A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF PEER LEADERSHIP EXHIBITED BY DIVISION I FOOTBALL CAPTAINS

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ABSTRACT

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The rationale for this study was to discover the peer leadership effect Division I football captains had on the remainder of their team by examining the phenomenological experiences of the captains and their teammates. Through interviews and a focus group, leadership practices were connected to the captains and their formal roles within the structure of the team, but were not limited to these title-bearing leaders.

Dependent upon factors such as age, playing experience and personality of a student-athlete, peer leadership extended beyond the verbal and visible demonstrations by the captains and was exhibited by various members of the team. Attributes relating to consistency and work ethic were more highly valued than sheer athletic talent. Additionally, misuse of talent was a key area where respect was lost. These values moved beyond the field and into the world of academics. Those who worked in the classroom for their marks, whatever they may be, were more likely to earn respect than those who did not apply their efforts away from the field.

Furthermore, the study suggests, the title ‘captain’ serves more of an external purpose of prestige and tradition than an internal end-all leadership function in this setting.

A suggestion of the research findings is the formal role may not have the same importance within the team structure that it once had. If this is true, the role of captain serves a public function of team representation and gives leadership accessibility to those who have earned it, whether or not they bear the title of captain.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Sporting heroes and athletes, both at the collegiate and professional level, have historically played a significant role in our culture. As a nation of captivated fans, we passionately follow our favorite teams each year regardless of record. This is made known through our consumption of merchandise bearing the team’s logos and colors, which we later proudly display everywhere from our office, to cars, to our body. Furthermore, this “nation of fans” makes great strides to watch such teams both in person and through broadcasts of the competitions. In this respect, Kent and Chelladurai (2001) see this captivation as having an influence on the North American society. Describing what they perceive as the economic impact of athletes, Kent and Chelladurai refer to factors such as media broadcasting contracts, corporate sponsorship and revenues gained by tickets, seat licenses, suites and other amenities of the athletic department, which brings capital to the organization (p. 138).

Influenced by internal and external factors and the spotlight illuminating their collegiate paths, many student-athletes find the pressure to succeed both on the playing field and in the classroom, unyielding. According to a few recent studies, athletic participation can increase the stress of student-athletes and create additional pressure that traditional students cannot understand (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Papnikolaou, Nikolaidis, Patsiaouras, & Alexopoulous, 2003). In a 2005 study on comparing the stress of student-athletes and their equivalent in the traditional student peer group, Wilson and Pritchard’s (2005) review of existing literature reported that the following stressors can affect student-athletes’ mental health: loss/gain of status (Humphrey, Yow, & Bowden, 2000; Papanikolaou et al., 2003); relationships with coaches, family and others; time management (Murray, 1997); and injuries
(Humphrey et al., 2003, Hudd et al., 2000; Papanikolaou et al., 2003; Skirka, 1997). Each of the
aforementioned stressors was linked to athletic participation at the collegiate level.

As if the previously stated stressors did not impact the student-athlete enough, additional
external forces may also weigh heavier on the student-athlete than on their peer group. When the
so-called ‘big (wo)man on campus’ posts what is considered to be a sub-par performance in a
particular game, numerous people ranging from members of his or her peer group to seasoned
fans to the media feel it is their right to publicly discuss and comment on the performance. As
this practice is considered, a rhetorical question must be posed: If a traditional student working
toward a medical degree were to fail a biology test, would anyone care? Furthermore, would that
future medical doctor lose future patients? In each case, the poor performance could affect the
student’s career. The price of collegiate sports gives rise to a much larger stigma until the
student-athlete has a chance to redeem him or herself in the next contest. It is becoming more
apparent that this type of public ridicule is no longer reserved for the actions of the playing field.
Various media outlets, which are easily accessible to family, friends and fans alike, make public
the poor choices made by students-athletes very public. It is because of this trend that the
general public is aware of the immoral and illegal acts that have landed some academically elite
schools in the news. In the spring and summer of 2006, players from the Duke University
lacrosse team and the Harvard University and the United States Naval Academy football teams,
three highly prestigious academic institutions, saw team captains and other student-athletes not
in leadership positions accused of sexually corrupt crimes with reference to their actions toward
the opposite sex.

Unfortunately, student-athletes are not the sole perpetrators of such crimes but they may
open the lines of communications to discuss such explicit factors that could push them to carry
out illegal acts. Currently, the discussions of stress, maturity levels, and peer leadership are spoken of at a surface level in relation to the sport and leadership dialogue. It was with this knowledge that this study set out to penetrate the literature at a deeper level.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences, impact, and characteristics of the peer leadership of football team captains. The study examined the personal experiences three Division I football captains encountered during the 2006-07 football season and how peer-leadership affected student-athletes on the same team.

The Significance of Athletes on a Global Scale

Athletes’ coverage in the media has noticeably extended beyond the tucked-away sports section of the local newspaper. Many athletes have even found themselves gracing the front pages of newspapers with headlines and stories detailing their recreational undertakings and misfortunes; thus, athletes are no longer known solely for their physical achievements. Fleming, Hardman, Jones, and Sheridan highlight this phenomenon in the introduction to their 2005 study examining identifiable role models amongst elite British adolescent rugby players. They acknowledge “high profile soccer players [have been] ‘good copy’ since the 1960s, when George Best was described as the ‘fifth Beatle’ to symbolize his shared physical similarity and iconic status with the stars of the popular music group” (Best & Wright, 1981, as cited in Fleming, Hardman, Jones, & Sheridan, 2005, p. 51). Despite Best’s popularity, he was a mere thread in the pop culture blanket, which has since intertwined itself internationally and now meshes across the globe. Additionally, the authors more clearly illustrate this point as they mention numerous international soccer stars whose pop culture stock and popularity rise due to their shenanigans and foolish public behaviors (Fleming, Hardman, Jones, & Sheridan, 2005).
British society is not unique in its appetite for sporting competitions, as was made clear in the summer of 2006 when Germany hosted the 18th staging of the FIFA World Cup. The fever ignited by the worldwide soccer tournament enthralled the global audience like a brush fire and held its attention for over a month. The world tournament was marketed by the athletic company Adidas, as the “Beautiful Game,” and featured multiple international soccer stars in an attempt to ignite global rivalries regardless of socio-economic or cultural make-up. Even more, an audience of an estimated 28 billion in-home viewers worldwide tuned into the celebrations of the event that takes place only once every four years (Adidas’ World Cup Shutout, 2006).

Localizing the issue, the American society, which embraced the World Cup even though soccer is not recognized as one of America’s major national sports of choice, is not unique in its creation of, and reverence to, sporting idols. Much like the British have an appreciation for the heroes on the roster of its national soccer team, professional sports teams owners in the United States build up their sports heroes with multi-million dollar contracts to entertain the masses as they take part in an industry that allows the athletes to play a game professionally and market a wide array of consumer products.

Statement of the Problem

As members of the student-athlete population, specifically young men who play football, young men are thrust into a perceived prestigious world filled with expectations to produce athletically as individuals and as teams, in order to gain the most victories. Ideally, a conference and/or a national championship will bring significant recognition and revenue to the university, benefiting the athletic department, the team, the coaching staff, and the student-athletes. At the same time, student-athletes must also attend classes and maintain good academic standing, as outlined by Section 14.012.1 of the NCAA Constitution Operating Bylaws and Administrative
Bylaws, and fulfill the minimum grade-point average requirement as outlined in Section 14.4.3.3. The NCAA designates a maximum of 20 hours per week to be allotted for the student-athlete to formally work towards the established athletic goals. The remaining 148 hours of the week are given to the student-athlete to return to the world of academics and young adulthood. Given these facts, one could begin to ponder how it is possible to separate the meanings of the words “student” and “athlete” and live in today’s media- and fan-crazed world as semi-traditional college students.

There are those few student-athletes who rise above the pressure of the academic and athletic commitments and lead by example. This complicated role of a student-athlete leader is often socially criticized; yet, it is not clearly defined. This study is based on the assumption that football team captains are leaders and intends to answer the seemingly simple question, “How are the leadership roles of Division I football captains defined?”

Scholarly work has concluded that as a captain, the student-athlete is responsible for additional general duties that their non-captain peers are not:

(a) to act as a liaison between the coaching staff and the players, (b) to act as a leader during all team activities, and (c) to represent the team at social events, meetings and press conferences. Furthermore, the captains are held accountable to ensure the constant flow of information between the coaching staff and the players, to lead by example at all times, and to help the coaches develop the team specific norms in the environment.

(Dupuis, Bloom & Loughead, 2006, p. 63)

As a society at large, we expect these skilled competitors to live above their peers and to set an example of how to succeed in all aspects of the greater game of life. As if the young men and women of the NCAA do not have enough titles, “role model” is added to the list of flattering
remarks, not always by choice, but by virtue of their athlete role. Former collegiate and professional basketball superstar Charles Barkley renounced this title publicly in the early 1990s in a Nike television advertisement and supported the notion for “role models” to come from the home environment.

Purpose of the Study

The study intends to examine the phenomenon of peer-leadership among collegiate student-athletes participating on a football team. The study will examine the relationships between Division I football captains and their teammates. According to James MacGregor Burns, the father of transactional and transformational leadership, “leadership is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize resources so as to arouse and satisfy the motives of the followers” (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 23). Through research synthesis, Kent and Chelladurai (2001) defined transformational leadership as “… building commitment for the organization’s mission and objectives focuses on the leader-follower relationship that benefits both the individuals involved and the organization as a whole” (p. 136).

Bernard M. Bass (1985) furthered Burns’ study of transformational and transactional leadership and created a base for a six-factor model that conceptualized leadership factors. Avolio, Bass and Jung (1999) present six operational definitions. The following four are most closely related to the assumed existing peer-leadership relationships exhibited in sport by captains and may, therefore, be applied although their root is found in other academic research disciplines:

1. Charisma/Inspiration – provides followers with a clear sense of purpose that is energizing, is a role model for ethical conduct and builds identification with the leader and his or her articulated vision.
3. Individualized Consideration – focuses on understanding the needs of each follower and works continuously to get them to develop to their full potential.

4. Contingent Reward – clarifies what is expected from followers and what they will receive if they meet expected levels of performance.

5. Active Management-by-Exception – focuses on monitoring task execution for any problems that might arise and correcting those problems to maintain current performance levels.

In their 2005 study, Dupuis, Bloom, and Loughead explored the perceptions of athletic leadership through a qualitative comprehensive structure of interviews with former ice hockey captains. The data yielded three distinguishing characteristics that would produce the greatest success as a peer leader/captain: interpersonal characteristics and experiences, verbal interactions, and task behaviors. When Avolio et al. (1999) and Dupuis et al. (2005) are compared, it is apparent that the presupposed leadership attributes of captains are to influence their peers through their dynamic actions to rally the team to work towards a common goal while recognizing individuals in the group and taking corrective actions to eradicating any deviations from progressive performance levels.

This study aimed to explore the essence of the motives and initiatives that captains impose on themselves and the team as a whole. By the same token, this study also sought to explore the effects these captains have on their fellow teammates. In order to fully examine this phenomenon, the following research questions were asked:

1. How do football team captains describe their experience as captains and as student-athletes?
2. What impact do football team captains have on the experience of the other players’ as student-athletes?

3. What are the peer-leadership characteristics of football team captains?

Significance of the Study

A critical question is whether the problems among high-profile student-athletes participating for high-profile athletic departments are recurring due to a lack of coaching control over the program, as the University of Southern California head football coach Pete Carroll suggested in a statement to the *Los Angeles Times*, or whether the problems are perpetuated through the examples student-athletes’ peers are interpreting from student-athlete leaders.

According to the article, “Preferred Leadership of NCAA Division I and II Intercollegiate Student-Athletes” (Beam, Serwatka & Wilson, 2004), “if in fact the sport context is unique, it becomes necessary to identify the dimensions of leader behavior that are relevant to sport” (p. 15). Yet, while the research in the field has looked into the effects of the player/coaching leadership relationships (Blaguer, Duda, Atienza & Mayo, 2002; Jambor & Zhang, 1997; Loughead & Hardy, 2003; Sullivan & Kent, 2003), the significance of player-to-player relationship has recently moved from seldom explored territory to a matter of concern (Dupuis, Bloom & Loughead, 2006; Todd & Kent, 2004).

Historically, athletic leadership has been investigated in conjunction with the concepts presented by Chelladurai’s governing work on leadership (see, e.g., Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Chelladurai & Carron, 1983; Chelladurai & Reimer, 1998). Since Chelladurai’s early work, dimension scales measuring leadership in sport have spawned and are widely applied (Beam, Serwatka & Wilson, 2004; Hollembeak & Ambrose, 2003; Loughead & Hardy, 2003; Sullivan & Kent, 2003; Todd & Kent, 2004). The Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) (Chelladurai & Saleh,
1980), a modified version of the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MLL), represents the five dimensions of leader behavior: training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback. Findings have confirmed these dimensions (Beam, Serwatka & Wilson, 2004; Hollembeak & Ambrose, 2003; Loughead & Hardy, 2003; Sullivan & Kent, 2003; Todd & Kent, 2004). Most student-athletes respond to and prefer the coaching staff to foster attributes related to training and instruction and autocratic behavior, while the peer leaders are preferred to demonstrate social support, positive feedback, and democratic behavior (Loughead & Hardy, 2004).

The presented literature leads to the conclusion that there are many gaps in the study of peer leadership among athletes when the coaching staff is removed from the equation. Therefore, the identification of the experiences of student-athletes serving as football captains and leaders will bring about numerous advantages to society. First, as society becomes increasingly interested in the lives of the student-athletes, these young adults are in need of peer role models that understand and display socially acceptable behavior both on and off the field. This advantage has the potential to infiltrate all sports at all levels, not only those that are more highly regarded or popular. Nor is the need for peer role models limited to one gender. Second, the relationship between coaches and players will benefit through the dual leadership functions that will be shared by the coaches and captains who will in turn provide positive guidance for the team.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the work of Loughead and Hardy’s (2005) study on coach and peer leader behaviors in sport. The Loughead and Hardy study examined peer leaders and coaches exhibited leadership qualities to a different extent from one another and found that coaches may
not be able to consistently meet the needs of the athletes and therefore must create an environment where athletes are able to exhibit additional forms of leadership (p. 311).

This framework was coupled with the work of Dupuis, Bloom and Loughead (2005) on the subject of leadership behaviors demonstrated by formal athlete leadership. The study was measured by six semi-structured interviews with six former hockey captains. Results of the study supported the importance of formal captains and the behaviors that they demonstrated to their teammates. Lastly, the researcher attempted to identify the six-factor model of characteristics of transformational leadership as was set by Avolio et al. (1999) and synthesize the leader attributes of the three distinguishing characteristics that would produce the greatest success as a peer leader/captain as set by Dupuis et al. (2005). More of this study will be covered in the Literature Review contained in Chapter II.

Definitions of Terms
For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

*Captain* is a member of the team who is elected as the formal leader by his peers and the coaching staff.

*Leadership*, according to Burns, is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize resources so as to arouse and satisfy the motives of the followers” (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 23).

*Peer leader*, for the purpose of this study, is a member of the team who is not on the coaching staff but is in a position to influence and guide their fellow student-athletes as a captain.

*Peer-leadership* is the act of contributing to the group as a peer-leader.
Redshirt can precede the academic standing of a student-athlete if their academic standing and NCAA eligibility are not distinguishable by the same classification and the student-athlete has been granted an extra year of eligibility by the NCAA due to a hardship.

Student-athlete is defined by Section 12.02.5 of the NCAA By-laws as a “student whose enrollment was solicited by a member of the athletics staff or other representative of athletics interests with a view toward the student's ultimate participation in the intercollegiate athletics program. Any other student becomes a student-athlete only when the student reports for an intercollegiate squad that is under the jurisdiction of the athletics department, as specified in Constitution 3.2.4.5. A student is not deemed a student-athlete solely on the basis of prior high school athletics participation.”

