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Whistles, Words, and Willpower: How Coach Etiquette Relates to Intrinsic and Extrinsic Sport Motivation among Collegiate Softball and Baseball Athletes

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study. This study examined whether perceived coach etiquette predicts intrinsic and extrinsic sport motivation among collegiate softball and baseball athletes in a selected Philippine university.
Materials and methods. A quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional (non-experimental) design was employed. Forty-five varsity athletes (softball n=23; baseball n=22; female n=23; male n=22) completed a survey packet consisting of (a) a modified Perceived Coach Attitudes and Behaviors Scale (PCABS; 28 items; 4-point response format) to capture coach etiquette-related behaviors and (b) the Sport Motivation Scale-II construct coverage (23 items; 4-point response format) to capture athletes' motivational regulations. Descriptive statistics summarized perceived etiquette and motivation. Linear regression tested the hypothesized predictive effect of coach etiquette on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (α=0.05).
Results. Athletes perceived coaches' etiquette as a moderate degree of respect (overall M=3.03). Athletes reported strong sport motivation (overall M=3.69). Regression analyses indicated that coach etiquette did not significantly predict intrinsic motivation (t=0.846, p=0.4023) or extrinsic motivation (t=1.33, p=0.2636).
Conclusions. Coach etiquette was positively perceived but did not significantly explain intrinsic or extrinsic motivation in this cohort. Future work should include autonomy-supportive coaching, motivational climate, and psychological need satisfaction as potential mediators/moderators.

Keywords: coach etiquette; coach-athlete relationship; intrinsic motivation; extrinsic motivation; softball; baseball; collegiate athletes; self-determination theory.

ARTICLE INFO

INTRODUCTION

Coaches shape athletes' sport experiences through day-to-day interpersonal conduct, communication, leadership decisions, and the motivational climate they create (Berki et al., 2020; Raabe & Zakrajsek, 2017). In collegiate settings, athletes spend extended time with coaches during training and competition periods; thus, athletes' perceptions of coaches' professionalism, respect, fairness, and etiquette may significantly influence athletes' engagement, psychological need satisfaction, and motivational processes (McGee & DeFreese, 2018; Raabe & Zakrajsek, 2017). For instance, research highlights that positive coach-athlete relationships foster feelings of relatedness and autonomy, key to athlete well-being and persistence in sport (Longakit et al., 2024).

Two complementary theoretical traditions guide research on coaching behavior and athlete motivation. Transformational leadership perspectives emphasize leaders' ability to inspire followers, model desirable values such as ethical conduct and respect, provide individualized consideration, and create a shared vision that enhances athlete effort and commitment (Erikstad et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023). Self-Determination Theory proposes that athletes develop higher-quality, more self-determined motivation—ranging from intrinsic to more autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation—when their basic psychological needs for autonomy (choice and

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volition), competence (mastery and effectiveness), and relatedness (social connection) are supported, which is often influenced by coaches' interpersonal style and behaviors (Shannon et al., 2021). Studies in collegiate sports confirm that coaches acting as social agents who promote need satisfaction contribute to optimal athlete functioning, including enhanced motivation and reduced burnout (McGee & DeFreese, 2018).

Prior research has shown that communication quality and respect in coach-athlete relationships are associated with athlete satisfaction, perceived relationship quality, and positive psychological outcomes (McGee & DeFreese, 2018). Autonomy-supportive coaching behaviors, such as providing clear instructions, encouraging feedback, and avoiding controlling tactics, tend to relate to more self-determined forms of motivation and behavioral persistence in sport (Hodge et al., 2023). Transformational elements like individualized consideration have been linked to extra effort and closeness in coach-athlete dynamics, particularly in team sports (Görgülü, 2019). In baseball-specific contexts, empowering climates generated by coaches have been shown to positively influence autonomous motivation and enjoyment among pitchers (Gutiérrez-García et al., 2019). Similarly, in collegiate softball, athletes' perceptions of coaching behaviors vary based on assigned expectations, underscoring the role of equitable and supportive conduct.(Buning, 2019) However, the broader category of "coach etiquette"—encompassing respect, appropriate language, fairness, approachability, and professionalism—is less frequently examined as a distinct predictor of intrinsic (enjoyment-driven) and extrinsic (reward/outcome-driven) sport motivation, particularly within collegiate softball and baseball contexts where team dynamics and high training demands amplify interpersonal influences (Buning, 2019).

