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**IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO THE LONGEVITY OF ATHLETIC COACHING: A
CASE STUDY OF A NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INTERCOLLEGIATE
ATHLETIC CONFERENCE**

By

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Division of Educational Leadership

Superintendent Program
In the Graduate School
The University of South Dakota
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DOCTORAL COMMITTEE

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ABSTRACT

Significant research regarding longevity existed for many professions. However, very little research was conducted on longevity for small college athletic coaches. This case study sought to identify barriers that affected athletic coaches who served at small colleges in the Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC). Participants in this study were current head athletic coaches in the GPAC with at least 15 years of experience.

The research concluded that each of the participants in the study was a transformational leader who desired to impact and influence young people beyond their sport. This study of eight athletic coaches revealed themes pertinent to coaching longevity: (a) familiarity; (b) supportive relationships; (c) impact on student-athletes; and (d) balance and flexibility. Each of the eight athletic coaches interviewed graduated from small colleges and five served at their alma maters. Supportive relationships were valued by the eight athletic coaches as they cited family members, colleagues, and college administration as being vital to their longevity.

Small college presidents and athletic directors should establish initiatives and programs that help spouses and families acclimate to the campus and local community. All of the eight coaches interviewed commented on their families feeling connected to the institution and communities they resided in. Lastly, limiting non-coaching duties for athletic coaches would increase the prospect of the athletic coaches remaining in their current positions. Because athletic coaching required arduous hours, few non-coaching duties ameliorated burnout.



Dr. David Swank

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2020, I innocently set off on this professional journey to become a better leader and role model for my children and grandchildren. The reality was that I never forecasted just how arduous it is to complete a doctoral degree. This has been a life-altering endeavor that required more patience and persistence than I expected.

There are many people to whom I owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude for their contributions to this process. The completion of this dissertation could not have been possible without the assistance, guidance, and support of many different individuals. My wife, Shawn, truly allowed for this project to be completed. Without her by my side, I would never have been able to finish. Her love and understanding of my taking on this endeavor inspired me. Dustin, Courtney, Marcus, Erika, and Caleb, my children, provided understanding when this study required my attention. Watson, Gracen, Landon, and Selah, my grandchildren, allowed Papa to dedicate time to my studies. My mom and dad have given me so much. Thank you for believing in me. Their examples of hard work and belief in the importance of education continue to be a guiding light in my life. My mom passed away during the writing of this dissertation, which was extremely difficult, but her life's witness and testimony were the motivation I needed to finish this task.

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Finally, thanks be to God for providing me with the desire to complete this dissertation (Colossians 3:17), and for providing individuals to help support me through the process

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The head athletic coach was the key figure responsible for leading the athletic team and fostering a positive experience for student-athletes. As Hardman and Jones (2011) stated, “The coach, as the central cog in the sports environment, has moral responsibilities reaching beyond the purely technical and tactical” (p. 346). The scope of an athletic coach’s responsibilities was immense, going well beyond the field of competition. The ever-evolving landscape of collegiate athletics required coaches to fundraise for their programs, recruit student-athletes nationwide and sometimes internationally, and serve as academic advisors (Hancock, 2019).

“Coaching is potentially a very rewarding pursuit due to the joy of working with aspiring athletes, the challenge of building a successful program, satisfaction derived from teaching sport skills, and the opportunity to facilitate athletes’ psychosocial development” (Raedeke, 2004, p. 333). The opportunity to stay involved in a sport they were passionate about while guiding young people was motivating for many athletic coaches. Raedeke (2004) also elaborated on potential reasons athletic coaches elected to depart the profession and pursue other career opportunities. The demands associated with serving as an athletic coach prompted them to seek employment in different fields with more defined working hours, higher salaries, and wages that were less visible to the general public and had lower incidences of career burnout. Accordingly, athletic coaching longevity was affected by numerous factors such as burnout, organizational support, and work-family conflict (Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Mazerolle et al., 2008).

The impact burnout had on coaching longevity was undisputed and many researchers concluded that transformational leadership, versus transactional leadership, stymied burnout and exhaustion (Brown, 2020; Burton & Peachey, 2009; Dawson, 2019). Research also indicated that burnout was significantly higher among athletes when they were coached by someone also

experiencing exhaustion and burnout; emotionally exhausted coaches were noted for providing less instruction, providing less guidance within the team, and were viewed as caring less for members of the athletic team (see González-García et al., 2019; Price & Weiss, 2000).

The adverse effects of emotional exhaustion and burnout were far-reaching. Athletic coaches who experienced exhaustion naturally impacted their families and student-athletes under their charges (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Raedeke (2004) noted that athletic coaches had the propensity to have a transformational impact on the athletes under their charges, but commented many athletic coaches left the profession before they reached middle age and prior to completely acquiring the teaching and coaching skills to fully influence young people. Because transformational leadership decreased burnout and exhaustion, universities, school districts, and businesses intentionally inserted leadership philosophies into the fabric of their organizations (Clopton et al., 2009; Goodger et al., 2007).

Transformational athletic coaches valued and prized holistic development for both their student-athletes and themselves. Transformational athletic coaches did not compartmentalize their ethos and philosophies. Rather, the values and principles that guided transformational athletic coaches appeared in all facets of their lives (Arnold, 2022; Burton & Peachey, 2009). As a result, transformational athletic coaches' daily activities and duties were intertwined and complemented one another. Thus, the quality of work a transformational athletic coach demonstrated on campus permeated their family and civic lives as well. Therefore, transformational coaches were not as susceptible to burnout as they had a self-awareness protecting them from the perils associated with working an inordinate number of hours or placing too much emphasis on winning athletic contests (Hebard et al., 2021; Vealey et al., 1992).

Athletic coaching, like many professions, was not a compartmentalized occupation. While it might be possible to contain work and non-work duties and activities to an office, it was nearly impossible to limit the mental and emotional components of the profession from spilling over into all facets of an athletic coach's life. Spillover was neither negative nor positive. However, Grzywacz and Marks (2000) confirmed that negative spillover was more apt to occur than positive spillover. As it related to athletic coaching, research confirmed that a behavioral spillover occurred. Bopp et al. (2015) conducted a study of 348 NCAA head coaches and learned that job satisfaction and life satisfaction were positively correlated. Knowing this correlation, presidents and athletic directors who supervised athletic coaches would be wise to provide guidance and education on providing structures and supports for athletic coaches who reported to them.

Qualitative research conducted by McLean and Mallett (2012) found that athletic coaches were motivated to remain in their positions due to four primary reasons: (a) coaches enjoyed being connected to the sports they coached; (b) athletic coaches appreciated the opportunities to simultaneously develop holistically with the athletes under their care; (c) coaches had high expectations for exemplary performance placed upon coaches; and (d) athletic coaches were enamored with the passion and intensity that accompanied athletic competition. Athletic coaches naturally possessed an innate desire to remain connected to the sports that oftentimes served as a vehicle for their own personal development. Further, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) studied the underpinnings and motivations for why individuals desired to serve as athletic coaches. Their research found athletic coaches possessed a "well-developed personal philosophy, a compelling and clear vision of success, the need to pull together the right people and manage them effectively, and the creation of an optimal environment where these people can thrive and thus

realize the vision” (pp. 232–233). Athletic coaches structured philosophies and ethos that guided them in their professional endeavors.

A common career path for athletic coaches consisted of playing multiple sports during the formative years of middle school and high school, attending college, and then embarking upon a career in athletic coaching upon graduating from college. Not uncommonly, athletic coaches were immersed in athletics since elementary and middle school and likely desired to remain in the athletic sphere because they had positive sports experiences in their histories. Due to their passionate involvement in sports, athletic coaches had the innate affinity to remain in the profession (Brown, 2020). Thus, when athletic coaches elected to pursue another career, they most often did so not because an alternative career path was attractive, but rather because athletic coaching was no longer fulfilling to them (Raedeke et al., 2000).

Relationship to Research

I resonate with research conducted by Brown (2020), Hancock (2019), Hardman and Jones (2011), and McLean and Mallett (2012) when they alluded to an unhealthy work-life balance as I worked an inordinate amount of hours when I was intent on winning athletic contests. In my own experience, I served as a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) head men’s basketball coach for nine years. Before that, I coached several sports at the middle and high school levels. Becoming an athletic coach was my chief goal as a high school student. I was positively impacted by my own coaches and was motivated to convey a favorable experience to those under my charge. Moreover, I loved sports for the thrill and excitement that paralleled the opportunity to assist young people in their personal development. Being an athletic coach was all I ever envisioned myself doing.

In 2009, I accepted a head men's basketball position in a Midwestern conference that was part of the NAIA, comprised of 10 institutions. After coaching for several seasons, I was alarmed at the turnover rate of head men's basketball coaches in the league of which I was a part. The 2017–2018 basketball season was my final year of coaching. From 2010–2018, a total of 31 individuals served as head men's basketball coaches in the conference where my institution was a member. At present, to the best of the author's knowledge, no research existed on the retention rates of men's basketball coaches at the NAIA level.

As I moved from my coaching role and into the role of director of athletics, I wanted to understand why head athletic coaches were leaving their positions. From my own experiences, most head athletic coaches I was associated with were leaving the profession entirely because they were no longer motivated to coach. Most used the term “burnout” when explaining the reasons for resigning. Some alluded to work-family conflict. I could identify with them as I was emotionally fatigued during my final two seasons of coaching.

