

## PERCEPTION OF JAPANESE COLLEGIATE ATHLETES ABOUT THE FACTORS RELATED TO MENTORING SUPPORT

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### ABSTRACT

*An athlete's entourage plays a key factor when providing support to the entire career of athletes. For example, mentors are one important component of an athlete's entourage. This study examined mentoring factors among Japanese student athletes who participated in competitive sports and belonged to athletic clubs. An online survey examined the status of university athletes. We recruited first-year students from 2-year colleges and first- to third-year students from 4- or 6-year colleges or universities. Questionnaire consisted of five domains as follows: 1) mentoring (presence of a mentor and mentoring functions), 2) whole-life well-being (subjective happiness and interdependent happiness), 3) sport-life well-being (connectedness to a club), 4) college-life well-being (passivity and career decision-making self-efficacy), and 5) positive spillover. Most participants (N=182, 88.78% of the participants) reported having a mentor. As a result of the regression analyses, the perception of subjective happiness might differ depending on gender. In male athletes (N=73), regression analyses revealed that career support explained subjective happiness, connectedness to the club, positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport. Psychosocial support explained campus life passivity. In female athletes (N=109), role modeling explained subjective happiness and positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport. Moreover, mentoring did not relate to passivity in the domain of class or study or to career decision-making self-efficacy. This study highlights effective mentoring for collegiate athletes and the necessary functions of mentors. By understanding the effectiveness of mentoring for collegiate athletes based on the findings of this study, it was hoped to establish effective mentoring systems.*

**Keywords:** Mentor, protégé, positive spillover, dual career, sport-life balance.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The International Society of Sport Psychology (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009) emphasizes the necessity of viewing athletes from an overall perspective (e.g., dual career or sport-life balance; Arai, 2013), given that an athlete's life involves activities other than sports. When athletes evaluate their career development as a person, and not just as an athlete, these diverse factors need to be considered.

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) advocated the lifespan model, which stipulates that career development in general can be broadly divided into psychological, psychosocial, and academic and vocational levels. However, for athletes, an athletic level needs to be added to this model. Wylleman and Reints (2010) explained that the period between adolescent and young adult stage in particular signifies a period of transition within each factor, with events such as entering school and dormitories standing out as milestones. At the athletic level, the athlete transitions from the training to the elite stage, experiencing a difficult period in which career developments simultaneously occur for the person and the athlete.

The EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes: Recommended Policy Actions in Support of Dual Careers in High-Performance Sport (European Commission Expert Group "Education and Training in Sport," 2012) pointed out that an athletic career represents only one part of the full, long life of a person. By promoting a dual career (i.e., sport and studies or work; Stambulova, Engström, Franck, Linnér, & Lindahl, 2015) and not just a sports career, this guideline serves to protect the future of athletes. In this way, interest in athletes' entire careers (i.e., including life and personal career) besides sport has been increasing in recent years. In Japan, dual careers have begun to be noticed, for example, the Sport Basic Plan mentioned the dual career of top athletes (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2012).

However, it is difficult for student athletes to achieve a good dual career or sport-life balance. Jowett and Cramer (2009) mentioned that the sport environment often consumes the daily life of high-level athletes. Competitive student athletes might encounter overlap with class schedules, student-sport identity issues, and other issues related to physical fatigue, training requirements, and injuries (Parker, Perry, Hamm, Chipperfield, & Hladkyj, 2016). Johnson, Wessel, and Pierce (2013) found that competitive student athletes were at risk of dropping out of school due to athletic demands. Student athletes on a competitive level had to adapt to two distinct environments consisting of academics and sports (Parker *et al.*, 2016). López de Subijana, Barriopedro, and Conde (2015) identified that most athletes recognized the dual career as being difficult and

further confirmed that student athletes experienced several problems with their studies. The academic transition to higher education might lead to changes in personal and academic responsibilities (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Although the interest in collegiate athletes has been increasing in sport science (Brown, Fletcher, Henry, Borrie, Emmett, Buzza, & Wombwell, 2015), the information and knowledge on how to achieve a dual career or sport–life balance among student athletes is insufficient. Moreover, the relationship between well-being regarding the whole life and sport life needs to be examined (Lundqvist, 2011).