Parameters of the Study

The findings of the study will be exclusive to the team captains that will be studied and their experiences with their fellow student-athletes on the Division I football team. Focus groups and interviews were used to complement the purpose of the phenomenological study by “adding depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level” (Patton, 1990, p. 18). Throughout the study and analysis of the data, the researcher was conscious of her ongoing efforts to remain unbiased as she interprets their responses due to her past history as a former team captain and her close work with collegiate student-athletes.

Summary and Overview of the Document

Chapter I provided an introduction to peer-leadership among collegiate student-athletes and articulated the importance of the study to not only the world of academia but also to popular culture. Chapter II will communicate the state of peer-leadership studies as seen through scholarly literature in the sporting realm while pinpointing areas in which this study will fill a
void. It will also make known a collection of examples of those student-athletes that made a name for themselves due to their involvement in irresponsible behaviors. Chapter III will outline the step-by-step methodology of the study. Chapter IV will discuss the participants of the study as well as the findings of the study. The final chapter will relate the findings back to the original three research questions as discuss their significance to the study, the team and society through a popular culture lens.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The cognitive understanding for the interpretation of the word ‘leadership’ is not solely appreciated through the articulation of the noun. It is the outward traits that are visible to a group of followers that bring the concept to life and solidify its meaning. Definitions for the term leadership vary as greatly as the multitude of acts that portray leadership in a given setting or organization. “In fact, over the last five decades there have been approximately 65 different taxonomies to define leadership” (Loughead, Hardy & Eys, 2006, p. 144).

Among its various definitions, leadership can be described “as a process of directing and supporting others in pursuit of the organization’s mission goals” (Covell, Walker, Siciliano, & Hess, 2003, p. 108). Another closely related definition states leadership is the “deployment of power, authority or influence to guide other’s thoughts and/or behavior and induce them to follow, willingly or not” (Cashmore, 2002, p. 152). For the purposes of this study, the researcher adopted the leadership definition as presented by the ‘father of transformational leadership,’ James MacGregor Burns, due to his historically renowned work in the field and his expert authority on the subject. Burns concluded, “leadership is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize resources so as to arouse and satisfy the motives of the followers” (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 23). The three definitions, albeit different, speak to the same message: through the act of leadership a person, or persons, in a hierarchical position, with a premeditated outcome, use a necessary form of motivation to stimulate their subordinates to work toward the accomplishments of said outcome.

Northouse (2001) defines four components that make leadership accessible to each and every person. His study concludes leadership is a process that has the power to influence those in
groups and guide said groups to a determined goal. This idea is especially important in an athletic team atmosphere, as leadership is an action that can be displayed, not only by the coach, but also by those designated as the formal peer-leader, the captain.

Leadership, according to Loughead et al. (2006), meta-analysis of the academic research of the nature of athlete leadership is unrestricted in its attainment and the procedures in which it may be carried out (p. 144). As the aforementioned research shows, the possibilities for a person to procure a leadership role are endless. Yet, upon receiving such a role, the success of his or her position is dependent upon his or her effectiveness as a leader through their directed actions to the group for the attainment of the set goals. In his heavily researched business management book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, Maxwell (1998) concurs leadership is a process that develops daily and one’s ability determines a person’s level of effectiveness. While each of these “laws” can be applied to athletics, Maxwell’s most convincing application comes in his law stating, “Leaders find a way for the team to win.” As a part of the Law of Victory, all leaders are thought to have the inability to admit defeat, which is not reserved solely for athletic competition but applies to all aspects of leadership.

A 1996 article from the *Journal for Quality and Participation* merges the business landscape with the sporting arena to define a foundation that will lead to success on the metaphorical basketball court, the global marketplace. Daniels (1996) urges businessmen to take leadership cues from championship basketball and make each “player” a leader and accountable for their position in the business.

Although business and sport analogies seem to fit like a glove to a hand, popular business management practice has yet to suggest a solid cross-section of leadership practices that fit both
disciplines. Furthermore, studies in business and management have spawned many efforts to understand other arenas of leadership, but have yet to fully reveal their differences.

The major impetus behind the development of theoretical models for the examination of leadership has come from management science research. This is unfortunate since the dynamics of leadership and its impact upon the performance and satisfaction of ‘subordinates’ is as pertinent and critical an issue for sport and physical activity as it is for business and industry. (Carron, 1980, p. 124)

The answer to the question, “What makes an effective leader?” may lie in present academic literature, business management practices, or a hybrid of the disciplines.

In sport, leadership research has sought to profile the characteristics of the coaching profession, but lacks the information of what may propel an athlete towards success or contentment (Carron, 1980). According to Loughead and Hardy (2005), a new social science issue that begs to be explored is the topic of identifying the peer leaders in sport and the nature of the support and leadership that they bestow upon their teammates.

“But because Division I basketball and football coaches have such high profiles, we often ascribe to all coaches motivations and personality characteristics exhibited by these coaches” (Frederick & Morrison, 1999, p. 222). Yet, we must look past the leadership bestowed by the coaches and the stereotypes that they are the lone source of said leadership on a team. According to Loughead and Hardy (2005) one-third of athletes identify the team captain as the sole source of peer-leadership on a given team. In light of this finding, the present study examined peer-leadership on a Division I varsity football team and the influence these peer leaders have on the remainder of the team. Additionally, the study bore importance not only to social science
research, but also to the student-athletes’ development of the lifelong skill of leadership no matter the role they partake on the team (Todd & Kent, 2004).

The Role of the Student-Athlete Leader

The complicated role of the leader is often conceptualized through coaching (Frederick & Morrison, 1999; Loughead & Hardy, 2005; Sullivan & Kent, 2002) and administrative research (Doherty & Danylchuck, 1996; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001), yet is not clearly defined for the student-athlete acting as the peer-leader (Todd & Kent, 2004). As a society at-large we expect student-athletes, as skilled competitors, to live above their peers and to set examples of how to succeed in all aspects of the greater game of life (Fleming, Hardman, Jones & Sheridan, 2005). According to Fleming et al. (2005), the reasons why certain players were tabbed as role models by a group of elite young male rugby athletes did not just include their style of play on the field. The analysis exposed the characteristics of “technical competence, decision-making, physical characteristics, (explicit reference to) ‘role models’ and temperament” (Fleming, et al., 2005, p. 51). Glenn and Horn (1993) asked female high school soccer players to rate their peers’ leadership abilities and found similar results. The authors’ results noted athletes who possessed the greatest perceived proportion of leadership skills ranked on the higher ends of self-perceived soccer competence, task-orientation behavior, and skill level.

Who is Recognized as the Ultimate Peer-Leader, the Captain?

The most recognizable leader among an athletic infrastructure is the head coach and his or her staff of assistant coaches, yet among the student-athletes the most visible leaders is likely that of the captains. Through such a natural hierarchy a systematic social order is established where those holding differing ranks are responsible for diverse actions within the team setting. Amorose and Horn (2000) advocate coaches who promote higher frequencies of democratic
behavior and lower frequencies of autocratic behavior influence athletes’ feelings of autonomy and contribute to a boost in the athletes’ intrinsic motivation. Because captains are often seen as an extension of the coaching staff, it can be concluded an effective captain will help to increase the intrinsic motivation of his or her peer group and could also harbor autocratic tendencies.

As an extension from the aforementioned Amorose and Horn (2000) study, the purpose of Hollenbeak and Amorose’s 2004 study was to extend their understanding of whether perceived competence, autonomy, and feelings of relatedness mediated the relationship between athlete’s perceptions of their coaches’ behavior and their intrinsic motivation for sport. The study also ventured to determine the specific coaching behaviors that are positively related to athletes’ motivation (p. 22). Hollenbeak and Amorose found democratic behaviors positively related to autonomy and autocratic behaviors instilled negative reactions in the athletes. Also, athletes whose coaches implored autocratic behaviors harbored feelings of disconnect from the coach. Extending these findings to athletic captains, it can be assumed leadership and motivation is most dependent upon democratic behaviors that will connect the peer group emotionally both on and off the field. Todd and Kent (2004) agree with the assumption and found the idea of peer-leadership has much deeper roots in interpersonal attraction and the perceived ability of the student-athlete. Kent and Chelladurai (2001) relate these behaviors to transformational leadership where the “followers feel included and supported, gain higher self-esteem, and are willing to change and to commit themselves to the leader’s vision” (p. 136). They tie the presented ideologies together saying “followers are expected to perform beyond expectations and maximize their collective performance for the betterment of the organization” (p. 136). Therefore, if the captains are acting democratically and give the followers the support that they command and expect, the cumulative unit, when motivated correctly, will strive to meet a goal.
Contribution as a peer-leader to one’s teammates does not rely heavily on the popularity of the captain but in the respect a peer-leader is given (Wechsler, 1979). In her studies regarding a pair of collegiate football teams and the varieties of interpersonal attraction, Wechsler (1979) defined respect to be “a function of the possession of rare and valued attributes” (p. 255). In addition, because so few student-athletes are recognized as formal peer-leaders, these players are given an unbalanced fraction of the total respect that is given in the group setting. In Todd and Kent’s (2004) exploratory investigation of ideal peer-leadership in adolescent student-athletes, the results substantiated various prior studies that demonstrated student-athletes look up to and respect other players who work hard in games and practices and respect their fellow teammates. This effort is assumed to be rewarded with playing time or the chance to be named as a starter during competition. Gill and Perry (1979) found among collegiate women’s softball players these characteristics, along with age and experience, are directly linked to perceived leadership ability. Academic support also shows a subordinates’ leadership behavior is a direct result of the influence and attitudes enforced by those who serve as leaders to the subordinates (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001).

Expected Actions of the Peer-Leader

Loughead and Hardy (2005) conducted an exploratory study to compare the relationship between effective coaching and peer leader behavior because “the structure of sport organizations typically limits the number of coaches and captains on any given team” (p. 305). Reportedly, Loughead and Hardy found the greatest source of peer leadership was initiated by those formally recognized to be the team captains; yet informal peer leaders exercised leadership qualities as well. An informal leader “emerges as a result of the interactions that occur among
group members” (Loughead, Hardy & Eys, 2006, p. 149). These informal leaders will be important to any given team because they represent the future of the captainship.

Loughead and Hardy’s study measured three central variables: coach behaviors, peer leader behaviors, and peer leader dispersion, or the ratio of peer leaders divided by roster size. The study was completed using a modified version of the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS) (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) in which five dimensions were measured for the coach and peer leader behaviors. The first dimension, training and instruction, evaluated the leadership characteristic involved with the improvement of the athletes’ performance as individuals and as a unit. Positive feedback, the second dimension, weighed the reinforcement and recognition of a successful performance. Next, social support was gauged upon the emotional traits of the leader in reference to his or her concern for the team as individuals and as a whole and the general disposition of the team environment. Subsequently the fourth dimension charted the democratic behaviors when it came time to make decisions that would affect the general population such as practice and game schemes. The final dimension, autocratic behavior, measured the independent decisions making skill set of the coaching staff (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980).

The findings of Loughead and Hardy’s (2005) study indicated that peer leadership was often socially driven while the coaching staff’s leadership focused on training and authoritarian behaviors. Further clarification may then come from peer leaders on teams in regards to the authoritative acts displayed by university administration and the coaching staff. These findings are particularly important to the present study, because they confirm Chelladurai and Saleh’s (1980) work, which found that male athletes expect and prefer coaches to have stronger autocratic qualities. Through additional studies it can be verbalized and generalized that student-athletes turn to each other to serve the function of social support leaders (Dupuis et al., 2006;
Loughead & Hardy, 2005; Todd & Kent, 2004). In Loughead, Hardy and Eys’ (2006) study, 11% of athletes were viewed as team, meaning formal, social leaders with just over half (57%) serving as a captain, almost all (93%) earning starting positions and just under three quarters (70%) to be in their third or fourth season with the team. Even at the peer, or informal, social leader level, similar results of social leadership dispersion (47%) were found in starters (66%) and those who have been with the team for three or four consecutive years (55%). Furthermore, their study examined the duration of the perceived social leadership and the results concluded the majority of those that were identified at the beginning of the season were once again named at the end of the season.

Limitations were found in Loughead and Hardy’s investigation with reference to the nature and behaviors of peer-leadership and the significance that it serves on an organized team. Findings indicate 65.1% of student-athletes recognize peer-leadership behaviors from both their captains and other teammates. These results also found student-athletes perceive just over one-quarter of their teammates (27%) to act as peer leaders. If this is true, one must ask why certain student-athletes bear the title of captain and why there are so few per team. Furthermore, if one-quarter of the members on a given team are perceived to be peer leaders, why are any given the distinction of captain? Also, it may be assumed of this quarter a disparity in age will occur among these leaders. With this in mind, are younger players groomed to become future captains if they show early signs of maturity and leadership?

The work of Martin Dupuis, Gordon A. Bloom and Todd M. Loughead (2006) may suggest an answer to the posed question through their study of team captain’s perceptions of formal athlete leadership. The study, an expansion of the Loughead and Hardy (2003) study, was conducted due to recognition of insufficient research in the arena of formal athlete
leadership in relation to athletes’ behaviors. Results from six interviews with former ice hockey captains yielded three higher ordered categories consisting behavioral traits such as interpersonal characteristics and experiences, verbal interactions, and task behaviors. The interpersonal characteristics and experiences category was formed by the intersecting of the personal idiosyncrasies of the captains as well as their sport experiences that formed their perceptions of the captainship. Verbal interactions were categorized by relationship and communication the captains provided while task behaviors were defined as those responsibilities associated with the control of the extraneous conditions of the team (Dupuis, Bloom, & Hardy, 2006). Scholarly discourse will reflect the results of the study and will suggest part of the reason so few athletes are given the distinction of captain is due in part to their adaptation of higher ordered behaviors and recognition of these behaviors amongst the coaching staff and the team members.

In their innovative study on team and peer leadership, Loughead, Hardy, and Eys (2006) found that athletes on a given team have the ability to serve as a leader even if they do not bear the distinction of captain. However, Dupuis, Bloom, and Hardy’s (2006) three higher ordered categories of task, social and external forces were more likely to be related back to the formal peer leader. According to Wechsler (1979), the greater the understanding of the best leadership practices to reach a goal amongst the whole, the greater the respect for those that are instrumental in leading the group to the goal.

Rayona Sharpnack (2005), a leadership trainer and the first player/manager in the International Women’s Professional Softball League, marks five areas—being, perceptions, trust, conversations for actions, and failure—in her leadership courses as the most instrumental to leadership. Among the five, the role of ‘perceptions’ attracts the most attention to the current study because Sharpnack notes leadership is addressed in terms of content and process but does
not fully explore how leadership affects situational behaviors. The perception role relates directly to the reactions, or lack thereof, to athletes and their comprehension of their ability to lead and the effects it has on others (Cheryl, 2005).

Student-athletes must bear the major psychological load of balancing the rigorous schedule of team, academic and personal time, while acting as good and moral citizens more so than their seemingly carefree non-athlete peers. Gregory Wilson and Mary Pritchard (2005) compared sources of stress in both student-athletes and their traditional non-sporting counterparts. The researchers found unique stressors regarding time demands, campus status, injury and player/coach relations to cause a unique situation for the student-athletes to work through regarding their mental health.

Decision Making

Brown, Basil and Bocarnea’s (2003) study on professional baseball player Mark McGwire’s very public health issues regarding alleged steroid use further found that athletes’ decisions do not just affect the athlete, but also have an influence on health-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the public. If the public, who is not in direct contact with the athlete, is affected by an athletes’ decisions, what is happening on a daily basis to the athletes’ teammates?

According to Cashmore (2002), “the process of making a choice between alternatives when the outcome cannot be known in advance is decision making. It involves often complex deliberations, such as predicting probable consequences, balancing moral and technical considerations, and attending to the likely impact of the decision on others” (p. 77). By this definition, decision making is not only important on the field when fulfilling the role of an
athlete in order to win, but also when a student-athlete is not engaging in competition and is forced to make decisions which could effect their life.

