

A Comparative Analysis of Three Levels (High School, College, Professional)
of Coaches' Perceptions of Their Athletes' Self-Efficacy and Confidence

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Nathan Henry Kafka

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION

Frank Guldbrandsen Ph.D., Adviser

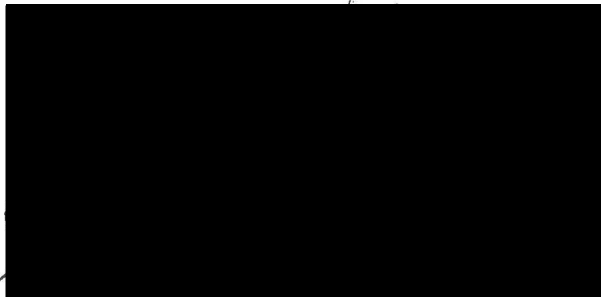
December 2013

Committee Signatures:

Chair

Member

Graduate Program Director



© Nathan Henry Kafka 2013

Abstract

The longstanding question within sports and baseball is what separates the good athletes from the great ones. The purpose of this study was to look at the role self-efficacy and self-confidence play in the success of athletes. This study was solely based on the coaches' perspective of their athletes. Three coaches who coach at different levels (high school, college, professional) were interviewed for this study. All of these coaches have a proven track record for success and have had the opportunity to work with thousands of players. These coaches, along with what research suggests, give us an interesting perspective on what separates good from great high school, college, and professional baseball players. Although self-efficacy and self-confidence are important, there are other factors that contribute to the success of athletes at each level respectively.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
CHAPTER ONE. Introduction.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	2
Background.....	2
Setting.....	4
Summary.....	4
CHAPTER TWO. Literature Review.....	6
Self-efficacy.....	6
Cognitive.....	6
Motivational.....	6
Mood or Affect.....	7
Optimism.....	1
Fixed Mindset.....	9
Growth Mindset.....	9
Athletes' Perceptions of Their Coaches.....	10
Confident Athletes.....	15
Coaches' Perceptions of Athletes.....	17
Summary.....	20
CHAPTER THREE. Methodology.....	21
Introduction.....	21
Setting.....	21
Participants.....	22
High School Coach.....	22
College Coach.....	22
Professional Coach.....	23
Research Design.....	23
Data Gathering and Analysis.....	23
Summary.....	24
CHAPTER FOUR. Results and Discussion.....	25
Introduction.....	25
Results.....	25
The High School Coach.....	26
The College Coach.....	27
The Professional Coach.....	28
Discussion.....	28
Summary.....	30
CHAPTER FIVE. Summary and Conclusion.....	32
Summary.....	32

Significant Findings.....	32
Educational Implications.....	33
Recommendations for Future Research.....	34
Conclusions.....	35
 Bibliography.....	 37
 Appendices:	
A. IRB Approval.....	40
B. Interview Questions.....	41

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It is the bottom of the 9th inning. The home team is in the field, up by one run. There are runners on 1st and 2nd with two outs and the 9 spot in the order is at the plate. If they get this out, the game is over. The pitcher is walking around the mound buying him some time to collect his thoughts. Fatigue has set in as he wipes the sweat off his forehead with his undershirt. The head coach is pacing back and forth in the dugout deciding what he should do. He then makes his way to the mound for a visit and with each step he contemplates if he should go to the bullpen or keep this pitcher in the game. He knows he has his best arm on the mound, but this decision is the difference between winning and losing the game.

Turn the attention to the other dugout. This coach is praying they can get to the next hitter in their lineup, which is their best hitter. If the number 9 hitter gets on, the leadoff hitter has a great chance to give his team the lead. He has been their most consistent hitter this season. If they get the lead, they have an All-American closer to come into the game and shut the door.

One hitter, one pitch is all that separates this game from being won and lost. A matter of inches can decide a ball or strike, a hit or an out. One pitch, one out is all that separates winning and losing. How does the coach's decision affect the outcome of this game?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to look at high school, college, and professional baseball players through the coach's eyes to determine the perception of the self-efficacy of the players. The study focused on what made these players reliable, and why the coach felt comfortable putting them into any situation. This study also looked at the ways coaches can instill self-efficacy so the players can be more confident and prepared for any situation. The research also examines why some players are more successful than others.

Background

There are players who feel they can coast and be successful on talent alone. They do not feel the need to put in extra effort to be mentally and physically strong. Lemire (2012) in "Being the Natural Isn't Enough," focuses on professional baseball players, and even with the very best prospects, he argues natural talent isn't enough. The article shows that there are many factors that lead to developing a successful athlete. With professionals there are a great number of players who have the ability to play the sport at a high level, but very few of them actually make it to the major leagues. A great deal of hard work and dedication is put into the ones who make it (Lemire, 2012).

Hill and Shaw (2013) state that self-focus is the most likely mechanism of choking in sport. During the course of the game, as the pressure mounts there are certain athletes who can handle the pressure and thrive in those environments, while others struggle when those situations present themselves. Through hours, days, and years of practice, the coaches have to instill calmness in their athletes to help reduce the risk of choking under pressure. The end result is a successful outcome for the team. Coaches try

to create drills and have contests to prepare these athletes for pressure situations daily. The reality of the situation is that some people can handle it while others cannot, no matter what they do in practice. There is no substitute for games and in-game situations.

Each coach has a certain way of teaching their philosophies, and athletes need to respect that coach. It is difficult for a coach to instruct successfully if an athlete does not want to listen. There are many athletes who feel that in order for a coach to be perceived as knowledgeable, he must have been a successful player. Currently there is a trend that is seen in sports as former players are filling coaching positions. However, there are exceptions to this as well. At Clemson University the head baseball coach never played past college and he is one of the most successful college coaches in history, owning a career 1224-694-1 record (Clemson University, 2013). Coaches who can earn the respect of their players by developing them further make both the player and the team better. There are also instances where it takes a coach a few years to turn a program around, and the great ones have that ability (Hanin, 2007).