To achieve a positive dual career, the athlete’s entourage (e.g., coach, team staff, or mentor) plays an important role. Alfermann, Geisler, and Okade (2013) identified that coaches contributed to Japanese athletes’ feelings of satisfaction, unlike in the case of German athletes. Student athlete coaches have the important role to provide useful social support and enhance resilience to prevent burnout among athletes (Lu, Lee, Chang, Chou, Hsu, Lin, & Gill, 2016). Thus, the coaching staff is very important for Japanese athletes. Moreover, to improve coaching, a mentoring system for athletes and coaches was expected to be created (Taskforce on Improving the Quality and Capacity of Sports Coaches, 2013). Therefore, not only good coaches but also mentors are needed especially for Japanese athletes.

An athlete’s entourage plays a key factor when providing support to the entire career of athletes. For example, mentors are one component of an athlete’s entourage that is seen as crucial. Wang, Tomlinson, and Noe (2010, p.358) summarized previous research on mentoring as follows: “Mentoring refers to a relational process whereby a more experienced individual, usually more senior, contributes to the professional development of a protégé by providing three distinct types of functions.” The three types of functions were psychosocial support, career-related support, and role modeling (Wang *et al.*, 2010). A mentor refers to a person that greatly contributes to the growth of a person (Kodama & Fukada, 2010). The action that a mentor, who provides assistance, performs for the protégé, who is receiving the assistance (i.e., the “mentee”), is known as mentoring (Kodama & Fukada, 2010). In this study, a protégé (mentee) refers to a collegiate athlete.

Roby (2014) mentioned mentors as a presence that fosters ethical leadership. A mentorship program was adopted even at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, U.S. (Poczwadowski, Diehl, O’Neil, Cote, & Haberl, 2014). In Japan, similar to other countries, a support system was built, fostering experts that are capable of balancing athletic and academic life (Japan Sport Council, 2014). The Japan Sport Council (2014) emphasized that mentoring and lifestyle support are important factors for this purpose. However, Carter and Hart (2010) claimed that research studies on mentoring in the field of sport

science are rarely conducted despite mentoring being an important resource. Moreover, Stambulova *et al.* (2015) encouraged the development of national dual-career guidelines adapted to each culture and based on national research.

Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine the factors related to mentoring by employing university student athletes as subjects. Because little research has focused on the aspect of well-being in athletic sport, further studies are needed (Lundqvist, 2011). Thus, we examined various indicators for athletes' well-being (i.e., whole life, sport life, study life, and positive spillover). Furthermore, gender differences in athletes' psychological and social factors have been described (e.g., Naoi, Watson, Deaner, & Sato, 2011; Warner & Dixon, 2013). How gender differences influence the support to athletes by their entourage should also be examined (Naoi *et al.*, 2011; Sheridan, Coffee, & Lavalley, 2014). We anticipated that different types of mentoring functions would distinctly contribute to various indicators of well-being according to gender.

## 2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

### 2.1 Participants

The researchers recruited first-year students from 2-year colleges and first- to third-year students from 4- or 6-year colleges or universities as participants of the Research Project for Sport-Life Balance 2014 at the University. To recruit typical student athletes, the selection criteria were as follows: 1) collegiate students at the colleges or universities; 2) athletes in competitive sports who belonged to athletic clubs (excluding recreational clubs and club staff); and 3) persons who were 17 years or younger or 26 years or older were excluded. All study participants provided informed consent.

### 2.2 Measures

Participants completed the following questionnaires as listed below. The original scales were used for each measure. Investigators defined five domains in the questionnaire as follows: 1) mentoring (presence of a mentor and mentoring functions), 2) whole-life well-being (subjective happiness and interdependent happiness), 3) sport-life well-being (connectedness to a club), 4) college-life well-being (passivity and career decision-making self-efficacy), and 5) positive spillover.

