfaction with team task contribution. This factor is concerned with those actions by which the team and coach serves as a substitute for leadership for the athlete. The coach, together with the team, sets up goals to be achieved over a season or tournament. These may include scoring targets and number of games won. The attainment of these goals may be a legitimate performance indicator (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997), therefore it constitutes a facet of athlete satisfaction. Sometimes the goals may not be achieved, but there are improvements in the performance of the team over a season and this may be the source of athlete satisfaction. There may be an overall growth and development of team members in terms of mastery of skills, tactics and strategies in sport. These contribute to the overall satisfaction of athletes. Understanding and acceptance of strategies and tactics, recognition and respect for each other's strengths and contributions toward the team's goals as well as a collective determination to perform to the best of their ability helps develop solidarity within a team (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997). These may influence the satisfaction of athletes. Furthermore, the degree to which team members get along well as a group and support each other may also influence their level of satisfaction.

TABLE 6. ITEMS, MEANS AND FREQUENCIES (PERCENTAGES) WITH REGARD TO STRATEGY

Item description	mean	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The level to which my talents are (were) employed	4.66	3.7	6.6	12.8	18.3	24.9	23.1	10.6
The improvement in my performance over the previous season	4.95	3.3	3.3	10.6	17.2	25.3	23.1	17.2
The instruction I have received from the coach this season	4.84	5.9	5.5	7.0	18.4	24.3	21.0	18.0
The role I play (played) in the social life of the team	4.78	2.9	4.4	11.4	23.8	21.2	22.0	14.3
The tactics used during games	4.74	4.4	5.1	10.2	21.5	23.4	23.4	12.4

The athletes' level of satisfaction with strategy is illustrated in Table 6. This factor is concerned with strategic and tactical decisions. Athletes were also overall satisfied with regard to the personal treatment that they received by the coach (the means of all items in the scale were greater than 4). The success that a team achieves is largely a result of strategic choices made by the coach (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997). Within the constraints of the rules of the game, a coach has the power to alter the structure and processes within the team. These may include a game plan which will influence the selection of players. The coach's understanding of the sport and tactics associated with it therefore influences the satisfaction of the athletes.

CONCLUSION

The present study has identified support, individual performance, personal treatment by the coach, team task contribution and strategy as important indicators of athlete satisfaction. The findings of the study have important implications for the university as a whole as it can influence the reputation and image of the institution, the financial and other resources being

made available for the institution, the number of quality athletes that can be attracted to the institution and the culture of the institution. Institutions can use inter university sport to gain a competitive advantage. There are also implications for further research. For example, the relationship between sport type and athlete satisfaction, the coach and athlete satisfaction and the sports bureau/department and athlete satisfaction could be investigated.

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