As the coaching and sports world evolves, there are many different types of coaching and there are many ways to coach. Whether one is trying to improve mental or physical skills, practice is what it is going to take. The more repetitions we have, the better chance we have at perfecting the skill (Kreber, 2007). Once the skill is perfected, it is easier to repeat the act. In sports, consistency is the key. The more one can repeat their actions the better chance one has to play at a high level. The coach has the ability to create opportunities to allow athletes to become consistent in practice. This allows coaches to put athletes in game situations. This lets them know if their athletes can be

successful or not. The difference between high school, college, and professional sports is not always talent, but also consistency.

When coaches have the ability to work with their athletes, it is usually the ordinary athletes doing things correctly, because for them it is the best way to become successful. There are times where the extraordinary athletes tend to do their own things. Hank Aaron was quoted saying, "Unusual mechanics require unusual talent" (Stallings, 2004). That being said, coaches have to tailor their coaching philosophies and teachings to each athlete. Athletes make it in sports because they have worked hard to develop their mechanics and skills. It is very rare that people make it because they are born with superior talent. That will only take athletes so far.

Setting

With the ongoing need to learn more about the reasons for success, this research project was done by interviewing one coach from three different levels of baseball: high school, college, and professional. All of these coaches have achieved success while coaching, playing and coaching, or just playing. These interviews took place face-to-face at the convenience of the people being interviewed. The target audience is high school, college, and professional coaches. With this study, we learned how athletes separate themselves and how coaches can develop self-efficacy in their athletes.

Summary

I have played at all three of these levels in baseball and it was interesting to see the perceptions of these coaches and their ability to develop self-efficacy among their players. I found out why they use certain players in certain situations and the reasoning

behind this. This is very important because we figured out what makes these players successful. With this research, I can now implement these techniques for my future players, allowing them a greater chance for success in something they love. As a player I loved the game of baseball and I would have played it forever if I could have. I assume that in high school baseball, athletic ability plays the biggest role in being successful; in college it has to do with athletic ability as well as mental toughness; and in professional baseball I think the mental side becomes a larger factor. There are a lot of people who throw 90 mph and very few of them make millions of dollars. I want to find out what separates players at each level and what we can do as coaches to try and maximize the confidence and ability of each individual.

There has not been much research on this subject. I did not have a broad field of study as I only interviewed one coach from each specified area. Ideally, one would be able to walk around at practice and be in the dugout for games to get a true grasp on why the coach is thinking what he is thinking. We cannot see how the kids are practicing and what they are doing specifically in practice to allow them to be successful. However, this study gives us an idea of why coaches put certain players in pressure situations and what methods they use to build self-efficacy in their athletes. It also gives us some insight as to why some athletes are more successful than others in the same sport at each appropriate level. What separates athletes who have the same ability?

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as people being able to realize their aims and goals. It is the ability to believe in yourself and realize what you are capable of.

Bandura (1997) breaks down self-efficacy into four major categories. What follows are operating definitions for these concepts:

Cognitive. Someone with high self-efficacy in a cognitive sense will set the standard high for themselves. They are unwilling to take the easy road and are fully prepared for the tasks that they set themselves. They visualize themselves having success rather than looking at things negatively. These people learn from mistakes, and are not rattled by difficulties (Bandura, 1993). A person with low-self efficacy will look at all of the possible things that could go wrong instead of focusing on what is right (Bandura, 1997).

Motivational. Bandura states. "Self-efficacy beliefs contribute to motivation in several ways: They determine the goals people set for themselves, how much effort they expend, how long they persevere in the face of difficulties, and their resilience to failures" (Bandura, 1997, p. 4). People with high self-efficacy will give forth the most effort and give themselves challenging goals to accomplish. If they have belief that they can achieve the goals they set for themselves, they are more likely to work until those goals are accomplished regardless of how long it takes. A person with low self-efficacy may set

goals for themselves. If a goal is not attained, they will quit rather than figure out what went wrong and try to change from there (Bandura, 1997).

Mood or affect. The type of efficacy one has directly affects how much stress one puts on oneself. People who have a positive attitude and can cope with problems that arise are ones with high self-efficacy. People with high self-efficacy find ways to make problems easier to solve. If one's hopes are defeated and they feel they can't handle the load, they are experiencing low self-efficacy. These people generally do not have satisfying social relationships and are in a poor mood much of the time (Bandura, 1997). People with high self-efficacy feel they are in control at all times. They are able to slow things down and don't think negative thoughts. Those who have disturbing thoughts and feel they can't manage, experience high anxiety and will struggle. The speed is too fast for them, so they give up (Bandura, 1993).

Optimism. If one is a person with high self-efficacy, one must be optimistic. You have to believe that you can accomplish certain tasks set before you and you pick those tasks that will challenge you. The goals you set for yourself will be high, and you will be eager to try and accomplish them. There are people who will avoid certain activities and situations because they do not believe in themselves (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1993) also goes on to say that the personal goal setting people have is greatly influenced by the self-appraisal of their capabilities. The more they believe they can do, the better goals they will set for themselves. People who have high self-efficacy do not just visualize success. They visualize scenarios that will provide guides for them to help with their performance. Rather than just looking at the end product and how they

got to the finish line, they will see in detail what it took them to accomplish each step. Referring back to Maslow, each step must build upon itself, and a person with high self-efficacy realizes that.

The selection process is also important when one is talking about efficacy. The choices people make, the people they associate themselves with, their interests, and networks help determine where they will go in life. Any choice they make can directly affect the direction of personal development. Career choice and development are an example of self-efficacy beliefs that affect one's life path. The higher and stronger their beliefs in efficacy, the more likely they are to consider different career options and the better they prepare themselves for those careers (Bandura, 1993).

People who have high self-efficacy are more likely to become successful in life. They are the ones who will find solutions to problems and set the bar high. They are able to take blame for their mistakes and correct them. They are held accountable for their actions and focus on the task at hand. They are highly motivated and willing to take on new tasks. They are unworried about themselves and their appearance as long as the problem gets completed. They believe in themselves and their abilities to be successful (Bandura, 1997).