**2.2.1 Demographic Data:** Investigators assessed gender, age, college or university grade, and years of competitive experience as demographic data.

**2.2.2 Presence of a Mentor:** In reference to Kodama and Fukada (2010), we created the following yes-no question: “For you to grow as a person, do you have someone who can contribute significantly?” The participants were asked if they had a mentor who was involved in their athletic club or not.

**2.2.3 Mentoring Functions:** Investigators modified the Japanese version of the 9-item Mentoring Functions Questionnaire (MFQ-9; Seki Sakakibara, Ishikawa, & Kiuchi, 2013) that assesses those working as mentoring employees for collegiate athletes. The Japanese version of the MFQ-9 has established validity and reliability and is composed of three factors: career support ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ), psychosocial support ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ), and role modeling ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ). Each factor comprises three items rated on a 5-point scale, with a score range for each factor of 3-15.

**2.2.4 Subjective Happiness:** To identify the extent to which participants felt happy, subjective happiness was rated on an 11-point scale, according to one item used in a national survey conducted by the Cabinet Office, Government of Japan (2012).

**2.2.5 Interdependent Happiness:** To assess the happiness of individuals who are relationally oriented, quiescent, and ordinary, we utilized the Interdependent Happiness Scale (Hitokoto & Uchida, 2014) that is comprised of nine items and rated on a 5-point scale (score range 9-45). Uchida and Oishi (2016) indicated that the meaning of happiness might vary across cultures. Many Japanese described happiness as an interpersonal construct, whereas Americans define it as a personal construct (Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). Thus, it was important to include the collective well-being that was captured by interdependent happiness. The definition of interdependent happiness is the “global, subjective assessment of whether one is interpersonally harmonized with other people, being quiescent, and being ordinary, and connected to the collective way of well-being” (Hitoko & Uchida, 2014, p. 214). The  $\alpha$  coefficient of this scale was .89.

**2.2.6 Connectedness to a Club:** The summarized adjustments of feeling connected to a club assessed whether life at the sport club was going well. The scale developed by Katsura and Nakagomi (1990) was utilized that uses a 7-point scale and includes two items (score range 2-14). The  $\alpha$  coefficient of this scale in the present study was 0.90.

**2.2.7 Passivity:** Investigators employed the Passivity Area Scale (Shimoyama, 1995) to assess the motivation regarding campus life of participants. The Passivity Area Scale includes three factors indicating passivity in the domains of class ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ), campus ( $\alpha = 0.64$ ), and study ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ). Each of the three factors includes five items. In compliance with Kano and Tsugawa (2011), each factor was rated on a 5-point scale (score range 5-25).

**2.2.8 Career Decision-making Self-efficacy:** Investigators used this factor from the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (Sato, 2013; Tominaga, 2000),

which comprises nine items rated on a 4-point scale (score range 9-36). The  $\alpha$  coefficient in the present study was 0.87.

**2.2.9 Positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport:** Athletic life and life outside of sport influence each other positively, which is referred to as positive spillover. In reference to Fukumaru (2003), six items were created to rate positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport using a 5-point scale (score range 6-30). The  $\alpha$  coefficient in this study was 0.87.

## 2.3 Procedure

An online survey was conducted in December 2014 as part of the Research Project for Sport-Life Balance 2014 at the University among voluntarily registered individuals of a Japanese Internet research company (Macromill Inc., Japan) to examine the status of university athletes in Japan. Participants who completed the online survey earned points (about 90 points, 1 point to 1 yen) that could be used toward reward products from the company.

Participants enrolled in the survey after receiving and agreeing to the following explanations regarding the study: general outline of the research, voluntary participation, consent to participate with the possibility of mental strain, future publication and benefits expected from the study, and protection of privacy. The study design was conducted with the approval of the university ethics committee.