Throughout this study herein, this researcher learned what affected athletic coaching longevity at the collegiate level. Longevity referred to a term of 15 or more years held by an athletic coach (Abrahamsen & Chroni, 2021; Gehring, 2002). While an athletic coach was influential in the lives of teenagers and young adults, athletic coaching turnover could negatively affect the student-athlete experience. Businesses, school districts, and universities benefited immensely when an athletic coaching staff remained intact for an extended period (Bidisha & Mukulesh, 2013).

Problem of Practice

The overriding problem was that head athletic coaches at small colleges experienced high turnover rates (Brown, 2020). Thus, this study herein aimed to understand what factors affected

head coaches leaving their sports at small colleges. Accordingly, this research aimed to help institutions improve coach retention at small colleges. This, in turn, has the potential to foster a positive student-athlete experience.

Purpose of Study

For the purposes of this study, my research efforts focused on small colleges, which comprised the Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC). Institutions in the GPAC were members of the NAIA. Schaeperkoetter (2017) defined small colleges as institutions with enrollments of 1,000–2,999 students. This research used the same qualification. Through developing an understanding of why head athletic coaches departed the profession, I aimed to make university presidents and athletic directors aware of barriers to athletic coaching longevity in small college athletics.

Retention of athletic staff permitted athletic directors to devote time to fundraising versus onboarding new employees. In addition, continuity among athletic teams that retained the head transpired in the way of recruiting new student-athletes to athletic teams, advising student-athletes academically, and enhancing loyalty between team members and the head coach. This study herein examined barriers that prevented athletic coaches from remaining in their roles as well as supports that retained athletic coaches through the framework of transformational leadership and spillover theory.

Research Questions

Two research questions were examined to identify barriers that prevented athletic coaching longevity. Both questions sought to discover why college athletic coaches remained in their positions for at least 15 years.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Does leadership style affect athletic coaching burnout at small colleges?
2. What is needed to enhance coaching longevity at small colleges?

The first research question desired to understand if an athletic coach's leadership style contributed to them remaining in the coaching profession. The second question sought to ascertain if an athletic coach's personal life promoted career longevity. Both questions sought to specifically understand more about coaching within a small college context. Organizations and universities could use this information to help them better retain their athletic coaching staff.

Definitions of Terms

Prior to conducting research, several terms must be defined. First, was a keen understanding of what was meant by the concept of *success* as it related to athletic coaching. The term *success* was used often to characterize outcomes such as goals and accomplishments. However, this expression as it relates to athletic coaching needed further clarification as it took on a slightly different connotation. In addition, the notion of retainment had to be established to understand the aim of this research herein. Athletic departments in higher education that repeatedly experienced high retention rates typically rendered higher marks in the classroom and in the athletic arena (Gardner, 2012; Stiemsma, 2010; Weight et al., 2021). In addition, the term longevity as it relates to athletic coaching was necessary to define. Finally, most research related to this study transpired at institutions with enrollments under 3,000 students. Thus, the term small college was succinctly defined. Career longevity was relative to various professions. Thus, understanding how the term intersected with athletic coaching was important to this research.

Burnout

A multidimensional syndrome of emotional, physical, or mental exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Nikolaos, 2012).

Coaching Success

Coaching success was imparting characteristics that fostered personal development, valuing process over product by establishing incremental measurable goals, promoting an environment in which discipline and accountability were present, and achieving athletic success by winning contests more regularly than losing (Collins et al., 2011).

Retention

Employee retention was “concerned with keeping or encouraging employees to remain in an organization for a maximum period of time” (Bidisha & Mukulesh, 2013, p. 8).

Longevity

Career longevity was “the persistence of an individual in his/her career over a long duration of time, typically over the greater portion of their career lifespan” (Gehring, 2002, p. 8).

Small Colleges

Small colleges were institutions with enrollments of 1,000–2,999 students (Schaeperkoetter, 2017).

Scope of Study

The GPAC was founded in 2000 and was comprised of 12 faith-based institutions in Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. By comparison, the geographical footprint of the GPAC was relatively small compared to the other conferences that comprised the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Each GPAC institution’s president was a member of the GPAC Council of Presidents (COP). The COP was responsible for the governance and oversight of the GPAC as this representative council upheld the conference constitution, passed relevant by-laws, and oversaw and enforced existing regulations and by-laws (GPAC, 2022). The GPAC was led by a commissioner and assistant commissioner. The GPAC,

like other athletic conferences, was governed by university presidents and led by a conference commissioner.

There was not a current GPAC president or athletic director who was in either of these roles when the conference was formed in 2000. Moreover, only one head athletic coach was in that same position in 2000. There were approximately 145 head coaches in the GPAC; 24 of these 145 head athletic coaches served in the GPAC for 10 or more years (GPAC, 2022). Historically, the offices of the president and athletic director collectively witnessed stability and consistency over the past two decades within the GPAC. This was not the case with head athletic coaches in the GPAC (2022) as turnover plagued the league since its inception. To this author's knowledge, no effort was made to keenly understand the reasons for head athletic coaches leaving the GPAC to pursue other career opportunities. The only known study on athletic coaching in the conference was conducted by Stiemsma (2010). Stiemsma's research focused on the job satisfaction of head coaches in the GPAC and found that coaches who perceived themselves as successful were also the most satisfied.

The research herein was conducted via a qualitative design, using a case study of head athletic coaches who served at least 15 years in the GPAC. The purpose of this study was to arm future presidents, athletic directors, and coaches with research to empower them to lessen athletic coaching turnover at small colleges. The study herein viewed the turnover issue from a combined perspective of spillover theory and transformational leadership.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational Leadership

According to Northouse (2018), a transformational leader "is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying

their needs, and treating them as full human beings. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership” (p. 263). Transformational leadership cared less about positional power and more about influencing others. To be effective, the relationship between the leader and the follower had to contain a high element of trust. Executed well, transformational leadership motivated and empowered followers to accomplish and achieve more than initially expected.

Further, Bass and Avolio (1994) maintained that transformational leadership had the potential to synergize a group or organization to perform work with greater quality and quantity than individuals who were emotionally detached in the workplace. Transformational leadership continued to gain traction into the 21st century as employees desired to be led well and empowered by their supervisors (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In short, employees yearned for more than merely an exchangeable working model in which the leader and employees coexisted but did not invest socially and emotionally invest in one another.

Most research regarding transformational leadership appeared in business and education literature (Northouse, 2018; Sarros & Santora, 2001). Northouse (2018) shared that transformational leadership yielded positive returns in the fields of business and education as individuals exhibited the desire to be governed well by their supervisors and were allowed to provide input on how they could positively impact organizations. Kouzes and Posner (2017) contributed to the sphere of leadership by stating transformational leadership revolved around the philosophy of inspiring and motivating people toward a shared vision to achieve goals at higher rates. The authors identified five leadership practices that were consistent with high-achieving schools: (a) exemplary leaders modeled the way; (b) inspired a shared vision; (c) challenged processes; (d) empowered others to act; and (e) recognized accomplishments. While Kouzes and

Posner's (2017) research focused on educational leadership, the principles and concepts applied to almost all professions.

Due to its success, transformational leadership was disseminated to many other professions. One of these professions was athletic coaching. Peachey et al. (2019) noted that "athletic departments considering instituting major revolutionary change should consider embracing transformational leadership at the top but complementing this with a transactional approach to focus on tasks and change implementation schedules" (p. 147).

Motivation and athletic performance were synonymous. Motivated athletes positioned themselves to be more successful in their pursuits. Halbrook et al. (2012) stated that athletes who were intrinsically motivated tended to compete without self-imposed mental and emotional parameters and expectations placed upon them by athletic coaches and parents, and were free to enjoy the sports they were participating in more so than externally motivated athletes. The authors stated that intrinsically motivated athletes enjoyed learning new techniques and strategies because taking on new challenges and risks was void of punitive consequences. Individuals who felt positive about their careers were also perceived to have a more enjoyable family life and were more committed to the institutions they served (Weight et al., 2021).

Spillover Theory

Spillover theory was first applied to the study of psychology and management in the 1980s, when researchers were curious about learning how work experiences might carry over and affect an individual's non-work experiences (Crouter et al., 1989; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Staines, 1980). Such non-work experiences included marriage, personal relationships, hobbies, and lifestyle choices. Behavioral spillover might be both positive and negative, depending on the experiences and quality of life that individuals experienced in their daily lives (Hanson et al.,

2006). Thus, spillover might generate momentum for some people by further enhancing quality of life, while serving as a stressor for others by compounding existing problems they might be encountering. Crouter et al. (1989) illustrated that spillover could impact personal lives by positively or adversely influencing individual well-being. Initially constructed to study economic change, research on the spillover concept took place in many sectors of society. Once anecdotal, spillover theory continued to build on relevant concrete data that confirmed the relationship between work and non-work experiences (Staines, 1980).

Interest in spillover theory in the field of education, athletics, and psychology continued to manifest. Hyun (2020) asserted that “behavioral spillover, indicating that one’s repeated behavior in one domain may become habits, scripts, or styles, which may affect behavior in another domain. Such behavioral spillover is particularly frequent when role requirements in two situations are similar” (p. 35). As mental and emotional well-being continued to be a focus for policymakers, employers, and local agencies, understanding that spillover naturally occurred from one’s occupation to non-work engagements was paramount. For instance, Lefdal and De Jong (2019) found that school superintendents experienced stress in their positions which invariably affected other aspects of their lives. The study by Lefdal and De Jong (2019) also noted that family and peer support was vital for stress reduction.