People with low self-efficacy will choose tasks they know they can complete with ease. They do not challenge themselves and are more worried about appearance than completing the tasks set before them. They are likely to give up when something does not go their way and the stress they put on themselves can lead to depression. They tend to blame themselves for failing and generally do not believe in their own abilities. They

doubt themselves (Bandura, 1997).

Fixed Mindset

Dweck (2010) believes that students with a fixed mindset believe they are born with a certain amount of intelligence, place value on appearance above all else, do not like being challenged, miss out on opportunities to learn, and are afraid of failure. If a task looks difficult, they immediately assume they will not do well and shy away from the problem. Students with fixed mindsets also believe that things should come naturally to them without having to put in the effort to improve. When students with a fixed mindset struggle, they get easily discouraged and lose their confidence (Dweck, 2010).

Students and athletes with a fixed mindset do not allow themselves room to grow. They are more likely to underperform, and when things get tough, they will back down. They are more worried about their looks and how they are perceived than they are of their actual performance. They always want to feel comfortable in situations, and when they are comfortable they are more likely to perform. When they perform they will feel a sense of belonging because the team will know and trust to them.

Growth Mindset

The growth mindset is the opposite of a fixed mindset. Students have the desire to learn and get better. They look at challenges as opportunities to expand and become more diverse. Students with a growth mindset do not believe in failure (Dweck, 2010). If they do not get something right the first time, they will keep trying different strategies until they get it right. Thomas Edison stated, "I have not failed, I've just found 10,000 ways that it won't work" (Edison, n.d.). Edison is a perfect example of a growth learner. Being

able to try new strategies is part of the learning process. Quitting after one try only hinders the ability to learn. Sometimes growth learners may be slower processing the information, but when they figure out the problem they tend to understand concepts on a higher level. Students with a growth mindset set goals for themselves and give the utmost effort to achieve those goals. A growth mindset allows one to be more successful because of openness to new challenges (Dweck, 2010).

A study by George (1994) was conducted to see if self-confidence and baseball performance had any correlation. He found that stronger self-efficacy predicted greater effort in the games as well as higher performance. This effort coordinates with a growth mindset. When someone with a fixed mindset gets out or makes a mistake, they are frustrated and tend not to work as hard. It is unrealistic to get a hit every time up to bat or to never give up a run on the mound. Effort is one thing that is not taught. The players in the George (1994) study were trying to get better and improve every day, and their performance was rewarded by playing better and more mistake-free baseball.

Athletes' Perceptions of Their Coaches

“Coaches are responsible for developing athletes’ mental, physical, technical, and tactical abilities, and in addition to all of these responsibilities, they are also expected to win” (Becker, 2009). The expectations of a coach in any sport at any level are great. The higher the level, the more about winning it becomes. In college and professional sports, coaches who do not win are likely to get fired. Very rarely do people outside the team focus on anything else besides wins and losses. Fans expect their team to be successful. The administrators or owners are often very quick to make a change if teams

are losing, despite what other benefits the coach has on his athletes. It is very important to understand the athletes' perceptions of their coaches. Being able to look at how the athletes judge the playing experience (either positively or negatively) is a key component that often is largely overlooked.

In a study by Gearity and Murray (2011), themes were developed as to why athletes viewed their coaches in a negative way. When athletes were poorly coached, it was because the coaches did these five things:

1. **Poor teaching skills:** Poor teaching skills caused the athletes to be less confident in their ability to perform when the task at hand was set before them. It appeared to them that the coach was not knowledgeable, and was poor at giving instruction, individualizing, and managing. The athletes reported not learning from their coaches, which also caused them to provide low emotional and relationship support to their athletes.

2. **Uncaring:** This was evident in poor coaches due to the fact that they did not care about their athletes' feelings or how they were enjoying their experience. These coaches were only worried about wins and losses to make themselves look good. These coaches also lied, degraded, and were negative towards their athletes.

3. **Unfair:** If a coach was reported as unfair, it was usually because they treated some athletes differently than others. They gave more support to certain athletes and did nothing for others. Due to this type of behavior, the athletes never felt they could please their coach and they also had a hard time trusting their coach.

4. Inhibiting athletes' mental skills: Athletes felt their poor coaches hindered their mental skills by making them feel helpless. They knew they were not going to improve and these coaches really slowed the player's ability to improve. "I could have been a lot more successful" (Gearity & Murray, 2010, p. 215). Athletes also felt these coaches were distracting during games, and the athletes had a tendency to lose focus. When the coaches did not encourage their athletes, the athletes felt unmotivated and did not want to give 100%. The athletes also responded that the coaches did not build confidence—instead they gave them self-doubt.

5. Athlete coping: The athletes used two main strategies to cope with the poor coaching experience they had. One strategy was just to avoid the coach however they could. Another coping method was that the athletes developed a whatever attitude.

Poor coaching at any level directly affects athletes' lives and not just the sport they are playing. There are many cases where athletes cannot handle poor coaching anymore and decide to quit. There are other instances where athletes cannot afford to quit, and they feel stuck. An example of this would be a high school athlete who wants to continue their athletic career at the collegiate level. If the player quits or has a bad relationship with their coach, the player will likely have a much more difficult time finding a place to play in college. Another example is a college player who is on scholarship. Many athletes have difficulty paying for college, so scholarships could be the primary reason they stay in school. If they did not participate in athletics, it would be more difficult for them to attend college.

There are many instances where the coach is the key to the athletes' future. In high school it is to get into college, college to get into professional, and professional to stay in professional. When coaches are worried more about their ego, they tend to give much less time to the athletes and what they feel or care about. By being negative, providing low support, and having punishment-oriented feedback, the athletes cannot perform how they and the coach would like. Poor coaches worry about the outcome of the game, while great coaches worry about staying focused on the task at hand. A coach who encourages and is positive to their athletes allows the athletes to develop a high self-efficacy. This directly relates to desirable outcomes, creating lofty but attainable goals, more effort and persistence, and the ability to manage emotions when the game is on the line (Gearity & Murray, 2010).