## 2.4 Statistical Analyses

For each gender, regression analyses (forced entry method) was performed that included subjective happiness, interdependent happiness, summarized adjustment of feeling connected to a club, three domains of passivity (class, campus, and study), positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport, and career decision-making self-efficacy as criterion variables and three factors of mentoring function and age (i.e., control) as explanatory variables. Statistical significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ . The IBM SPSS Version 21 package was used for all analyses.

## 3. RESULTS

Participants consisted of 205 collegiate athletes, of which 182 (88.78%) had mentors who were either related to or not related to their club. Therefore, regardless of the mentors' affiliation, we analyzed the data of 182 participants who had a mentor (Table 1).

**Table 1: Demographic and descriptive data of participants who had mentors**

Variable	Option	N (%)
Gender	Male	73 (40.11)
	Female	109 (59.89)
College or university grade	1	75 (41.21)
	2	50 (27.47)
	3	57 (31.32)

  

Variable	Min	Max	M	SD
Age	18	23	19.80	1.06
Competition experience (years)	0	18	5.47	4.23
Career support	4	15	10.04	2.30
Psychosocial support	4	15	10.81	2.51
Role modeling	3	15	10.75	2.56
Subjective happiness	0	10	7.13	1.95
Interdependent happiness	11	45	29.84	6.60
Summarized adjustment of feeling connected to a club	2	14	9.37	2.63
Passivity				
Class	5	25	12.49	5.17
Campus	5	25	12.36	3.70
Study	5	25	13.97	3.74
Career decision-making self-efficacy	10	36	22.17	5.79
Positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport	6	30	22.20	4.63

**Table 2: Relationship between mentoring functions and other factors**

Variables	Mentoring functions												Age							
	Career support				Psychosocial support				Role modeling											
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female					
	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	Adjusted $R^2$	<i>p</i>	Adjusted $R^2$	<i>p</i>		
Subjective happiness	.36	.03	.11	.28	-.19	.17	.08	.43	-.14	.39	.22	.04	.06	.59	.12	.23	.03	.21	.11	.003
Interdependent happiness	.61	<.001	.05	.65	-.15	.23	.13	.21	-.04	.78	.16	.14	.09	.42	.13	.19	.23	<.001	.07	.02
Summarized adjustment of feeling connected to a club	.53	<.001	-.01	.93	-.02	.86	-.04	.70	-.03	.84	.12	.32	-.07	.52	.01	.95	.23	<.001	-.03	.88
Passivity																				
Class	.10	.53	-.03	.76	.08	.58	.05	.63	-.15	.38	-.02	.86	-.18	.15	.02	.88	-.01	.49	-.03	.98
Campus	-.13	.38	-.21	.06	.42	<.001	-.13	.20	.03	.85	-.05	.63	-.18	.11	-.03	.76	.14	.008	.06	.04
Study	-.20	.24	-.05	.64	.16	.26	-.11	.31	-.09	.59	-.09	.45	-.08	.53	-.14	.15	-.00	.44	.03	.12
Career decision-making self-efficacy	.05	.77	.13	.24	.06	.69	.14	.19	-.04	.79	.01	.92	.21	.08	.05	.61	-.01	.51	.02	.22
Positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport	.47	<.001	.10	.33	.06	.65	.05	.65	-.08	.60	.23	.04	.02	.84	.07	.46	.15	<.001	.08	.01

Table 2 shows the results of the regression analyses. In male athletes, career support explained subjective happiness, interdependent happiness, summarized adjustment of feeling connected to a club, and positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport. Moreover, psychosocial support explained passivity in the domain of campus life. On the other hand, in female athletes, role modeling explained subjective happiness and positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport.

