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## How Accurate Are Athletes' Perceptions of Their Coaches' Expectations?

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Angela Marathakis entitled "How Accurate Are Athletes' Perceptions of Their Coaches' Expectations?." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Sport Studies.

Craig Wrisberg, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Joy T. DeSensi, Leslie A. Fisher

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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How Accurate Are Athletes' Perceptions of Their Coaches' Expectations?

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Angela Marathakis

December 2005

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to determine the extent to which there is a correspondence between athletes' perceptions of their coach's expectations and the coach's actual expectations. It was predicted that a significant difference would exist between the coach's expectations of high and low expectancy athletes (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al 1996b). In addition, for both groups of athletes, it was predicted that there would be no difference between athletes' perceptions of their coach's expectations and the coach's actual expectations, supporting the notion that both groups of athletes accurately perceive the expectations their coach has for them.

The participants in this study consisted of coaches (N=2) and athletes (N=49) from two female intercollegiate athletic teams (1 lacrosse and 1 softball) from the Northeastern United States. The athletes' ages ranged from 18 to 22 years and the coaches' ages were 41 and 52 years. Prior to the beginning of their competitive season each coach was asked to fill out a revised expectancy rating form for each of their athletes rating them on both physical and psychological skills. At the conclusion of the regular season each player completed an athlete revised rating form, which indicated their perceptions of their coach's expectations of them. An independent t-test was used to determine whether a significant difference existed between coaches' expectations of high and low expectancy athletes. Separate independent t-tests were also conducted to determine whether a significant difference existed between high and low expectancy athletes' perceptions of their coach's expectations and the coach's actual expectations.

Consistent with expectations, a significant difference was found to exist between coaches' expectations of high and low expectancy athletes and no significant difference

existed between the low expectancy athletes' perceptions of their coach's expectations and the coach's actual expectations. Thus, it was concluded that the low expectancy athletes in this sample, perceived their coach's expectations accurately, presumably based on the verbal and non-verbal behaviors the coach displayed toward them.

A significant difference was found between high expectancy athletes' perceptions of their coach's expectations and the coach's actual expectations. High expectancy athletes rated themselves lower than what their coaches rated them. Thus, it was concluded that high expectancy athletes in this given sample either did not fulfill their potential for the season and in turn rated themselves on average four points lower than what their coaches rated them, or perhaps the high expectancy athletes did not receive enough positive reinforcement from their coaches thus creating a communication barrier. The communications barrier could be due to the fact that coaches may have assumed that their high expectancy athletes were on the same page as them and that they didn't need as much reinforcement when in fact they did.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

One of the crucial aspects of organized sport participation is the relationship athletes establish with their coach. That relationship consists of lines of communication and expectations that the coach places on his/her players and vice versa. Expectancy theory, also known as self-fulfilling prophecy theory, states that the expectations coaches form about the ability of individual athletes can serve as prophecies that dictate or determine the way the coach behaves toward each athlete and eventually influences the level of achievement the athlete is able to reach (Horn et. al, 2001).

Expectancy theory is comprised of four stages. During the first stage, coaches form expectations about their athletes through various impression cues such as gender and ethnicity. Second, those expectations affect the coach's behavior toward his/her athletes both verbally and non-verbally. Coaches verbally influence their players through the quality and quantity of feedback they issue to their players and non-verbally through the facial expressions they make while watching his/her athletes perform. During the third stage the coach's behavior in turn influences the athletes' psychological development and performance. The fourth and final stage completes the self-fulfilling prophecy cycle when the athlete's behavior reinforces the coach's original expectations. The reason is because if the coach's expectancy messages are conveyed, verbally and/or non-verbally, consistently over time, and the athlete accurately perceives those messages, his/her

behavior is likely to conform to the expectations (Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982; Solomon et al. 1996b).

This phenomenon was first examined in the classroom setting where researchers observed the interactions between teachers and their students based on the teachers' expectations of the students. The results of these studies supported the notion that teacher's expectations impacted student performance. Those students who teachers believed to be the better students (high expectancy students) received more praise from the teacher than did their low expectancy counterparts. In addition, teacher expectations had a direct effect on students' motivation, self-confidence, and classroom performance (Brophy, 1983; Martinek, 1981; Martinek & Karper, 1986).