“Great coaches are perceived by their athletes by avoiding breakdowns, by maintaining interaction within, and between all of the coaching dimensions. This is perhaps one of the major factors that separates great coaches from their peers” (Becker, 2009. p. 98). These coaches not only serve as coaches but fill many different roles for their athletes. They were viewed as mentors, friends, and teachers. In some cases, these coaches were even looked at as parental figures. Athletes also viewed these coaches as regular people: they were human. The great coaches admitted to making mistakes, showed their faults, and rightfully admitted that they did not have all of the answers. They did not have a chip on their shoulder and were very responsive to the needs of their athletes. They never acted like they were better than anybody else regardless of the prior success they had.

Great coaches' personalities also separate them from their peers because the coach is always willing to learn and try new things with the team. A great coach shows a passion for the game and a passion for what they do. Great coaches are emotionally stable, perfectionist, organized, and professional. They separate themselves by being the first to show up and the last to leave. They have character, class, and respect for others. By possessing these traits, their athletes know that they will be prepared for every game, which instills confidence in the players, enabling them to perform at a high level.

Great coaches have the ability to adapt to situations and never make the game about them. They always know that the game is about the athletes they coach and the athletes should be the ones to receive the accolades. The players come first, and in doing that, coaches make themselves very accessible and approachable to the athletes. The athletes like a coach who is honest, loyal, and treats them with respect and kindness. Great coaches also care about what their players are like as people, not just as athletes. They build relationships that extend beyond the court/field. These coaches are also successful teachers. They can use tilings they learned and relate them to the athletes they coach. They also realize that not all athletes learn the same way, so they are able to adapt different methods and styles to ensure everyone learns the material. They have outstanding communication skills and are able to motivate differently than their peers. Most of all. these coaches perform under pressure. There is never a situation that is too big for them (Becker, 2009).

Athletes perceive coaches in many different ways, and the coaches who have positive effects on their athletes are the ones who are not worried about their own

individual achievements. They are very approachable with their athletes and work to get the most out of them. The athletes who are coached by great coaches want to learn and want to get better daily. With poor coaches, the athletes are eager to avoid or be done with the experience they have with that person. Great coaches are great communicators and teachers and are prepared. This is what separates them from their peers.

Confident Athletes

It has been said that mental toughness is the most important physiological characteristic in achieving performance excellence of an athlete. The self-belief and self-desire of athletes sets them apart from others. Athletes who have a higher belief in themselves and the drive to be better are the ones who allow themselves the opportunity to be successful. Connaughton, Wadey, Hanton, and Jones (2008) believed the topic of self-belief has two dimensions: (a) belief in one's ability to achieve competition goals; and (b) believing that you are different to, and therefore better than, your opponents. The athletes who were considered elite athletes had the rare ability to have a very high self-belief. They believed they could achieve great things, and setbacks in performance only pushed them to work harder and make sure their skills were refined so those setbacks did not occur again.

The athletes who are considered elite became elite at a young age and it started with their parents and coaches. Parents and coaches who were more positive and less involved tended to mold better athletes. When they believed in the athletes, the athletes felt more confident in their ability and that carried over into the future. Through the parents and coaches, these athletes developed a desire to win and a desire to want to be

better. When they were better, they won, and the winning turned into something they enjoyed.

When the athletes were in the middle years of maturity, they started to experience setbacks. We all have setbacks during athletics, but again, the separation was starting to develop between the elite athletes and the ones who were not. This is the point where the athletes started to set goals for themselves and were more likely to challenge opponents so they could try and beat someone else. The older the athletes get, the more likely uncontrollable events will occur. When these events occur, the superior athletes with a high amount of mental toughness can weather the storm, so to speak. They never let the situation get out of their control and they are able to keep whatever damage to a minimum. Elite athletes have the rare ability to be, and not be fazed with any situation that is presented to them.

As these athletes continue to get older, they no longer just want to be good at the sport, they want to be the best. The elite athletes are more likely to challenge others and work to be the best at that particular sport. These athletes who are considered elite also have the ability to prepare both mentally and physically for competition. They have run over situations in their heads on how they were going to approach a game strategy-wise. They also know that no one they are competing against has outworked them (Connaughton et al., 2008).

Athletes who have a high self-belief in themselves are elite athletes. These athletes are developed from the early years on. Besides being gifted physically, a lot of things need to work in their favor for these athletes to be successful. They need support.

opportunity, a work ethic, and the drive to be the best. Once these qualities have been instilled, it is up to them to go through with the skills necessary to be considered elite. No question about it, the elite athletes are elite for a reason and are very hard workers. Many of them, however, had a lot of help getting to where they are today.

Coaches' Perceptions of Athletes

The role of a coach is to deliver quality coaching and a positive learning and performance environment, which are accomplished by teaching athletes (Bucci, Bloom, Loughead, & Caron, 2012). One of the biggest goals for a coach is to enhance player development, and the coach's perception changes if they feel they enhance the player development of their athletes. As the coach develops their players physically, they also try to develop their players from a mental capacity. Who can handle the challenge? During this stage the coaches can then pick leaders for their team. These leaders are the ones who take the coach's philosophies and instill them in the rest of the athletes. Leaders influence the team members towards common goals and the achievement of those goals that the coach sets forward. The coach expects the leader to be an extension of the coaching staff and creating and fitting with the team's identity. In a recent study 75% of people identified work ethic as the single most important characteristic to success (Bucci et al., 2012). When a coach understands the work ethic of their athletes, it is easier for the coach to pick a leader, and an easier decision for the coach to put that player in a stressful situation. "He must be a player that leads by example, who is ready to work, who follows the plan, and who is willing to play with bumps and bruises all the time" (Bucci et al., 2012, p. 249). These are the types of players coaches build their teams

around. The coach knows that the athlete is prepared. The athletes and coaches viewed the relationship between each other as one of mutual respect. The athletes then look to their coaches as a valuable source of support and encouragement in and out of the sport. With the coach having a mutual respect with the athlete, it is easy for the coach to be comfortable with the athlete and less stress can occur. If coaches are not comfortable with the athletes, it creates a more stressful environment as well as the coaches second-guessing themselves.