While it might be possible to intentionally compartmentalize work and non-work duties and activities, it was especially challenging to contain mental and emotional well-being from spilling over to various aspects of life. Grzywacz and Marks (2000) confirmed that negative spillover was more apt to occur than positive spillover. They maintained that both spouses working put additional stress on the work-home family dynamic.

In the realm of athletic coaching, research confirmed that a behavioral spillover effect was transpiring in this field as well. Bopp et al. (2015) conducted a study of 348 NCAA head coaches and learned that job satisfaction and life satisfaction were positively related. Furthermore, Bopp et al. (2015) found that males were more apt to experience higher degrees of life satisfaction if their work environments were affirming and rewarding; whereas, females were more likely to experience higher degrees of work satisfaction if their home environments were more stable and secure. Given this research, employers should strive to provide an enriching experience for their staff to improve both retainment and overall productivity within the workplace.

Organizational support was found to significantly impact the work-family dynamic and validated and supported the notion of behavioral spillover (Dixon & Sagas, 2007). In the athletic coaching context, collegiate athletic departments that demonstrated support for athletic coaches were likely to have satisfied staff who invested more deeply in the student-athletes they served and led (Dixon & Sagas, 2007). Furthermore, transformational leadership and spillover theory were congruent with each other as each sought to improve the quality of life for both the leader and follower. Both concepts were founded on the notion that personal growth was continuous as opposed to stagnant and static. As transformational leadership and spillover related to athletic coaching, it was surmised that athletic coaches who were intrinsically motivated and supported by the organizations that employed them would invariably remain in their athletic coaching positions for greater spans of time.

Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter one contained an introduction that provided context for the study, a theoretical framework, a set of research questions that guided the study,

and definitions of key terms. Chapter two provides a review of literature that addressed leadership styles, burnout, organizational support, and the work-home relationship. Chapter three outlines the methodology used for this study. Chapter four conveys the coaching interview findings; chapter five disseminates the findings of this study via a podcast.

Summary

This research aimed to discover if leadership style had a mitigating effect on burnout and if an athletic coach's support network contributed to career longevity. The literature indicated transformational leaders cared little about positional power and motivated leaders to impact people under their influence. Moreover, transformational leadership was centered around trust and employees' desire to be led by a transformational leader because their professional careers were more enriching. Similarly, spillover theory maintained that compartmentalizing work and non-work activities were challenging. Job satisfaction and work satisfaction of athletic coaches at small colleges were positively correlated. Spillover was neither negative nor positive but rather dependent on the life experiences of an athletic coach.

This research herein desired to understand if the leadership style of an athletic coach ameliorated coaching burnout and promoted career longevity at small colleges. While factors such as personality, work-family conflict, and perceived organizational support influenced athletic coaching longevity; leadership style proved to be the most influential variable determining longevity. This study herein investigated athletic coaching leadership style and the impact of an athletic coach's personal life on career longevity at small colleges. The aspiration was this study would promote interest and future research concerning athletic coaching longevity within the small college context.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

A body of research existed regarding the topic of athletic coaching longevity (e.g., Abrahamsen & Chroni, 2021; Brown, 2020; London-Hill, 2019; Mielke, 2007). Furthermore, a plethora of research existed regarding the reasons individuals opted to leave the athletic coaching profession (e.g., Goodger et al., 2007; Hancock et al., 2019; Madigan et al., 2019; Stiemsma, 2010; Tashman et al., 2010). Combined, these findings revealed why a relatively low number of college athletic coaches remained in the athletic coaching profession for the duration of their careers. As one example, of the nearly 145 head coaches that served in the GPAC, only one sitting head coach was over the age of 60 (GPAC, 2022).

Horn (2018) detailed the correlation between burnout and coaching longevity. Namely, Horn noted emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were two reasons why athletic coaches left the profession. Kelley (1990) remarked the pressure associated with producing a winning team weighed heavily on athletic coaches and accounted for athletic coaches leaving the profession at the conclusion of each season.

Reasons for athletic coaches departing the profession were many. Few professions received the scrutiny that college athletic coaches received (Brown, 2020). Performing under the magnifying glass of the public contributed to short coaching tenures as athletic coaches experienced significant stress due to public criticism (Dawson, 2019). In addition, Dixon and Sagas (2007) concluded that work-family conflict contributed to athletic coaches resigning from their duties. Further, athletic coaches left their vocations before retirement age due to a combination of work-family conflict, burnout, and a lack of perceived organizational support (Abrahamsen & Chroni, 2021).

Coaching longevity in intercollegiate athletics was impacted by numerous factors. For example, the amount of non-coaching duties athletic coaches were asked to perform at their institutions had a direct correlation to reported levels of job satisfaction (Brown, 2020). Head athletic coaches required to execute additional duties beyond their coaching assignments were more apt to leave their positions (Stiemsma, 2010). A thorough uncovering of why this was the case was potentially important to improving retention rates among athletic coaches.

Leadership Style

Transformational Leadership

The athletic coaching profession was saturated with coaches who employed both transformational and transactional leadership styles. Both philosophies extracted successful athletic coaches. Transformational leadership was studied thoroughly, beginning with the contributions of political sociologist James Burns in the 1970s (Northouse, 2018). Burns was particularly interested in the concepts of *transformational* vs. *transactional* as they related to motivation and leadership. Transformational leadership was about empowering people and helping them feel good about themselves so that they might realize their full personal and professional potential. Transactional leadership was distinguished by a management style that consistently relied on rewards when goals were met and punishments when performers failed to meet objectives.

Burns (2012) surmised that an authentic relationship between the leader and the employee would result in the said employee having an enhanced level of motivation that would generate a greater performance outcome. In addition to an increased level of motivation, the relationship between the leader and employee also experienced an increased degree of trust and compatibility. Transformational leaders strived to develop authentic and meaningful

relationships with their employees. The transformational leadership approach gained in popularity in recent years as individuals in the modern workforce were intrinsically motivated and wanted to overcome uncertainty by being in control of their success and being recognized and commended for their contributions to the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2016).

Notably, transformational athletic coaches were not necessarily more successful in competition compared to those labeled as transactional; however, transformational coaches had deeper relationships with student-athletes and were more successful in other professional pursuits after they exited the coaching arena as compared to autocratic athletic coaches (Dawson, 2019). Further, research indicated that transformational coaches were motivated to provide their athletes with an impactful experience, which also aided in their personal and professional development. Kao et al. (2021) reported that “transformational coaches invest extra efforts in cultivating athlete development. In return, the developed athlete competence/skills promote their independency from their coaches and are associated with a decrease in perceived coaching competency over time” (p. 51). Northouse (2018) summed up transformational leadership when he stated, “Transformational leaders are effective at working with people. They build trust and foster collaboration with others. Transformational leaders encourage others and celebrate their accomplishments” (p. 281).

Thus, transformational leaders valued and prized holistic development for both their employees and themselves. Transformational leaders did not compartmentalize their ethics and philosophies. Rather, the values and principles that guided transformational leaders appeared in all facets of their lives (Northouse, 2018). As a result, the daily activities and duties of transformational leaders were intertwined, complementing one another. The quality of work a

transformational athletic coach demonstrated on campus permeated their family and civic lives as well (Bass & Avilio, 1994; Burton & Peachey, 2009).

Transactional Leadership

Like transformational leadership, transactional leadership was widely used in the fields of education and business, focusing on the leader-follower relationship. Transactional leadership was defined by Burton & Peachey (2009) as: “The process of managing by contract and reward, and on clarifying responsibilities of subordinates and then evaluating how successfully those responsibilities are carried out” (p. 246). As it related to athletics, transactional leaders motivated players by way of playing time or the prospect of winning an athletic contest. Transactional leadership was characterized by a highly structured management style that consisted of regular checks and balances. When goals were met, rewards were distributed. However, when performers failed to meet objectives, punishments might be delved out with the philosophy that motivational levels would increase and subsequently outputs would improve.

By contrast, transformational leadership sought to intrinsically motivate athletes. Whereas, transactional leaders tended to use strategies and initiatives that motivated extrinsically. An example of attempting to motivate extrinsically might be the threat of removing playing time for poor performance or using additional physical conditioning when goals and objectives were not met (Halbrook et al., 2012).

Athletes under the charge of a transactional leader were influenced by external motivational strategies. External motivational techniques could inhibit athletes in their athletic endeavors because their desires to avoid punishment prevented them from taking risks during play (Halbrook et al., 2012). For example, when high school athletes became more concerned

about performing well so they could obtain college scholarships versus playing sports for pleasure, their motivation could produce negative results during competitive play.

Both intrinsic (transformational leadership) and extrinsic (transactional leadership) motivation proved to extract desired results during an athletic performance. However, athletes who were motivated using extrinsic techniques were found to demonstrate higher levels of motivation for a *shorter* time (Kingston et al., 2006). While Kingston et al.'s (2016) study confirmed that athletic performance results could be obtained under the influence of more than one leadership style, this study sought to ascertain if leadership styles contributed to athletic coaching longevity. This research concluded that athletic coaching burnout was a state that did impact career longevity.

Athletic Coaching Burnout

Historical Context

The numerous athletic coaching job postings at high school and college levels verified that coaching turnover was remarkable. While the reasons for athletic coaches departing the profession were many, burnout was the leading cause of athletic coaches departing the profession (Brown, 2020; Lundkvist et al., 2014; Raedeke, 2004). Research on job burnout began extensively in the 1970s in the United States.

