

Organizational Justice and Team Performance in Interscholastic Athletics

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Considerable research in various settings outside of sport has established a linkage between organizational justice (perceptions of fairness in organizations) and performance outcomes. This study drew upon that literature to determine if team performance was impacted by student athlete perceptions of their coach's level of fairness when dealing with the athletes. Student athletes (n=323) assessed the fairness of their coaches across three dimensions—distributive justice (decision outcomes), procedural justice (process used to arrive at the decision), and interpersonal justice (how the individual is treated during the decision making process). The study found that fairness perceptions did differ when comparisons were made between students who played on teams with winning records and students who played on teams with losing records. Students who played on winning teams perceived the level of fairness their coaches displayed to be higher than the coaches of students on losing teams.

Introduction

Social scientists have understood for sometime the importance of fairness in the workplace. Research has shown that relationships exist between employee perceptions of fairness and work related outcomes such as satisfaction (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000); organizational commitment (Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993); citizenship behaviors (Moorman, 1991); turnover (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000); and performance (Colquitt, Noe, & Jackson, 2002). The significance of these relationships, and their influence on organizational success, has lead to the development of a substantial body of scholarly work on justice. The study of employee perceptions of fairness, termed organizational justice, examines how individuals develop determinations of fairness and how these perceptions influence their attitudes and behaviors (for a meta-analytic review, see Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). This line of inquiry has evolved from a one-dimensional view of justice (Adams, 1965) to the current multi-dimensional explanation of how individuals form perceptions of fairness (Colquitt, 2001, Colquitt et al., 2001). These dimensions, distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, and informational have been shown to individually and collectively influence employees' perceptions of fairness. The purpose of this study was to determine if three of these same dimensions of justice—distributive justice, procedural justice, and interpersonal justice—impacted team performance in sports.

Dimensions of Organizational Justice

Initial research on workplace fairness was conducted by Adams (1965) who focused on distributive justice; the perceived fairness of outcomes provided by the organization to its employees. Adams found that employees were more concerned with the relative fairness of the outcomes they received rather than the absolute value of a particular outcome. Through his research Adams discovered that employees felt outcomes (e.g. pay, promotions, bonuses, etc) were most fair when they were an accurate reflection of the effort and contribution the employee had made to the organization. This theory, deemed the equity rule, established that employees who make the largest contributions to the organization are entitled to the greatest rewards. Additional research focusing on the importance of distributive justice examined how employee perceptions of fairness varied when outcomes were provided in an equal manner to all members (Deutsch, 1975; Lerner, 1975) or based on employee needs (Homans, 1982). Each of the three allocation methods involves employees making a comparison of their "inputs" to the outcomes provided by the organization. Therefore, perceptions of fairness concerning distributive justice tend to involve individual considerations by the employee and reactions are focused on the outcome received (Colquitt et al., 2001). Regardless of how outcomes are allocated, perceptions of distributive justice have been shown to influence employee attitudes and behaviors (Ambrose, 2002). However, as researchers continued to study employee perceptions of justice it became evident that additional factors were often considered when making a fairness judgment (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001).

As organizational justice research continued to evolve it became evident that in addition to the actual outcomes, the processes used to determine outcome allocations were significant in terms of fairness (Ambrose, 2002). Initial research on procedural justice was conducted by Thibaut and Walker (1975) who examined the importance of process and decision control in litigation. Results from their work indicated a positive relationship between perceptions of procedural justice and the amount of process and decision control a litigant experienced. These authors found that litigants were more likely to feel they had been treated fairly in the judicial process when they were allowed to voice their concerns and had a say in their trial strategy. This finding was expanded and applied in an organizational setting by Leventhal (1980) who established additional antecedents of procedural justice beyond decision and process control. Leventhal established that the policies used to make decisions were likely to be deemed fair when they were: a) based on accurate information; b) applied in a consistent manner; c) considerate of all affected by the decision; d) free from any personal biases; e) based on prevailing ethical standards; and f) safeguarded by a mechanism to remedy incorrect decisions. Therefore, what has been established is that the application of these six rules, as well as providing members with a "voice" (i.e., process and decision control) in the decision-making process is likely to lead to positive perceptions of procedural justice. While distributive justice tends to involve reactions to individual outcomes, procedural justice involves employees' cognitive and behavioral responses to the organization as a whole (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Procedural injustice then is likely to

result in the employee directing negative attitudes and behaviors towards the organization.