Any good coach will put high expectations on themselves as well as their athletes. The coach's main job is to aid in player development. A coach is judged on how well the players can be developed in order to win games. A big part of this is in the recruiting and drafting process. Through the years recruiting has become more crucial to the coaches' success. These days there is not only recruiting/drafting in professional and college sports, there also is recruiting done at the high school level. This is all centered around athletes, and high schools, universities, and professional sports teams have turned into powers by doing this the right way. One of the biggest parts of any coaching job description is being able to evaluate and develop talent (Solomon, 2010). No matter what level the athletes are at, the coaches have to see either a finished product or how good they perceive that athlete to be. It is no secret, as athletics progress, that the best coaches who can recruit the best are the ones who win. There is less focus on teaching and more on recruiting.

With the expectations that coaches put on their athletes, there comes an issue with self-esteem, confidence, and competence of these athletes. How a coach judges these

things within the athletes will determine playing time, scholarship money, and recruitment. Coaches spend a great deal of time evaluating the performance of athletes. This determines how they feel they can compete against opponents and what strategy they need to use to be victorious. The good coaches will then provide feedback to the athletes based on these evaluations (Sinclair, 1989). During the recruitment and practice sessions, evaluations will tell the coach who the high expectancy and low expectancy athletes are. Coaches do not spend as much time with low expectancy athletes as compared to athletes in higher levels. In Sinclair's (1989) study, it was said the high expectancy athletes received more individual communications from coaches than low expectancy athletes. The low expectancy athletes are the ones who need more instruction and correction. Due to the nature of the business, with such a strong push to win, the coach does not have time to spend with the athletes they do not feel will help them to win. If the coach perceives an athlete as low expectancy, it is hard to spend much time with that person. That being said, it is the coach's responsibility to provide feedback and evaluation to all athletes and not just the ones they feel will help them. This goes back to recruiting and evaluating talent. There are times coaches will miss on players and they never reach their potential. In some cases, this is not the athlete's fault, and they should be given feedback just as everyone else. When the coach does give feedback, immediate reinforcement is advocated, which has a greater impact on the learner than delayed reinforcement. When the athletes receive timely feedback to help them improve, they are more confident in their ability to perform in the future (Sinclair, 1989).

Summary

The ability for a coach to develop self-efficacy and self-confidence in all their athletes is what separates the good from the great coaches. Knowing what type of player a coach wants and creating an environment to allow that athlete to grow and develop, not only physically but also mentally, is what separates each coach. As previously stated, a prepared athlete is a confident athlete. A team of confident, prepared athletes is difficult to beat because they have come on board, and the coach has earned the respect of those athletes.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

This interview-based study was used to determine the coaches' perceptions of their athletes' self-efficacy and confidence. It was used to get a different perspective on what the coaches looked for in their athletes and what they feel could make those athletes succeed. Was self-efficacy and confidence the only trait coaches looked for? Based on views of coaches from the three levels, which included high school, college, and professional baseball, desirable qualities these coaches looked for were identified. This chapter will discuss the setting and participants involved in this study. It will then discuss the development of the interview and the questions asked. Finally it will look at the process that was used to gather and analyze the interview-based data.

Setting

This study was conducted in various locations for the convenience of the participants involved. There were two face-to-face interviews in a small town in northeast Wisconsin and a city in southern Minnesota. These interviews were conducted in the offices of the interviewees. One of the interviews had to be conducted over the phone, as the interviewee was located on the East Coast for his season. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

Participants

Three individuals participated in the study. The participants for this study were selected by the researcher and were selected based on personal relationships. The selected coaches represented each level of baseball relevant to this study. The coaches interviewed brought many years of playing and coaching experience and were highly successful in both. With a difference in levels, different perspectives and opinions were given as to what it took to be a successful baseball player.

High school coach. This coach grew up in northeast Wisconsin and went to college in the same area. He has had four years of high school and one year of college baseball playing experience. As a coach, this individual has 21 years of experience and boasts an impressive 316-164 career mark which is good for a .658 winning percentage. He has two state runner-up finishes and six conference titles. He is in the top 30 in wins among Wisconsin high school baseball coaches.

College coach. This coach is from southern Minnesota and played both college and professional baseball. He played college baseball for four years and was then selected in the Major League draft. He played professionally for three seasons and has been coaching for 11 years. He was an assistant coach for six seasons and has been the head coach for five seasons. As a head coach he boasts a 215-66 career mark which is good for a .765 winning percentage. He has already been named Region and National Coach of the Year in multiple seasons. He has coached several All-Conference, All-Region, and All-American players. Additionally, 25 of his players have signed professionally in his time as a head and assistant coach.

Professional coach. This coach is also from southern Minnesota and played both college and professional baseball. He has been in professional baseball as a player, scout, coach, or manager since 1979. He has been a Minor League manager for seven seasons and has also served as a Major League coach for 13 seasons. He is currently managing in Triple AAA and is leading his team to their best finish in five seasons. He has coached several Minor and Major League All-Stars and has coached some of the all-time greats. His all-time winning percentage as a manager is over .500. a very well respected feat in professional baseball. The years of knowledge and the high caliber of play he has experienced gave great insight to this study.

Research Design

This particular study was conducted by interviewing three participants. These interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. This method allowed the researcher to “define an area to be explored, at least initially, and from which the interviewer or interviewee may diverge in order to pursue an idea in more detail” (Britten, 1995, p. 251). Using this style, it was easier to observe and let the interviewees feel more comfortable to speak their mind. Additionally, each question could be expanded, which allowed the opinions and answers to vary between the coaches interviewed.

Data Gathering and Analysis

During the interview process each participant was asked six questions. The phone interview was more difficult to conduct than the face-to-face, but some important information was gathered and the interviewees were a pleasure to talk to. Due to the style

of the open-ended interview, more questions were asked of the individuals as the interviewer saw fit. Notes were taken during each interview and at the conclusion of the interview the notes were reviewed and prioritized accordingly. This was done to examine themes and commonalities between the interviews. There were specific things that each coach looked for in their players. Some were more detailed in what they wanted and others were brief. During this time, specific players were used as examples of certain characteristics these coaches admired. That said, it was important to note these opinions and examine how these skill sets allowed someone to be successful. The positive themes were monitored and repeated numerous times throughout all of the interviews.