Decision-making skills serve as an important responsibility to the captain’s capacity to serve as an effective leader because, as Fleming et al. (2005) explain, these leaders/role models are admired and emulated among their peer group and a large number of younger athletes. With this emulation comes the responsibility to model behaviors that are desirable and to not promote those that are not. Furthermore, there is a social acceptance that athletes demonstrate a great power over those who are in close proximity to them and those who they indirectly influence by simply acting as themselves (Fleming, et al., 2005). This power to influence is very closely related to the mastery of their skill and the confident persona underlying in the ego (Carr & Weigand, 2001). It is easy to draw a parallel comparison between those who are chosen to lead teams as captain due to their physical and emotional authority and those who systematically become role models for the same reasons.

The Student-Athlete as a Celebrity

Richard Lipsky (1981) examines the point of importance of the sporting star in his comparison to the athlete as a “vernacular hero” and how “we can learn a great deal about the values that are talking hold within ordinary lives and mass consciousness by looking at who rises as an athletic hero at a particular time” (p. 107). Walton (2004) expands upon this idea and believes “we can learn a great deal about cultural change across time by examining the ways stories about sports heroes are remembered” (p. 62). If this is true, what can be said about the current state of the American culture? Also, who decides what stories of which collegiate student-athletes will be recounted in the mass media? How is their celebrity status defined and what actions have promoted their name to become known to the common man?
Student-Athlete Celebrities and the Media

“The modern sport culture has spawned a spectrum of print and broadcast media between the traditional daily newspapers’ sports page and the modern game telecast” (Marrs, 1996, p. 216). The media, in every form including newspaper, radio, Internet, and television, have become a powerful source of information where any action made by a student-athlete can be publicized by both his or her university or anyone with access to a publishing medium. In the world of mass communication, which we cannot escape, culture and access no longer matter (Melnick & Jackson, 2002).

In the age of instant replay it has become very common to be aware of every mistake a student-athlete makes while in the heat of battle on the field, but the luxury of instant replay has transitioned to these young adults’ lives off the field. When these student-athletes are involved in an altercation their jersey is traded in for a scarlet letter and their dirty laundry is aired on the various television networks devoted to sports or even on the Internet on sporting news websites.

Yet, not all of the publicity the student-athletes receive is necessarily negative. Life under the spotlight for playing well can be just as hot as life under the spotlight for disobeying the law. According to Marrs (1996):

Star football players are promoted for awards by their university public relations staffs and by the sport media -- for the Heisman Trophy, the Walker Award, the Maxwell Award, the Lombardi Award, the Butkus Award, the Outland Trophy, and All-American team selections. This NCAA-sport media culture is built on the exploitation of the athletes, and the NCAA’s rules have the effect of supporting and furthering the exploitation. (p. 217)
A large part of the celebrity life is defined in the context of the media and the representation of the student-athlete in said media. In his examination of college track standout Steve Prefontaine, Walton (2004) points out “whereas Prefontaine himself might be considered an authority on his meaning—as captured in quotes and interviews—he is not the ‘sole author of the text that is known culturally’ as Prefontaine” (p. 64). Since Prefontaine, other athletes have experienced a growth in popularity from being known on campus to becoming a household name. Each has also attempted to tell his or her own story through interviews, but the very fabric of their stories is partially woven by the context of the communicator and the receivers. Walton (2004) backs this idea as he states, “Nonetheless, every consumer of the images and texts of Prefontaine has the opportunity, given his or her own experience and perspective, to make meaning of Prefontaine” (p. 64).

How Lawfully Are Student-Athletes Portrayed in the Media?

When student-athletes are welcomed into an athletic department they are entering into a relationship with their universities’ athletic department and those who work in the department. This give and take relationship comes with the understanding that each side will use their given talents and will help to create success for the other. It is quite possible to see this relationship as an extension of the family concept with the athletic department as the parental figure/role model to the student-athlete. Just as a parent has a duty to protect his or her child, the athletic department assumes the responsibilities set forth by the federal laws and the by-laws of the NCAA. Fortunately for the student-athlete, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) also protects the student-athlete from the over exposure which may come at the hands of the trusted athletic department.
In 1974, U.S. Senator James Buckley introduced the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 as a floor amendment to other educational legislation. Buckley gave the reasoning for the presentation as his disturbance with the “growing evidence of the abuse of students’ records across the nation. According to the sponsors of the Act,

the purpose of the Act is two-fold to assure parents of students… access to their education records and to protect such individuals’ rights to privacy by limiting the transferability of their records without their consent. (Batista, 2004, p. 3)

Housed in FERPA, among other provisions, is the right granting privacy to each student in educational institutions receiving federal funds and prohibiting the release of the students’ educational records without consent. Due to the intentionally broad language surrounding the definition of educational records, the assignment to a universal meaning has been a controversial debate.

In 1996, the NCAA approved a policy in its general council meeting stating personally identifiable information made known to the NCAA by the student-athlete must be disclosed under the allowance of said athlete to the public unless it is permissible under FERPA. Supplementary information regarding eligibility and their educational records are not subjected to authorization to unrestricted dissemination (“Council Reviews I Initial-Eligibility Process”, 1996). Student-athletes now must sign a waiver giving permission for their personal information to be distributed by the athletic department. While this waiver abides by the NCAA by-laws, should a student-athlete choose to turn down the publicity, this or her eligibility status would be questioned and would lead to their removal from practice and competitions. Savvy NCAA negotiators have made the two reliant upon each other to the extent a student-athlete may not
participate if a signature is missing in the sports information files. To date, no student-athlete has raised the obvious legal question this practice brings.

The common sports fan relies upon the NCAA to produce sports in which he or she can be entertained everyday of the week. The athletic success of a university can raise enrollment numbers and can put a small town on the national or even global map. A football team may be granted numerous nationally televised games where they wear the name of the school on their jersey for ninety minutes. Take into consideration the commercials promoting the school, the mannerisms of the players and coaches, and the background information that is given during the game through the broadcasters’ color commentary; a school can receive an incredible amount of positive publicity in a single night. Prior to the game, the Athletic Department will use the services of their Marketing Department to use the players’ likeness in commercials and on promotional posters to the extent that “the universities parlay such publicity into prestige, recruiting attractions, and gate receipts” (Marrs, 1996, p. 217).

Now consider the role of the student-athlete at any given university. During the week of December 15, 2005 a national press conference was produced by sports network ESPN in regards to the announcement to the verbal commitment of one of the nation’s top prep-school quarterback to his university of choice. His football statistics were made into a montage of clips and a viewer could more than likely all recite the three state records he broke; but was anyone concerned with what he would study? Mention was given to his possibility of graduating high school early to move onto his next educational opportunity; spring football where he would be schooled in the offense he would run one day at the quarterback position. If he is to make the grade in the classroom he will be revered as a rarity in the NCAA, but what leadership skills will he bring to the university? Furthermore, how can an 18-year-old student-athlete be expected to
live above the collegiate experience when he is not even sure how to live as a student in the university atmosphere? What if he is arrested but wins a national championship, should the media and its public even care?

Expository Illustrations in Collegiate Athletics

Unfortunately, it is not hard to find examples of collegiate athletes serving as captains breaking on to the media scene for actions not related to their respective sports. While the most public stories break from the sport of football as a result of the national captivate surrounding it, several other examples of captains misbehaviors gained attention in the popular culture. The following examples give a face to this study and the need for proper leadership amongst today’s student-athlete population.

**Football**

The University of Southern California’s (USC) football program is no stranger to the media spotlight at any point of their season. From 2003 to 2005, the team made three consecutive pilgrimages to the national championship game, winning in 2003 and 2004. Furthermore, individual student-athletes became national celebrities, whose daily actions away from the line of scrimmage captivated the nation. In the April 28, 2005 issue of *Sports Illustrated on Campus*, star quarterback Matt Leinart discussed his relationship with fellow Trojan student-athlete Brynn Cameron, a then-freshman on the women’s basketball team. Once the couple split, he was later forced to defend his alleged attachments with many of Hollywood’s eligible single women. The saga of Lineart and Cameron’s personal relationship made news once again in November of 2006 when it became public knowledge that Cameron gave birth to Leinart’s child.
Although Leinart attempted to describe himself as a “normal guy, just like any other 21-year-old college student,” the *Sports Illustrated on Campus* author described Leinart’s life as far from normal and made references to the heightened media hype caused when student-athletes, such as Leinart, have an “evening out” with friends (Markazi, 2005). The Trojans’ media attention was not all positive despite the bubble-gum image Leinart attempted to portray to the media. Since the summer of 2004, two student-athletes have been accused of, yet never formally charged with, rape. The incidents occurred two years apart, with the latest occurrence taking place in April of 2006. Another player was accused of punching a student at a party in October of 2005, while two stars, including Leinart, found themselves in the midst of housing scandals (Feldman, 2006). USC head football coach Pete Carroll was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* about educating his players to be more aware of outside influences and the distractions which success may bring. “Our guys are marked guys, they have had success and there’s people trying to get in on that, and we need to do a better job of making them understand the problems there” (Feldman, 2006, p. 1).

Other reputable academic institutions such as Navy and Harvard had their established character challenged in the summer of 2006 as their football captains were involved in disputes with women which resulted in both domestic assault (Harvard) and rape (Navy) allegations. The Naval Academy student was acquitted by a jury of the rape charges but was charged with behavior unbecoming of an officer. The sentence could have been two years in jail; however, the student was not punished (Jury: No Punishment for Ex-Navy QB Acquitted of Rape, 2006). Harvard coach Tim Murphy dismissed former captain Matthew Thomas in June of 2006 after his domestic assault arrest; another player was dismissed in September of 2006 for what was deemed
a “disrespectful” skit that was preformed as a team tradition in August (Harvard Receiver from Tucson Dismissed from Team, 2006).

_Lacrosse_

National attention came to the Duke University campus in the early spring of 2006, not in recognition of some outstanding academic discovery, but to defend the off-colored actions of the men’s lacrosse team. This same team, which celebrated a trip to the NCAA championship match just 10 months prior, was now appearing in the national headlines due to an off-campus party held at the home of three seniors who also happened to be tri-captains. The now infamous March 13 party was attended by nearly the entire team and was supposed to be highlighted by a pair of hired private dancers. Rape allegations and the later indictment of two underclassmen and a team captain resulted in the forfeiture of the remainder of the season and spawned a national debate regarding student-athletes’ behavior, the heightened local racial tensions due to the privileged class of lacrosse players, and the background of the dancers.

Depending on one’s personal school of thought, it can be argued the players in question were no longer student-athletes because they were suspended from the team due to their involvement in the case; however, other camps would offer the retraction, would the media have been involved as heavily as they were if the students were not athletes in the first place? As a consequence of this study’s questions of the substantial extent of leadership by the student-athlete, it must be brought to light that Mike Pressler, the 2005 National Coach of the Year for Duke Lacrosse and a highly respected and regarded coach in the profession, resigned within weeks of the accusations (Price, Evans & Munson, 2006). Although the present study recognizes student-athletes as leaders, what message does a resignation send to the accused and the many others attached to them?
Unfortunately, this lack of positive leadership is not reserved for a team known for its outlandish late-night behavior, but, on the flip side could boast 100% graduation since 2001 and perennially saw twice as many players named to the conference academic honor roll as their opponents (Price, Evans & Munson, 2006). The fine line between a sporting life and a private life blurs the moment a student-athlete steps onto campus and joins the ranks of the media darlings. Many of the student-athletes are on their own for the first time in their lives, traveling far from home in order to gain an education in their determined majors and in life. Experts in leadership identify the backbone of leadership to be “what they [people] believe, how they feel, and the shared norms and cultural messages from the groups and communities with which they identify” (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 23). But who are these leaders guiding these groups of naïve newcomers and under what social norms are these student-athletes passing from one generation to the next?

Summary

It is apparently clear that the student-athlete should be protected while attending the university and representing its athletic department, yet there is no law stating their personal lives are free from exposure. With this in mind, leadership roles are important to the team and the university so as to avoid any unwanted press. In the wake of the Duke lacrosse scandal, Colin Finnerty, one of the indicted players made news in July, nearly four months after the now infamous party incident, for his involvement in an unrelated crime.

“Public knowledge of the personal lives of athletes is greater today that it has ever been at any point in history” (Brown, Basil & Bocarnea, 2003, p. 43). Therefore proper leadership amongst student-athletes should become a priority on every team, especially Division I football teams, seeing as they subjected to public scrutiny. The need for this study is apparent, as,
besides the coach, the captain is the most important influence and role model to other student-athletes.
CHAPTER III. METHODS

Introduction

The present study intended to examine the phenomenon of peer-leadership among collegiate student-athletes participating on a particular varsity football team. Phenomenology uses “qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively and holistically understand human experiences in context-specific settings” (Patton, 1990, p. 37). The methodology of this qualitative study concentrated on the first-hand knowledge of those who are undertaking the responsibility of the position of captain on a Division-I football team, while also carrying out the daily life of a student-athlete. It also took into consideration those student-athletes participating on the team who were not captains and their experiences and relationships with the group of captains.

It was assumed that a student-athlete bearing the title captain would be considered one of the elite leaders on his team and would have a formal role that is recognized beyond the confines of the team. Yet, academic research has found there can be many student-athletes who fulfill a leadership function on the team without such a title (Loughead & Hardy, 2005; Loughead, Hardy & Eys, 2006). Therefore, this phenomenological study sought to identify those characteristics that separated formal leaders holding captain’s positions from those who are informal leaders that do not bear the title. The process to identify such characteristics consisted through the words and experiences of current Division-I football players and their captains.

Research Questions

The following research questions fueled the inquiry to more fully understand the essence and experience of leading a Division-I football as a student-athlete captain participating as a
member of the college football squad. Also, the research questions were meant to deduce the
effects these assumed peer-leaders had on their teammates both on and off the field.

1. How do football team captains describe their experience as captains and as student-
athletes?
2. What impact do football team captains have on the experience of the other players as
student-athletes?
3. What are the peer-leadership characteristics of football team captains?

Setting

According to Todd and Kent (2004), “One of the best environments to evaluate the
leadership potential of adolescents is within that of sport, as it is a naturalistic setting that
provides an appropriate context for multiple ratings of leadership behaviors” (p. 106). The
present study took place at an accredited university that sponsors 18 NCAA Division I varsity
sports. In the past six seasons, the university’s athletic program has been the spotlight of regional
and national media attention due to the successful performance of the athletic department, more
specifically the football program.

The NCAA’s 2005 graduation rate report shows that the university had a 76% graduation
rate from the 1998-99 student-athlete freshman cohort, a figure that was 16% higher than the
non-student-athletes of the same cohort. The university also saw an 84% student-athlete
graduation success rate across all cohorts during that same period. The university’s athletic
department has produced eleven Academic All-Americans in the past five years, including two
that garnered the award while also serving as football captains during their final season on the
team. In September of 2005, the conference in which the university participates had the highest
percentage of campuses with a Graduation Success Rate (GSR) of 70% or above (8 of 12 schools) and a GSR of 50% or more (12 of 12) for public institutions.

Participant Selection

Two groups were selected to participate in the study, one consisting of those named captain for the 2006-07 season (Group A) and another comprised of team members without captain status (Group B).

Group A

Group A was selected by their peers prior to the 2006-07 season to serve as team captains. The selection process began by the coaching staff creating a ballot consisting of those team members who reached junior and senior academic status. The ballot was then passed out to the team where they were asked to vote for their future captains. The four student-athletes with the highest number of votes were named captain for the 2006-07 season. This process happens annually in the summer months before the start of the new season. The 2006-07 captains’ group was formed by four student-athletes who have been on the team roster for a minimum of four seasons. This is the first season each will serve as a captain; only one captain will have the chance to repeat in the next season due to additional eligibility as a result of academic class standing.