The final two dimensions which comprise organizational justice, interpersonal and informational justice, were first introduced by Bies and Moag (1986) as one construct termed interactional justice. These authors identified that interactional justice was based on the interpersonal treatment and quality of information received by an employee. Recently, Colquitt (2001) and Colquitt et al. (2001) have suggested that interactional justice is best understood by separating the construct into two separate dimensions. The first, interpersonal justice is based on the extent to which an individual is treated with respect, dignity and in a polite manner by personnel occupying supervisory positions. Perceptions of interpersonal justice develop then as the result of interactions between the employee and individuals who are perceived as the source of justice. The second, informational justice is determined by the quality and degree of explanation provided regarding policies used in the decision-making process. This form of justice is determined by the extent to which employees are provided explanations regarding decisions that have an affect on them. While distributive justice involves reactions directed towards individual outcomes, and procedural justice towards the organization as a whole, interpersonal and informational justice tend to influence behaviors and attitudes directed towards the person deemed the source of justice (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). This means that when employees experience interpersonal or informational injustice they are likely to respond in a negative manner towards the supervisor (source of injustice) rather than the organization as a whole. It is evident then that in order to have a complete

understanding of fairness in the workplace researchers need to examine employee attitudes regarding all dimensions of organizational justice. This is critically important in light of the fact that when employees feel they have been treated fairly they are more likely to make meaningful contributions and help an organization achieve its established goals and objectives (Ambrose, 2002). One aspect of contribution that has been shown to improve with positive perceptions of justice is employee performance (Colquitt et al., 2002).

Organizational Justice and Performance

The present study is focused on the relationship between organizational justice and team performance. To date there have been no attempts to explore this relationship in a sport setting. Therefore, empirical findings from the social sciences regarding this line of inquiry must be used as a theoretical framework. Fortunately, there have been numerous attempts to determine what type of influence each dimension of organizational justice has on individual and group performance. However, despite the number of studies in this area there remains inconsistency of results. Distributive justice, specifically the equity principle, has been theorized to provide the most concrete prediction of how fairness influences performance (Adams, 1965; Deutsch, 1975; Lerner, 1975). The reasoning being that employees who feel their outcomes are reflective of their relative contribution to the organization are likely to demonstrate increased performance compared to those who experience inequity (Adams, 1965; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). The influence of procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice on

employee performance has been somewhat unclear as the result of conflicting results (Colquitt et al., 2001). For example, research has demonstrated that procedural justice has a positive relationship (Colquitt et al., 2002; Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991), negative relationship (Kanfer, Sawyer, Earley, & Lind, 1987) and no relationship (Gilliland, 1994) with performance. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether positive perceptions of interpersonal and informational justice lead to improved effort and performance by employees (Colquitt et al., 2001). In an attempt to clarify inconsistencies and establish consensus in the organizational justice literature, meta-analyses were conducted by two separate research teams (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). Results of both studies indicated a relationship exists between organizational justice and performance. However, in both studies procedural justice demonstrated the strongest relationship with performance compared with the other dimensions of organizational justice. This finding is in contrast to much of literature which theorized a strong connection between distributive justice and performance. One explanation put forth by Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) is that "when outcomes are distributed unfairly, people examine the procedure to see if it was fair, and only if it is not do they withhold performance as a legitimate means, in their view, of restoring equity" (p. 304). Findings of both studies suggest that performance behaviors tend to be based on reactions to the organization and less dependent on individual outcomes and interactions with supervisory personnel. Currently, it is not understood if this result would hold true with sport teams or in a sport organization.