Research in sport psychology has suggested that expectancy theory may operate in athletic contexts in a similar fashion to that found in the classroom setting (Horn & Lox, 1993). The dynamic structure of social-psychological interplay is considered to be the same in athletic contexts and in the classroom environment. Coaches are deemed to have the same hierarchal status as the teacher and athletes are presumed to be the information seekers, just as the students are in a classroom. As a result, it is assumed that coaches, like teachers, are prone to form expectations of their athletes and that those expectations can influence athletes' perceptions and behavior (Solomon et al., 1996).

As coaches form expectations of their athletes, they tend to categorize them in ways similar to the ways teachers do in the classroom setting (Solomon et. al, 1998). Coaches psychologically label athletes they feel have a higher opportunity to excel as high expectancy, and those they feel do not quite have what it takes in comparison to their

peers, as low expectancy. Past research has shown that coaches' expectations of athletes is related to the amount of time and feedback coaches give to athletes; with coaches spending more time and providing more feedback to athletes they deem as high expectancy than to those they label low expectancy. This is likely due to the fact that coaches feel the high expectancy athletes are the ones who will determine whether the team wins or loses the competition (Solomon & Kosmitzki, 1996).

Research to date has focused on the lines of communications between athletes and coaches from the coach's perspective only. Solomon et. al, (1996a) conducted a study looking at the implications of the self-fulfilling prophecy in women's college basketball. Their results revealed that head coaches offered significantly greater rates of feedback to high expectancy athletes than to low expectancy athletes in every feedback category recorded and that high expectancy athletes received significantly more positive reinforcement and instruction than their low expectancy teammates.

Solomon & Kosmitzki (1996) conducted a study that focused on the perceptual flexibility of and differential feedback exhibited by intercollegiate female basketball coaches. In this study perceptual flexibility was defined as the coach's ability to change their expectations for their athletes throughout the season and differential feedback was defined as the difference in quality and quantity of feedback given to high expectancy athletes and low expectancy athletes. The study examined the flexibility of coaches' expectancies over time, whether coaches' expectancy-guided feedback patterns changed over the course of a season, and whether or not coaches' feedback was guided by criteria other than their ability expectancies of their athletes. The results indicated that coach's

perceptions of athletes' basketball ability were stable over time. This finding may not necessarily reflect actual consistency in players' ability; rather it may indicate the difficulty in changing a coach's initial expectation (Solomon & Kosmitzki, 1996). Results also indicated that athletes ranked higher by their coaches received more feedback. These findings show support for the second stage of the expectancy cycle.

Solomon et al (1998) conducted another study investigating the effects of coaches' expectations and coaching experience and found that while years of coaching experience did not influence coaches' feedback patterns, the expectations they placed on their athletes did influence the feedback they gave to athletes. These results suggest that the higher expectations placed on athletes, the more feedback they will receive in comparison to their lower expectancy counterparts. To date, no research appears to have examined expectancy theory from the athlete's perspective. Since one of the stages of the self-fulfilling prophecy presumes that athletes perceive their coach's behavior and feedback in ways consistent with the coach's expectations of them (Solomon & Kosmitzki, 1996: Solomon et al. 1998), it would seem important to document this assumption in a systematic fashion. Currently, there remains the need to determine whether athletes perceive the behavior of their coach in way that would make the athlete feel she/he is considered by her/his coach to be a high or low expectancy athlete.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study was to determine the extent to which there is a correspondence between athletes' perceptions of their coach's expectations and the coach's actual expectations. Past studies have shown that coaches hold higher expectations for high expectancy athletes than for low expectancy athletes. This study attempted to replicate this finding and also clarify whether or not the expectations the coach conveys to high and low expectancy athletes are actually being received and interpreted by high and low expectancy athletes in the presumed way.

## DELIMITATIONS

The present study contained three delimitations. The first pertained to the athletes that participated. Only female athletes participated in the present study. The study was limited to female varsity athletes and coaches from two NCAA Division I institutions from the Northeastern United States. Another limitation that could possibly affect the present study is that the validity of the Revised Rating Scales was determined by logic and not by empirical testing. Finally, no objective measures of coach behavior and feedback were obtained to determine the extent to which athletes' perceptions were based on differential coach behavior and feedback.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

1. Athlete: Individuals competing at the NCAA level in either lacrosse or softball.
2. Athlete's Perception of Coach's Expectation: Athlete's ratings of the coach's expectations on the instrument (Marathakis, 2005, based on Solomon, 1993).
3. Coach's Expectations: The coach's ratings of that athlete on the instrument (Becker, Brown, Marathakis, & Smith, 2004, based on Solomon, 1993).
4. High Expectancy Athlete: An athlete categorized by her coach's expectation to be in the top third of the team in both physical and psychological capabilities (based on Solomon, 1993).
5. Low Expectancy Athlete: An athlete categorized by her coach's expectation to be in the bottom third of her team in both physical and psychological capabilities (based on Solomon, 1993).