The study used two foundational theories: Transformational Leadership Theory and Self-Determination Theory. Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) posits that effective leaders motivate their followers through methods beyond traditional rewards or authority. This theory identifies four key components of transformational leadership (Figure 1): Idealized Influence (II), where leaders serve as strong role models; Intellectual Stimulation (IS), which promotes innovation and challenges existing norms; Inspirational Motivation (IM), aimed at enhancing morale and commitment; and Individualized Consideration (IC), focusing on mentorship and support for the personal growth of each team member (Burns 1978).
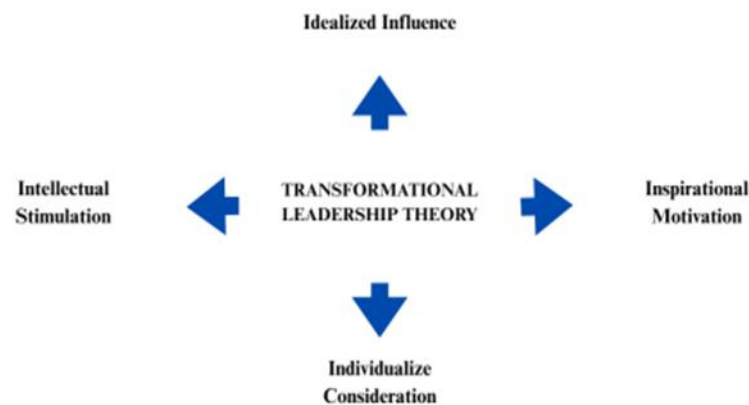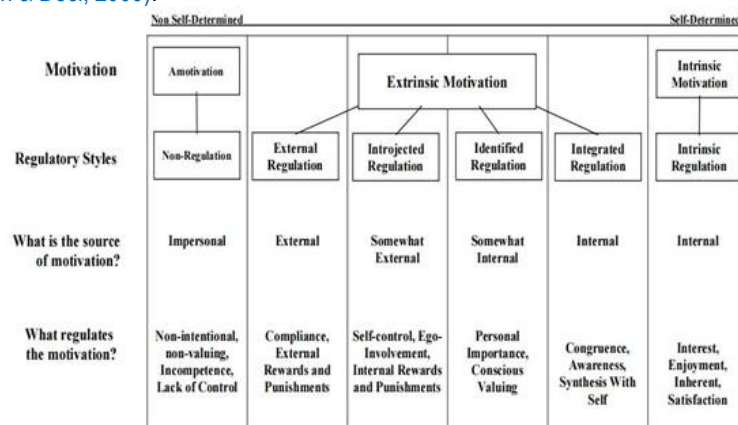

Figure 1. Transformational Leadership Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) represents a broad framework for the study of human motivation and personality. Conditions supporting the individual's experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are argued to foster the most volitional and high-quality forms of motivation and engagement for activities, including enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity. SDT articulates a meta-theory for framing motivational studies, a formal theory that defines intrinsic and varied extrinsic sources of motivation (Figure 2), and a description of the respective roles of intrinsic and types of extrinsic motivation in cognitive and social development and in individual differences (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Figure 2. Self-Determination Theory

The coach-athlete relationship is a pivotal factor in shaping both the performance and psychological well-being of athletes.

At its core, this relationship is built on effective communication, mutual respect, and shared motivation, all of which foster trust and cohesion (McGee & DeFreese, 2018; Raabe & Zakrajsek, 2017). Coaches play a critical role in influencing athletes' behavior, attitudes, and performance through their conduct, communication style, and leadership approach (Tuck et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2023). Recent research highlights that athletes respond more positively in environments where coaches are approachable, emotionally available, and prioritize open communication (Hebard et al., 2021; Khoiri et al., 2025)

Communication emerges as a vital coaching tool that not only facilitates the transfer of knowledge but also strengthens interpersonal bonds. Positive perceptions of coach communication are associated with greater team cohesion, motivation, and athlete satisfaction (Davis et al., 2019). Models such as the "network" approach to team communication show that when athletes feel heard and respected, motivation and resilience increase (choi et al., 2019).

Understanding whether etiquette-related perceptions are meaningfully associated with motivation can help refine coach development programs: etiquette may represent a foundational ethical and relational standard that underpins trust and engagement, but sustained motivation may require additional mechanisms such as explicit autonomy support, competence-enhancing feedback, and a mastery-oriented motivational climate (Liu et al., 2023). For example, while general coaching climates have been studied extensively, etiquette-specific behaviors like avoiding unrealistic demands or using respectful communication remain underexplored in relation to SDT continua of motivation (Tait et al., 2020).