Organizational Justice and Sport

Despite over forty years of inquiry in the social sciences on the importance of fairness in the workplace there remain a limited number of studies which examine the influence of organizational justice in sport. The first attempt to apply the theoretical propositions and empirical findings of organizational justice research in a sport setting was by Greenberg, Mark, and Lehman (1985). These authors identified that “justice is historically a central concept underlying sports and games” and that organizational justice research can “offer explanatory power for much behavior of interest in sports” (p. 30). It was suggested that a more complete understanding of why sport participants demonstrate certain behaviors and attitudes could be gained by applying the principles of distributive and procedural justice to sport. The authors based this on their belief that “given the apparent fit between sport and the existing theoretical and empirical work on justice, it would be possible to translate recent work on justice directly into a theory of justice in sports” (p. 27). One outcome that Greenberg and his colleagues identified as having the potential to be better understood by applying organizational justice theory was performance. Individual as well as team performance are both likely influenced by participants’ perceptions of justice. If team members feel they have been treated unfairly they often will exhibit behaviors and attitudes intended to correct the perceived injustice. These actions could include withholding effort, detachment from the group, and other behaviors counterproductive to team performance (Greenberg et al., 1985; Jordan, Gillentine, & Hunt, 2004). Despite the apparent theoretical fit between organizational justice and sport, Greenberg and colleagues (1985) posited that “a well-

grounded theory of justice in sport will come about only with the conduct of research that further examines justice directly in sports contexts" (p. 27). Finally, it was noted that, "the application of justice to sport has implications that go beyond empirical research and the development of theory; the concept of justice also has potential implications for the practice of sports psychology. Consider for example the hypothesis that injustice can affect performance, satisfaction, and in the case of team sports, cohesion" (p. 29).

Nearly two decades have passed since Greenberg and his associates (1985) noted that while justice research was being actively pursued by organizational theorists and social scientists, researchers aligned with sport had failed to apply the construct. In an attempt to fill this void in the literature researchers in sport management have begun to develop a line of inquiry which examines the influence of organizational justice in a sport setting (Hums & Chelladurai, 1994a,b; Mahony, Hums, & Riemer, 2002; Mahony & Pastore, 1998). However, these studies have tended to focus on the fairness of group allocations as opposed to the perceived fairness of individual outcomes, limiting the understanding of how organizational justice influences the attitudes and behaviors of persons in sport organizations.

Recently, work by Whisenant and Smucker, (in press) and Whisenant and Jordan, (2004) have attempted to examine organizational justice and three of its dimensions—distributive justice, procedural justice, and interpersonal justice—within high school sport settings from the perspectives of coaches and also of student athletes. Whisenant and Smucker, (in press) in their study of high school coaches, found that the coaches' perceptions of

fairness were influenced by the sex of their athletic director. Coaches who worked under the direction of a male athletic director demonstrated significantly ($p < .05$) higher levels of distributive justice and procedural justice compared with coaches who worked for a female athletic director. A second study involving interscholastic athletics found that student athletes perceived significantly higher levels of fairness demonstrated by coaches of the sports the students enjoyed playing the most when compared to the climate of fairness surrounding the coaches of the teams the students enjoyed participating on the least (Whisenant & Jordan, 2004).

Additional works have attempted to identify relationships between justice and a variety of organizational outcomes including job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (as cited in Colquitt et al., 2001). Jordan, Fink, and Pastore (2004) and Whisenant and Smucker (2004) have investigated the association of coaches' perceptions of fairness within their organizations and job satisfaction. Whisenant and Smucker (2004) found that coaches' perceptions of fairness did impact their satisfaction with their job in general as well as their level of satisfaction with their supervisor and promotional opportunities within their organization. These results were similar to that of Jordan and colleagues (2004) who found that three dimensions of organizational justice made unique as well as collective influences on NCAA basketball coaches' overall and facet specific job satisfaction. Of the three dimensions, interactional justice had the largest influence on the overall levels of job satisfaction experienced by basketball coaches. Similar to studies outside of sport which have demonstrated that commitment and retention are influenced by organizational justice, Whisenant (in

press) found that the probability of student athletes continuing to play a referent sport was directly associated with the athletes' perceptions of organizational fairness.

