

# Leadership study hints that age beats height

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Height and weight data of almost 3,000 athletes from the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games was analyzed for the University of Melbourne study.  
Credit: Flickr

Professor Mark Elgar, an expert in evolutionary biology and animal

behaviour from the School of BioSciences, analysed data from elite-level team sports to shine a light on the nature of leadership.

"Conventional wisdom holds that leaders, in business and politics, are picked on the basis of their physical stature, where taller and bigger suggests a better leader," Prof Elgar said.

"I wanted to know if this is true in sport," he added.

Prof Elgar analysed the height and weight data of 2,801 athletes at the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games across a range of team sports, including basketball, football, wheelchair rugby and hockey.

"Perhaps unsurprisingly, team captains were no taller than their teammates," Prof Elgar said.

"But in almost all [sports](#), team captains were significantly older than their teammates, so it seems like age is a big factor when it comes to selection."

While the study found no evidence that older captains steered their team to win medals or gain higher scores per game, there was a measureable impact on team discipline.

Teams with older captains were typically penalised less per game than teams with younger captains.

"So there are advantages to having an older captain simply because he or she seems to be better equipped at reducing ill discipline within the team," Prof Elgar said.

"And in the long term, this may translate into team success."

The results of the study have been published in international journal, *The Leadership Quarterly*.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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