Most studies attempted to understand why people grew tired and approached stages of exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001). Several themes emerged from research conducted in the 1970s and 1980s: (a) emotional exhaustion was a natural response to work overload; (b) people attempted to combat burnout by way of cynicism; and (c) detaching oneself from work was a natural coping mechanism for individuals who felt fatigued (Maslach et al., 2001). The same burnout findings that research pioneers learned about in the 1970s and 1980s held true in athletic coaching (Price & Weiss, 2000). Burnout syndrome was studied extensively for decades among

athletic coaches (Brown, 2020; Goodger et al., 2007; Kelley, 1994; Madigan et al., 2018).

Burnout, a chronic condition, had long been a significant factor for athletic coaches leaving the profession (Raedeke, 2004). However, a challenge when researching burnout was the large scope associated with the concept.

The basic definition of burnout was devised by Maslach and Jackson (1981) when they constructed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). In this definition, burnout was explained as having three components: (a) emotional exhaustion; (b) depersonalization; and (c) a lack of personal accomplishments. Emotional exhaustion was characterized by being overwhelmed, emotionally and physically depleted, and having insufficient energy. Depersonalization was signaled by withdrawn behaviors or feelings of detachment. A lack of personal accomplishment indicated feelings of inadequacy or inefficacy. Burnout was an important factor related to athletic coaching effectiveness and longevity (Abrahamsen & Chroni, 2021; Goodger et al, 2007; Lundkvist et al., 2014; Madigan et al., 2019; Price & Weiss, 2000; Short et al., 2018).

The MBI was an instrument consisting of 22 questions, divided into three subscales, and was used widely by human resource departments (Brown, 2020). The MBI was also used extensively to study athletic coaching burnout, where it was typically the instrument of choice. (Lundkvist et al., 2014). Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and coaching accomplishments (efficacy), the components associated with the concept of athletic coaching burnout, were interrelated while also having their own unique characteristics. Lundkvist et al.'s (2014) study indicated that succinctly defining and accurately measuring athletic coaching burnout was challenging. Because burnout was relative to individuals, concisely defining and labeling the term relative to athletic coaching was problematic (Lundkvist, 2014).

The expansive definition of burnout presented challenges to researchers. Researchers concluded burnout was a real condition, but debate persisted on how many individuals truly suffered from it (Malesic, 2022). Longitudinal data on athletic coaching burnout subjects was lacking as most studies were cross-sectional (Raedeke, 2004). Ample time to conduct thorough research proved to be a barrier, according to Raedeke (2004). Similarly, appropriate athletic coaching subjects who were experiencing or experienced burnout were difficult to secure.

Price and Weiss (2000) indicated that finding athletic coaches who were truly burned out could be arbitrary and problematic. Subjects who voluntarily chose to participate in studies might not actually be experiencing burnout or showing high levels of coaching burnout. Moreover, some athletic coaches who were burned out might desire to avoid being research participants as they viewed doing so would serve as an additional stressor (Horn, 2018).

Burnout rates for athletic coaches were estimated to be comparable to those in other professions (Madigan et al., 2018). Madigan et al. (2018) asserted most professions, including education, reported burnout rates of around 15%. Schaffran et al. (2016) noted that many studies on burnout among athletic coaches utilized self-report questionnaires. This method was only as reliable as the subjects who agreed to participate in such studies. Further, as the concept of burnout could be ambiguous, this additionally presented challenges for researchers using survey instruments. Nevertheless, enough data existed to verify that the state of burnout was a real phenomenon that adversely affected athletic coaches.

Emotional Exhaustion

Of the three components that comprised burnout, emotional exhaustion was the element contributing most to the state of burnout (Horn, 2018). Emotional exhaustion was especially prevalent among female athletic coaches. In her study of 249 college athletic coaches, Kelley

(1994) discovered that female college athletic coaches were more prone to emotional exhaustion as they felt compelled to take extra time to nurture student-athletes in a manner male athletic coaches were not expected to do. Kelley (1994) also concluded that emotional exhaustion tended to reach its highest levels at the conclusion of the athletic season when pressure mounted for teams to win and advance in tournament play. Kelley's (1994) findings were consistent with studies conducted by Kelley & Gill (1993) and Vealey et al. (1992), which indicated burnout and emotional exhaustion could be accentuated by personal and situational factors, such as gender, years of experience, and competition levels.

More recent studies on the significance of emotional exhaustion contributing to the state of burnout were validated by Horn (2018) and Lee and Chelleadurai (2016). While depersonalization and professional accomplishment both impacted athletic coaching burnout, emotional exhaustion was the leading contributor to those who articulated intense feelings of fatigue, loneliness, and stress (Horn, 2018). When athletic coaches felt emotionally depleted and failed to find joy and meaning in their work, the experience of both the athletic coach and student-athlete was diminished (Burton & Peachey, 2009).

The impact burnout had on coaching longevity was undisputed and additional factors contributing to burnout syndrome beyond what Maslach and Jackson (1981) and Lundkvist et al. (2014) identified included emotional stressors, interpersonal stressors, and cynicism (Brown, 2020). Notably, coaches who were emotionally exhausted were noted for providing less instruction, providing less guidance within the team, and were viewed as caring less for members of the athletic team (González-García et al., 2019; Price & Weiss, 2000). The adverse effects of emotional exhaustion and burnout were far-reaching. An athletic coach experiencing exhaustion impacted their family and student-athletes under their charge (Dixon & Bruening, 2007).

Burnout was multidimensional as it affected the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual capacities of athletic coaches (Maslach et al., 2001). Over time, the chronic attributes of burnout adversely impacted the ability of the athletic coach to nurture athletes and derive joy in their occupation. Raedeke (2004) noted that once an athletic coach experienced emotional exhaustion and burnout, it was essentially a *permanent* state. As a result, identifying and curbing burnout among athletic coaches was proven to be arduous (Raedeke, 2004).

Non-Coaching Duties

As Westfall (2018) stated, most coaches naturally understood they were expected to perform duties beyond merely coaching student-athletes. Moreover, athletic coaches were often asked to execute duties that were not included in their initial job descriptions when they were hired. One example was “serving as the team’s de facto athletic trainer, organizing team fundraisers, supervising athletes in the weight room, being an amateur sports psychologist, mentoring student-athletes, and teaching life skills” (Westfall, 2018, p. 108).

The scope of non-coaching duties for athletic coaches varied among institutions. Non-coaching duties might include adjunct or assistant teaching responsibilities or athletic game management duties (Stiemsma, 2010). Further, small college athletics was a unique lifestyle in that many athletic coaches accepted positions with the understanding that additional responsibilities had the potential to coincide with their coaching duties.

Athletic coaches welcomed dual responsibilities but expected the bulk of their workloads to be in the coaching arena (Stiemsma, 2010). Gorczynski et al. (2020) stated that “the number of stressors coaches face has a direct impact on their mental health” (p. 4). Staff members were typically passionate about coaching and could thrive in that arena when given adequate time each week to focus on pertinent tasks associated with coaching. However, when forced

to complete numerous non-coaching tasks for the institution, job satisfaction began to deteriorate. As Clopton et al. (2009) asserted:

Intercollegiate athletic coaching profession is a unique profession in that many demands upon personal and family time, personal resources, and more are enacted upon each coach. While a small percentage of today's college coach receives overwhelming financial rewards, the vast majority of coaches are drawn to the profession for the love and enjoyment of competing and performing the intricacies of the very job of coaching itself. (pp. 79–80)

There were 1,352 institutions that comprised the NCAA and NAIA governing organizations (NCAA, 2022; NAIA, 2022). Of this number, only 69 institutions belonged to a group of universities known as Power Five schools. Power Five institutions invested significantly more funds for salaries, athletic scholarships, and facility enhancements than their peers (Weight et al., 2021). Athletic coaches receiving robust salaries that were annually larger than seven figures coached at Power Five institutions (Wanless et al., 2019). However, like teachers who entered the field of education, most college coaches embarked upon a career in collegiate athletics to impact young people versus seeking robust salaries (Brown, 2020).

When non-coaching workloads become too comprehensive and demanding, athletic coaches felt compelled to work longer hours to be fully prepared to coach their teams (Kelley, 1990). Excessive hours each week potentially contributed to the chronic nature of burnout. An example of this was excessive hours for the sake of perfectionism.

Perfectionism

Hill and Curran (2016) stated that perfectionism was a combination of exceedingly high standards and a preoccupation with extreme self-critical evaluation. Perfectionism was a

characteristic found to contribute to increased incidences of athletic coaching burnout. Individuals with perfectionist tendencies found stressful situations more threatening and less manageable (Tashman et al., 2010). Athletic coaches often felt pressured to perform well in competitions as a portion of their annual evaluations was typically based on winning athletic contests. This repeated pressure eventually led some athletic coaches to depart from the profession, with perfectionism being a contributor to an inordinate amount of pressure they felt or placed on themselves (Tashman et al., 2010).

Tashman et al. (2010) remarked that athletic coaches with perfectionist tendencies also believed they lacked sufficient resources, such as adequate time, appropriate scholarship money, and necessary program staffing to be successful, thus creating increased levels of stress, which invariably contributed to increased levels of burnout. Norris et al. (2017) found that many athletic coaches with perfectionist tendencies lacked adequate coping strategies. A person with perfectionist traits had to acquire appropriate coping skills; otherwise, they were especially susceptible to career burnout (Norris et al., 2017).