Finally, Jordan et al. (2004) conceptualized that team performance in sport could be improved by applying the theoretical propositions of organizational justice. An extension of the work of Greenberg and associates (1985), these authors suggested that the empirical findings of justice research in the social sciences might also hold true in a sport setting since sport teams share many of the same characteristics as business organizations (Chelladurai, 2001). These similarities are important in that much of what is understood about organizational justice has been the result of research involving employees in different work settings (Colquitt et al., 2001). Based on this line of inquiry Jordan et al. (2004) identified that player perceptions of justice in a sport setting are likely based on the perceived fairness of outcomes (distributive justice); policies and procedures used to determine outcomes (procedural justice); social interactions (interpersonal justice); and decision justifications (informational justice). Players arrive at fairness determinations based on personal evaluations of these four criteria which lead to feelings of justice or injustice. These determinations of justice often have influence over player attitudes and behaviors (Jordan et al., 2004). Therefore, positive perceptions of fairness are likely to lead to attitudes and behaviors that are beneficial to team success. In contrast, perceived injustice can cause team members to exhibit behaviors detrimental to individual as well as team performance. While the relationship between organizational justice and sport team performance can be understood conceptually, there is limited empirical support.

This creates the need to determine if findings of organizational justice research in the social sciences hold true in a sport setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to expand upon recent works involving the three dimensions of organizational justice—distributive justice, procedural justice, and interpersonal justice—by applying them to team sports in order to examine if a climate of fairness impacts team performance. The research objective was to determine the extent that fairness perceptions and team performance were related. Specifically, perceptions of fairness held by student athletes at the high school level were compared between students who played on teams with a winning season (winning teams) and students who played on teams with a losing season (losing teams). The perceptions were divided among each of the three dimensions of justice—procedural justice, distributive justice, and interpersonal justice. Additional demographic data of the students were also of interest to the researchers.

Methodology

The data used for this study was extracted from a data set drawn from high school students who participated in an earlier study focused on perceptions of fairness held by student athletes (N=630) who competed in interscholastic athletics (Whisenant, in press). As a part of that study, students were asked to identify the sport they enjoyed playing the most and the sport they enjoyed playing the least in high school. Those two sports then served as referent sports for questions designed to assess the students' perceptions of fairness displayed by the coach(s) of each sport. Some students identified as their most

enjoyable referent sport an individual sport ($n=248$), while others selected a traditional team sport ($n=323$). Those students who selected a team sport were the subjects for this study. The students also provided the number of wins and the number of losses the team experienced in its most recent season. If the team had won more games than it lost, the team performance data was coded as a winning team. If the team had lost more games than it had won, the team performance data was coded as a losing team.

The portion of the instrument used to collect data pertaining to the student athletes' perceptions of fairness, was a modified version of the Justice Measure developed by Colquitt (2001). The specific questions regarding fairness perceptions are displayed in Figure 1. The questions were rewritten to ensure the student athletes' coach(s) would serve as the referent when considering the response to the questions. The response scale was also extended from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree). The average of the multiple responses within each dimension was used to capture the perceptions held by the students. A mean score less than 4 would indicate the perceptions of justice were not positive while a mean score greater than 4 would indicate higher perceptions or a positive perception of justice for each dimension.

Independent Samples T-Tests were used for the analyses of the mean responses of each of the justice dimensions since equal variances were not assumed due to sample sizes being unequal. The measure instrument developed by Colquitt was found to have a reliability ranging from .90 to .93 (Colquitt & Shaw, 2003). The reliability coefficients for this study produced an alpha of .755.

What is your level of agreement with each of the following statements?