## HYPOTHESES

It was hypothesized that:

1. A significant difference would exist between coaches' expectations of high and low expectancy athletes (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al 1996b).

2. No difference would exist between athletes' perceptions of coaches' expectations and coaches' actual expectations for either high or low expectancy athletes.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Most expectancy theory research has been conducted in the classroom setting. The research conducted in an athletic context has only been conducted from the coach's perspective. No research to date has examined the validity of the assumption of self-fulfilling prophecy that in stage three there would be a correspondence between coaches' expectations of athletes and the athletes' perceptions of coaches' expectations. Therefore the present study was conducted in an attempt to address this gap in the research and provide more insight into the coach/athlete relationship within the framework of expectancy theory (Horn & Lox 1993).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will address a few of the limited research articles which have attempted to look at expectancy theory in an athletic setting. All of the articles to date have focused on the first two steps of the expectancy theory which state that coaches form expectation for their athletes and that as a result of those expectations affect the coach's behavior, including the quality and quantity of feedback issued to his/her athletes.

The self-fulfilling prophecy refers to the effect of one person's expectation on another's behavior (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Expectancy theory, also known as self-fulfilling prophecy theory, states that the expectations people form about the ability of others can serve as prophecies that dictate or determine the way they treat others and the level of achievement others will ultimately reach (Horn et. al, 2001). In a classroom setting, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that instructor's perceptions are based on their expectancies regarding students' capabilities. Since the late 1970's, research on the relationship between teacher expectations and student development has been examined in both physical education and sport settings (Horn, 1984; Martinek, 1981; Rejeski, Darracott, & Hutslar, 1979). Based on expectancy theory, teachers' feedback patterns are predicted to differ according to whether they perceive their students to be high or low expectancy. Researchers in this area have measured the direct and indirect effects of teaching behaviors on student performance, motivation, and self-confidence (Brophy, 1983; Martinek, 1981; Martinek & Karper, 1986). The results of those studies show that



students who teachers believe to be better students (high expectancy students) receive more praise from the teacher than do their low expectancy counterparts. In addition teacher expectations have been shown to have a direct affect on student's classroom performance in the direction predicted by expectancy theory (Brophy, 1983; Martinek, 1981; Martinek & Karper, 1986).

The predictions of expectancy theory have also been examined in the competitive sport setting. Based on the results of educational research, Horn and Lox (1993) formulated a four-step model for the sport domain that encouraged the examination of the self-fulfilling prophecy in interactions between coaches and athletes. The first step involves coaches forming initial expectations of their athletes. These expectations might be formulated based on performance cues, physical appearance, practice behaviors, and past performances, as well as on certain demographic information such as race and age (Horn & Lox, 1993; Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982).

The second step occurs when the initial expectations formed by the coach exert an impact on the amount, type, and quality of feedback the coach provides the athlete (Horn & Lox, 1993). This is the point when coaches tend to pay more attention to those athletes they have labeled as high expectancy than to those they have labeled low expectancy. For example coaches tend to give more instructional feedback and praise to those they have deemed as high expectancy than to athletes they have deemed as low expectancy (Solomon et. al, 2000). Once the coach begins to act on his/her expectations it is presumed that the coach's behavior can be seen and felt by the athletes (Solomon, 2002).

In the third step, the coach's behavior is communicated to the athlete through verbal and nonverbal cues, which the athlete presumably perceives. When this happens it is predicted that the athlete's psychological growth and future performances is altered in the expected direction (Horn & Lox, 1993). That is, when the coach's perceptions of an athlete are consistently communicated and most importantly interpreted by the athlete in the predicted way (i.e., high or low expectations), the coach's behavior can impact the athlete's future performance and psychological growth in a positive or negative manner. If the athlete is receptive to the coach's expectations the athlete's behavior is expected to conform to those expectations. Simply stated, if the athlete is consciously or unconsciously aware of the coach's expectations and conforms to them, the athlete's future performance and psychological growth is impacted in either a positive or negative manner, depending on the nature of the coach's expectations. Thus, at this third step in the cycle, athletes are presumably gathering information that inform them about the coach's expectations, presumably in the form of the coach's behavior and feedback. The effects of the coach's expectations and feedback on the self-perceptions of the athlete begin to be evidenced in this stage (Sinclair & Vealey, 1989).