Summary

Throughout the course of this study, the correlation between self-efficacy and confidence and the effect it has on positive baseball performance was examined. Insight and characteristics on what these coaches believe makes players successful was discussed repeatedly. This is a topic that has not been researched in great detail. Looking into the interviews with the coaches, it was apparent they each had their ideal baseball player. There were both similarities and differences between the interviews. Having three different perspectives at three levels gave great insight and a deeper examination at how athletes become successful. As the research was reviewed, similarities and differences became apparent. Throughout the next chapter, these themes will be discussed thoroughly to better understand successful baseball players.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussion

Introduction

Self-efficacy and confidence in the game of baseball is a crucial factor to positive performance on the field. Confidence helps develop consistency, and the more consistent players are more likely to succeed. This study was conducted to determine what coaches at three different levels of baseball look for in successful baseball players. What type of player do they want on their team to ensure the greatest amount of team and personal success? Without high self-efficacy, the athletes' chances of success lessen. Through interviews with coaches from high school, college, and professional baseball, self-efficacy, confidence, and the ideal baseball player were discussed at great length. Each coach brought their own perspective on what it takes to be successful and what it takes to win. They also talked about why some coaches can pull through at a crucial moment while others fail.

Results

As the interviews were being conducted, it was evident what the coaches wanted in baseball players. The coaches discussed what it takes to be a successful baseball player and what separates the good from the great. Not to this researcher's surprise, each coach talked about similar characteristics, even if they used different words and phrases. As these traits were talked about, athletic ability was never the main topic of the discussions. Athletic ability was an added bonus, but the coaches looked for many other

characteristics beforehand.

The high school coach. The high school coach was great for this study and provided beneficial information. The ideal baseball player for this coach focused on the team more than the individual, played the game hard, and practiced hard. A player who can lead by his actions and his words is someone this coach wants. This player creates an attitude and has a confidence about him that cannot be duplicated. The great players this coach has had focused as much on baseball as time allowed. "Others can't maintain a great attitude because they let their outside sources influence them, such as parents, friends, etc." (high school coach, personal communication). This coach develops his players mentally by creating a positive environment and has a positive attitude towards them and their team. The players who do succeed and do not melt under pressure are the ones that are confident in what they are doing. In practice these players will be the first to step forward to demonstrate a new drill or situation. The coach feels that having a player who is coachable is more valuable than one who has a lot of athletic ability. No matter the talent level, if a high ability kid has a poor attitude, it will not benefit the team. All players are different and need to be treated as such. It depends on the attitude of these players and their ability to comprehend what the coach is telling them. In high school, there are many outside influences that can affect the player's ability and performance. Many things are placed on the shoulders of these students, including weight training, workouts in the off-season, and school. This coach has only three months of the year with his players. Many students play other sports and are not interested in putting in the time and commitment to only baseball. This presents many challenges for this coach and

allows minimal time for the players to buy into philosophies and practices.

The college coach. The college coach went into great detail about what characteristics his ideal baseball player would have. They are as follows: desire, potential, personal goals, work, dedication, determination, confidence, concentration/visualization, courage, pride, persistence, and winning attitude. The coach stated that what separates the good athletes from the great ones are all of these traits as well as consistency. Not only consistency on the field, but off the field as well. These players are consistent both mentally and physically. The coach develops players by teaching and repetition. The basic fundamentals, techniques, and individual skills are not overlooked. Consistency is what allows them to be successful and be the person up to the plate or on the mound with the game on the line. Athletes who are coachable, more willing to learn, take suggestions, and apply those into everyday practice are the ones this coach wants on his team. Athletic ability is not always the answer because those players are sometimes less coachable. As the players get older in the program they understand what it takes. This coach does not treat all his players the same, but he treats each fairly. He recognizes that players are individuals and need to be treated as such. They all have different strengths and weaknesses and are motivated by different things. Coaches need to know the personalities of their players. Some players need more encouragement while others need to create less stress. "Good coaches understand that the key to success is motivating their players to do their best and improve beyond apparent limitations, motivated by team goals" (college coach, personal communication).

The professional coach. This coach describes his ideal player as someone who is intelligent about the game with good feel and tools and athletic ability that fit the sport. The thing that separates the good baseball players from the great ones is self-confidence. These players must have the drive to compete and win in games, not just play. There are many hard workers but they struggle under pressure. Some players get caught being stuck in the past and thinking about past blunders. The best athletes do not live in the past. They focus on the present. At the professional level there is no responsibility to develop these athletes physically. Mentally they need to overcome busses, fatigue, and a marathon season. What goals they had should not be forgotten and to be consistent they need to be sharp mentally and physically, which includes weight and fitness training. Combining both the mental and physical aspects will show how well one can play the game on a daily basis. The player that this coach wants in, with the game on the line, is someone who believes in him. "He believes he belongs in that moment, thrives to be in that moment., wants to be there. That's what separates the best, they want to get the big hit" (professional coach, personal communication). The character of the player or players allows the coach and the team to be successful. "He is a better person than a player. You are going to be successful as a coach if your team has this mentality: high character, self-disciplined, and are good teammates" (professional coach, personal communication).