With regards to the decisions made by your coach or coaches:

- You had the opportunity to express your views & feelings
- The decisions they made were applied consistently
- You had the opportunity to challenge or appeal their decision
- They collected and used accurate information to make decisions

With regards to the how the coaches rewarded you with playing time during games or tournaments:

- You were fairly rewarded for your effort during practice
- You were fairly rewarded for the amount of experience you had
- You were fairly rewarded for your performance while in competition
- You were fairly rewarded based upon your skill level

With regards to how the coach or coaches treated you:

- You were treated with dignity
- You were treated with respect
- The coach(s) refrained from improper remarks or comments

Figure 1: Justice Questions

Results

Of the students who participated in the base study (N=630), 51% of the athletes (n=323) utilized a team sport as their referent sport when completing the research instrument, which permitted them to be utilized for this

study. Of the 323 students, 63% indicated they played for winning teams ($n=205$) and 37% played for losing teams ($n=118$). Student demographics were collected regarding sex, ethnicity, grade level, and age. Boys ($n=228$) accounted for 71% of the athletes while girls ($n=95$) represented 29% of the athletes comprising the study. The ethnic make-up of the student athletes was as follows: 38% were Hispanic; 36% were African American; 23% were White; and 3% indicated that they were of another ethnic category. By grade level, the student representation was as follows: 29% freshman, 31% sophomores, 24% juniors, and 16% were seniors. The largest number of students ($n=100$) 31%, reported their age as 15 years old, followed closely by 16-year-olds 29%. The fewest students (8%) were 14 years old. The older students, 19% 17 year olds and 13% 18-year-olds, accounted for the remaining students. Additional frequencies pertaining to the students' team performance (winning or losing record) by each of the demographic attributes may be found in Table 1.

The most frequently identified referent team sport was football (41%). Following football were basketball (18%), volleyball (12%), soccer and softball (10% each), and baseball (9%). Table 2 contains additional frequencies related to the referent sports, the sex of the students, and win/loss status.

The findings addressing the research objectives of the study indicated that team performance was only influenced by one justice dimension, procedural justice. The perceived level of procedural justice differed significantly, $t(232.2) = 2.148$, $p = .033$, based upon the whether the student athlete was on a winning team ($M5.16$; $SD1.11$) or a losing team ($M4.88$; $SD1.18$). Fairness perceptions for

Table 1
Demographic Data of Student Athletes

Sex	<i>Boys (n)</i> 228	<i>Girls (n)</i> 95	<i>Record</i>	
			<i>Winning</i> 203	<i>Losing</i> 118
Ethnicity				
African American	93	20	73	40
Hispanic	80	39	65	54
White	44	30	59	15
Other	9	2	6	5
Missing Data	2	4	0	4
Grade Level				
Freshman	73	21	74	20
Sophomore	66	32	58	40
Junior	53	23	45	31
Senior	35	15	23	27
Missing Data	1	4	3	0
Current Age (Years)				
14	16	8	20	4
15	74	26	63	37
16	65	27	61	31
17	44	18	38	24
18	27	13	21	19
Missing Data	2	3	0	3

both distributive justice and interpersonal justice were higher for those students on winning teams than those on losing teams, however the differences were not significant ($p < .05$). The specific results were as follows: distributive justice, $t(211.8) = 1.588$, $p = .114$ with perceptions on winning teams ($M = 5.65$; $SD = 1.23$) being higher than perceptions

Table 2
Referent Sports

Sport	Boys (<i>n</i>)	Girls (<i>n</i>)	Winning Record	Losing Record
Baseball	30	n/a	17	13
Basketball	44	13	43	14
Football	134	n/a	83	51
Soccer	20	12	20	12
Softball	N/z	31	21	10
Volleyball	N/a	39	21	18

Table 3
Independent Samples Test

Justice Dimension	Activity	M	SD	t	p
Procedural Justice	Winning Team	5.16	1.11	2.148	.033*
	Losing Team	4.88	1.18		
Distributive Justice	Winning Team	5.65	1.23	1.588	.114
	Losing Team	5.39	1.46		
Interpersonal Justice	Winning Team	5.66	1.30	1.716	.088
	Losing Team	5.39	1.334		

on losing teams (M5.39; SD1.46); and interpersonal justice, $t(238.8) = 1.716$, $p=.088$ with winning teams (M5.66; SD1.30) rated higher than losing teams (M5.39; SD1.34).