Emergent themes of Yukelson, Weinberg, Richardson, and Jackson’s (1983) study on collegiate athletes confirms athletes who receive higher leader ratings by their peers were more likely to be better performers and had more seniority on the team. Todd and Kent’s (2004) work confirms these themes and found leadership appeal is dependent upon perceived ability through visible work ethic and the skill set preformed in the practice and game setting. Fleming et al. (2005) offers further evidentiary support into the depths of the technical competence factor and
to the attractiveness of a leader. Therefore, it is imperative to note the accomplishments of the four captains prior to the 2006-07 season. Two of the student-athletes are in their fifth season with the team. One was not a starter, nor a major offensive contributor, prior to the 2006 season; the other earned a starting position in the 2005 season after seeing action in 34 of 35 possible games played throughout his career. The third is a true senior in his fourth year with the team. He was named a starter as a freshman and was named to the freshman All-American team in the same year. The fourth is a redshirt junior in his fourth year with the team. He has started every game in his career with the university. He was also named a freshman All-American and earned recognition on the All-Conference team in both of the seasons in which he participated in competitive game action.

As a group, two of the captains played on the defensive side of the ball, while the other two played offense. The group is also racially divided, which is mentioned due to the ongoing debate over discrimination of African-American athletes and their subsequent leadership abilities in the sporting arena (Lewis, Jr., 1995). Another characteristic of the team are the positions that the student-athletes hold during game play. Loy and McElvogue (1970) initially found in football the offensive positions of center, guard and quarterback gave rise to player requirements of poise, refined athletic skill, and the ability to make rational decisions. The same was said for the linebacker position on the defense (Loy & McElvogue, 1970, as cited in Lewis, Jr., 1995). Interestingly, of the four captains, only one player holds a position known for its necessary leadership skills. The remaining three hold positions that are thought to rely on strength, aggressiveness, size, agility and speed.
Group B

Two representatives from the freshman, sophomore, junior and senior classes were invited to comprise the second group of participants. Since collegiate athletics allow for academic class standing to be measured by credits and participation eligibility to be measured by years on the team, this study identified Group B by academic class standing to give the participants four distinct classifications (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) rather than eight classifications (i.e., freshman, redshirt freshman, sophomore, redshirt sophomore, junior, redshirt junior, senior, and fifth-year senior).

The student-athlete must be recognized first as an individual, second as a member of the academic community, and third as a participant in an extracurricular activity. The common reference to athletes being students first and athletes second neglects to take into account the varied personal/social and developmental concerns of the individual.” (Lottes, 1991, p. 32)

Therefore, academic classifications were selected in order to recognize the participants as student-athletes, with emphasis on the student adjective and its scholarly connotation. A further breakdown occurred through the selection of one student-athlete from an offensive position and one from a defensive position from each academic class.

The participants assigned to Group B were selected by the following method: (a) the active roster was accessed through the 2006-07 media guide, which is produced and distributed through the university’s athletic department; (b) the team was categorized by academic standing and listed into offensive and defensive groups, the captains were excluded from said groups; (c) further breakdown of the group listed the student-athletes by class in numerical order by jersey number. In cases of duplicate numbers within the same subgroup the second athlete will be
assigned the next logical number available consisting of two digits; (d) the random number table listed on page 390 from Basic Statistical Concepts in Education and the Behavioral Science (Bartz, 1976) was selected to generated the chosen participants; (e) the researcher blindly chose a number from the table and listed the last two digits from each set of four and the corresponding name owning the jersey number that matched the digits; (f) this process continued vertically down the row until all numbers was used; (g) at the end of the first row, not every academic/position category had been filled, therefore steps d-f was repeated on page 388 (also part of the random numbers table) until all categories had been filled.

A composite of the selected participants will be discussed in Chapter IV.

The Coaching Staff

The coaching staff was not interviewed nor was made aware of the names of the generated participants in order to avoid influencing the participants’ responses. Of the 14 member coaching staff, the Football Operations Director agreed to serve as the liaison between the researcher and team. He had exclusive access to the true identification of the participants. In addition, he contacted the participants and was responsible to report to the researcher those that would and would not be available to participate. Had a member of the participant group been sought out for further questioning the Football Operations Director would have been responsible for the coordination of such contact between the researcher and the participants. The liaison understood his role of confidentiality and did not speak of the study to the remaining thirteen coaching staff members in order to keep the scholarly integrity of the study.

Data Collection

The data were collected in two forms relative to Group A and Group B. After selecting the participants for each group, a letter (Appendices A & B) was hand-delivered to two of the
captains who were still on campus and each of the eight generated non-captain participants explaining the study and asking for participation. Of the remaining two captains, one graduated and was not available while the other initially agreed to participate over the telephone because of his geographic location in relation to the researcher. He was also sent a letter (Appendix C) asking for his participation that was to be mailed back to the researcher. Data were collected from Group B in the form of a focus group with all eight participants in attendance. Conversely, data was collected from the captains through one-on-one interviews. As was previously mentioned, one interview was conducted over the phone.

Focus Groups

Semi-structured interviews, in the form of focus groups, allowed the researcher to explore the pre-determined content areas that were addressed in the literature review while also facilitating the ability to probe more deeply into certain content areas, as the circumstances warrant. The focus group method was the most complementary form of data collection in relation to the phenomenological study and the non-captain participants because “the aim of focus groups is to get closer to participants’ understandings and perspectives of certain issues” (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p. 81).

Because the team was already established, natural group distinctions occurred, such as captain/non-captain, educational experience, and position groups, to articulate a few. The earmark which may designate a participant to a particular group is not exclusive, which in-turn gives the researcher the responsibility to guide and direct the pace and flow of the interview (Cassell & Symon, 2004). The nomination and selection to each of the two groups was discussed in the outline of the previous Participation Selection section. The location of the meetings was
the designated team meeting room which the participants frequented on a daily basis during the season so as to give the participants a comfortable and familiar environment.

The focus groups were audio- and video-taped for future identification purposes so that the researcher could transcribe the focus group at a later time. This action was coordinated with the team’s video coordinator for optimal audio and visual quality in advance of the taping so that the participants’ anonymity was maintained. The video coordinator was never in the team meeting room simultaneously with the participants nor did he view the recording at any time thereafter. The researcher was the only one to see the video and will keep it under lock and key for a period of no less than three years with the other collected data.

Group B was the first group that the researcher spoke with and was questioned for approximately sixty minutes regarding the role of the student-athlete and the captain, decision making, personal experiences as a student-athlete, and recognizing peer-leadership practices. Additional questions addressed the expected leadership practices of the captains and their influence on the atmosphere of the team. The twenty questions posed to the group can be accessed in Appendix D.

One-on-One Interviews

It was decided that the captains would be interviewed separately so that each would be given the opportunity to address his individual experiences and views regarding the subjects of the role of the student-athlete and the captain, decision making, personal experiences as a student-athlete, and recognizing their own peer-leadership practices and their influence on the atmosphere of the team.

The interviews were digitally audio-taped for future transcription purposes. In the case of the telephone interview, the conversation was conducted over speakerphone and was recorded
with the participant’s verbal approval. In all other interviews, a digital voice-recorder was kept on a table between the researcher and the participant. The researcher was the only one to hear the audio and destroyed it upon its full transcription.

The captains were interviewed individually within the three days following the focus group in the same location with the exception of the telephone interview. Of the four captains invited to participate in the study, three agreed but only two were interviewed due to scheduling issues. The focus group interview was transcribed prior to the captain interviews so that any additional subjects would be addressed had the situation arisen.

In order to ensure anonymity, each participant was asked to assign himself a pseudonym that was neither offensive nor a name of another member of the team or the coaching staff. The captains selected the pseudonym at the start of the discussion and simply told it to the researcher. Because there was no group present, the captains were not asked to sign the Confidentiality Maintenance Form (Appendix E).

Post interview, each participant was given the chance to speak with the researcher separately if he or the researcher believed there was more to be said on any given topic. The one-on-one interview was not to last for more than one half-hour and was to take place in the exact location as the focus group. Notification of the one-on-one interview would have been conducted through the Football Operations Director and was to happen within one week from the initial focus group with either party having the option to turn down the opportunity to speak one-on-one. Neither the researcher nor the participants chose to further their discussion on leadership.

Data Analysis

“Within the specific boundaries of a research project, data analysis is critical to success. Without understanding how to analyze data, a researcher will not be able to interpret that data,
nor draw any conclusions or recommendations from it. The researcher will not be able to assess the effectiveness of his or her research design, and will be prevented from presenting anything meaningful” (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p. 143). Qualitative research, such as that being conducted in the current study, will come full circle through analysis, interpretation and the presentation of the findings (Patton, 1990).

**Objectivity Due to Human Instrument**

“Any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study. The investigator’s commitment is to understand the world as it is, to be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and to be balanced in reporting both confirming and disconfirming evidence” (Patton, 1990, p. 55). The first step in doing this, according to Patton (1990), is that of Epoche, where the researcher examines her own personal bias and attempts to remove herself from any personal attachment to the material being studied. In order to overcome this first step, the researcher will need to remove herself from any past competitive athletic experiences and will need to control her biases that were created during her tenure where she not only wore the student-athlete hat, but also that of captain in the high school setting. Furthermore, the researcher will also have to identify any bias she has adopted through her work in collegiate athletics and will have to clarify any preconceived notions she has developed towards Division I football, its student-athletes and the years of media dissemination which have shaped her values regarding the subject. She will also have to identify the values she shares with the popular culture in terms of the popularity of collegiate athletics, namely football, and the student-athlete participants. After the identification has occurred, Patton (1990) suggests the researcher will have the ability to examine the data in its purest form and to treat each piece of data with equal value.
This bias will be controlled through the member checking and peer review encoding of the transcribed focus groups.

**Member Checking and Peer Review**

According to Patton (1990), “the human factor is the greatest strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis” (p. 372). Therefore, once the focus groups have been transcribed, verbatim transcripts of the focus groups and interviews were emailed to the participants. The participants were then asked to read over the transcripts and make corrections as they saw fit. Such corrections would be reflected in the transcriptions. Once the member checking process was complete, the transcripts will be analyzed as outlined in the following section and will be subjected to peer review. Peer reviewers included, but were not limited to, objective committee members and experts in athletic administration.

**Qualitative Content Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis, according to Brewerton and Millward (2001), has a propensity to be more subjective and places the emphasis on the meaning of the data rather than attempting to quantify it. A color coding system was used to identify similar units of information which are congruent with the research questions, topics of discussion and the existing literature. The units of coded segments ranged from phrases to entire passages from the transcripts. The purpose of coding was to “locate quotations to illustrate particular themes or strands of meaning within the transcript” (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p. 151). In the coding process, a cross-case analysis was employed to categorize the participants’ views expressed in the focus group session and the individual interviews to analyze the various perspectives in light of the research questions and topic (Patton, 1990).
Observational Analysis

“Where interviews construct data, observers find it. Whether direct or via the proxies of audio—or video—recording, [observation] enables us to document members accounting to each other in natural setting” (Miller & Dingwall, 1997, p. 60). Therefore, a key events structure was used to “present the observational data by critical incidents or major events, not necessarily in order of occurrence but in order of importance” (Patton, 1990, p. 377). The encoded events consisted of noted body language, changes in group dynamic, and noticeable audible changes in voice and tone.

Summary

Chapters I and II set the scholarly groundwork and established a need for the present study. Chapter III has strictly outlined the participant selection and methodology to reproduce the study at will for future research purposed. Chapter IV will detail the encoded themes from the focus group, interviews and any observations. These themes will be used to respond to the study’s primary research questions. Chapter V will then relate these themes to the established literature and analyze its place in the current discussion of athletic peer-leadership.
CHAPTER IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences, impact, and characteristics of the peer-leadership of football team captains. The study examined the personal experiences participating Division I football captains encountered during the 2006-07 football season and how peer-leadership affected the remaining student-athletes on the same team.

In order to fully consider this phenomenon, the following three research questions were used to identify five distinct, yet related, keynote areas. The areas were then broken down into the twenty questions which were posed to the participants:

1. How do football team captains describe their experience as captains and as student-athletes?

2. What impact do football team captains have on the experience of the other players as student-athletes?

3. What are the peer-leadership characteristics of football team captains?

The keynote areas consisted of definitions, decision-making, experience, peer-leadership, and peer-leadership through captaincy. Questioning was opened under the definitions section where the participants were given a series of phrases to define in order to set the tone for the discussion. The dialogue was next moved to the comparison of these phrases such as student and athlete or captain and coach. Next, the participants moved to the concept of decision-making and were asked to share instances of positive and negative decisions that were made on the field, and to voice the effect it had on the rest of the team. Further questioning focused on teammates’ decisions and how their roles affected the consequences of such decisions. The last concept posed to both captains and non-captains was experience. Under this concept, participants were questioned regarding their past experience as a football player on other teams, their status in the
eyes of others and the social aspect of a football team during various phases of their career. Of the remaining concepts, peer-leadership was addressed only in the captains’ interviews, while peer-leadership through captaincy was only addressed in the non-captain focus group. Peer-leadership was covered through questions regarding the captain’s leadership style as well as discussing other peer-leaders who have had an affect on their leadership style. The interview was then moved to the leaders’ affect on decision-making and the comparison of captain and leader. The non-captains focused on peer-leadership through captaincy, the effect captains had on their experience as student-athletes, and the role of the leader. It also asked the participants to reflect on past leaders who have had an affect on their careers. The twenty questions which were posed to each of the groups can be accessed in Appendix D.

Participant Composite

Twelve student-athletes from the same Division I football team were invited to engage in either a focus group or one-on-one interview, depending upon their status on the team during the 2006-07 season. Three of the four captains were available for, and agreed to, one-on-one interviews but only two participated in the study. One of the interviews was conducted over the telephone due to the geographical location of the participant in relation to the researcher. The remaining eight invitees were comprised of team members who did not hold the formal leadership title of captain. Each of the eight student-athletes agreed to participate in the focus group. Of the group of eight who did not hold captaincy, the members were comprised of two senior, junior, and sophomore representatives from both the offensive and defensive positions. The freshman class was unique as it was embodied by two defensive players due to one student-athlete switching his position from defense to offense during the 2006-07 season. Each of the
participants was redshirted his freshman year with the exception of freshman representatives Jimmy Jones and Stuart Little. Every participant was also a high school football captain.

*Peter Q.*

Peter Q. is a captain who had senior academic standing at the start of the 2006-07 football season but was listed on the official roster as a fifth-year senior. At the conclusion of the 2006-07 season, Peter Q. played the offensive position of wide receiver for five seasons. During his tenure, he participated in 41 collegiate games, including starting seven. He was honored with a major award at the annual team banquet at the conclusion of the 2006-07 season. He will graduate in May of 2007 with a degree in education.

*Mike Lebowitz*

Mike Lebowitz is a captain who had senior academic standing at the start of the 2006-07 football season but was listed on the official roster as a redshirt junior. At the conclusion of the 2006-07 season, Lebowitz played the center position on the offensive line for four seasons. He participated in and started in all 35 collegiate games and will have one additional season of athletic eligibility with the team. He has garnered such national awards as Freshman All-American in 2004, pre-season All-American in 2006 and was nominated for the Rimington Award, which is given annually to the nation’s top center. He has also been named to the all-conference team in each of the seasons that he has participated in competitive team play and was named the team’s Top Offensive Performer in 2006. He is the only captain to have the possibility of serving as captain for more than one season. Lebowitz is a criminal justice major.

*Jon Dough*

Jon Dough is a captain who had senior academic standing at the start of the 2006-07 football season but was listed on the official roster as a fifth-year senior. At the conclusion of the
2006-07 season, Dough played the defensive end position on the defensive line for five seasons. During his tenure, he participated in 45 collegiate games, including starting 20. His first two years on the team were spent with his older brother playing on offense. He was honored with a major award at the annual team banquet at the conclusion of the 2006-07 season. He will graduate in May of 2007 with a degree in education.

*Mr. Bob*

Mr. Bob was not a captain but had senior academic standing at the start of the 2006-07 football season. He was listed on the official roster as a redshirt junior. At the conclusion of the 2006-07 season, Mr. Bob played the defensive position of linebacker for three seasons before moving to his current position of long snapper. He participated in 23 collegiate games and will have one additional season of athletic eligibility with the team. Mr. Bob is an education major.