Research Gap and Rationale

Existing studies commonly evaluate coaching climate, transformational leadership, or motivational climates rather than etiquette-specific behaviors such as consistent plan adherence, openness to athlete input, or ethical decision-making.(Castillo et al., 2018) Moreover, evidence specific to collegiate baseball and softball cohorts is limited, with few investigations addressing how perceived etiquette predicts distinct motivational regulations in these high-stakes, team-oriented sports.(Buning, 2019; Gutiérrez-García et al., 2019) This scarcity persists despite growing interest in coach-athlete dynamics in collegiate athletics, where unique factors like roster size, attrition rates, and dual academic-athletic demands may heighten the impact of daily coach interactions.(Choi & Smith, 2024; McGee & DeFreese, 2018) This study addresses this gap by testing whether athletes' perceived coach etiquette statistically predicts intrinsic and extrinsic sport motivation within a single institutional context in the Philippines, contributing novel insights to SDT applications in underrepresented sport populations.

Objectives and Hypotheses

Objectives: (1) describe athletes' perceptions of coach etiquette; (2) describe athletes' sport motivation; and (3) test whether coach etiquette predicts (a) intrinsic motivation and (b) extrinsic motivation. Hypotheses: Ha1—Perceived coach etiquette significantly predicts intrinsic motivation. Ha2—Perceived coach etiquette significantly predicts extrinsic motivatio.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study participants

Participants were 45 collegiate varsity athletes from a selected Philippine university (softball n=23; baseball n=22). The gender distribution was nearly equal (female n=23; male n=22). Athletes were included based on current varsity roster membership and availability during the survey administration period. Demographic information collected included age, gender, academic year, and duration under the current coach.

Study organization

Design and setting: The study used a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional, non-experimental design to examine naturally occurring perceptions and self-reported motivation without manipulation of variables.

Procedural algorithm (research protocol): (1) participant recruitment and roster verification; (2) informed consent and briefing on voluntary participation, confidentiality, and withdrawal rights; (3) standardized administration of the questionnaire packet; (4) data screening and coding; (5) statistical analysis; and (6) reporting of findings aligned with the study objectives.

Instruments and measures

Coach etiquette: A modified Perceived Coach Attitudes and Behaviors Scale (PCABS) was used to assess etiquette-related coach behaviors across 28 items rated from 1 (Never) to 4 (Always). Item content captured respect, communication, fairness, and professionalism-oriented behaviors. The PCABS has been reported as valid and reliable in prior validation research.

Sport motivation: Athlete motivation was assessed using a Sport Motivation Scale-based instrument aligned with SDT, containing 23 items rated from 1 (Never) to 4 (Always). Items were interpreted in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation indicators consistent with SDT-informed measurement traditions. For future replications, the Sport Motivation Scale-II (SMS-II) is recommended given its established factorial validity in athlete samples.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) summarized participant characteristics and scale responses. Linear regression tested whether perceived coach etiquette predicted intrinsic and extrinsic motivation at $\alpha=0.05$. The regression results are reported with t-statistics, degrees of freedom, p-values, and hypothesis decisions.

Ethical considerations

This study utilized a survey method while ensuring ethical standards were met to protect participant rights. Informed consent was obtained, and participation was voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, with no personally identifiable information collected unless necessary. Participants could withdraw without repercussions, and sensitive questions were handled only

after ethics review board approval. Coercion mitigation measures were implemented for participants who were also teammates of the researchers. Indirect benefits like snacks and tokens of appreciation were provided. The researchers declared no conflicts of interest, and the study was conducted purely for academic purposes, fulfilling the requirements of a specific research course. Informed consent and confidentiality: Participants were informed about the study purpose and procedures, their rights as respondents, and the confidentiality of collected data. Participation was voluntary and respondents could withdraw at any time without penalty.

RESULTS

The moderately respectful scores across professionalism indicators complement Hill et al.'s (2021) discussion of professionalization in sports, which requires coaches to maintain ethics, responsibility, and adherence to rules. The athletes' responses support the presence of these qualities, though the moderate averages show that the coaching environment can be further enhanced to achieve higher levels of perceived professionalism.