Discussion

Someone with high self-efficacy will set the standard high for himself; they are unwilling to take the easy road and are fully prepared for the tasks that they set

themselves (Bandura, 1997). Upon the conclusion of the interviews, some themes started to develop. It was clear that each coach was focused on the team and wanted a team built with high character athletes. All of the coaches expressed qualities in their players that would translate into someone with high self-efficacy. Another common theme was consistency. The coaches want their players consistent on a day-to-day basis. This means consistent in games, consistent in practice, and consistent outside of baseball. In high school and college baseball, players need to be consistent in the classroom to be allowed to play. In professional baseball, players need to develop a consistent routine because games are played every day. In high school and college baseball, both coaches expressed the quality of hard work in their players. Individuals who work hard have elevated confidence levels because they know that none of the competition has outworked them (Connaughton et al., 2008). The professional coach likes to have athletes on his team who also put in the work and time to do well. Most of those players will put in their work because it is their job and source of income. In high school they are playing for the team and will most likely end up doing something else other than baseball in the future. In college, there is a chance that they are on scholarship and are playing to have reduced tuition. Both the high school and college coaches said they looked upon the individual and treated them accordingly. They acknowledged that each player is treated fairly, but they are treated differently depending on the situation. The professional coach said everyone is treated the same at his level. In professional baseball the players are more mature; consequently, they are better able to handle criticism. All of the coaches agreed that the great players want to be in the moment and have practiced that moment many

times. There is no situation that is too big for them. All three levels present their own challenges and each coach stated such. In high school, many players play other sports and the coach has no control over who decides to play and what they do when the season is not in session. In addition, these coaches only have their players for three months out of the year. In professional baseball, the manager is given a team and many times is told how to play those players. He has no choice in players; he is there to manage them six months out of the year. If the team does not perform, the manager is the most likely to take the blame. College baseball presents many challenges outside of baseball. These include school admittance, tuition fees, and location of school. In college a coach is allowed to pick the type of player he likes and feels will be successful. It is easier to look at the desired characteristics and compare them to the athlete who is being recruited to find that perfect fit.

As mentioned previously, someone with high self-efficacy does reflect positive athletic performance. As we have learned, players with high self-efficacy have a growth mindset, they have the desire to learn and get better, and they look at challenges as opportunities to expand and become more diverse. Players with a growth mindset do not believe in failure (Dweck, 2010). Having self-efficacy and this mindset allows players to practice and play hard, be coachable, and be consistent. These players want to win and want to improve each day. It is up to the coaches to motivate them and create that positive environment at a young age.

Summary

Upon the conclusion of the interviews, several themes were apparent. These interviews were very informative, interesting, and correlated with the previous research conducted. This study provided an in-depth look into how coaches perceive athletes at three different levels as well as the similarities and differences between those levels. This research is accurate and credible because of the wealth of experience and success these coaches have had throughout their careers. Much of the previous literature was written with the first-hand knowledge of sports, specifically pertaining to baseball. This study provides an in-depth look specific to baseball and what attributes reflect a successful baseball player.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusion

Summary

During this study, three coaches were interviewed: a high school coach, a college coach, and a professional coach. These interviews asked what the coaches' perceptions of their athlete's self-efficacy and confidence were and how they defined their ideal athlete. This study was conducted to examine what coaches looked for in athletes and how they could build efficacy and confidence so their players and team could be successful. As there has not been much research done on this topic, this study can be used for future topics involving other sports and future professions as well.

Significant Findings

All of the interviewees discussed self-confidence in their players as a trait they must have. They also went on to talk about other traits that build confidence, such as consistency and hard work. The more repetitions we have the better chance we have at perfecting the skill (Kreber, 2007). The high school and college coach both said they treat their players fairly but not the same. It depends on the attitude and make-up of their players, and this dictates how they are coached. Upon conclusion of the interviews, it was determined that self-efficacy and self-confidence were very important to the success of baseball players but are not the only characteristics that make a successful baseball player. There are many other traits and attributes one must possess to reach the top level and achieve their personal goals. There is a great deal of hard work and dedication that is

put into the players who make it (Lemire, 2012). Lemire (2012) goes on to state that being natural is not enough, and all three coaches reiterated that fact. Hard work, intelligence, self-efficacy, and drive are some of the characteristics that are essential for players to attain the highest level.

Educational Implications

The traits and characteristics of the players cannot only be looked at in a baseball sense but also other sports and professions. Rarely did the coaches talk about athletic ability and what the players were born with, their natural abilities. What they talked about are things that the players could control and how they could make them better—things like hard work, drive, confidence, efficacy, teamwork, coachability, and communication were among a few. These characteristics are also characteristics of successful people in our society. To be successful you need to do these things successfully. Bandura (1997) states that successful people believe in themselves and their abilities to be successful. They look at problems more in-depth and give themselves more options because of their actions and characteristics.

This study was conducted to show how playing a game, such as baseball, teaches us life lessons and skills that adapt to everyday life. At any level one plays, they are still taught how to play as a team, work together, compete, fail, become leaders, learn, and achieve their goals. In a full-time job, one has to keep doing things well to allow themselves the opportunity to continue to move up and be rewarded. If you possess these traits you have to be able to do them well and keep growing with each pitch, at-bat, and game. The learning never ends. There are times when people look at baseball as just a

game and that anyone can do it. Only 5.6% of high school baseball players go on to play NCAA college baseball. Only .5% of high school baseball players go on to professional baseball, and only 10.5% of NCAA baseball players make it to professional baseball (High School Baseball Web, 2013). These statistics show that very few baseball players are able to continue their playing career and that it takes immense amounts of time to continue to grow with this sport. As with any situation in life, it takes time to achieve your goals (i.e., college degree, job. promotions). The game of baseball teaches us all that we need to know how to become successful in our own right. It teaches us how to fail, and to get back up and try again. A great baseball player fails or makes an out seven out of 10 times. Stephen Covey (1989) wrote a book entitled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. The seven habits are: (a) be proactive; (b) begin with the end in mind; (c) put first things first; (d) think win-win; (e) seek first to understand, then to be understood; (f) synergize; and (g) sharpen the saw (Covey, 1989). All of these effective habits can be learned in some way in great detail by playing a game called baseball.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was both informative and successful. Having interviews and being able to interact one-on-one with highly successful coaches made the information credible. This study obtained interesting and valuable information. With that being said, there are always ways to improve on research studies.