In the fourth and final stage the athlete's behavior becomes altered as a result of the athletes' perceptions of the coach's expectations. At that point, the coach sees the athlete's behaviors as a confirmation of his/her initial assessment of the athlete and, as a result, the expectancy cycle comes full circle (Horn & Lox, 1993). That is, the high expectancy athletes perform well and reinforce the coach's expectations about them being

high expectancy while the low expectancy athlete's performance diminishes, confirming the coach's initial expectations of them being low expectancy athletes.

In summary, the four-step model created by Horn & Lox (1993) exemplifies the predictions of expectancy theory regarding the coach/athlete relationship. Some research suggests that high expectancy athletes are usually the starters on the team, while low expectancy athletes tend to be the reserves or those who experience little or no time on the field or court during competition (Solomon et. al, 1998).

A number of studies have been conducted in sport settings that have examined the first two steps of the expectancy cycle. For example, Solomon et. al (1996a) investigated the effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy in a women's college basketball setting. They hypothesized that high expectancy athletes would receive more instruction and reinforcing feedback from the coach than would low expectancy athletes. In this study coach expectations were measured via a coach expectancy rating form and coach feedback was measured using the Coaching Behavior Assessment System (CBAS). Consistent with their hypothesis the results revealed that head coaches offered significantly more frequent feedback in every feedback category examined to high expectancy athletes than to low expectancy athletes, with the greatest discrepancy being shown for instructional feedback and reinforcement.

More recently Solomon (2002) conducted a study to examine whether coaches' perceptions of athletes' physical ability (performance impression cue) and/or confidence (psychological impression cue) served to predict coaches' perceptions of athletes' performance. Coaches' perceptions were measured using the Coaching Behavior

Assessment System (CBAS) and coaches' perceptions of athlete performance were measured by the results of the expectancy rating form that the coach filled out for each athlete. The results revealed that the only significant predictor of coaches' perceptions of athlete performance was the coach's expectation of athlete confidence (i.e., a psychological impression cue). This finding suggests that psychological impression cues are at least as important as physical impression cues in the formation of a coach's expectations.

In one of the only studies designed to assess the athlete's perception of coach behavior Summers (1991) investigated the moderating effect of athletes' perceptions of their own abilities in relation to the frequency of the coach's technical-instruction for one women's lacrosse team. Specifically, the study focused on the relationship between the frequency of the coach's technical-instruction and two specific outcome criteria: athletes' rating of their athletic effort (performance) and athletes' satisfaction with their coach. The Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS) was used to measure the athletes' perceptions of their coaches' technical instruction behavior. Athlete satisfaction was measured by instructing the athletes to rate their satisfaction with their coaches using a scale with verbal anchors ranging from (1) very unsatisfied to (5) very satisfied. Summers found that the athletes' perceived frequency of the coach's technical-instruction was a significant predictor of both the players' effort and the players' satisfaction with the coach. That is, the higher the perceived frequency of coach technical-instruction the higher the level of athletes' perceived effort and perceived satisfaction with the coach. Overall, Summers (1991) concluded that athletes who felt they were more capable had higher effort ratings. This

supports the assumption of expectancy theory that athletes who perceive they are receiving higher frequencies of feedback from their coach should demonstrate higher confidence levels (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al, 1996b).

### SUMMARY

In summary, the majority of the studies examining the predictions of expectancy theory have produced support for the first two steps of the expectancy theory cycle (Solomon & Kosmitzki; 1996, Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al, 1996b). However, there remains the need for further research on the third step (athlete's perspective) of the expectancy cycle. To date, there appears to have been no research examining whether the coach's expectations are interpreted in the predicted direction by their high and low expectancy athletes. The existing research suggests that coaches focus more attention on their high expectancy athletes than their low expectancy athletes (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al, 1996b). However, the correspondence between coaches' expectations of athletes and the athletes' perceptions of those expectations remains to be determined.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

In the present study, athlete's perceptions of coaches' expectations were examined. It was hypothesized that a significant difference would exist between coaches' expectations of high and low expectancy athletes (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al 1996b). In addition, for both groups of athletes, it was also hypothesized that there would be no difference between athletes' perceptions of coaches' expectations and coaches' actual expectations, supporting the prediction of expectancy theory that both high and low expectancy groups of athletes accurately perceive the expectations their coaches have for them. In this chapter, the following methodological components of the present study are discussed: participant selection, materials, procedures, and data analysis procedures.

### PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The participants in this study were coaches (N=2) and athletes (N=49) from two female intercollegiate athletic teams located in the Northeastern United States. Participants were selected due to their convenient accessibility. Participants were members of one lacrosse team (N=27) and one softball team (N=22). The athletes' ages ranged from 18-22 years (M=20.27) and the coaches' ages were 41(female) and 52(male) years. The female coach had 15 years of coaching experience and the male coach had 25

years. Both coaches and all athletes identified their race as Caucasian. Each athlete and coach signed a consent form (see Appendix A and B) indicating his or her willingness to participate in the study.

## INSTRUMENTATION

The materials used in the present study included a Demographic Questionnaire, the Coaches' Expectancy Rating Form (Solomon, 1993), and the Athlete Revised Expectancy Rating Form (Marathakis, 2005). Permission was acquired from Dr. Gloria Solomon to use her rating form in this study.

### Demographic Questionnaires

The coach's Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix E) consisted of questions pertaining to the coach's age, gender, ethnicity, years of coaching experience, and overall coaching record. The athletes' Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix F) addressed the athlete's age, gender, ethnicity, primary position, year in school, years played with current head coach, and playing status (starter, non-starter).

### Coach's Revised Expectancy Rating Scale (Becker et al., 2004)

The Coach's Revised Expectancy Rating Scale was used to determine each coach's expectations for athlete performance. This scale was a revision of an earlier scale developed by Solomon (1993) and included both psychological factors and performance factors. It was assumed that the revised scale would provide a more accurate determination of the coaches' perceptions of their athletes' abilities by including both

psychological and physical dimensions. Three psychological factors were added to the original 5-item Expectancy Rating Scale (Solomon, 1993). These factors pertained to the athlete's level of competitiveness, work ethic, and willingness to listen and learn (see Appendix C).

The Athlete Revised Expectancy Rating Scale (Marathakis, 2005)

The Athlete Revised Expectancy Rating Scale was used to assess athletes' perceptions of their coach's behavior toward them. The questionnaire was identical to the questionnaire filled out by the coaches with the only difference being that the items were worded to assess the athletes' perceptions of her coach's expectations of her abilities.

#### PROCEDURES/DATA COLLECTION

First, IRB approval was received through the University. Then each coach was contacted in person by the principal investigator and was informed of the purpose of the study. The coaches were requested to read and sign the letter of consent as an indication of their willingness to participate (see Appendix A). After each coach agreed to participate in the study she/he was asked to complete the Coach's Revised Expectancy Rating Scale for each of his/her athletes. These ratings were completed prior to the beginning of the competitive season. After meeting with the coach; the principal instigator met with the team members in a group setting to explain the purpose of the study and solicit their participation. Those athletes who were willing to participate (49 out of 49) were asked to read and sign the Athlete's Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B).



One week prior to the end of the regular season, each coach was mailed a package containing sealed envelopes with each of his/her player's names on an envelope. The envelope contained a copy of the Athlete Revised Expectancy Rating Scale and a stamped envelope with the principal investigator's return address on it. The coach was instructed to distribute the envelopes the day following the last game of the regular season. Each athlete then filled out their rating form, placed it along with their signed consent form in the envelope provided for them, and returned it to the principal investigator via regular mail.

The rationale for having the coaches complete their expectancy ratings at the beginning of the season was to capture the coach's initial expectations of their athletes. The rationale for having the athletes complete their expectancy rating forms at the end of the season was to give them sufficient time to interpret their coach's expectations of them.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which there would be a correspondence between athletes' perceptions of their coaches' expectations and the coaches' actual expectations. It was hypothesized that a significant difference would exist between coaches' expectations of high and low expectancy athletes (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al 1996b). It was also hypothesized that no difference would exist between athlete's perceptions of coaches' expectations and coaches' actual expectations for either the high or low expectancy athletes, supporting the notion that both groups of athletes accurately perceived the expectations of their coaches. In this chapter, the dependent measures and analysis procedures used to evaluate the two hypotheses are discussed and then the results pertaining to each hypothesis are presented.