Table 1. Softball and Baseball athletes' perception of their coaches' etiquette

Coach Etiquettes Questions	Mean	Interpretation: The coach exhibits
1. Does not blame the athletes when the team loses or fails	2.86	Moderate degree of respect
2. Respect the personal choices of the athletes	2.84	Moderate degree of respect
3. Treats the athletes more understandingly regardless of demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender, course, nationality)	3.12	Moderate degree of respect
4. Listen to athletes' concerns and opinions respectfully.	2.86	Moderate degree of respect
5. Gives clear tactical instructions that I need during competition	3.33	Moderate degree of respect
6. Cares about teamwork and internal communication	3.33	Moderate degree of respect
7. Does not use profanity or improper words when communicating with the team	2.88	Moderate degree of respect
8. Communicates with the team always using respectful and appropriate language.	2.77	Moderate degree of respect
9. Is strict but not fearful	2.95	Moderate degree of respect
10. Is easy to approach at any time	2.77	Moderate degree of respect
11. Avoids assigning tasks or setting expectations that are beyond the athletes' current abilities (e.g., not asking a beginner to perform an advanced routine they haven't been trained for).	2.58	Moderate degree of respect
12. Pays attention and shows genuine interest in the athletes	3.09	Moderate degree of respect
13. Tactically solves the challenges during game well	3.05	Moderate degree of respect
14. Willingly takes strategic risks during the game to help the team succeed.	3.40	Moderate degree of respect
15. Consistently follows the innovations in the field	3.00	Moderate degree of respect
16. Is open to feedback and questions from athletes.	2.79	Moderate degree of respect
17. Follows the training within the plan.	2.74	Moderate degree of respect
18. Consistently acts responsibly, such as arriving on time, and following team rules.	3.12	Moderate degree of respect
19. Demonstrates consistent behavior in attitude and performance, such as putting in steady effort during practices and maintaining a positive mindset.	3.09	Moderate degree of respect
20. Has ethical standards in all coaching practices.	3.21	Moderate degree of respect
21. Gives value to all regardless of performances	3.19	Moderate degree of respect
22. Uses only fair and legal methods to help the team succeed (e.g., adhering to official rules and guidelines during competition and training)	3.40	Moderate degree of respect
23. Maintains integrity by not using their position for personal gain (e.g., not giving themselves special privileges or favors at the expense of the team).	2.91	Moderate degree of respect
24. Supports my personal development as both an athlete and individual.	3.12	Moderate degree of respect
25. Motivates the athletes through non-intimidation actions	2.79	Moderate degree of respect
26. Demonstrates honesty by speaking truthfully before, during, and after training or games.	3.26	Moderate degree of respect
27. Does not demand that athletes act illegally or irresponsibly	3.30	Moderate degree of respect
28. Does not resorts to violence in cases of his/her inability	3.23	Moderate degree of respect
OVERALL	3.03	Moderate degree of respect

Note: Scale: 1.00 – 1.74: The coach exhibits a high degree of disrespect, 1.74 – 2.49: The coach exhibits a moderate degree of disrespect 2.50 – 3.34: The coach exhibits a moderate degree of respect,3.25 – 4.00: The coach exhibits a high degree of respect

Table 2 presents the selected collegiate softball and baseball athletes' perception of their sport motivation. The results consistently indicate that the athletes are strongly motivated in all measured aspects of the scale. All 19 items received a verbal interpretation of *"The athlete is strongly motivated,"* with mean scores falling within the highest range of 3.25 to 4.00. This high level of motivation is evident across all dimensions, reflecting a strong internal drive such as enjoyment of the sport and satisfaction gained from mastering complex techniques as well as a high value placed on the developmental and social benefits of their athletic involvement (e.g., fostering discipline, maintaining physical health, and building interpersonal relationships).

Table 2. Softball and Baseball athletes' perception of their sports motivation

Coach Etiquettes Questions	Mean	VI
29. It pleases me to know more about the sport I practice.	3.63	Strongly Motivated
30. I enjoy discovering and applying new training techniques, such as incorporating interval training to improve endurance or using video analysis to refine skills.	3.77	Strongly Motivated
31. It pleases me to feel while learning training techniques I have never tried before.	3.67	Strongly Motivated
32. I enjoy discovering new performance strategies, such as setting specific game-day goals to	3.79	Strongly Motivated

improve focus and boost overall team performance.