Even though some of the adjusted R-squared (Adj-R2) scores were significant, their values were quite small. However, happiness and well-being are constructed from many internal or personality factors, external factors, and macro-level factors (Uchida & Oishi, 2016); thus, such results are understandable and justified in the context of this study.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The present study confirmed that most Japanese collegiate athletes have mentors, and their mentoring functions were associated with important elements for the athletes. Building on this finding, this study emphasized the positive effects of a mentor. Previous studies found that those who received mentoring showed a higher satisfaction level than those who did not (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2016a). The current study confirmed this previous result.

In addition to identifying the significant relationships between mentoring and other factors, the role of gender in this relationship was investigated. The types of mentoring that were related to subjective happiness and positive spillover between athletic life and life outside of sport depended on gender (i.e., career support in male athletes, role modeling in female athletes). The summarized adjustment of feeling connected to a club was related with career support, and passivity in the campus domain was related with psychosocial support only among males. Overall, career support was effective for male athletes, whereas role modeling was effective for female athletes. In Japan, as well as in many other countries, most men continue to work as breadwinners until retirement age. Thus, career support would be more important for male student athletes. In previous research among Black female athletes, role modeling was also one of the important factors of mentoring (Carter & Hart, 2010). Most coaches of collegiate athletes are male; thus, female athletes would likely prefer to learn from a role model of the same gender. For example, female athletic trainers desired more female role models who were able to balance the multiple responsibilities of their lives (Eason, Mazerolle, & Goodman, 2014). In the current study, psychosocial support was not significantly related to any variables without passivity in the campus domain. Hoffmann and Loughead (2016b) conducted a research study



with 272 collegiate athletes, showing that psychosocial mentoring was positively correlated with protégé satisfaction. According to DeFreese and Smith (2013), teammates are a precious human resource that prevents burnout and enhances self-determined motivation among college athletes. The participants of the present study received enough psychosocial support from their teammates and therefore did not need to get psychosocial support from their mentor. Summing up, this study suggested the possibility that gender plays a significant moderator role in mentoring; therefore, it is necessary to consider the factor of gender when examining mentoring. Further, the perception of subjective happiness might differ depending on gender.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that mentoring was not related to passivity in the domain of class or study or to career decision-making self-efficacy. Schooling of collegiate athletes is an issue to be addressed (López de Subijana *et al.*, 2015), and previous findings suggest that having a mentor leads to stronger career motivation (Day & Allen, 2004). However, no relationship between mentoring functions and career-related factors was found in this study. Unlike other countries, human resources other than mentors might be effective for Japanese collegiate athletes regarding academic career and selecting career paths. Furthermore, there is a possibility that Japanese athletes view mentors differently than athletes from other countries. These findings suggest that it is important to cover social and cultural perspectives when conducting research and practice related to athletes' careers, as stated by Stambulova and Ryba (2014).

In the future, longitudinal and qualitative research on the mentoring of collegiate athletes should be conducted. A longitudinal examination would be necessary because, for instance, passivity in the campus domain was positively related to psychosocial support among males in the present study. However, this study was unable to determine whether psychosocial support negatively influenced passivity in the campus domain, or whether the male athletes sought psychosocial support due to the decline in passivity in the campus domain. Furthermore, a qualitative examination would be necessary in order to examine the well-being of athletes in a more detailed and thorough manner (Lundqvist, 2011). For example, when athletes continue interacting with their mentor, it might become normal for them to rely on the mentor and they become dependent, which makes mentoring no longer functioning. On the other hand, there might be indirect and not just direct contributions from mentors. According to Weaver and Chelladurai (2002), the mentor could direct the protégé to a group member who would be able to satisfy the protégé's needs. Thus, the precise mechanisms of mentoring could be identified by conducting longitudinal or qualitative research. Furthermore, initiatives such as peer-to-peer mentoring as proposed by Hoffmann

and Loughead (2016a) are highly anticipated. An athlete might grow by taking charge of other athletes' mentoring.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

It is important to understand what type of mentoring is effective for collegiate athletes and present specific functions and abilities that mentors need to have. By understanding the effectiveness of mentoring for collegiate athletes based on the findings of this study, we hope that effective mentoring systems will be established.

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