Lumpkin and Anshel (2012) revealed their participants overall felt favorable about their positions as collegiate athletic coaches as they expressed high levels of passion and enjoyment. However, those with perfectionist traits had difficulty delegating tasks, and, as a result, felt overwhelmed by the number of duties that needed to be executed. The inability to assign operational tasks to managers and assistant athletic coaches inevitably became a stressor for the head coach, which could lead to emotional exhaustion—the key tenant of athletic coaching burnout.

While organizations and institutions might contribute to athletic coaching burnout by requiring athletic coaches to execute excessive non-coaching responsibilities, individual factors,

such as perfectionism, among athletic coaches also propelled those in the athletic coaching profession to experience burnout and fatigue. Nevertheless, athletic coaching burnout affected those in the profession from all demographics (Raedeke, 2000). Yet, there were several individual factors, like perfectionism, that made athletic coaches more susceptible to coaching burnout. Higher incidences of burnout were reported in athletic coaches with high-intensity coaching styles, coaches who were transactional in nature, coaches who used extrinsic rewards to motivate athletes, female coaches overall, and athletic coaches with weak social support systems (Schaffran et al., 2016).

The same individual and personality traits, including perfectionism, that contributed to burnout in other professions were the same characteristics and traits that plagued athletic coaching burnout as well (Horn, 2018). Perfectionism was a personality characteristic that was inextricably linked to burnout. Also linked to burnout was efficacy, which was the belief that athletic coaches possessed the ability to impact learning and performance.

Efficacy

Efficacy was an important individual characteristic that successful athletic coaches likely possessed. A succinct definition of coaching efficacy was coined by Feltz et al. (1999) efficacy was “the extent to which coaches believe they have the capacity to affect the learning and performance of athletes” (p. 765). According to Feltz et al., athletic coaching efficacy was multidimensional as it was comprised of game strategy, motivation, teaching technique, and character building. In the athletic coaching profession, Feltz et al. (2008) stated that efficacy was one of the most important psychological states a coach had to possess. An athletic coach who possessed self-confidence naturally conveyed that same posture to one’s team and exhibited a

tenor of confidence that helped team members believe they could overcome obstacles and challenges.

Athletic coaching burnout could be the result of simultaneous variables negatively influencing the coach. Researchers linked efficacy to higher incidences of burnout. In their study using the Coaching Efficacy Scale devised by Feltz et al. (1999), Short et al. (2015) found that coaches with increased levels of coaching efficacy were more apt to be insulated against the stressors that were often associated with the athletic coaching profession. Short et al. (2015) established that low-efficacy coaches illustrated higher levels of emotional and physical exhaustion and found that low-efficacy coaches had higher burnout levels than high-efficacy coaches.

Specifically, Short et al. (2015) noticed that athletic coaches who possessed low levels of efficacy prior to the competitive season had higher burnout levels at the conclusion of the season. Thereby, athletic coaches with low levels of efficacy were more prone to leave the athletic coaching profession (Short et al., 2015). Athletic coaches who had high commitment levels but were less confident in their abilities to impact their athletes were more likely to experience burnout (Horn, 2018).

A confident athletic coach possessed the resiliency needed to endure an athletic season (Feltz et al., 2008). Athletic coaches were routinely scrutinized by school administrators, parents, fans, and student-athletes (Feltz et al., 1999). When athletic coaches no longer felt confident and empowered, their abilities to interact with key stakeholders was compromised, which had the potential to lead to further stress (Horn, 2018). When an athletic coach experienced a loss of confidence, the coach would compensate for that by dedicating more hours to the craft, which inextricably led to a work-life imbalance (Short et al., 2015).

Work Imbalance

The athletic coaching profession was exceptionally prone to life imbalance and work addiction (Hancock et al., 2019). Life balance and well-being received an extensive amount of research attention (Laney, 2021). Work addiction and life imbalance were characterized by higher levels of stress and anxiety, sleep disruption, and lower levels of quality relationships and friendships (Hancock et al., 2019). Several industries, by nature, presented challenges for acquiring a work-life balance. Athletic coaching at the intercollegiate level was potentially susceptible to work addiction due to unregulated hours and broad job descriptions.

Dixon and Bruening (2007) shared that an intense work setting consisting of athletic practices, recruiting, off-season workouts, staff meetings, and administrative and teaching responsibilities was an environment suited for individuals who were willing to work 12-hour days, six days a week. The premise within the profession was that satisfaction derived from athletic coaching often superseded valuable and meaningful relationships (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Often, athletic coaches found it acceptable to work long hours and saw it as a badge of courage when they put forth work weeks that exceeded 75 hours (Lumpkin & Anshel, 2012). Athletic coaches might enter the profession with the understanding that inconsistent work hours would be part of the fabric of their vocations. However, many athletic coaches were potentially not equipped to strike a healthy work-life balance when they embarked upon the athletic coaching profession (Lumpkin & Anshel, 2012).

Long hours might be rewarded by way of winning athletic contests and enhanced reputations because of their successes or could potentially harm the athletic coach and organization due to burnout and turnover. Working excessive hours was a delicate balance and was enticing due to the rewards derived from winning competitions. In their study of 245

collegiate athletic coaches and administrators, Hancock et al. (2019) found that participants suffered from higher levels of stress and anxiety and higher levels of sleep disturbance than the general population. Interestingly, the study also revealed higher levels of career satisfaction among the athletic coaches but lower levels of quality relationships and friendships.

Hancock et al.'s (2019) study related to research conducted by Horn (2018) which found that "there are associations between exhaustion and, both negative work-home and home-work interference" (p. 34). In essence, athletic coaching appeared to interfere with family dynamics, and home life could also interfere with athletic coaching. Young professionals were potentially not equipped to establish parameters surrounding an appropriate number of hours dedicated to athletic coaching and might fall prey to work-life imbalance and work addiction (Hancock et al., 2019).

Preventing Athletic Coaching Burnout

Institutions, athletic departments, and athletic coaches themselves, that desired to promote longevity and experience high retainment rates, should be motivated to readily identify markers of burnout and implement preventative measures to promote joy-filled work within the organizations they served (Kelley, 1994). Because burnout was a *chronic* condition, devising strategies to prevent burnout might be more advantageous than designing interventions to treat burnout: "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" (Kelley, 1994; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaffran et al., 2016). Supported by Raedeke (2004), athletic coaches must "strive for some degree of life balance and be encouraged to add energizers into their weekly schedule by identifying things they enjoy outside of coaching and make those things a priority" (p. 346).

Both Hancock (2019) and Horn (2018) spoke of the ills of work addiction as it related to retention and athletic coaching burnout. Burnout, along with work addiction, both presented

obvious, visible characteristics that were identifiable such as logging excessive work hours, working in isolation, weight loss or weight gain, poor skin color, and deteriorating relationships with colleagues and student-athletes (Hanock et al., 2019; Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Gill, 1993). The organization and supervisor that athletic coaches reported to bore a degree of responsibility in guiding their direct reports to live a versatile life that included meaningful activities beyond the realm of athletic coaching. Universities that encouraged a holistic lifestyle among their athletic coaching staff had the potential to stimulate a transformational experience within the organization. Accordingly, Horn (2018) commented:

Research has shown that those coaches who are able to find balance between work, social, family lifestyle have a much better chance of longevity and happiness within their coaching career, as opposed to those that struggle with this and experience the effects of coaching burnout. (p. 39)

While individual characteristics associated with burnout might be difficult for an institution to curb, promoting a holistic, transformational spirit within the university athletic department, which includes burnout education, might improve the quality of the work experience for athletic coaches.

This literature revealed many sub-themes that impacted the rate of athletic coaching burnout such as emotional exhaustion, the scope of non-coaching duties coaches were asked to perform, and individual characteristics like perfectionism, efficacy, and work imbalance. The extant literature also indicated that burnout among athletic coaches varied on an individual basis as coaches experienced and managed stress differently. Further, athletic coaching burnout did have a degree of ambiguity associated with it. Yet, the research undeniably asserted that athletic

coaching burnout adversely impacted many in the profession. Beyond burnout, work-family conflict was also a stressor many athletic coaches had to navigate.

Work-Family Conflict

Greenhaus and Powell (2003) defined work-family conflict as work and family responsibilities not being compatible with one another and in which one of the two domains was adversely affected. Thus, work responsibilities spilled over and interfered with family and vice versa, causing stress on the individual attempting to execute the dual roles. Researchers acknowledged that work could spill into the family (work-to-family) and into work (family-to-work) (see Boles et al., 2001; Crouter, 1989; Frone et al., 1997; Stains, 1980). Boles et al. (2001), Crouter (1989), Frone et al. (1997), and Stains (1980) also concluded that spillover could both enhance job and family satisfaction and also increase stress and tension in work-family dynamics.

Research on work-family conflict began in earnest in the early 2000s and continued into recent years (Boles et al., 2001; Byron, 2005; Cancino, 2019). Little research existed on work-family conflict as it related to athletic coaching, but a plethora of scholars demonstrated an interest in the tension between work and nonwork, especially the work-family conflict (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Collegiate athletics comprised a lifestyle that could potentially strain family relationships. A fluid working schedule that was accompanied by excessive hours and the demands of the profession compromised the home and family life of those employed in collegiate athletics (Mazerolle et al., 2008).

