

The role of leadership in a national team's success

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Every elite football team wants to maximize their success. Especially in international football, smaller footballing countries need to perform well as underdogs when pursuing qualification to the group stage phase of international tournaments. With limited player options, development of leadership within the team might be one solution to achieve better results. The purpose of this study was to find out team members' perceptions on what kind of leadership behaviours and leadership structures occur in a men's football national team participating in the UEFA Euro 2020 and how those are connected to the team's success. Due to the precise nature of the target sample, we applied a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five coaches and two players. The interviews were analysed with a hybrid approach to thematic analysis. The results emphasized the importance of team cohesion between the coaching staff, between players and the whole team. Coaches felt that with a particular investment on the team's psychological wellbeing they can get the team to overachieve. Coaches' leadership behaviour was seen as a big part of the team's success by all the interviewees. The effectiveness of peer leaders amongst the players was explained by their unselfish personalities and small egos and work ethic. Our study suggests that paying more attention and investing to the leadership of coaches and players, team's chances of success could be increased without player changes. To be able to put these results into practice, a leadership development section could be introduced to coach education programs.

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