*Steve McKinley*

Steve McKinley was not a captain but had senior academic standing at the start of the 2006-07 football season. He was listed on the official roster as a redshirt junior. At the conclusion of the 2006-07 season, McKinley played the offensive position of guard on the offensive line for four seasons at the university with Lebowitz. He participated in 35 collegiate games and will have one additional season of athletic eligibility with the team. McKinley is an education major.

*Prince Alibaba*

Prince Alibaba was not a captain but had junior academic standing at the start of the 2006-07 football season. He was listed on the official roster as a redshirt sophomore. At the conclusion of the 2006-07 season, Prince Alibaba played the defensive position of linebacker for three seasons. He participated in 23 collegiate games, including starting all 12 games during the
2006 season. He has two seasons of eligibility remaining with the team. He was named the Top
Defensive Performer on the team for the 2006 season. Prince Alibaba has not yet decided on a
major.

Rocky Balbonovich

Rocky Balbonovich was not a captain but had junior academic standing at the start of the
2006-07 football season. He was listed on the official roster as a redshirt sophomore. At the
conclusion of the 2006-07 season, Balbonovich played the offensive position of tight end for
three seasons. He participated in one collegiate game and has two seasons of eligibility
remaining with the team. Balbonovich is a computer science major.

Reggie B.

Reggie B. was not a captain but had sophomore academic standing at the start of the
2006-07 football season. He was listed on the official roster as a redshirt freshman. At the
conclusion of the 2006-07 season, Reggie B. played the offensive position of running back for
two seasons. He participated in 11 collegiate games, including starting five games during the
2006 season. He has three seasons of eligibility remaining with the team. Reggie B. was also
named to the Freshman All-American squad after setting a new school record for rushing yards
gained by a freshman. He also ranked nationally amongst all other freshman, both true and
redshirted, for total rushing yards gained. Reggie B. is a sport management major.

Ala Coldwater

Ala Coldwater was not a captain but had sophomore academic standing at the start of the
2006-07 football season. He was listed on the official roster as a redshirt freshman. At the
conclusion of the 2006-07 season, Coldwater had played defensive back for two seasons. He
participated in five collegiate games and has three seasons of eligibility remaining with the team. Coldwater is a business technology major.

*Jimmy Jones*

Jimmy Jones was not a captain but had freshman academic standing at the start of the 2006-07 football season and was listed on the official roster as a true freshman. At the conclusion of the 2006-07 season, Jones began the season at the offensive position of running back, but later switched to the defensive side of the ball where he played defensive back. He participated in eight games and has three seasons of eligibility remaining with the team. Jones is a business management major. Additionally, he was the captain of the basketball and track teams in high school.

*Stuart Little*

Stuart Little was not a captain but had freshman academic standing at the start of the 2006-07 football season and was listed on the official roster as a true freshman. At the conclusion of the 2006-07 season, Little played defensive back in his first collegiate season. He participated in nine games, including starting two and has three seasons of eligibility remaining with the team. Little is currently undecided on a major.

**Overview of Interviews**

Independent interviews were conducted with team captain’s Peter Q. and Mike Lebowitz. Peter Q. spoke with the researcher via telephone, while Lebowitz spoke to the researcher face-to-face. A focus group was assembled of current players who were on the team roster for at least one season. Two representatives from each class were present for the focus group.
Focus Group

The researcher met with the participants in the team meeting room located on the property which houses the football team stadium, team locker room and practice area. The team meeting room was selected as a result of the participants’ assumed comfort and familiarity with the venue. The focus group began at 1:00 p.m. and lasted until 2:15 p.m. Each of the four keynote areas were covered, but due to the diminished attention span of the focus group toward the end, two of the predetermined questioned were not posed and the focus group was ended early.

The upperclassmen were the first team members to arrive. Each of the two juniors and seniors arrived between five and ten minutes before the focus group was to start. Prince Alibaba was the second person to arrive and went to another room to watch game film while he waited for his teammates to arrive. The participants chatted amongst themselves and to the researcher prior to the group discussion. They joked often and seemed to be at ease with each other. Of the eight participants, six wore something bearing the name or logo of the school. The participants sat in a straight row so that researcher could film discussion as it was happening. A sign posted by the team hung on the wall to the participants’ backs reading in all capital letters: LEADERSHIP MUST BE DEMONSTRATED, NOT ANNOUNCED. Other inspirational signs were hung around the room. Utilizing the removable walls within the space, the main wall was closed in order to ensure the room would be secluded for privacy and confidentiality.

As participants seated themselves, three of the four upperclassmen sat on the ends of the row while Prince Alibaba sat in the middle seat. As the discussion progressed, it was noticed that Prince Alibaba and the young man sitting to his left, sophomore Ala Coldwater, tended to answer
a majority of the questions. Mr. Bob, a senior who sat to the right of Prince Alibaba, also interacted with the researcher on a majority of occasions.

Throughout the discussion, four main themes arose. Such themes were also apparent throughout the discussions with the captains and will be discussed later in Chapter IV. It was also noticed that the older student-athletes seemed to have a jaded attitude toward the coaching staff. After the interview, the researcher discovered with the exception of one position, every student-athlete on the team will not graduate with the same position coach they started their career with. One senior went as far as pointing out the business of the coaching profession and spoke with annoyance and disdain both in his voice and through his body language.

The researcher did not have the opportunity to ask all of the predetermined questions to the focus group due to the revelation that one of the captains was playing in a nationally televised all-star game. Upon this revelation, various members of the group gave both verbal and visual cues they were no longer interested in the task at hand. The researcher asked for any closing statements and Prince Alibaba spoke for the group, saying they were finished. With this, the group was thanked and released from their commitment.

Transcriptions were sent to each of the group members for member checking verification. Of the eight members, three responded. Two upperclassmen replied that the transcriptions accurately represented the words and ideas of the discussion, while a freshman wished the researcher luck and did not mention the focus group.

Peter Q.

Peter Q. was the first captain to speak to the researcher post-focus group. In order to fulfill a university teaching requirement, the fifth-year senior had moved more than 1,200 miles from the campus and was therefore contacted via telephone. Peter Q. remained in his apartment
for the 45-minute interview which took place approximately 28 hours after the conclusion of the focus group. The researcher recorded the conversation with her phone on speaker mode and a digital recorder next to the cellular telephone. Each of the four keynote areas was covered during the conversation and two extra questions were asked as a result of the focus group discussion concerning the leader’s age and leadership opportunities available to non-captains.

Before answering each of the questions, Peter Q. paused for one to two seconds, repeated the question then replied to the researcher. The captain spoke candidly, revealing his expectancy to be named captain during the 2006-07 season, due to his consistent positive attitude and performance, not words, both on and off the field during his career. He also focused on the separation between the roles of student and athlete during his career. Seeing as Peter Q. had finished his final season of competitive play, his answers were reflective in nature even though he had not been fully removed from the team for less than one semester. His reflections did, in fact, mirror similar values and attitudes of his teammates.

Factors such as body language or environmental cues were not available seeing as the researcher could not see Peter Q. Upon receipt of the interview transcripts, Peter Q. did not make changes to his commentary.

*Jon Dough*

Jon Dough was the second scheduled captain interview. Dough, a fifth-year senior completed his final season of competitive play in 2006. Like Peter Q., Dough is now responsible to finish his academic student-teaching requirement in order to graduate. Dough’s teaching placement was in a school district near the university and, via telephone, he agreed to participate in a face-to-face interview. After setting the date and time to fit Dough’s schedule, he was not
present for his interview. Upon contact, he revealed to the team liaison that he had forgotten about the interview and was no longer available.

Mike Lebowitz

Mike Lebowitz was the last captain scheduled to speak to the interviewer. Lebowitz has yet to fulfill his academic requirements and still has two seasons remaining with the team before he will graduate. Lebowitz met with the researcher in the same team meeting room as the focus group three days later for approximately 40 minutes. The researcher recorded the conversation via a digital recorder which was placed in between the two. Like the focus group, Lebowitz’s back was to the leadership sign displayed in the front of the room. Each of the four keynote areas was covered during the conversation. As a result of the focus group discussion concerning leader’s age and leadership opportunities available to non-captains, two extra questions were asked.

Lebowitz was very animated throughout the discussion and had a tendency to speak by gesturing and adjusting his sweatshirt often. Lebowitz wore at least one visible piece of clothing bearing the name of the school and the athletic logo. Lebowitz appeared a bit nervous in the early stages of the interview and often asked if his answers reflected what the researcher was looking for. Each time he asked the researcher this question, she replied that all answers would be complete upon his satisfaction being met. Lebowitz smiled and joked through the discussion once he became comfortable in the environment. This point was reached after approximately five to seven minutes into the interview.

Unlike his counterpart, Peter Q., Lebowitz was not expecting to take reins of the captaincy this season and hesitated to give himself credit often. At one point, Lebowitz mentioned that he personally had played well in a number of games but it did not matter because
his team had not won the game. He regularly passed credit to others and did not reflect it back to himself. Much like Peter Q., Lebowitz mentioned his leadership style to be one of example and few words. Lebowitz also separated himself from his captain peers as he noted the negative responsibilities of the captain such as enforcing playing techniques in a more forceful manner.

Similarly to Peter Q., Lebowitz divided the roles of students and athletes, but tended to believe the athletic role was harder to fulfill than the academic role. It must be noted that Lebowitz’s beliefs were translated into the form of a conference honor as he was named to the academic all-conference team in 2006.

In the member checking stage, Lebowitz did not change his answers and also shared he was happy with the answers he gave. Once again he commented to the researcher that he hoped his honesty would help the researcher in her study.

Themes

Four major themes emerged in this phenomenological study: The Student-Athlete vs. Athlete-Student, Leadership by Example, Actions of Peer-Leadership, and the Accountability of the Individual to the Team.

The Student-Athlete vs. Athlete-Student

The common name for a young person that works toward a higher education degree, while also participating in a varsity sport at the collegiate level, is ‘student-athlete’. While many of the participants gave the impression they were in school, and also played football as a bonus, the statements of one veteran participant led the researcher to believe he was using the academic system to play football. The common name for one with this type of belief might be ‘athlete-student’.
Peter Q., a captain, defined ‘student-athlete’ as those students in higher education who are called upon not only to work toward success in the classroom but also to strive for it on the field. He touched upon the dual meaning of the word when he stated,

A student-athlete, to me, is a term that has lost the meaning to outsiders that it should have. They are known around the campus as a student-athlete, but they are someone that has more responsibilities than other students on the campus.

Based upon Peter Q.’s personal beliefs, student-athlete is, in fact, a term which has a versatile meaning – even among those in his peer group on the same team. In the focus group setting a sophomore first sparked a bit of debate over the meaning of the word ‘student’ after piggybacking a teammates’ response to the definition of the word. He declared a ‘student’ was “someone that is willing to learn” while an upperclassman added that a ‘student’ was “someone who was serious about learning.” The tables were turned when the aforementioned veteran ‘athlete-student,’ a junior, remarked with a smile, “[He is] someone that is forced to go to class.”

A near exact exchange took place when the focus group was asked to define the word ‘student-athlete’. Phrases such as ‘time consuming’, ‘college athlete’, and ‘balance’ were mentioned from the members of the focus group. The word ‘balance’ triggered the remark, “Yeah, anyone that can juggle sports and academics.” Once again, the same veteran ‘athlete-student’ twisted the motivating factors and candidly declared a ‘student-athlete’ was, “Someone that uses sports to get through school.” The veteran’s responses continued to perpetuate this concept as he informed the researcher the role of the student-athlete was to bring money into the school and attract incoming students with the success and popularity of the athletic program. He then matter-of-factly stated, “To be an athlete at that program, you obviously have to go to school.” As if his words did not point toward the notion, the Defensive MVP used football as a
motivating factor, at the start of the season he was listed as “undecided on a major” in the official football media guide.

The presented commentary makes a valid point that not all student-athletes are in a university setting as a result of their educational curiosity. An outspoken senior made an astute follow-up comment to the veteran ‘athlete-student’s’ statements attempting to show the impact athletics has on the attraction of incoming students. He pointed out the enrollment of his university increased “by like 20% or something like that” after his team won their post-season bowl game. While he may or may not have the exact figure correct, the “Flutie Factor”, or the dependence of enrollment inflation on athletic success, has been widely discussed both amongst those in the popular culture and the academic institutions. The heart of the “Flutie Factor” argument is a direct result of the ratio of Boston College’s enrollment skyrocketing after quarterback Doug Flutie helped the non-traditional athletic power achieve Bowl victory in a “David v. Goliath” match-up on national television in the 1980s.

Further discussion of the definitions of the terms ‘student’ and ‘student-athlete’ revealed both captains recognized a line that split their four to five years on the team into the roles of ‘student’ and ‘athlete’ with additional overlapping responsibilities. One captain stated, “I think they are two very separate things and if you are able to combine them, and be effective at it, then it is a pretty good achievement.” Another captain also spoke of the combined effort and observed from his own experiences, “When you are not playing, you have to put in the same effort off the field as you would on the field. A student-athlete has to be able to balance the multiple roles you have to play.” On the field, both young men spoke of a consistent need to perform at an optimum athletic level. According to a captain, the role of the student-athlete stretches beyond the world of academia and pours into everyday life. Student-athletes extended roles include
“setting an example … because we are held to a much higher standard than just the average student.”

The distinction between ‘student-athlete’ and ‘athlete-student’ also factors into the players’ reactions toward their celebrity status. When asked about the distinction of the student-athlete at other universities, the banter of the focus group focused on the athlete-students who are recognized outside of the team and game atmosphere due to their playing ability. An explanatory account was spoken of during the focus group. One player has witnessed such encounters by virtue of a cousin attending and playing for a university which is nationally renowned for its academic and athletic programming. He witnessed the student-athlete garnering celebrity status when “people have stopped him in the mall and other places because he is on that team.” A teammate contributed the example of two former high school teammates who receive special treatment in the classroom as a result of their athletic prowess. The grade inflation at the major university took the effect of the players “not putting that much effort into their classes,” but still “passing with a higher grade than the work they did.” The participants did not feel as if the so-called spotlight shown as brightly on their own program, despite several telecasts of their program’s football contests. Recognition of their own campus celebrity status was localized in the form of youthful citizens posing as autograph seekers or their popularity in the dorms amongst their non-athlete peers.

The celebrity status can turn negative when traditional students attempt to challenge the student-athletes’ machismo in public. A focus group member reflected upon several occasions within the summer off-season months when “guys [non-athletes] start trouble with one of our guys for no reason other than someone is an athlete.” He further explained in his experience, the trouble is normally started in a public place because “the guy [non-athlete] is just trying to prove
something.” He stated before settling into any public establishment, he will first scan a crowd for a fellow football player, “because I trust them no matter what and I know that they have my back if something were to happen.”

The captains’ opinions differed in relation to their feelings of popularity. Whereas one admitted he has felt that spotlight on campus, another denied the status due to his position on the field. Interestingly enough, each of the captains has played on national television on numerous occasions, and the youngest of the captain’s group was in the running for a national award. Also, each was no stranger to the media as they both often spoke to the local media that covered the team as their regular beat. This finding may be significant as it was assumed, due to their participation as collegiate student-athletes, the players would all automatically fall into the celebrity category. It may be possible that the fans and media are more to blame for this diagnosis than the beliefs and actions of the student-athletes themselves.

As simplistic as it may be, freshman Stuart Little’s statement of, “It’s hard to be a student-athlete,” may have summed the four (or five) year experience as a student-athlete, or athlete-student, beautifully. The young men realize they are a part of, and have an effect on, the greater educational community. At the same time, they are trying to navigate through their undergraduate years with multiple factors motivating their growth as young men, students and athletes.

**Leadership by Example**

In spite of Little’s previously stated comment, “It’s hard to be a student-athlete,” a lay person may question “Why?” The answer be may rooted in the words of a peer-reviewer and former Division I football captain who gained academic all-conference honors due to his multiple levels of success in all facets of the university life,
Young student-athletes are always looking for leaders on and off the field because many are afraid to take that leadership role or it may be easier to just follow along. These student-athletes are unsure how to properly act and need that example to use as a guideline, if you will, on how to present themselves and act accordingly.