In their quest to achieve success, “reducing engagement in their profession is not an option in the context of a race for performance” (Joncheray et al., 2019, p. 457). Studies involving the work-family conflict in athletic coaching dynamics focused especially on female

athletic coaches (e.g., Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Eby et al., 2005; Inglis et al., 2000; and Sagas & Cunningham, 2005). Notably, in 1972, Title IX paved the way for female athletes to experience the same participation opportunities as their male counterparts. A generation of women who grew up in the post-Title IX era raised daughters who were beneficiaries of the landmark legislation. Title IX provided increased funding for female sports at the collegiate level, increased the number of athletic scholarships for females, and paved the way for facility enhancements for women (Gehring, 2022). Despite an increasing number of females playing sports over the past 50 years, the number of female athletic coaches did not increase (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Baeth, 2022; Gehring, 2002).

In their longitudinal study, Acosta and Carpenter (2014) found that in 1972, 90% of female athletic teams were coached by females. That percentage drastically declined since the inception of Title IX, with females holding coaching positions of female teams at 54% in 1980, 47% in 1990, 46% in 2000, and 43% in 2014 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Gehring, 2022). Acosta and Carpenter (2014) succinctly demonstrated the increasing rate of female athletic participation was not matched by the rate of females entering the field of athletic coaching. Research pointed to work-family conflict as being the chief reason why females did not enter or remain in the athletic coaching profession (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Baeth, 2020; Inglis et al., 2000).

Work-family conflict was likely to be challenging for female athletic coaches who had children (Gehring, 2022; Inglis et al., 2000; Laney 2021). In her quantitative study, Laney (2021) asserted mothers were often stereotyped as being the primary caregivers for children in the family. This assertion was supported by previous research (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Welch & Sigelman 2007). Hewlett and Luce (2005) performed a comprehensive study involving over

2,400 women aged 28–55 in the United States and found that 43% of women with children voluntarily left the workforce at some juncture in their professional careers to raise their families. Additionally, Dixon and Bruening (2007) studied female NCAA I head coaches who coached eight different sports. Their research found that personality types and personal values of female athletic coaches influenced the work-family dynamics and that “coaching mothers placed a high value on success at work while simultaneously valuing family time, thus causing stress and strain, particularly at home” (p. 391). Dixon and Bruening (2007) revealed that even though most coaches valued both work and family, their families felt the sacrifices more than their work.

Female athletic coaches who reported they had children “expressed the relentless pull on their job and the extreme sacrifices and negative impacts the job imposed on their lives” (Weight et al., 2020, p. 12). Female athletic coaches with children expressed regret, sadness, and consternation relative to the continuous prioritization of career over family. Over time, this tension resulted in female coaches leaving the profession at higher rates than their male counterparts (Byron, 2005; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Weight, 2020).

A study conducted by Weight et al. (2020) of more than 4,000 athletic department employees at NCAA institutions, found that athletic coaches who had supportive spouses were apt to feel fulfilled in their work and experienced greater longevity in the profession. Male athletic coaches overwhelmingly felt support from their spouses (66%); whereas female athletic coaches often attempted to make work and family sacrifices in order to keep the work-family tension to a minimum (Weight et al., 2020). Researchers noted that when both men and women exited the athletic coaching profession, each gender pointed to an increased desire to spend more time with family and that time demands necessary for athletic coaching adversely impacted the

work-family dynamic (see Baeth, 2020; Barber, 1998; Laney, 2021; Pastore, 1991; Pastore, 1992).

Data indicated the work-family interface spilled over into each other's respective domains (see Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Greenhaus & Buetall, 1985). Further, workaholism had a negative impact on work-family conflict. Described by Weight et al. (2020) as being obsessively committed to work, workaholism was prominent in the sports industry as competitive individuals were prone to immerse themselves in a task until they achieved the intended results (Wayne et al., 1999).

While determination was vital to most professional fields, the lack of structures and organizational parameters left athletic coaches unchecked (Weight et al., 2020). Work engagement was the antithesis of workaholism. Schaufeli (2002) defined work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). The characteristics associated with work engagement were consistent with the findings concerning transformational leadership which was: (a) inspired a shared vision; (b) challenged processes; and (c) empowered others to act (Kouzas & Posner, 2017; Maslach et al., 2001).

The research noted that work addiction became commonplace within US culture and that burnout and tension within the work-family dynamic became an unintended consequence (Lumpkin & Anshel, 2012). In their study of NCAA athletic coaches, Lumpkin & Anshel (2012) learned work addiction was prominent among participants and that many lacked time management skills. This could contribute to feelings of guilt for not thinking of work while at home with their families (Greenhaus & Buetall, 1985).

Work-family conflicts were likely inevitable in the profession of collegiate athletic coaching. Because of the scope, randomness, and variety of duties affiliated with athletic coaching, establishing a daily and weekly routine with concrete working hours was potentially not feasible (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Thus, at different times during an athletic season, athletic coaches needed to compromise quality and excellence either in their profession or in their home lives. An athletic coach, the organization they served, and the family unit they belonged to, have to be in concert with one another for the athletic coach to feel they were serving both entities well (Hancock et al., 2019).

Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support was significant for the validation and affirmation of an employee with respect to: (a) response to illness; (b) family emergencies; (c) mistakes; and (d) superior performance (Dixon & Sagas, 2007). As defined by Eisenberger et al. (2001), perceived organizational support was “an experienced-based attribution concerning the benevolent or malevolent intent of the organization’s policies, norms, procedures, and actions as they affect employees” (p. 42). The more the organization was seen as supportive, the more likely employees attached themselves to it and cared about the organization’s welfare, and helped the organization fulfill its mission (Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Eisenberger et al., 2011; Rocha & Chelladurai, 2011). Furthermore, Imran et al. (2020) found “that when organizations provide support to their employees in terms of caring for their well-being and meeting their socio-emotional needs, this support creates positive results such as employee flourishing, thriving, and work engagement” (p. 13). Gestures such as providing childcare, flexible schedules, and implementing mandatory days off were viewed by employees as authentically caring for the

well-being of the staff member and their families on behalf of their organizations (Weight et al., 2021).

Polyhart and Moliterno (2011) encouraged management to invest in their human capital to promote consistency, stability, and longevity in their organizations. Specifically, the researchers concluded that employees that possessed the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to execute pertinent duties within the organization should be cared for in a way where they felt valued. DePree (1989) asserted that individuals with the responsibility of leadership should provide employees with the gift of space and freedom to execute required duties and the necessary resources for the employees to be successful in their endeavors.

DePree (1989) advocated for transformational leadership in the workplace and believed organizations owed members of the organization the opportunity to thrive and feel empowered in their service: “Work should be and can be productive and rewarding, meaningful and maturing, enriching, and fulfilling, healing and joyful” (p. 32). According to DePree (1989), organizations that embraced all employees, regardless of organization title, invariably promoted longevity within their organizations.

Rocha and Chelladurai (2011) noted that athletic coaching was quite different from other occupations in terms of pressure for winning, non-traditional schedules, and job instability. The authors stated that collegiate athletic coaching was a zero-sum game (i.e., winning or losing competitions), which was rare, even in business and industry. Rocha and Chelladurai (2011) studied 267 collegiate athletic coaches and concluded that people tended to repay institutions when they felt emotionally and financially supported. This conclusion matched that of previous research (such as Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1986;

Rhoades et al., 2001). Namely, institutions that authentically sought to meet the needs of athletic coaches were held in high regard by athletic coaches that reported to them.

Laney (2021) supported prior research by concluding that employees tended to remain in their respective positions and tolerated a reasonable salary and longer working hours if they felt supported by the organization or institution (Cho et al., 2009, Gardner, 2012; Knight et al., 2015). When athletic coaches did not feel they were being supported in the areas of equity, professional development, and professional advancement, they were more apt to leave their positions (Knight et al., 2015; Laney, 2021). Support within an athletic department was linked to an athletic coach's professional life, along with one's life outside of work (Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Laney, 2021). Kim and Cunningham (2005) noted that effective organizational support influenced job satisfaction among athletic coaches.

The literature regarding organizational support seldom mentioned salaries and benefits. Rather, words such as *culture* (DePree, 1989), *atmosphere* (Rocha & Chelladurai, 2011), and *climate* (DePree, 1989) took on more significance in the workplace than compensation (Kim & Cunningham, 2005). When there was a supportive culture within an athletic department, athletic coaches were more satisfied with their occupations (Dixon & Sagas; Laney, 2021). Laney (2021) concluded, "When an organization does not show support for their coaches, the coaches can feel as if they are easily replaceable" (p. 25).

Several themes regarding *support* from the institution, or athletic department administration, emerged from the research. When athletic coaches felt the administration was amenable to family obligations and partnered with the athletic coach to reduce work-family conflict, reported job satisfaction was higher (Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Laney, 2021). Women athletic coaches noted that social support that athletic administration fostered by way of

parents of student-athletes, and the community at large, was especially impactful (Knight et al., 2015; Laney, 2021; Myers et al., 2005). Knight et al. (2015) also noted that athletic coaches desired for administration to support the visions they had for their respective athletic programs. The literature regarding athletic coaching and desired organizational support matched succinctly with the literature on transformational leadership in that employees wanted their supervisors to affirm and encourage them in their pursuits (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 2012; Dawson, 2019; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Peachey et al., 2019)

Athletic Coaching Longevity

When defining the concept of longevity, Gehring (2002) said career longevity was “the persistence of an individual in his/her career over a long duration of time, typically over the greater portion of their career lifespan” (p. 8). Athletic coaching longevity referred to professionals who persisted in their field for a minimum of 15 years (Gehring, 2022). In her qualitative study on coaching longevity among four collegiate cross country coaches with at least 15 years of experience, Gehring (2002) learned that two primary themes emerged detailing why athletic coaches persisted and remained in the profession: relationships with student-athletes and career success. Gehring (2002) found the ability to formulate meaningful relationships with student-athletes was the most significant factor determining athletic coaching longevity, followed closely by sustained career success.