### DEPENDENT MEASURES

The total value of each coach's ratings of each athlete and each athlete's ratings of her respective coach's expectations was tabulated. Coaches' and athletes' ratings were then combined for the two teams and mean scores were calculated for a) coaches' ratings of high expectancy athletes ( $n = 38.86$ ) and low expectancy athletes ( $n = 26.56$ ), and b) high and low expectancy athletes' ratings of their respective coach's expectations (Table1). The range of possible values for both coach and athlete ratings were from 8-40.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Coaches' Ratings for High and Low Expectancy Athletes' Ratings of Their Perceived Coaches' Expectations

| Group           | Coach                 | Athlete            |
|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| High Expectancy | 38.86 <sup>a, b</sup> | 34.93 <sup>b</sup> |
|                 | -0.77                 | -2.97              |
| Low Expectancy  | 26.56                 | 26.22              |
|                 | -2.79                 | -4.63              |

#### ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

An independent t-test was conducted to determine whether a difference existed in the mean coaches' ratings for the high and low expectancy groups. Then, separate independent t-tests were conducted to determine whether a significant difference existed between the means of high and low expectancy athletes' perceptions of their coach's expectations and the mean of the coaches' actual expectations.

It was hypothesized that a significant difference would exist between coaches' expectations of high and low expectancy athletes (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al 1996b). The results of the independent t-test revealed support for this hypothesis,  $t = 6.135$ ,  $df = 25$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\omega^2 = .5754$ .

It was also hypothesized that there would be no significant difference between athlete's perceptions of coaches' expectations and coaches' actual expectations for either

the high or low expectancy athletes, supporting the notion that both groups of athletes accurately perceived the expectations of their coaches. The results of the independent t-tests revealed only partial support for this hypothesis. For the low expectancy athletes, there was no significant difference between athletes' perception of their coach's expectations and their coach's actual expectations. However, the ratings of high expectancy athletes were lower than those of their coaches and this difference was statistically significant,  $t=5.329$ ,  $df=13$ ,  $p=.000252$ ,  $\omega^2 = .6293$ .

## CHAPTER V

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether head coaches' expectations differ for high and low and expectancy athletes and whether or not high and low expectancy athletes accurately perceive the expectations their head coaches have of them. It was hypothesized that a) a significant difference would exist between coaches' expectations of high and low expectancy athletes (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al 1996b) and b) no difference would exist between athlete's perceptions of coaches' expectations and coaches' actual expectations for either the high or low expectancy athletes (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon, 2002; Solomon et. al., 1996b), supporting the notion that both groups of athletes accurately perceived the expectations of their coaches. In this chapter the results pertaining to each hypothesis are discussed, possible explanations for the findings are presented, and conclusions and recommendations for future research are offered.

Analysis of the coaches' questionnaires revealed support for Hypothesis 1 by showing that a significant difference existed between coaches' ratings of high expectancy athletes and low expectancy athletes. This finding is consistent with previous research (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon et. al, 1998; Solomon & Kosmitzki, 1996) and suggests that coaches hold different expectations for different athletes. It is assumed that the coaches in the present study used both physical impression cues and psychological impression cues to formulate their expectations of athletes (Solomon et. al, 1996a;

Solomon et. al, 1998). However, it is possible that other factors may have impacted coaches' expectations as well. For example, one factor that may have contributed to coaches' expectations is their performance expectations for high and low expectancy athletes (Horn, Lox, & Labrador, 2001; Martinek, 1981; Solomon, 2002). Solomon (2002) has suggested that coaches tend to favor their starters (high expectancy athletes) over their non-starters due to the fact that starters are given more playing time and as a result have more to do not only with the success of the team, but with the coach's career as well. Further research is needed to delineate more precisely whether factors such as this, or perhaps others, contribute to the expectations coaches form for different athletes.