33. I feel a lot of personal satisfaction while mastering specific, complex training techniques.	3.67	Strongly Motivated
34. I enjoy improving my weak points and complex training techniques.	3.77	Strongly Motivated
35.I take great pleasure in executing precise and complex movements with control and confidence.	3.67	Strongly Motivated
36.I enjoy the thrill of living exciting experiences, such as competing in a close championship match.	3.79	Strongly Motivated
37. I feel energized and excited when I'm actively involved in an activity, like leading a fast-paced team drill during practice.	3.58	Strongly Motivated
38. I experience powerful emotions when I play a sport I love for example, the adrenaline rush during a last inning match.	3.70	Strongly Motivated
39. I love the feeling of being completely immersed in an activity, such as losing track of time while perfecting a new routine.	3.49	Strongly Motivated
40. The sport I am in is the best way to meet people.	3.72	Strongly Motivated
41. My sport is one of the best ways to develop other aspects of myself, such as discipline, teamwork, resilience, and time management.	3.84	Strongly Motivated
42. My sport is a good way to learn many things that could be useful to me in other areas of my life.	3.77	Strongly Motivated
43. Being in my sport is one of the best ways to maintain good relationships with my friends.	3.74	Strongly Motivated
44. Engaging in sports is essential for maintaining physical fitness and overall health.	3.81	Strongly Motivated
45. Participating in sports is essential for me to feel good about myself and boost my overall well-being.	3.74	Strongly Motivated
46. I would feel disappointed if I didn't regularly set aside time for exercise programs as part of my routine.	3.40	Strongly Motivated
47. I must do sports regularly.	3.53	Strongly Motivated
48. My sport helps me earn respect and admiration from friends, family, and others in my community.	3.84	Strongly Motivated
49. Being involved in sports gives me the prestige of being recognized as an athlete, whether it's through being selected for a team or receiving accolades for my performance.	3.74	Strongly Motivated
50. People around me think it is essential to be in shape.	3.47	Strongly Motivated
51. I enjoy showcasing my skills in my sport, whether it's through winning competitions, performing challenging routines, or setting personal records.	3.74	Strongly Motivated
OVERALL	3.69	Strongly Motivated

Note: Scale: 1.00 – 1.74: The athlete is not motivated, 1.74 – 2.49: The athlete is less motivated, 2.50 – 3.34: The athlete is moderately motivated, 3.25 – 4.00: The athlete is strongly motivated.

To determine whether coach etiquette significantly impacts intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, regression results showed that that coach etiquette has no significant impact on intrinsic motivation among the softball and baseball athletes ($p = 0.4023$), leading to the rejection of Ha1 (Table 3).

Table 3. Perceived coach etiquette and its impact on intrinsic motivation

Dep Variable: Intrinsic Motivation							
Ind. Variable	Mean	SD	t-Stat	df	p	Decision	Remarks
Perceived coach etiquette	3.05	0.44	0.846	42	0.4023	Reject Ha1	Not significant

Note: Alternative hypothesis is accepted at P-value < 0.05

Coach etiquette was also found to have no significant impact on extrinsic motivation, as indicated by the P-value of 0.2636 which is below 0.05 (Table 4). Hence, hypothesis (Ha2) is rejected, confirming that coach etiquette does not influence athletes' extrinsic motivation.

Predictive tests: coach etiquette and motivation

Linear regression analyses tested whether perceived coach etiquette predicted intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The results are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Regression result: coach etiquette predicting intrinsic motivation

Independent variable	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**p**	**Decision**	**Remarks**
Perceived coach etiquette	3.05	0.44	0.846	42	0.4023	Reject Ha1	Not significant

Table 5. Regression result: coach etiquette predicting extrinsic motivation

Independent variable	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**p**	**Decision**	**Remarks**
Perceived coach etiquette	3.05	0.44	1.33	42	0.2636	Reject Ha2	Not significant

Coach etiquette did not significantly predict intrinsic motivation (p=0.4023) or extrinsic motivation (p=0.2636).

DISCUSSION

This pattern indicates that while coach etiquette—encompassing respect, fair communication, professionalism, and ethical behaviors—is valued and rated above neutral, it functions more as a foundational interpersonal standard or "hygiene factor" in coach-athlete dynamics rather than a potent driver of motivational variance.