Athletic Coach-Athlete Relationship

The desire to enhance the student-athlete experience, and to form strong relations with students, invigorated athletic coaches to remain in the profession. The athletic coach-athlete relationship was defined as when the athletic coach and the athletes’ cognitions, feelings, and behaviors were mutually and causally interrelated (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett &

Poczwardowski, 2007; Jowett et al., 2005; Poczwardowski et al., 2002). Jowett & Cockerill (2003), Jowett & Poczwardowski, (2007), Jowett et al. (2005), and Poczwardowski et al. (2002) noted the athletic coach-athlete was like other human relationships in that they were fluid and amenable over time. Specifically, Jowett et al. (2005) and Jowett & Poczwardowski (2007) shared that athletic coaches' and athletes' thoughts and emotions were synced according to closeness (trust, liking, respect), commitment (cognitive intention to maintain the relationship), complementarity (athletic coach and athlete responding favorably to conflict), and co-orientation (finding common ground within the relationship).

In her study of over 600 NCAA athletic coaches, Magle (2010) learned there was a strong correlation between a healthy and vibrant athletic coach-athlete relationship and efficacy. In addition, she reiterated that efficacy had a direct effect on athletic coaching longevity. This supported previous research conducted by Feltz et al. (1999) and Myers et al. (2005) when they concluded that athletic coaches who were sure of themselves and were confident in their abilities tended to remain in the profession longer because they believed they were effective.

Gehring's (2002) research was consistent with previous work conducted by Inglis et al. (2000) and Weiss et al. (1993), who shared that the aspect of the job they missed most after leaving the coaching profession was the daily contact with student-athletes. Possessing transformational leadership qualities motivated athletic coaches to persist through long working hours and tiresome administrative duties. The reason for their persistence was because of their dedicated service to their student-athletes.

Athletic Coaching Success

In athletic coaching circles, because contests typically generated a winner and a loser, the term *success* was often understood to merely indicate whether a coach had a cumulative winning

record. However, coaching success was more comprehensive than merely winning competitions. The concept of *success* was broad and ambiguous and was defined in numerous ways in the literature. Judge et al. (1995) defined career success as “the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one’s work experiences” (p. 486). Wayne et al. (1999) built upon the definition of Judge et al. (1995) to also include the supervisor’s subjective assessment and the employee’s promotability.

The most complete definition of career success was devised by Boudreau et al. (1999) when they said career success “reflects the accumulated interaction between a variety of individual, organizational and societal norms, behaviors, and work practices” (p. 4). Research indicated that career success was not measured merely by the winning percentage or salary of the athletic coach. For instance, Abrahamsen and Chroni (2021) further supported the notion that coaching salary was not synonymous with career success. They also noted that career success was paramount to career longevity. As was the case with most other research on longevity and success, Abrahamsen and Chroni (2021) did not ascertain how much athletic coaching success was necessary to motivate athletic coaches to remain in the coaching profession. To date, to the best of this author’s knowledge, very little research existed correlating athletic coaching longevity and career success among athletic coaches at the collegiate level in the United States.

The most comprehensive research on athletic coaching success and longevity was conducted by Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) when they studied international ‘serial winning coaches’ from 10 different sports with an average of 29 years of experience and between them who had claimed 160 Olympic gold medals or captured major professional championships. All of the athletic coaches in the study commented on how career success motivated them to continue coaching. Nevertheless, they were unable to pinpoint the success threshold that was

necessary for them to remain in coaching. Interestingly, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) also found that each of the athletic coaches possessed transformational leadership qualities as described by Kouzes and Posner (2017), such as: (a) exemplary athletic coaches modeled the way for their athletes; (b) inspired a shared vision among their athletes; (c) empowered their athletes to take ownership of their training routines; and (d) encouraged the hearts of their athletes by forming impactful relationships with them. The study by Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) on international athletes at the professional and Olympic levels was significant and meaningful but did not transfer cleanly to athletic coaches at the small college level.

A study by Margaret Gehring (2002) of NCAA III cross country coaches elaborated on the relationship between athletic coaching longevity and career success. Each of the participants in Gehring's (2002) study was highly successful as each had claimed multiple conference championships and fielded teams that were competitive at the national level. Yet, each coach that participated in the study went beyond one's win/loss records and expressed an authentic desire for their athletes to be successful in all their personal endeavors as well. Baeth (2020), in her study of female head athletic coaches in the NCAA with at least 20 years of experience, found that success was paramount to longevity:

Though coaches' career performance (i.e., win-loss records) has not been studied as a variable that might influence career longevity explicitly, research on women who have sustained themselves in teaching and medicine suggests job success positively impacts career longevity. Considering the same might be true in coaching, and particularly because winning is highly valued in sport, the win-loss record of each coach in this sample was found and compared in the first phase of this study. The average win percentage for coaches in the sample was over 64%, a high percentage compared to the

general coaching population, who foreseeably have a median win-loss record of 50%.

Perhaps reasonably, winning seemed to positively impact career longevity for coaches.

(p. 147)

Baeth (2020) surmised that winning contests and athletic coaching longevity had a strong correlation to athletic coaching longevity. However, she was not able to arrive at the reason why athletic coaches with strong winning percentages remained in the profession.

Summary

Athletic coaching burnout was a significant factor in athletic coaches leaving the coaching profession (Brown, 2020; Horn, 2018; Short et al., 2018). Hallmarks of athletic coaching burnout included: (a) emotional exhaustion; (b) non-coaching duties; (c) perfectionism; (d) efficacy; and (e) work imbalance (Feltz et al. 1999; Kelley, 1994; Lundkvist et al, 2014; Madigan et al., 2018; Maslach et al., 2001; Raedeke, 2004). The literature revealed many sub-themes that impacted the rate of athletic coaching burnout such as emotional exhaustion, the scope of non-coaching duties coaches were asked to perform, and individual characteristics of athletic coaches (Chroni, 2021; Goodger et al., 2007; Price & Weiss, 2000; Stiemsma, 2010; Westfall, 2018).

The extant literature also indicated that burnout among athletic coaches varied on an individual basis as coaches experienced and managed stress differently (Feltz et al., 2008; Hill & Curran, 2016; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Lumpkin & Anshel, 2012; Vealey et al., 1992). Further, athletic coaching burnout did have a degree of ambiguity associated with it (Malesic, 2022). Yet, the research undeniably asserted that athletic coaching burnout adversely impacted many in the profession. In addition to burnout, work-family conflict was also a stressor many athletic coaches had to navigate.

The demands of the athletic coaching profession compromised the home and family life of those working in college athletics Boles et al., 2001; Crouter, 1989; Frone et al., 1997; Stains, 1980). Because of the scope, unpredictability, and variety of duties affiliated with athletic coaching, establishing a daily and weekly routine with concrete working hours was often not feasible (Joncheray et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2008). Thus, at different times during an athletic season, athletic coaches needed to compromise quality and excellence either in their profession or in their home lives (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Greenhaus & Buetall, 1985; Weight et al., 2021).

Additionally, organizational support was a barrier that impacted athletic coaching longevity. Several themes regarding support from the institution, or athletic department administration, emerged from the research (Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Eisenberger et al., 2011; Imran et al., 2020; Polyhart & Moliterno, 2011; Rocha & Chelladurai, 2011; Weight et al., 2021). When athletic coaches felt the administration was amenable to family obligations and partnered with the athletic coach to reduce the work-family conflict, reported job satisfaction was higher (DePree, 1989; Hancock et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2021).

Notably, research was limited regarding athletic coaching longevity at the small college level. Thereby, the aim of this study herein was to enhance the body of research and ascertain how athletic coaches remained in the profession for at least 15 years. Namely, the research herein was interested in athletic coaches' leadership styles and support mechanisms to encourage retention in small college athletics. To accomplish this, a case study of athletic coaches with at least 15 years of service at their current institution was conducted.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This research identified barriers that affected career longevity in the athletic coaching profession. The following questions served to focus the research on interview responses from active head coaches with at least 15 years of experience in their current roles:

1. Does leadership style affect athletic coaching burnout at small colleges?
2. What is needed to enhance coaching longevity at small colleges?

Thus, this research sought to uncover to what extent leadership styles affect athletic coaching burnout and what support was necessary for coaches to remain in the profession for at least 15 years specifically within the small college context.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational Leadership

According to Northouse (2018), a transformational leader “is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers’ motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership” (p. 263). Transformational leadership cared less about positional power and more about impacting people in an organization. To achieve desired results, the relationship between the leader and the follower contained a high element of trust. Performed well, transformational leadership influenced and empowered followers to accomplish and achieve more than initially expected.

Kouzes and Posner (2017) contributed to the realm of leadership by stating transformational leadership revolved around the notion of inspiring and motivating people toward a shared vision to achieve goals. The authors identified five leadership practices that were

consistent with high-achieving schools: (a) exemplary leaders modeled the way; (b) inspired a shared vision; (c) challenged processes; (d) empowered others to act; and (e) recognized accomplishments. While Kouzes and Posner's (2017) research focused on educational leadership, the principles and concepts applied to almost all professions.

