

Session: **Research for management and marketing II.**

Abstract nr: **EASM-0050**

### **An examination of varying foci and bases of athlete commitment and their relationship with team performance**

*B. Turner*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Ohio State University, Sport Management, Columbus, USA*

turner.409@osu.edu

Commitment has been a popular topic in sport management literature for several years. However, a majority of these studies have focused on coaches (e.g., Chelladurai & Ogasawara, 2003; Turner, 2007, 2008) and athletic administrators (e.g., Pack, 2005; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004b). Despite the positive findings in these studies for a variety of outcome variables, very few studies have examined maybe the most prominent group for any sport organization – the athletes.

The general consensus today is that commitment is multidimensional in nature (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Meyer and Allen (1991) originally conceptualized organizational commitment as having two dimensions – affective commitment (AC; an emotional attachment to the organization) and continuance commitment (CC; costs associated with leaving the organization). They later added a third dimension – normative commitment (NC; obligation to stay). These varying natures of employee commitment have generally been labeled bases of commitment (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986).

Meyer and Allen's initial conceptualization focused on commitment to the organization; however, recent studies have extended their three-component model to other foci. Vandenberghe, Bentein, and Stinglhamber (2004) found strong support for examining commitment to supervisor and to work group. These two foci, along with their organization, appear relevant for athletes on team sports. These athletes are recruited, trained, and work closely with their "supervisor" (i.e., their coach); similarly, they must work together and have frequent interactions with their "work group" (i.e., their teammates).

Performance is arguably the most important variable for any sport organization. In team sports, this measure is typically the won-loss record of the team. Unfortunately, studies examining the relationship between commitment and performance have produced mixed results. However, "...even small changes in employee performance can have a significant impact on the organization's bottom line" (Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 39). In the current study, athletes can be viewed as employees of the sport organization.

Only a few studies to date have examined athletes' commitment. Scanlan et al. (1993) developed the Sport Commitment Model to investigate athlete's commitment to their respective sports. Additionally, Raedeke (1997) examined burnout from a commitment perspective. However, neither of these studies examined the relationship between commitment and performance. Because of the importance of athletes in the overall success of sport teams, the purpose of this study was to examine these individuals' commitment. Specifically, the present study extends previous organizational commitment research by studying the multidimensionality of athlete

commitment and its relationship to the performance of their teams.

Athletes from 10 team sports at a large University in the United States were selected to participate in this study. A total of 143 questionnaires were collected, with 62.9% ( $n=90$ ) coming from female athletes and 37.1% ( $n=53$ ) coming from male athletes.

Items from Meyer, Allen, and Smith's (1993) scale were used to measure athletes' AC, CC and NC to their organization (in this case, their university), coach, and team. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to each on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Because of the generally low reliability estimates for the three CC measures, it was decided to drop this base and focus on AC and NC for the rest of the study. Performance was measured by the won-loss record of each individual athlete's team.

Initial results from the study showed a positive correlation only between coach commitment (both AC and NC) and performance. Organizational and team commitment were not related to performance. This finding is congruent with Becker et al. (1996) who claimed "researchers and human resource professionals concerned with employee performance should focus their efforts on commitment to supervisors rather than on that to organizations.... Enhancing commitment to a supervisor's goals and values – via leadership training, socialization, and team building, for instance – would affect performance to a greater extent than would increasing commitment to an organization" (p. 477). Further results based on subgroup differences and implications for practitioners based on the findings from this study will be discussed in further detail during the presentation.