From the lens of Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation thrives when athletes experience satisfaction of their basic psychological needs: autonomy (volitional endorsement of actions), competence (mastery and effectiveness), and relatedness (secure connections with others) (Bartholomew et al., 2010; Mossman et al., 2022). Coach etiquette likely contributes modestly to relatedness and psychological safety by fostering respectful interactions and fairness, as evidenced by higher-rated items like "Uses only fair and legal methods" (M = 3.40) and "Cares about teamwork" (M = 3.33). However, it may fall short of fully addressing autonomy and

competence needs, which require more nuanced strategies such as providing rationales for decisions, offering meaningful choices, and delivering structure-enhancing feedback (Mossman et al., 2022). In this sample, athletes' already elevated motivation levels (e.g., top items exceeding 3.80) suggest a strong pre-existing internal commitment to sport, potentially creating a ceiling effect where baseline etiquette exerts limited additional influence (McGee & DeFreese, 2018).

Extrinsic motivation subtypes, spanning external regulation to more internalized forms like identified regulation, are similarly influenced by contextual pressures beyond etiquette, including scholarships, team selection, performance incentives, and social recognition—as reflected in high-rated extrinsic items like earning community respect (M = 3.84). Etiquette alone may not capture these reward structures or competitive demands prevalent in collegiate sports (Valenzuela et al., 2019).

These null findings align with broader SDT-guided research emphasizing that coaches' autonomy-supportive interpersonal styles and task-involving motivational climates yield stronger links to self-determined motivation than general "niceness" or professionalism (Bartholomew et al., 2010; Mossman et al., 2022). For instance, meta-analytic evidence confirms robust positive associations between autonomy support and autonomous motivation (ρ = .39), need satisfaction, and well-being, while controlling styles predict maladaptive outcomes (Mossman et al., 2022). Studies also highlight coaches and teammates as key social agents for need fulfillment, where targeted behaviors outperform diffuse etiquette (Raabe & Zakrajsek, 2017).

Theoretically, this study underscores the distinction between ethical baseline behaviors (etiquette) and motivational catalysts (need-supportive practices), enriching SDT applications in sport by illustrating boundary conditions for etiquette's role amid high baseline motivation (McGee & DeFreese, 2018; Valenzuela et al., 2019). Practically, coach development programs should integrate etiquette training with SDT-based interventions, such as autonomy-supportive techniques (e.g., athlete input in decisions), competence feedback (e.g., progress-oriented praise), and mastery climates (e.g., emphasizing effort over outcomes) (Mossman et al., 2022). Workshops could draw from evidence-based models like those promoting need-supportive climates to enhance athlete persistence, performance, and well-being (Bartholomew et al., 2010). Future coach education in collegiate athletics might prioritize multi-faceted training to elevate both ethical standards and motivational efficacy.

Limitations

1. The design was cross-sectional and non-experimental, limiting causal inference.
2. The sample was restricted to one university and two teams, reducing generalizability.
3. Measures relied on self-report and may be susceptible to social desirability bias.
4. Motivation scores were high overall, suggesting potential ceiling effects that reduce detectable associations.
5. Ethics committee approval information must be explicitly reported to meet international publication standards.

Directions for future research

1. Test expanded models including autonomy-supportive coaching, controlling coaching, and motivational climate as predictors of motivational regulations.
2. Examine mediators such as basic psychological need satisfaction and coach-athlete relationship quality.
3. Use multi-institution samples and, where feasible, longitudinal designs to track motivation across a season.
4. Report psychometric properties (e.g., reliability coefficients) for the adapted instruments in the study sample.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings accumulated and analyzed by the researchers, the current study has formulated the following conclusions: The selected softball and baseball athletes perceived their coaches as demonstrating a moderate degree of respect, indicating generally positive but not consistently exceptional etiquette; The athletes reported strong levels of sport motivation, showing high intrinsic and extrinsic drive regardless of their perceptions of coach behavior; and statistical analysis revealed that coach etiquette had no significant impact on either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.

Based on the study results, which generally showed high mean scores ranging from 3.0 to 4.0 across most indicators, it is evident that athletes perceive their coaches as practicing positive and respectful etiquette. The researchers recommend the following points for future studies, based on the conclusions drawn, to further enhance and expand the understanding of this topic: coaches are encouraged to continue strengthening positive etiquette such as fairness, respectful communication, and professionalism to ensure consistent and supportive interactions with athletes; coaches should maintain open feedback channels, allowing athletes to express concerns or suggestions freely, to improve approachability and reinforce a healthier coach–athlete dynamic; the athletic department should provide continuous, regular training for coaches on communication, ethical leadership, and athlete-centered coaching; and future researchers may investigate other factors that influence athlete motivation, such as team culture, peer support, or coaching style, to better understand the complex relationship between coaches and athlete engagement

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest that arose among the participants of the study, the researchers, the athletic department, and the university.

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