The need for leadership by example was made very clear not only as the student-athletes spoke of what they deemed to be a leader. In each of the three interview settings, leadership by example was noted in those exact words and was also alluded to numerous times. A freshman starter with multiple career accolades defined a leader as “someone that leads by example.”

The responsibility of leadership by example was also added to the conversation because it was thought to be passed along to all student-athletes as a role unique to their athletic exposure. A sophomore articulated this as the need to refrain from trouble and to attend class. To one freshman, the actions translated into leading the traditional student population by setting the correct example. A soon-to-be fifth-year senior waxed at great length regarding leadership through the lessons learned during his four years in the program. He expanded the message to set the proper example at all times:

I think you have to be a leader at all times because you have to know how to carry yourself in certain situations. You have more to lose and others will have no problem putting you into a predicament where you can get into trouble.

The phenomenological experience of the captains echoed a similar message in relation to their captaincy during the 2006-07 season. Their leadership details also included to not speak unless it was absolutely needed. What is interesting about the message of leadership by example was that of the three captains who agreed to participate, Jon Dough was never present for his interview. After choosing the day and time, he failed to show up for the interview. When he was
later contacted regarding the matter, he proclaimed that he had forgotten about the interview. During the focus group, Mike Lebowitz and one other captain were named specifically to lead by example – Dough was never mentioned in this discussion. The leadership of the captain must be questioned if he could not remember to attend a session to speak about his captaincy for which he chose the date and time. Focus of the group discussion leaned toward the behavior of Dough and other examples of leaders who criticize their fellow players while not backing up their words on the field, classroom, or other areas of life.

Additionally, successful captains were classified in a different category than the coaching staff. It was mentioned those captains who attempted to directly mirror the actions of a coach were not as respected by their peers. A further lack of respect was given to the captains who attempted to correct teammates’ actions on and off the field despite the extenuating circumstances which prevented the captains from seeing success in the same areas. Simultaneous agreement was given through verbal cues and body language as one junior focus group participant shared, “I think the best captains are those that try to lead by example. Not so much trying to get on people, but try to better them.”

A former captain with the team, not participating in this study, was noted as a living example of a person who attempted to better his peers in all situations. According to the student-athletes, and their noticeable change in body language, the young man’s sheer presence in a room can be noticed before he even utters a word. A former non-scholarship walk-on player reminisced that this individual made an impact on his peers due to his respect for all players, regardless of their status, on the team. He said, “I have a ton of respect for him. It’s not only on the field of what he did – he was an animal – but he just a real person that cares. I think that does
Younger players who did not hold roster positions concurrent with this player also spoke highly of the alumnus and current graduate student.

The captains also voiced they had followed the same rules after watching former captains find success on the field through their actions and their limited verbal cues to the team. Peter Q. noted five former university players with whom he, at one time or another, occupied the same roster. A majority (three-of-five) were former captains. He described their leadership through such phrases as, “[Name Retracted] was another one that never really said a whole lot, he just went out there and did it …. They were performers that just led people by example. They were also the same way off the field”. Lebowitz recognized two other former players, both of which played the same position as Lebowitz. One, who now plays at the professional level, was described as:

I guess I always just watched him and I kind of envied him in the beginning just because he had a great attitude, he was funny and confident. Plus, he was a hell of a football player – still is. I still try to model myself somehow after him. In some areas he just had it figured out, others he needed some work. On the football field he just had it figured out.

Lebowitz further explained that his mentors are memorable due to their patience and “…realizing they may have strengths and they may be beneficial to the team but they may not know everything yet. Also, just helping them get to the point where they can help the team a lot.”

When both Peter Q. and Lebowitz were asked to apply the past leaders’ examples and describe their own leadership style, each mentioned the need to ‘lead by example’ by using that exact phrase. Peter Q. specifically mentioned,
I want people to watch me so that they will follow my example. I have never been too crazy about the people that do all that chirping. Truth of it is I don’t think they get anything done unless [they] are out there doing something.

Lebowitz acknowledged the same sentiment:

I like to lead by example most of the time, especially with my playing on the field. I think that if I work hard and if I can do my job better than anybody else that gives me more leverage. It puts me into a better position to lead everybody else and tell them what they may or may not have done right.

At no point can it be assumed the captains were not under pressure during their tenure. The need to lead by example was stressful. When asked to advise the next generation of captains, each spoke to the matter that a captain is no longer a single unit on the team but is now accountable to himself and the entire team. With this accountability comes the responsibility to motivate the remainder of the team. This action was thought to be the most difficult. After calling this advice the ‘million-dollar question’ Lebowitz stated the job “is not going to be easy.”

He went on to explain,

There will be times when you think that you need to say something but you do not have the words. There are times when you want to motivate people but you do not know how. Just to understand you are not always going to have the right thing to say or do, but if you are really committed and you’re trying and your heart is in the right place, you will be just fine.

The experiences of the 2006-07 season gave the captains a first-hand glance that the captaincy is not an easy task to carry out because captains also hold the responsibility to not only live the expression “lead by example” both on and off the field due to a belief their actions are
held accountable to the rest of the team, but these formal leaders may be placed out of their element and motivate others on the team without prior knowledge of how to carry out such a task. As Lebowitz stated:

You can’t be prepared enough [to be a captain]. When you step into the captain role it becomes your business of what everybody else is doing because it affects you and those that elected you captain. I think you have to look out for everybody, plus yourself.

Actions of Peer-Leadership

The participants dove deeper in the phenomenon of peer-leadership as they repeatedly mentioned leadership was recognized through examples. Earning the needed respect to succeed at the helm of the team also took the positive actions of the leaders. This idea was made known immediately as the questioning for the focus group began. When asked the definition of ‘leader’ one participant stated, “Guys that do things right.” At the point when the word was given meaning by action it became obvious that the levels of leadership ran deeper than just the examples given at the surface level. Rocky Balbonovich, a junior who has seen very limited playing time thus far, made the comment that it was hard to listen to somebody when you do not see them out there doing what is right. … If somebody does not do what they are supposed to on the field, it makes it a lot harder to listen to them if they try to come yell at you for doing something wrong.

Later Balbonovich mentioned, “I do not think there is one act that makes you an automatic leader. If you are going to be that vocal leader, where people really want to listen to you, then you have to prove yourself.”
What was interesting were that the actions of peer-leadership and “proving one’s self” were not directly affected by the status or skill level of a player, but more by the effort and heart that were put into the actions. An elder on the team clarified this point:

…I think a leader is selfless and that is how they earn respect. There are some guys on that have come in here and have not really played, but I know I respect them more than anything in the world because they care about others and the ability to make those other guys better without worrying of falling on the depth chart.

Many participants mentioned the outward desire of the player and his various abilities in the academic, athletic, and everyday situations that would earn the player respect amongst his peers. Two underclassmen backed-up the point by mentioning peer-leaders want to help their teammates and citing examples of times when it has happened on the team in the past seasons.

The respect that is given to these players with heart and desire who are willing to overcome all obstacles is not easily obtained. In the same token it can be lost as quickly as it was earned. Once again, it was the veterans who explained how these actions of peer leadership are carried out. Respect is earned on the field because that is the place of battle and it is learned who is willing to go the distance. The loss of respect is credited to the lack of commitment to playing well at all times and “taking plays off.” A veteran went as far as describing his ideal competition teammate:

I would rather have a guy that might not be as athletic, but if he wants it more, I know he is going to try hard and I trust a person that cares and tries more than someone that is more athletic.

With the earned element of respect also comes that of trust. One participant credits the trust to the collective experiences of the group while another named the team his surrogate
family when he is away from his own. This issue of trust was also made interesting because of the diversity of the focus group and the team as a whole. The players were able to trust each other after overlooking their differences in background and childhood experiences. One veteran expressed his relationships to possibly be closer with the group then his own family.

The actions of peer leadership are given a chance to flourish on the team because of the tremendous amounts of time the student-athletes spend with one another. When asked to describe the social atmosphere, captains and non-captains alike described the season as a time of constant togetherness dusted with excitement through weekend travel with the team and competitions. The off-season was split into two periods – winter and summer. Winter was the time to catch-up on school related issues and work, while summer was the highlight because the team is in one area with a diverse social atmosphere, which allows all of the student-athletes to interact outside of practice and football related activities.

Accountability of the Individual to the Team

Although the official 2006-07 team roster listed 94 individuals, those participating in this phenomenological study acknowledged their individual status is lost because each of their actions affects their teammates and the reputation of the greater team. Both those in formal and informal roles on the team described actions that would both positively and negatively affect the team and each was well aware of the possible consequences. In terms of accountability, many times negative repercussions were spoken of with a greater ease and regularity than instances of greatness. Of those spoken with, only Lebowitz spoke with passion of two positive memories on the football field. In each case, the resulting play or action gave the team something to celebrate. He also mentioned there were games where he played well as an individual, but it did not matter because the team did not win as a unit.
Highly decorated freshman Reggie B. took the burden of two losses on his own shoulders because of his failure to produce, while another student-athlete described one game as the worst memory he had while playing football.

While several game-related examples were shared, the greatest majority of the cases mentioned were examples of players who made wrong decisions off the field and away from the team atmosphere. In each of these cases, the resulting consequences fell back to the team when those players were suspended for competition and the reputation of the team was tarnished. As a senior stated,

When one athlete gets into trouble the entire athletic department can come down on every team. It can result from having nothing to do with you but you are apart of the end result and you may have to pay for something. All athletes get put down for one person’s mistakes.

Reputations were most recognized to be in jeopardy when those actions were brought to light in the media. More than one student-athlete, including captains, made specific mentions to a quote often said by their head coach “The paper is going to have headlines reading [Name Retracted] basketball player or [Name Retracted] football player does whatever. No one will care if Joe Student did the same thing.”

The discussion also gave rise to what the team called a “snowball effect.” To illustrate their point, the student-athletes referenced professional football player Terrell Owens who is know for his outlandish public actions. One student-athlete spotlighted the point that Owens was arguably the best athlete to play the game, but it was his acts off the field that had the potential to ruin any professional football organization with which Owens was associated. The notion was revealed that any individual member of a team could potentially have an effect on a team as a
whole: “… if you have a guy that is incompetent and has no composure, the messages that that
guy sends in a negative or positive light can take a team up or down.”

One member of the focus group drew on the optimistic point of view and mentioned
many of the team members who had suffered suspensions coached those players who would
replace them on the field. He went as far as saying it helped the team to have the back-up play
because the reserve players’ potential was recognized and utilized in the long run.

Both Lebowitz and Peter Q. took the idea more personally and named the accountability
as a responsibility of the captain’s position. Each repeatedly mentioned they were accountable to
the team as a result of being named to the formal leadership position of captain. Additionally, all
players made it known the relationships they built made the impact of the group accountability
that much more powerful and important.

Research Questions

*How do football team captains describe their experience as captains and as student-athletes?*

Question one was the most revealing of the three posed research questions. Through
interviews it was made clear the two captains had similar beliefs as leaders to display proper
actions at all times both on and off the field, yet their experiences in the captaincy were quite
different. Whereas Peter Q. believed it was his earned right to be in the role this season, Mike
Lebowitz was surprised by the nomination. He described the high school captain to be selected
as a result of their athletic accomplishments or their seniority on the team. Due to the “pool” to
pick from on this team, he called the recognition an honor.

In high school I think it is the best player or even just the seniors who are the captains. At
my high school there was not a very big pool to pick from for captains. When I came here
and to be a captain when there was a pretty large selection of people to pick from so I think it was a lot different. It was also a lot more of an honor in my mind.

Each captain agreed the roles of student and athlete played a different factor in their lives, but did not have a vastly different experience from their peers. Much like his peer group, Lebowitz mentioned his transition from high school student-athlete to collegiate student-athlete was not easy because he was “definitely not the biggest or the strongest guy” in college and was not used to daily competition seeing as he did not receive it in high school. His leadership by example began at an early age, though, because he used these factors to “find other ways to make [himself] stand out.”

The one experience the captains undertook that their student-athlete peers did not was the role to “make it their business” to correct others’ mistakes. According to Lebowitz, “… what’s best for the team isn’t always good to hear and may not be what’s best for the person. You have to correct [other players] sometimes and it may not be what they want to hear.” Similarly, Peter Q. warned future captains, “If [a future captain] is going to say something and not do it, people will notice and not respect you.”

*What impact do football team captains have on the experience of the other players as student-athletes?*

The impact the leader had on the team varied from captain to captain. Two of the four captains were mentioned specifically by name. One freshman went as far as exclaiming he would try to translate a foreign language if one of the captains were to speak him a different language exclaiming, “He could have spoke Chinese and I would have tried to learn it and understand it!”

The answer to the second research question could be answered in various ways according to the experience of the student-athlete. Players with less experience gave the impression the
captains played a much different role than those who were veteran players. Whereas one freshman noted Lebowitz was “a leader as a captain” during the season, a veteran senior said,

If you have the ability to bring anybody with you as a freshman or sophomore, positively or negatively, whatever, you can be a leader. If you have people follow you then you are a leader.

All age groups openly mentioned they would follow a leader no matter their formal or informal leadership status on the team. Just after mentioning leaders should emerge, a focus group participant admitted, “I am not going to follow just a title. If someone is a leader on the field, I will have more respect for them.”

*What are the peer-leadership characteristics of football team captains?*

Exact peer-leadership qualities were mentioned in passing amongst the group, yet the overriding idea of leadership through example resonated throughout the discussions. As one player stated, “When you are a leader, you are different, you just stand out. You can’t just choose someone to be a leader. When you are a captain you are elected, but a leader just really stands out.” Moreover, after careful synthesis and analysis of the experiences of those interviewees, it was determined the peer-leadership characteristics of all leaders were made known, not only those in the formal leadership roles. Student-athletes looked for leaders that will model the correct pattern of behavior both on and off the field.

In the event such a leader does not possess the highest level of academic or athletic success, the desire for the team to thrive was more important to those teammates interviewed. Just as Peter Q. stated:

In football … everybody is looking for someone to be a good example and show them how to succeed. … It is very important to have someone that you can actually look up,
has the experience, and knows how to do whatever the job is that needs to be done. It is very important that every team has captains and leaders.

Summary

The findings of this phenomenological study gave light to four overriding themes regarding peer-leadership on this specific Division I football team: The Student-Athlete vs. Athlete-Student, Leadership by Example, Actions of Peer-Leadership, and the Accountability of the Individual to the Team. Of these themes, Leadership by Example and Actions of Peer Leadership were mentioned most often.

To reiterate the words of senior, Mr. Bob:

I think a leader is selfless and that is how they earn respect. There are some guys that have come in here and have not really played, but I know I respect them more than anything in the world because they care about others and being able to help make them better. They might lose their spot [on the depth chart], but they are going to help a teammate out and show them how to do something better. They will have no problem telling someone, (Pointing) ‘Dude, on cover two you need to slide.’ That is a leader to me because he is selfless and just wants good for the team. If they have the ability to play on top of that you have the great makings for an individual leader.
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

This study set forth to examine the phenomenon of peer-leadership among collegiate student-athletes participating on a football team. In order to understand the events comprising the captain’s experiences individual interviews were conducted with two Division I football captains after the season in which they served as a formal leader. A focus group was held with eight team members in order to realize any leadership effect the captains had on their teammates. Emergent themes resonated from the combined discussions relating to the motives of student-athletes in accordance to football and the academic setting, as well as leadership by example and those actions related to peer leadership. Unity and accountability to those within the football team organization were also realized.