Interviewing only three coaches is just a small sample size of what the study could become. The fact that all three of the coaches talked about similar characteristics is encouraging, but having a larger sample size would be beneficial. All of the coaches were

from the Midwest even though they have coached in other areas of the U.S. Interviewing coaches from the East, West and South could yield different results. It would also be interesting to examine other levels. There are five levels in professional baseball alone along with the NCAA, NAL, NJCAA, and high school baseball. Do these characteristics change drastically or slightly based on level? It would also be interesting to look at the success of different coaches and see how coaches who have not had much success answer the questions. This study could even go as far as looking at the background of successful players and how they were raised. If someone comes from money, or how their parents raised them, is that a direct reflection on success? If someone does not come from money, is that a reflection on hard work and success? There are a lot of different avenues to be looked at with this purpose in mind. Despite the small sample size, there were many years of coaching between the three coaches and thousands of baseball players have crossed paths with these coaches. This was very informative and covers a wide range of people.

Conclusions

Self-efficacy and confidence are vital to success in the game of baseball. There are other things that must also assist with reaching your goals. Some players have the drive, intelligence, confidence, and leadership to be successful. It takes many things working together to achieve personal and team goals, and when the right group of players get together, the team and the individuals will succeed. Through research, studies, interviews, and writings, it is safe to say that having high self-efficacy and confidence is a driving force in allowing baseball players to be successful. Giving one the opportunity

to improve and willing to take instruction and grow is critical to success. This study shows that people with the drive and the will to compete will have a better chance to succeed in the game of baseball.

Bibliography

- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational Psychologist*, 28(2), 117.
- Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy. *Harvard Mental Health Letter*, 13(9), 4.
- Becker, A. J. (2009). It's not what they do, it's how they do it: Athlete experiences of great coaching. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(1), 93-119.
- Britten, N. (1995). Qualitative interviews in medical research. *BM J*, 311, 251-253.
- Bucci, J., Bloom, G. A., Loughhead, T. M., & Caron, J. G. (2012). Ice hockey coaches' perceptions of athlete leadership. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 24(3), 243-259.
- Chen, C.-C. (2010). Leadership and teamwork paradigms: Two models for baseball coaches. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 38(10), 1367-1376.
- Clemson University. (2013). Clemson Tigers baseball season statistics. Retrieved from http://www.clemsonigers.com/SportSelect.dbml?&DB_OEM_ID=28500&SPID=103712&SPSID=657829
- Connaughton, D., Wadey, R., Hanton, S., & Jones, G. (2008). The development and maintenance of mental toughness: Perceptions of elite performers. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 26(1), 83-95.
- Covey, S. (1989). *7 habits of highly effective people*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- DeRohan, N., Nagy, C., Meisenhelder, H., & Katayama, A. D. (2011). Using team efficacy surveys to help promote self-and-team-efficacy among college athletes. *The Sport Journal*, 14. Retrieved from <http://cabdirect.org/abstracts/20123144206.html;jsessionid=95D6309175E34E30F88DC8B994E69489>
- Dweck, C. S. (2007). The perils and promises of praise. *Educational Leadership*, 65(2), 34-39.
- Dweck, C. S. (2010). Even geniuses work hard. *Educational Leadership*, 68(1), 16-20.
- Edison, T. A. (n.d.). Quotes. Retrieved from www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3091287. Thomas A Edison
- Gearity, B. T., & Murray, M. A. (2011). Athletes' experiences of the psychological effects of poor coaching. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 12(3), 213-221.

- George, T. R. (1994). Self-confidence and baseball performance: A causal examination of self-efficacy theory. / confiance en soi et performance au baseball, un examen causal de la theorie de Pauto efficacite. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 16(4), 381-399.
- Hanin, Y. (2007). Coaching experience, playing experience and coaching tenure: A commentary. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 2(2), 129-131.
- High school baseball web. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.hsbaseballweb.com/>
- Hill, D. M., & Shaw, G. (2013). A qualitative examination of choking under pressure in team sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 14(1), 103-110.
- Kreber, J. (2007). Urban baseball: Boosting the young player's performance. Retrieved from <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-l68812620.html>
- Lemire, J. (2012). Being the natural isn't enough. Retrieved from <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1200407/index.htm>
- Lundqvist, C., Kentta G., & Raglin, J. S. (2011). Directional anxiety responses in elite and sub-elite young athletes: Intensity of anxiety symptoms matters. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicines Science in Sports*, 21(6), 853-862.
- Nicholls, A. R., Polman, R., & Levy, A. R. (2010). Coping self-efficacy, pre-competitive anxiety, and subjective performance among athletes. *European Journal of Sport Science*, 10(2), 97-102.
- Oliver, E. J., Hardy, J., & Marland, D. (2010). Identifying important practice behaviors for the development of high-level youth athletes: Exploring the perspectives of elite coaches. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 11(6), 433-443.
- Phillips, M. B., & Jubenville, C. B. (2009). Student-athletes' perceptions of men's basketball head coaches' competencies at 15 selected NCCAA division II Christian colleges. *Journal of Sport Administration & Supervision*, 1(1), 39-51.
- Sinclair, D. A. (1989). *The effect of coached expectations and feedback on athletes' self perceptions*. Eugene, OR: Microform Publications. College of Human Development and Performance, University of Oregon.
- Sinclair, D. A., & Vealey, R. S. (1989). Effects of coaches' expectations and feedback on the self-perceptions of athletes. / effets des espoirs des entraineurs et de la retroaction sur Pauto perception des athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 12(2), 77-91.
- Solomon, G. B. (2010). The influence of coach expectations on athlete development. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 1(2), 76-85.

Stallings, J. (2004). Dot your eyes and improve your coaching. Retrieved from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Dot+your+eyes+and+improve+yoii+coaching.-a0126076968>

APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/ INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

Study Number: 1306E36261

Principal Investigator: Nathan Kafka

Title(s):

Comparative analysis of 3 levels (High School, College, Professional) of coaches' perceptions of their athlete's self-efficacy and confidence

APPENDIX B**Interview Questions**

1. Describe your ideal baseball player?

2. What do you feel separates the good baseball players from the great ones?

3. How do you develop your athletes both mentally and physically?

4. What traits or abilities must the athlete show in order for you to use them in a game on the line situation? Or if they are already in the game why do you want that person on the mound or up at the plate?

5. Which of these traits in your players contributes more to your success as a coach and why? Coachability or athletic ability?

6. Do you treat all players the same in your program and why or why not?