Only partial support was obtained for Hypothesis 2. Consistent with the hypothesis, low expectancy athletes' perceptions of their coaches' expectations were not significantly different from their coaches' actual expectations. These results are similar to those of Smith et. al (1978) who found that athletes tend to perceive coaching behaviors accurately. Moreover, this finding represents the first experimental support for the third phase of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Horn & Lox, 1993). In this phase, athletes are assumed to be capable of accurately perceiving the expectations their coaches have of them. One possible explanation for the parsimony found between coaches' expectations of low expectancy athletes and the athletes' perceptions of those expectations may be that the coaches exhibited behaviors or provided the types and amounts of feedback that were clearly interpreted by these athletes. There are a number of studies that show that athletes are able to perceive and retain coaches' feedback information in a fashion consistent with the coach's expectations (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon et. al, 1998; Solomon &

Kosmitzki, 1996; Horn, 1985; Martinek, 1981). If the coaches in the present study provided significantly lower rates of feedback to low expectancy athletes than to high expectancy athletes as some research has shown (Solomon et. al, 1996a), it is possible that the low expectancy athletes detected these differential feedback patterns and used this information when rating their coach's expectations of them. However, further research is needed to determine the extent to which there is a link between coaches' feedback patterns and athletes' perceptions of coaches' expectations.

Contrary to the results obtained for the low expectancy athletes, a significant difference was found between high expectancy athletes' perceptions of their coach's expectations and their coach's actual expectations.

One possible explanation for this finding might be that the coaches may have failed to positively reinforce their high expectancy athletes as much as they needed to. It is possible that the two coaches in this study assumed that s/he and his/her athletes were on the same page regarding the coaches' expectations and that no further reinforcement was needed. Further research is needed to determine whether this finding is generalizable to high expectancy athletes on other teams and, if so, what factors contribute to the expectancy mismatch between high expectancy athletes and their coaches.

It is also possible that because coaches rated the athletes at the beginning of the season while the athletes rated their coach's expectations at the end of the season, the athletes who the coaches rated as high expectancy may have not played to their potential throughout the season and therefore rated their coach's expectations for themselves lower than the initial ratings of their coach. If this were the case, the athletes' ratings may have

actually been consistent with those of their coach at the end of the season. Thus, it is possible that the present findings may have been different if both coaches and athletes had been asked to rate their expectations at both the beginning and end of the season.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that low expectancy athletes perceive the expectations their coaches have for them more accurately than do high expectancy athletes. Support for the first two steps of the expectancy cycle has already been found (Solomon et. al, 1996a; Solomon et. al, 1998; Solomon & Kosmitzki, 1996). The third step of the expectancy cycle, which states that athletes' performance conforms to coach's initial expectations and implies that athletes perceive their coaches' expectations accurately, was supported only by the results of the low expectancy group.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the present study, the following recommendations are offered for future research. First, it is recommended that the expectations of assistant coaches as well as head coaches be examined. In some cases, assistant coaches can be extremely influential due to their more intimate and less formal relationships with athletes compared to those with the head coach.



Future research should also obtain coaches' and athletes' expectations at various points throughout the season in order to determine whether any changes in coaches' expectations (Horn et al., 2001) might be reflected in changes in athletes' perceptions of coach's expectations as well.

Further research should also be conducted to examine the expectations of athletes and coaches of different races and ethnicities. Every participant in the present study identified as being Caucasian, which begs the following questions: In what way(s) do athletes from other races and ethnic backgrounds perceive and conform to the expectations placed upon them by their coaches? Do athletes who identify with other races and ethnic perspectives perceive coach feedback differently than those who identify with being Caucasian?

Future research should also examine the expectations of athletes and coaches representing different sports and gender than those in the present study. Regarding the latter factor, future research might also investigate whether differences in expectations exist when the gender of the coach and athletes is the same or different. In that regard an interesting research question would be whether athletes are more susceptible to the expectations of a male coach than to those of a female coach. Murtland (1999) investigated the coaching gender preferences of female athletes and found that athletes were more concerned with having a solid personal relationship with their coach and with the coach's insights for the game more than they were with the coach's gender. However, it remains to be determined whether athletes respond differently to the expectations and feedback of male and female coaches.

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APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A**  
**COACH CONSENT FORM**

Athletes' Perceptions of Coaches' Expectations

Department of Exercise, Sport, and Leisure Studies

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the relationship between coaches' expectations of their athletes and the athletes' perceptions of their coaches' expectations. You will be asked to fill out an expectancy rating form for each of your athletes at the beginning of the season. At the end of the season your athletes will also be asked to fill out a post-participation questionnaire consisting of seven questions assessing their perceptions of your expectations on a five-point Likert Scale. This task should take your athletes no more than 15-20 minutes to complete.

All data collected will remain confidential and will be securely stored. The data will not be available to anyone other than my thesis committee and me. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you or your identity to the study.

While this study will not result in direct benefits to you or your team, the information gathered from your participation will provide important new information on the relationship between coaches' expectations and athletes' perceptions. You may request a copy of the final report if you so desire.

**Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will either be returned or destroyed.**

If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures involved in the study please feel free to contact Angela Marathakis at (865) 974-1283 or via email at [amaratha@utk.edu](mailto:amaratha@utk.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact the Research Compliance Services Section of the University of Tennessee Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**  
**ATHLETE CONSENT FORM**

Athletes' Perceptions of Coaches' Expectations

Department of Exercise, Sport, and Leisure Studies

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the relationship between coaches' expectations of their athletes and the athletes' perceptions of their coaches' expectations. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete an athlete post-observation questionnaire at the end of your regular season consisting of seven questions designed to assess your perceptions of your coach's expectations of you on a five-point Likert Scale. This task should take you no more than 15-20 minutes to complete.

All data collected will remain confidential and will be securely stored. The data will not be available to anyone other than my thesis committee and me. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you or your identity to the study.

While this study will not result in direct benefits to you or your team, the information gathered from your participation will provide important new information on the relationship between coaches' expectations and athletes' perceptions. You may request a copy of the final report if you so desire.

**Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will either be returned or destroyed.**

If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures involved in the study please feel free to contact Angela Marathakis at (865) 974-1283 or via email at [amaratha@utk.edu](mailto:amaratha@utk.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact the Research Compliance Services Section of the University of Tennessee Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C**  
**COACH'S REVISED EXPECTANCY RATING SCALE**  
**(Becker, Brown, Marathakis, Smith, 2004)**

Directions: Please rate each of your athletes on each item from 1 (not true) to 5 (very true) by comparing them to other athletes at their competitive level.

Name & Number of Athlete \_\_\_\_\_

|  | <b>Not True</b> |   |   | <b>Very True</b> |   |
|--|-----------------|---|---|------------------|---|
| 1. This athlete possesses sound lacrosse/softball fundamentals.....  | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 2. This athlete has the aptitude to become an exceptional lacrosse/softball player.....                                    | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 3. This athlete possesses the natural physical attributes necessary to become an exceptional lacrosse/softball player..... | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 4. This athlete is receptive to coaching.....  | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 5. This athlete is a hard worker.....  | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 6. This athlete possesses a high level of competitiveness.....   | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 7. This athlete is willing to listen and learn.....  | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 8. Overall, this athlete will be an exceptionally successful lacrosse/softball player at this level of competition.        | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |



**APPENDIX D**  
**ATHLETE'S REVISED EXPECTANCY RATING SCALE**  
**(Marathakis, 2005)**

Directions: Please rate yourself on each item from 1 (not true) to 5 (very true) in regards to how you feel your coach perceives your abilities.

Name & Number of Athlete \_\_\_\_\_

|  | <b>Not True</b> |   |   | <b>Very True</b> |   |
|--|-----------------|---|---|------------------|---|
| 1. I think my coach feels I possess sound lacrosse/<br>softball fundamentals.....  | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 2. I think my coach feels like I have the aptitude to<br>become an exceptional lacrosse/softball player.....                               | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 3. I think my coach feels I possess the natural physical<br>attributes necessary to become an exceptional<br>lacrosse/softball player..... | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 4. I think my coach feels I'm receptive to coaching...   | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 5. I think my coach feels I'm a hard worker.....   | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 6. I think my coach feels I possess a high level of<br>competitiveness.....  | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 7. I think my coach finds me willing to<br>listen and learn.....   | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |
| 8. Overall, I think coach finds me to be an exceptionally successful<br>lacrosse/softball player at this level of competition.....         | 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                | 5 |

**APPENDIX E**  
**COACH DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Write in the appropriate response to each of the following:**

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Coaching  
Experience \_\_\_\_\_

Overall Coaching  
Record \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX F**  
**ATHLETE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Write in or circle the appropriate response to each of the following:**

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Year in School \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Position \_\_\_\_\_

Playing Status (circle one)

Starter

Non-Starter

Other (i.e. injured, ineligible)

Number of years playing for current head coach (circle one)

1

2

3

4

5

## VITA

Angela Marathakis was born in Albany, NY March 27, 1981. She was raised in Ravena, NY and went to grade school and junior high school at Ravena Coeymans Selkirk. She graduated from Albany Academy for Girls High School in 1999. From there, she attended Ithaca College and received a B.S. in Sport Studies in 2004. She then attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and received a M.S. in Sport Studies in 2005.