Contributions to Peer Leadership Theory

The present study will find its niche in the literature of leadership in athletics through its validation of existing studies, while also contributing additional subject matter to the budding discussion of athletes in leadership roles, as distinguished from coaches (Loughead & Hardy, 2005). Although four main themes emerged in the present study, the most prevalent theme related to leadership practices as determined by the leaders’ actions and examples. Per the adopted theoretical framework for the present study, the researcher assumed Division I football captains would show tendencies of transformational leadership (Dupuis et al., 2005; Avolio et al., 1999). Evidence of Avolio et al.’s (1999) operational definitions of transformational leadership was manifested when describing the captains individually by the focus group, but was only hinted at when describing the four captains as a whole. As a rising fifth-year senior stated, “Captains seem to formulate every year, not one year or one team is going to be the same as the last or the next. It really is their personality and what works once might not work again.”
Of the six operational definitions of transformational leadership, four were given attention in this study and each can be exemplified through the words of the participants. Leaders on this team were found to be both charismatic and inspirational through their words and actions. One freshman mentioned he would learn another language if it meant understanding the message from a specific captain while other players mentioned the atmosphere of a room can change by a leader simply giving a look, their swagger or their presence when entering a room. These were the leaders the players mentioned to emulate. Whereas individualized consideration was marked by those leaders who, regardless of a player’s status, showed compassion for his teammates and made them feel welcomed. The words of one former walk-on spoke of a specific captain stated:

The cool thing for me about [Name Retracted] was we were on defense together and no matter what year I was he was asking if I was OK and showing that he cared – he did that to everyone too. I will always remember that because as a walk-on there was no reason for a captain to talk to me but he checked up on me to make sure I was OK.

This type of behavior also mirrors the Active Management-by-Exception operation where the leader maintains control of the situation and attempts to handle problems before they arise. As captain Mike Lebowitz stated, current performance levels were monitored and brought to the players’ attention when needed no matter the backlash it may result in.

I mean what’s best for the team isn’t always good to hear and it may not be what’s best for the person. You have to tell them sometimes and it may not be what they want to hear and may think you are an [Retracted] for saying it.

As members on a football team, it was expected the participants would understand and denote the terms of transformation leadership’s contingent rewards. Execution on the field was highly valued on the team and the followers were well aware of the performance levels needed to gain
rewards such as wins. When asked the worst football moment the players experienced, the focus group mentioned losing to what they deemed as a sub-par program earlier in the season. Yet when asked about their best moment travels to a post-season Bowl game was mentioned. Each time, the group was able to name the rewards they received and were denied dependant upon the outcome of a situation. These contingent rewards are comparable to a mentality as the team was only as good as their last win or loss. One captain looked past his own rewards and acknowledged the good of the team was more important

There are games where you feel like you really had brought your A-game and then there are others where you feel like you just can’t bring yourself out of a slump. The [Name Retracted] game was the last one where I thought I really did consistently well and where I thought the team really played consistently well. Even though I may have had some other good games this season, they do not seem like good games because we lost.

Although the captains were originally thought to be the only leaders displaying signs of transformational leadership such leadership was found to be in practice throughout the team. Thus the expectations to produce similar findings of Loughead and Hardy (2005) were met. Some team members were seen as emerging transformational leaders in the form of formal and informal leaders, regardless of title.

Leadership Practices

The data in this study led the researcher to believe the most effective leadership process within teams is that of leadership by example (Dupuis, Bloom & Loughead, 2005; Munroe, Estabrooks, Dennis & Carron, 1999) and is accessible to all members of the team (Loughead & Hardy, 2005). This form of leadership allows the football team, or any group, to work toward a common goal. In leading by example, a leader’s power to influence is empowered by the respect
that is given when the leadership example has positive undertones both on and off the field. As data were collected, the theme of leadership through and by example became overwhelmingly obvious and satisfied the needs of the other student-athletes. This finding appeared to be a team value as one sign in their team meeting room read: “LEADERSHIP MUST BE DEMONSTRATED, NOT ANNOUNCED.”

In their study on hockey team captains, Dupuis, Bloom and Loughead (2005) found leadership by example to be important not only to younger, more inexperienced athletes associated with the team, but also to the mentors and the team as a whole. The focus group session associated with the present study found underclassmen, sophomores and freshmen, were more likely to specifically name current captains as leaders than were the upperclassmen, juniors and seniors (Dupuis, Bloom & Loughead, 2005). In this context, it was the veteran players who looked for leadership from multiple peers, whereas the rookies viewed the captain as the essential source of leadership with others aiding in the process. Through the veterans it was learned various leadership actions were taken by a variety of their peers. Some players were looked upon for academic knowledge, while others had perceived leadership strengths on the field. Leadership was also taken into the social context as some players were seen as role models. Junior captain Mike Lebowitz stated,

There are so many guys on our team that are good leaders in different situations. We have guys that know the right things to say. There are guys that know the right things to do. There are just so many guys that have leadership abilities…. Undergraduate Division I football players recognized leadership by the examples their peers set, and the leaders keep their earned respect through the positive actions they display on a daily basis. This endorsement of respect confirms the results of Mady Wechsler’s 1979 study
regarding varieties of interpersonal attraction in two collegiate football teams. She found a group member is respected for contribution to goals of the group, both instrumental and expressive. Much like Weschler’s findings, the leaders on the team in the present study were respected for their athletic and/or academic ability and the use of this ability to propel the team toward its collective goals and success. Such respect was also noted to be lost if the ability appeared to be taken for granted in the form of “taking plays off” (not putting forth maximum effort on the field) or not fulfilling academic requirements. Furthermore, it was found student-athletes who excelled in both academics and athletics were given more respect when they voiced their opinions regarding related matters than those who spoke but were deficient in such areas.

The concept can be illustrated through an event that was spoken of at the focus group. A former captain, who post-graduation went on to play professional ball briefly, was invited to speak to the team prior to a home contest. The only players to have shared a field with the young men were the fourth and fifth year players. According to these players, this former captain was not highly respected as a player due to his lack of inclusion of the younger team members. The former player was remembered as “a captain and a leader [who] did not care about you unless you were a starter. There were times when he told me that I didn’t matter because I was a redshirt freshman on the scout team.” A rising fifth-year senior recounted the night of the speech as follows:

The coaches brought [former team captain, Name Retracted] back to speak to us before a game and it didn’t do much for anyone because we couldn’t believe in him and had no respect and trust for what he was saying. Most of the guys that day were just looking around the room not even listening to him.
These statements bear a resemblance to a finding of Dupuis, Bloom and Loughead (2005), who noted the “timing and quantity” of the communication made by the captain was more significant than the “quantity of feedback” (p. 74). The present study also validates their conceptual work as the speculation is made that “team captains’ communication skills are fundamental to … motivation by providing support and positive feedback” (pp. 74-75).

Kent and Chelladurai (2001) noted a central component of transformational leadership to be leaders who help others enhance other team member’s talents, which creates a cascade effect of leaders developing leaders. Because there were multiple captains, it can be assumed multiple forces were impacting the lives of all of the student-athletes on the football team. The focus group revealed successful transformational leaders on the team not only helped their fellow student-athletes in practice and games, but also on campus, in the weight room and any other place where an athlete was uncomfortable with his environment. Such leaders are helping their teammates to be better men, not just better players. A senior noted such leaders,

… can make an impact on your life. I think that is why football is so big, especially in this country. Football is a metaphor for life. You work so hard, but you only get 12 shots [in games] and if you don’t do well then you lose.

A junior added,

I think it is people that live what they say. If you don’t have the best grades but people still see you are going to class and are still trying versus someone that doesn’t go to class but you see them trying to get into your face -- that just isn’t going to work. If someone is yelling at me for missing study tables but they have a .75 GPA, I am not going to listen to them. It’s the same as people that hustle if they are your star player but they don’t work that hard, you aren’t going to look up to them.
In the end, it was found that both individuals bearing formal titles and those lacking such titles exhibited transformational leadership skills.

Such a finding does not lead to a dramatic change in the literature, but this notion leaves room for interpretation of a paradoxical question: If each member has the potential for leadership fulfillment, then whom will they lead? As was found in the present study, although each person may have the ability to earn a leadership role, it did not appear as if all student-athletes were prepared to take on such a role. Captain Mike Lebowitz credited this phenomenon to the fact that many players have leadership abilities, but they are inconsistent with their display of those abilities to the team. As a result, it is possible the younger student-athletes have not yet reached a point of experience to be able to lead the entire team. With this being said, the captains and other veterans were needed to help guide these future leaders through role modeling. Such results were clearly maintained as student-athletes named previous teammates holding both formal and informal leadership roles to be those role models who were the most memorable.

The attainment of intra-team leadership status was unlimited and attainable to everyone on the roster, as was noted by each of the captains and the focus group. The current study found agreement with Loughead, Hardy and Eys (2006), as both studies find it reasonable to assume formal leaders such as captains and informal leaders, those not bearing a title but still maintaining leadership roles, play a major role in the group as a whole. Taken together athletes who occupy formal or informal leadership roles represent peer leaders on their respective teams (Loughead & Hardy, 2005, p. 304).

Furthermore, this study will expand the athletic leadership literature due to its surface suggestion of the existence of numerous types of leadership on a Division I football team. Whereas the focus group brought to light that both positive and negative leaders are present on a
team, one captain openly admitted, “There are so many guys on our team that are good leaders in different situations.”

Supplementary effects of transformational leadership were also seen in the organizational commitment shown to the team by the student-athletes. Signs of transformational leadership were implied through the words of the student-athletes, yet it did not appear as though such beliefs were explicitly handed down from the captains. The cultural values of the team atmosphere gave more power to the argument that transformational leadership can be a learned behavior. These findings can be coupled with the suggestion made by Glenn and Horn (1993) that the naming of formal captains does not warrant successful formal leadership. According to the present study, findings suggest the bearer of transformational leadership was less important than the presence of leadership amongst the student-athlete peer group.

Motivation to Reach Collegiate Status

Throughout the discussions, each of the participants made it very clear that student-athletes are in fact a unique group on a college campus. This knowledge has been previously documented in texts such as Carron’s (1980) *Social Psychology of Sport*. In his publication, Carron notes, “The differences between those who participate in athletics and those who do not have been noted by several authors, thus supporting the ideas of athletes as students with special concerns and pressures” (p. 32). The anomalous circumstances that the student-athletes must confront create the distinction from their traditional peer counterparts.

Although this study did not intend to study the motives of the student-athletes, such academic and athletic motives were discussed while defining the roles these young men must play everyday. It was found that these young men partake in two roles, that of student and that of collegiate athlete; the order of importance is dependent upon the motivating factors of the
student-athlete. The emphasis of athletics before academics gives rise to the possibility that some participants are amongst the group of current athletes across the nation that would not have lived the reality of a higher education had they not had the athletic skills to propel them to athletic scholarships.

One sophomore indicated the designation of student-athlete, as “anyone that can juggle sports and academics.” His counter-part inadvertently gave the definition of athlete-student when he described a student-athlete as “someone that uses sports to get through school.” According to Snyder (1996) this dual representation is not significantly shocking as he noted, “As early as high school African-American student-athletes expect sports to provide opportunities for their future” (p. 654). Snyder found African-American student-athletes were more likely than their Anglo peers to be drawn to the pursuit of a professional sports contract than a bachelor’s degree. He also found student-athletes who participated at the Division III level were more academically prepared than those at the Division I level. Regardless of race and ethnicity, such ideas give backbone to the motivation of a student-athlete versus an athlete-student.

Traces of academic motivation over athletic motivation were also apparent. A senior relayed a chain of events that he saw leading to success. In his deduction, if a person did not go to college to get a degree then he or she might not that one big shot that is needed to succeed in life. Furthermore he stated, a person must work hard enough to obtain a job and take the position seriously or else failure was eminent. Captain Peter Q. added,

… You go through your days and you play sports but later in life no one really cares. Unless you are a professional athlete, no one is going to care that you played college ball. You will lose your status of a celebrity. I am ready to just go back and live a normal life.
Contributions to Peer-Leadership Practice

The phenomenological experiences of those studied lead to recommendations that may be applied to this team and others reflecting the same attributes or values. The following recommendations relate to both the position of captain and to the practice of leadership on Division I football teams.

Recommendations for Captaincy

This study indicates a need for leadership training to enter the dialogue of captaincy and its essential tasks. In both cases, the current captains did not receive instructions to properly live up to the title and based their role on those who previously held the position or from their experiences as captains in their high school years. While leadership is discussed on a large scale through NCAA efforts such as the annual NCAA Leadership Conference, the CHAMPS/Life Skills program, it does not touch the student-athletes locally unless they are active members of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC). SAAC is comprised of representatives from all university sponsored varsity athletic teams (NCAA Student-Athlete-Advisory Committee Brochure). SAAC representation and participation is not limited to captains. With this being said, organizations such as the NCAA could sponsor leadership development and training at a local level in additional to the existing national conferences.

Success may be found in the captaincy role if the student-athlete were to occupy it for more than one season. As Loughead, Hardy and Eys (2006) found, a majority of team (49%) and peer (40%) leadership came from those student-athletes in their third year (p. 142). If these results are generalized to this study, it would be recommended to purposefully select two senior and two junior captains each year, expecting the two juniors to remain captains during their senior year. This would give the team a cycle of leadership that would allow the senior captains
to mold the junior captains and so on. Also, the student-athletes would have more time in the position to be effective instead of a lone playing season. The current practice of this idea is dependent upon the structure of the team’s roster as well as internal and external factors surrounding the team.

Practice of Leadership on Division I Football Teams

The practice of leadership by example encompasses an array of successful actions found in the classroom, on the field, and in the leader’s personal life. Such an example was shown to be the responsibility not only of the captain, but also of all peer leaders on the team. As a result of this, it is suggested to give student-athletes more of a role in the process and practice of formal leadership. For example, the University of Utah football team currently employs such a suggestion through the Utah Football Leadership Committee, which began in the spring of 2003. The annually elected group is comprised of student-athletes holding sophomore through senior status who are free of academic or discipline issues. The council functions similarly to a smaller group of captains as their duties entail contributing to forming team policy, suggesting and contributing in the decision making regarding student-athlete discipline, as well as the foremost spokesmen of the team (Abel, 2006).

Due to the size of the roster of a Division I football team reaching a maximum of 106, the researcher believes the practice of such a council distributes the leadership authority to a greater number of student-athletes and gives more student-athletes the freedom to lead without their age and experience acting as a hindrance. Such a council has the potential to work on this team due to the multitude of comments made with respect to lack of consideration for age to impede on the leadership of the team.
Lastly, it is suggested for the motives of all student-athletes to be recognized and understood by the captain in order to stimulate growth on and off the field. By understanding the social needs of student-athletes or athlete-students, leaders of a team may choose to offer support in any or all areas which are deficient.

Reflections of Phenomenology as Researcher

As I reflect on this research experience and as a former team captain, I can appreciate the sentiments reflected in the findings of particular student-athletes securing the consideration as a leader amongst their peers without the consideration of their formal designation as a captain. In the case of all organized teams, I hold a personal belief that a title does not automatically make a leader into what is expected – too many factors play into leadership roles such as relationships, ability, experience, and preconceived notions as to how one should act.

The work of Loughead and Hardy (2005) makes known the possibility of many leaders on a team who serve both formal and informal functions. With this being said, I too have witnessed the situation described by the student-athlete where another student-athlete may not be given a chance to compete anywhere other than practice, but their selfless acts and dedication to the team make it possible for their teammates to enhance their skills. Such student-athletes seem to personify the meaning of transformational leader and need to be more closely examined.

The tradition of captaincy has been long upheld to exemplify the function of leadership. Within the collegiate ranks I cannot help but assume their role has been reduced to pomp and circumstance and their leadership traits, if they exist, would shine through with or without the formalized title of ‘captain.’ One reason for this may be the earlier ages under which children are exposed to athletics. From the time they are learning the fundamental rules of a sport, athletes of all ages are indoctrinated with leadership examples. As these future collegiate student-athletes
grow, it may be speculated they develop characteristics of an ideal captain and seek out the person that will fit the role or try to live it themselves.

It must also be stated the researcher has mixed views on the attention given to student-athletes in matters other than their specialized sport. As was discussed in Chapter II, many high profile student-athletes make names for themselves as high school prep players before they even reach a college campus. In football, the student-athlete’s role of a celebrity begins each February as College Football’s National Signing Day is treated as an official holiday and is meticulously covered throughout the United States via all entertainment reporting mediums. This type of press coverage is handled by a team of representatives for celebrities but student-athletes must share the sports information department in college.