Further analyses beyond the primary purpose of the study sought to determine if the justice perceptions of

these students who participated on team sports differed based upon the athletes' sex, ethnicity, grade level, age, or sport played. In only two instances—sex and two team sports—did perceptions differ significantly ($p < .05$). When looking at the sex of the athlete, an independent samples test found that only the perceptions of interpersonal justice indicated by the girls ($M5.78$; $SD1.20$) differed significantly, $t(196.3) = -2.065$, $p = .040$, from the perceptions held by the boys ($M5.47$; $SD1.36$). By sport, interpersonal justice perceptions differed significantly ($p < .004$) only between those playing football ($M5.41$; $SD1.38$) and those playing soccer ($M6.09$; $SD.73$).

Discussion

Since the urging of Greenberg and colleagues (1985) to apply justice theory to sport, two decades have past with little known work in this area dealing with fairness perceptions and organizational outcomes in sport. As noted earlier, Jordan et al. (2004) suggested that if the student athletes perceived their coaches were fair in dealings with the athletes, those positive feelings might impact various organizational outcomes, one of which being team performance. The findings of this study provide support for their proposition regarding the dimensions of justice and their application to sport.

The students' perceptions of the fairness displayed by their coaches did differ based upon the performance level (win/loss record) of the team they used as the referent sport when responding to the questionnaire. For each justice dimension—distributive justice, interpersonal justice, and procedural justice—the students who played for winning teams had higher perceptions of fairness towards

their coaches than those playing for teams with losing records. Of the dimensions, only the perceptions attributed to procedural justice differed significantly between the two groups. When compared to other studies within organizational settings other than sport, these findings are consistent. Colquitt et al. (2001) found that each dimension was correlated with performance. Their findings suggested that while there was a relationship between performance and perceptions of fairness, for both distributive justice and interpersonal justice the relationship was weak. A moderate relationship existed between procedural justice and performance. This finding appears to hold true in the present study as positive perceptions of procedural justice were significantly related to team performance. This result could be due to the participants using team sports as their reference when determining perceptions of fairness rather than individual sports. Outcomes received by participants in team sports tend to be more group based and therefore are difficult to evaluate on an individual basis. For example, if a football team wins a particular game all team members share in the success and normally individual contributions are viewed within the context of overall team performance. In contrast, individual sports such as cross country allow for more self-based considerations of fairness because participants are recognized more for individual performances rather than in the context of team. The limited amount of individual outcomes distributed in team sports likely creates an environment where athletes tend to base considerations of fairness on determinations of procedural justice or injustice. Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) noted that when individuals receive less than desired outcomes the focus often shifts to the

processes used to determine these outcomes. If these processes are perceived to be unfair individuals are likely to demonstrate behaviors which exhibit their dissatisfaction. Jordan et al. (2004) propose that in a team sport setting, these behaviors could include: withholding effort; withdrawal from the team; group fragmentation; and decreased communication between the dissatisfied athlete and team members and/or coaches. A sport team that has members who exhibit these negative behaviors could see a decrease in overall team performance, especially in situations where a large number of team members share perceptions of organizational injustice.

An additional explanation for why procedural justice was significantly related with team performance in the present study could be the uniqueness of team sport participation. The enjoyment associated with team sport membership is often identified as one of the main considerations for youth when deciding whether to participate, or continue participation in sport (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 2003). Specifically, one of the desired outcomes for sport participants is the opportunity to play and experience the enjoyment of sport competition. The amount of time a participant is allowed to play, while an individual outcome, is at times difficult to evaluate based on the tenets of distributive justice. One complexity is that playing time on a team is an outcome that is often distributed among team members in a very limited manner. In high school football there could be over 60 team members however only 11 players on offense and 11 players on defense can compete at any one time resulting in a large number of participants watching, waiting for their turn to compete. Furthermore, while more than one athlete may play a given position (i.e., four running backs

may rotate in and out of the game) playing time among the different participants is normally not distributed in an equal fashion. Coaches consider a number of factors when deciding which athletes will play in a game at a given point. Some of these factors are related to the individual performance of the athlete, competitive experience, or the level of effort demonstrated. However, some considerations may be based on the situation and the opponent the team is competing against. This means that an athlete who has performed at a high level or demonstrated the greatest effort in the past may not receive the largest proportion of playing time. Therefore, in some instances participants may perceive the amount of playing time they receive as unfair, especially when evaluations of individual contribution (i.e., effort, experience, and performance) are compared to the amount of time they are allowed to compete. This lack of direct connection between effort/performance and the desired outcome of playing time makes considerations of fairness based on distributive justice somewhat difficult. Thus, when a sport participant is dissatisfied with the outcome of playing time the focus may shift from an evaluation of individual "inputs" vs. "outputs" to the policies and procedures used by the coaching staff to allocate playing time. If these policies are fair, take into consideration all group members, and are applied in a consistent manner (Leventhal, 1980) team members are more likely to have positive perceptions of justice. Positive perceptions of fairness demonstrated by individual athletes are likely to lead to improved team performance because each participant will continue to make productive contributions to the team and not demonstrate the previously mentioned negative behaviors (Jordan, et al., 2004).

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study combined with results of previous research (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001; Jordan et al., 2004) have important implications for interscholastic coaches and administrators. It would appear team performance is more likely to improve when coaches create a climate of fairness with their team. While it is understood that many different factors contribute to the success of a team, the idea of fairness, specifically in this study procedural justice, is one that a coach can directly influence. As identified by Leventhal (1980) there are several factors that can be addressed when attempting to improve perceptions of procedural justice. The following factors, based on the work of Leventhal and Jordan et al. (2004) can be instituted by coaches desiring to improve athlete perceptions of fairness.

First, coaches should allow athletes to contribute in the process of developing team policies. Team members who feel that they had the opportunity to provide input during the development of team policies are more likely to view these policies as fair. Second, coaches must make sure that athletes not only understand team policies but also recognize the relationship between team policies and individual outcomes. For example if an athlete understands how decisions regarding playing time, position or other relevant decisions are to be made it is more likely that this athlete will view the decisions as just. Third, coaches should limit the amount of preferential treatment afforded to certain individuals on the team. Obviously there are times when exceptions to policies or rules must be made; however, procedural justice is more likely to occur when policies are applied in a consistent manner. Fourth, encourage athletes

to communicate their concerns or displeasures while making sure that they understand that this must be done at an appropriate time and in a respectful manner. When athletes feel that they can communicate with coaches about issues that concern them it is less likely negative feelings will be internalized and develop into behaviors that are counter productive to team success. Finally, identify the relationship between established policies and the overall success of the team. As mentioned previously, understanding the fairness of individual outcomes in a team sport setting can at times be very difficult. Shifting the focus from what is best for each individual athlete to what is best for the entire team may help create a climate of fairness if team policies can be directly related to team success.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The contribution of this research should be viewed recognizing the limitations which the study experienced. First, when making comparisons to organizations outside of sport the subjects are most often adults. This study dealt with high school students. In addition, performance data for sport is more objective. Wins and loses are absolutes. For many of the organizational studies, performance tends to be a more subjective measure, derived from the subjects' performance appraisals which are often based on the subjective perceptions of supervisors.

Further research is needed to fully understand the relationship between fairness and its influence over student athletes. Numerous other factors which are of interest include perception differences between students who play team sports and those who play individual sports; differences among students based upon the sex of

their coach; and perhaps differences among students who attend rural and urban schools. Integrating social exchange theory with justice research in sport may provide considerable insight into how the relationships between students and their coaches influence student perceptions and a variety of organizational outcomes. This study and those that follow may, as Greenberg et al. (1985) suggested, provide a unique view of justice theory which will enhance the current knowledge surrounding justice and its impact in organizational settings.

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