As student-athletes progress through their career, they are well aware of the implications present in their decision-making both on and off the field. Such implications for student-athletes’ actions reach far beyond that of a traditional student and do not seem as if an end is in sight. Proper management for and by the media is needed to limit the intrusion of the student-athlete’s life. Such a concept is easier proposed than carried out.

Suggestions for Future Research

Captains are widely known as the formal leaders on all sporting teams and are appointed at all levels of athletic competition. Based on the experiences of the two Division I football captains, pre-existing sets of formally acknowledged guidelines are non-existent for captaincy nor is formal training existent prior to the captain’s tenure. These observations leave much room for academic study and comparison to other collegiate student group leaders such as those in the Greek system or student government, which are known for their more formalized preparation of student leaders.
Through the study of formal and informal leaders, it has been recognized many student-athletes have the potential to lead. With this in mind a case study may be developed to analyze a team utilizing a council of leaders, much like the leadership council at the University of Utah, instead of the traditional captains’ positions. The forms of leadership and the effects many people in these positions have may help to understand the functions of multiple leaders on a large team.

The present study may also be expanded and replicated at other venues with differing characteristics from the current university setting. Nationally prominent athletic institutions would be a suggested locale for such research as a result of the many recognizable individual talents, but also the plethora of incidents occurring from a multitude of NCAA violations. Such external factors may yield divergent findings from those in the present study. Other suggested venues would include programs bearing the distinction of mid-major, Ivy League or military service academies due in part to the existing values and experiences separating their student-athletes from others. Division II and Division III programs should also be taken into consideration as a result of their perceived historically unique values. Upon replication, the data would be compared in order to pinpoint peer leadership qualities in captains.

It is clear by the emergence of the study of formal and informal leadership it is a worthwhile endeavor and needs to be pursued in future research where various avenues will allow for expansion such as large vs. small roster size, teams competing as a unit (e.g., football, basketball, hockey) vs. team members competing as individuals (e.g., track and field, swimming, rifle), or male teams vs. female teams to just name a few.
Limitations

Existing limitations hinder the generalization of this study to all Division I football captains and the teams they serve. Limitations can categorized by the single Division I football program studied as well as the lack of data collected to fully determine the traits of transformational leadership of the captains. The lack of data regarding transformational leadership occurred as a result of the group of four captains not exhibiting such traits with much force. Prior to the study, the researcher aimed to focus solely on the leadership of the captain, yet the team appeared to hold a differing value of leadership in their team structure and generalized their answers to all leaders, both formal and informal, present on the team.

Further understanding of the team captains through their own words was limited as only two of the four captains made themselves available for interviews. The timing of the interviews may also pose an obstruction in data collection since they were conducted nearly two months after the 2006-07 season had come to an end.

Conclusion

The rationale for this study was to discover the peer leadership effect Division I football captains had on the remainder of their team by examining the phenomenological experiences of the captains and their teammates. Through interviews and a focus group, leadership practices were connected to the captains and their formal roles within the structure of the team, but were not limited to these title-bearing leaders. In fact, leaders were not defined by their title, but more importantly by the actions of the student-athlete both on and off the field. These actions resulted in a leadership by example mindset, which was widely kept and highly regarded in the culture of this Division I football team.
Dependent upon factors such as age, playing experience and personality of a student-athlete, peer leadership extended beyond the verbal and visible demonstrations by the captains and was exhibited by various members of the team. Contrary to the findings in existing literature, athletic ability was not the overriding factor in the attainment of respect earned by members of the team. Attributes relating to consistency and work ethic were more highly valued than sheer athletic talent. Additionally, misuse of talent was a key area where respect was lost. These values moved beyond the field and into the world of academics. Those who worked in the classroom for their marks, whatever they may be, were more likely to earn respect than those who did not apply their efforts away from the field.

Furthermore, the study suggests, the title ‘captain’ serves more of an external purpose of prestige and tradition than an internal end-all leadership function in this setting. According to the student-athletes the distinction of captain in high school was mainly given to veterans because of their rank and seniority in the program. The current student-athletes saw a modified reoccurrence of this practice on their own team. Opposition to the selection process led to dissatisfaction within the current channels utilized to single-out those student-athletes named the formal captains.

A suggestion of the research findings is the formal role may not have the same importance within the team structure that it once had. Indeed, the title may not bear the honor those outside of the team environment think it does. If this is true, the role of captain serves a public function of team representation and gives leadership accessibility to those who have earned it, whether or not they bear the title of captain.
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APPENDIX A
Consent Letter – Focus Group
Date:
Dear [INSERT NAME]

I would like to invite you to participate in a Master’s thesis research study exploring peer leadership exhibited by Division I football captains. This letter explains my relationship to the study and how you will be asked to be involved.

I am currently a second year master’s student in the Educational Administration and Leadership Studies program at Bowling Green State University and I am working towards the completion of my master’s thesis. The subject of leadership in collegiate athletics is not only one that is often criticized in various media outlets but, it is becoming more commonly explored through academic research such as the current study. The study is very important to me, because I hope to pursue a career in collegiate athletics once I have earned my post-graduate degree.

You have been randomly selected to participate in a focus group discussion by your academic standing and playing position. With this selection, I am asking for you to participate in a one and one-half hour focus group where you will be asked to give your opinion on leadership, and the role of the captain and student-athletes on a Division I football team. Should you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at anytime without suffering any penalties or consequences.

By agreeing to attend this focus group your name and answers will not be exposed to others on the team, nor will the coaching staff be made aware of your commentary during the session. While I will be making an audio and video recording of the focus group, I will make every effort to protect your identity as a participant and your identifying characteristics. I will ask you to create a pseudonym that will be used when the data is reported. Only you and I will know which pseudonym is yours. To further protect your identity, at the conclusion of the interview you will be asked to sign a confidentiality form that will ask you to keep the ideas and discussion within the confines of the focus group. Once the videotapes have been transcribed, you will be given a copy of the notes to read and make any changes to your commentary. If additional questions arise, you may be asked to meet with me for a 30-minute one-on-one interview. The interview option can also take place if you feel as if there is more you would like to say outside of the group atmosphere.

The importance of this study is rooted in the expansion of knowledge regarding the leadership behaviors of football captains and their experiences during their tenure. You can benefit from this study because it can make you aware of leadership practices that you see on the team or that you feel are lacking on your team. With this knowledge, you will be able to better contribute to any teams you may be a part of throughout your playing career or as a professional in your desired career path.

At this time there are no risks that you will be exposed to that are greater than daily life. If you agree to participate, you will be invited to a focus group that will be held in the team meeting room at [NAME OMITTED]. A confirmation email will be sent to you regarding time, date and location.
[NAME OMITTED] will be the liaison between the team and myself. At no time will your participation or lack thereof impact your grades, class standing, or relationship to the team or the university which you attend.

I have attempted to provide you with a solid background of information that will enable you to make an informed decision regarding your participation in the focus group. Please sign and date one copy of this letter and return it to [NAME OMITTED] to either accept or deny participating in the study by [DATE]. Retain the other copy for your records.

Thank you for your consideration in participating in what I believe is an important study. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at BGSU at 419-372-7716 or via email at hsrb@bgsu.edu. You may also contact my thesis advisor or me at the following email addresses:

Erin Marie Schorr                        Dr. Patrick Pauken
Master’s Candidate                        Thesis Advisor
schorem@bgsu.edu                             paukenp@bgsu.edu

Sincerely,

Erin Marie Schorr                        Dr. Patrick Pauken
Master’s Candidate                        Thesis Advisor
Bowling Green State University                  Bowling Green State University

I have been informed of the research as it was described to me, and I voluntarily consent to participate in the research study. Please mark the appropriate answers and then sign and date the line below.

I voluntarily consent to the focus group    ___Yes  ___No
I voluntarily consent to a possible additional interview  ___Yes  ___No

Print Name________________________________________

Signature___________________________________________       Date____/____/____
APPENDIX B
Consent Letter – Captains
Date:  
Dear [INSERT NAME] 

I would like to invite you to participate in a Master’s thesis research study exploring peer leadership exhibited by Division I football captains. This letter explains my relationship to the study and how you will be asked to be involved.

I am currently a second year master’s student in the Educational Administration and Leadership Studies program at Bowling Green State University and I am working towards the completion of my master’s thesis. The subject of leadership in collegiate athletics is not only one that is often criticized in various media outlets but, it is becoming more commonly explored through academic research such as the current study. The study is very important to me, because I hope to pursue a career in collegiate athletics once I have earned my post-graduate degree.

You have been selected to participate in a one-on-one interview due to your status as captain on the [TEAM NAME OMITTED]. With this selection, I am asking for you to participate in a one-hour interview where you will be asked to give your opinion on leadership, and the role of the captain and student-athletes on a Division I football team. Should you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at anytime without suffering any penalties or consequences.

By agreeing to participate in the interview your name and answers will not be exposed to others on the team, nor will the coaching staff be made aware of your commentary during the session. While I will be making an audio recording of the interview, I will make every effort to protect your identity as a participant and your identifying characteristics. I will ask you to create a pseudonym that will be used when the data is reported. Only you and I will know which pseudonym is yours. To further protect your identity, at the conclusion of the interview you will be asked to sign a confidentiality form that will ask you to keep the ideas and discussion within the confines of the interview. Once the audiotapes have been transcribed, you will be given a copy of my full interpretation the notes to read and make any changes to your commentary. If additional questions arise, you may be asked to meet with me for a 30-minute one-on-one interview that will also be audio recorded. The interview option can also take place if you feel as if there is more you would like to say outside of the initial interview.

The importance of this study is rooted in the expansion of knowledge regarding the leadership behaviors of football captains and their experiences during their tenure. You can benefit from this study because it can make you aware of leadership practices that you see on the team or that you feel are lacking on your team. With this knowledge, you will be able to better contribute to any teams you may be a part of throughout your playing career or as a professional in your desired career path.

At this time there are no risks that you will be exposed to that are greater than daily life. If you agree to participate, you will be invited to an interview that will be held in the team meeting room at
[NAME OMITTED]. A confirmation email will be sent to you regarding time, date and location. [NAME OMITTED] will be the liaison between the team and myself. At no time will your participation or lack thereof impact your grades, class standing, or relationship to the team or the university which you attend.

I have attempted to provide you with a solid background of information that will enable you to make an informed decision regarding your participation in the focus group. Please sign and date one copy of this letter and return it to [NAME OMITTED] to either accept or deny participating in the study by [DATE]. Retain the other copy for your records.

Thank you for your consideration in participating in what I believe is an important study. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at BGSU at 419-372-7716 or via email at hsr@bgsu.edu. You may also contact my thesis advisor or me at the following email addresses:

Erin Marie Schorr                          Dr. Patrick Pauken  
Master’s Candidate                        Thesis Advisor
shorem@bgsu.edu                           paukenp@bgsu.edu

Sincerely,

Erin Marie Schorr                          Dr. Patrick Pauken
Master’s Candidate                        Thesis Advisor
Bowling Green State University           Bowling Green State University

I have been informed of the research as it was described to me, and I voluntarily consent to participate in the research study. Please mark the appropriate answers and then sign and date the line below.

I voluntarily consent to the one-on-one interview    ___Yes  ___No
I voluntarily consent to a possible additional interview    ___Yes  ___No

Print Name________________________________________
Signature___________________________________________       Date____/____/____
APPENDIX C
Predetermined Questions
Focus Group/Interview Questions
Revised: 11/08/06

CAPTAINS (Group A)

Question Theme: Definitions
☐ What words or phrases come to your mind when you hear the word
   o leadership?
   o captain?
   o peer leader?
   o student?
   o athlete?
   o student-athlete?
☐ What is the role of the student-athlete on and off the field?
☐ How do you distinguish between being a student and an athlete?
☐ In your experience does the distinction of student-athlete differ from year to year
   or by university?
   o Do you have any friends at involved in other programs that would answer
     the previous question differently?
☐ How is the captain similar to the coach?
   o How are they different?

Question Theme: Decision Making
☐ What is your best “Friday Night Lights” story where you made a positive
   decision?
   o What is a “Friday Night Lights” story where you made a poor decision?
   o How did these decisions affect the rest of your team?
☐ Can you think of a time when a decision you made affected your team off the
   field? (Note to researcher: Might get something positive or might get something
   negative here)
   o Can you think of a time when a decision a teammate made affected your
     team off the field?
   o Did the status of the player play a role in the effect it had on the team?

Question Theme: Experience
☐ Were you a captain in high school?
   o How has this affected your current experience?
☐ What is the comparison between the high school football experience and the
   college experience?
   o How was your transition? (Note to researcher: Big fish, little pond
     question)
   o If poor, who helped you through the hard times?
☐ Were you surprised when you were named captain this season?
   o Were you prepared to take on the role?
     ▪ If yes, how so?
     ▪ If no, what was lacking in your preparation?
   o What should future captains know prior to assuming the role?
During your playing career, have you ever felt like a celebrity because you are a football player?
  o If yes – How does the celebrity status affect you personally?
  o If no – Have you seen it affect anyone in a positive or negative way?
What is the social atmosphere of the team before, during and after the season?
Please explain the “Big Brother” mentor program.
  o What type of support do captains offer the in the program?

**Question Theme: Peer-leadership**

□ How would you describe your leadership style?
□ Who are some peer leaders who have effected your playing experience at any level?
  o What made them so memorable?
□ Do you think your leadership and decision-making skills affects your teammates?
□ What is the difference between a captain and a leader?

Is there anything else you would like to add to the discussion that we have not already mentioned?

**NON-CAPTAINS (Group B)**

**Question Theme: Definitions**

□ What words or phrases come to your mind when you hear the word
  o leadership?
  o captain?
  o peer leader?
  o student?
  o athlete?
  o student-athlete?
□ What is the role of the student-athlete on and off the field?
□ How do you distinguish between being a student and an athlete?
□ In your experience does the distinction of student-athlete differ from year to year or by university?
  o Do you have any friends at other schools that would answer the previous question differently?
□ How is the captain similar to the coach?
  o How are they different?
□ How are the captains chosen on this team?

**Question Theme: Decision Making**

□ What is your best “Friday Night Lights” story where you made a positive decision?
  o What is a “Friday Night Lights” story where you made a poor decision?
  o How did these decisions affect the rest of your team?
□ Can you think of a time when a decision you made affected your team off the field? (Note to researcher: Might get something positive or might get something negative here)
Can you think of a time when a decision a teammate made affected your team off the field?
Did the status of the player play a role in the effect it had on the team?

**Question Theme: Experience**

- Were you a captain in high school?
  - How has this affected your current experience?
- What is the comparison between the high school football experience and the college experience?
  - How was your transition? (Note to researcher: Big fish, little pond question)
  - If poor, who helped you through the hard times?
- During your playing career, have you ever felt like a celebrity because you are a football player?
  - If yes – How does the celebrity status affect you personally?
  - If no – Have you seen it affect anyone in a positive or negative way?
- Please explain the “Big Brother” mentor program.
  - What type of support do captains offer the in the program?

**Question Theme: Peer-leadership through captainece**

- How does a captain affect your experience as a student-athlete both on and off the field?
- How does starting status and academic standing affect how you view a captain?
- Are multiple captains viewed as a group or are the seen for their individual qualities?
  - Why?
- Who are some peer leaders who have effected your playing experience at any level?
  - What made them so memorable?
- How does the leadership and decision-making skills of a captain affect his teammates?
- Is there a difference between a captain and a leader?

Is there anything else you would like to add to the discussion that we have not already mentioned?
APPENDIX D
Confidentiality Maintenance Form
Confidentiality Maintenance Form

By signing this confidentiality maintenance form, I hereby swear to not discuss the identity of my fellow participants nor will I share the ideas set forth in this education setting.

Print Name________________________________________

Signature___________________________________________       Date____/____/____