Due to its accomplishment, transformational leadership was circulated to other professions. One of these professions was athletic coaching. Peachey et al. (2019) found that "athletic departments considering instituting major revolutionary change should consider embracing transformational leadership at the top but complementing this with a transactional approach to focus on tasks and change implementation schedules" (p. 147).

Motivation and athletic performance were interchangeable. Motivated athletes situated themselves to be more successful in their pursuits. Halbrook et al. (2012) shared that athletes who were intrinsically motivated tended to compete without self-imposed mental and emotional parameters and expectations placed upon them by athletic coaches and parents. These same athletes commented they were free to enjoy the sports they were participating in more than externally motivated athletes. The authors stated that intrinsically motivated athletes enjoyed learning new techniques and strategies because taking on new challenges and risks was void of punitive consequences (Weight et al., 2021).

Spillover Theory

Interest in spillover theory in the field of education, athletics, and psychology continued to manifest. Hyun (2020) commented that "behavioral spillover, indicating that one's repeated behavior in one domain may become habits, scripts, or styles, which may affect behavior in another domain. Such behavioral spillover is particularly frequent when role requirements in two situations are similar" (p. 35). As mental and emotional well-being was a focus for policymakers,

employers, and local agencies, understanding that spillover naturally occurred from one's occupation to non-work engagements remained central.

In the realm of athletic coaching, research confirmed that a behavioral spillover effect transpired in this field as well. Bopp et al. (2015) conducted a study of NCAA head coaches and learned that job satisfaction and life satisfaction were positively related. Furthermore, Bopp et al. (2015) found that males experienced a higher degree of life satisfaction if their work environments were rewarding; whereas, females experienced a higher degree of work satisfaction if their home environments were stable and secure. Thereby, employers ought to provide an enriching experience for their staff to improve both retainment and overall productivity within the workplace. Transformational leadership and spillover theory were congruent with each other as each sought to improve the quality of life for both the leader and follower. Both concepts were founded on the notion that personal growth was continuous and not stagnant and static.

This research herein sought to learn if leadership style had a mitigating effect on burnout and if an athletic coach's support system contributed to career longevity. Previous research noted transformational leaders cared little about positional power and were motivated to impact their followers (Kouzes and Posner, 2017). Furthermore, transformational leadership focused on trust and employees' desire to be led by a transformational leader because their professional careers were more supplemented. Comparably, spillover theory maintained that compartmentalizing work and non-work activities were challenging (Hyun, 2020). Rocha and Chelladurai (2011) found that job satisfaction and work satisfaction of athletic coaches at small colleges were positively correlated. Notably, spillover was neither negative nor positive but rather was dependent on the life experiences of an athletic coach.

The significance of this research study aimed to understand if the leadership style of an athletic coach mitigated professional burnout and promoted career longevity at small colleges. In addition, this research sought to understand what support systems universities provided athletic coaches in an effort to retain them. Thus, this study herein investigated athletic coaching leadership style and the impact of an athletic coach's personal life on career longevity at small colleges.

Research Design

To answer the research questions about what affected athletic coaching longevity, I conducted a case study on athletic head coaches with at least 15 years of experience in the GPAC. Specifically, this line of qualitative inquiry explored the leadership styles of athletic coaches and whether leadership affected burnout. I also sought to know what supports contributed to athletic coaching longevity.

Maxwell (2013) stated that qualitative research had several goals which could help a researcher understand processes, experiences, and behaviors. Furthermore, Creswell (2012) detailed several characteristics of qualitative methods that were beneficial for this study: (a) a natural setting; (b) the researcher as the key instrument; (c) multiple sources of data; (d) data analysis; (e) and the ability to create a holistic account.

Words were the primary data of qualitative research, so qualitative researchers must strive to intuitively understand what the participant was attempting to convey through their voices (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). This study employed the use of interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, following a line of inquiry supported by an open-ended question design to allow for probing and marking.

Yin (2017) indicated that defining the boundaries of the case study was paramount to the success of the research project. Creswell (2014) defined a case study as an “in-depth exploration of a bounded system (activity, event, process, and individuals) based on extensive data collection” (p. 465). Moreover, Yin (2017) expressed a need for the researcher to engage in a topic they were passionate about. Athletic coaching longevity is personal and intimate to this researcher, due to over 20 years of coaching experience, nine of which were at the small college level.

Yin (2017) shared that a single case “can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building by confirming, challenging, or extending the theory” (p. 97). This research on athletic coaching longevity in small colleges would provide future investigations with relevant data. Nominal research exists about athletic coaching longevity in the NAIA and GPAC (GPAC, 2022). This study would contribute to the scope and breadth of athletic coaching longevity in these two governing bodies. Thus, a case study design was employed for this study.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers must be cognizant of their own roles in studies and how their personal background and experiences held the potential for shaping their interpretations as they aimed to produce an overarching account of their findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A chief responsibility of the researcher was to pose quality questions to the participants. Yin (2017) stated that in addition to the formal research question, possessing the ability to ask clarifying and probing questions during an interview was essential to the success of the study. In addition, the researcher must condition oneself to actively remain mentally and emotionally engaged with participants during the interview. According to Yin (2017), this called for the researcher to

compile large amounts of information while being cognizant of their own biases, and having the capacity to infer what the participant was implying.

Possessing the ability to ‘read between the lines’ while tabulating information was a skill researchers needed to have acquired (Yin, 2017). In addition to having a firm grasp of the content material, researchers were obligated to conduct their studies from the highest ethical position possible. As Yin (2017) noted, embarking upon a research study for the purpose of advancing a personal stance was unethical and contrary to the spirit of professional research.

Yin (2017) noted the need for human subjects to be protected at every turn. Gaining informed consent and protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants was paramount to adherence to research ethics. Following the prescribed protocols of the institutional review board (IRB) before securing data from subjects was necessary. Thus, the IRB granted approval before the qualitative research began, which was imperative in qualitative research (Leavy, 2017; Yin, 2017). Leavy (2017) stated that participants must be cared for, and their confidentiality not compromised. In addition, Leavy (2017) shared that ethical research was paramount as researchers had a duty and obligation to protect the profession of which they were a part.

As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), to assist with data collection, the use of a reflexive journal was initiated to record the researcher’s experiences, thoughts, and reflections throughout the process. The intent was to capture the story about what affected athletic coaching longevity to explore the participants’ frames of reference. In addition, bracketing was employed to ensure the researcher became aware of his own biases throughout the study. According to Roll and Relf (2006), bracketing interviews conducted throughout the data collection process could

uncover themes that might hinder the researcher's ability to listen intently to the subjects without the researcher's personal experiences affecting the securing of data.

Research Setting

The GPAC was founded in 2000 and was comprised of 12 faith-based institutions in Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. By comparison, the geographical footprint of the GPAC was relatively small compared to the other conferences that comprised NAIA. Notably, there was not a current GPAC president or athletic director who was in either of these roles when the conference was formed in 2000. Moreover, only one current sitting head athletic coach was in that same position in 2000. There were approximately 145 head coaches in the GPAC; 24 of these 145 head athletic coaches served in the GPAC for 10 or more years, while only 19 current head athletic coaches have been in their positions for more than 15 years (GPAC, 2022).

Sampling Criteria and Participant Selection

An intentional sampling method was utilized for the data collection in this study. As this was a single case study, securing participants with at least 15 years of head coaching experience in their current role was necessary to obtain an accurate depiction of the reality of athletic coaches and their career longevity. Collecting data from athletic coaches at the time of participation increased the reliability of the study results by ensuring that coach interviews represented current beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. A goal of purposeful participant selection was to derive a diverse range of subjects (Maxwell, 2013).

I consulted each athletic director in the GPAC and requested the names of head athletic coaches in their respective departments who had served at least 15 years in their current roles. Eight participants were selected based on years of service. A recruitment email was sent to

prospective participants inviting them to be part of a study to explore athletic coaching longevity. Participants were provided with a consent form outlining a study summary, key study information, an introduction to the researcher, an overview of the purpose, and an outline of procedures and confidentiality. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants was protected, pseudonyms were assigned to the subjects. This study was possible due to the established and trusted working relationship I had with the participants and their willingness to provide rich responses

Data Management

As recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the researcher replaced the names of the athletic coaches with pseudonyms. Thereby, the researcher only had access to the real names of the participants. The researcher was conscientious of confidentiality and privacy and stored data on a secure computer where the researcher was the only person who had access to the password. Furthermore, upon completing the transcription of the interview recordings, the researcher destroyed the recordings. The transcripts will be destroyed three years after the research project concludes to align with IRB requirements.

Data Collection

To capture the experiences of the athletic coaches as they related to career longevity, I conducted interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. To ensure the highest degree of ethical research persisted, I utilized safeguards to protect participant confidentiality, recorded and transcribed interviews, and jotted memos and notes to retain and clarify my thoughts. Yin (2017) stated it was imperative in a case study that the researcher met the subjects on their own terms. I did this well by being amenable to their respective schedules. Interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted via Zoom to

allow participants to choose a setting where they would be most comfortable. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using Zoom. Data were collected until saturation occurred.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Yin (2017) shared that “case study interviews will resemble guided conversations rather than structured queries” (p. 183). In essence, my actual line of questioning was fluid and adaptable rather than rigid and concrete. Weiss (1995) referred to this process as an intensive and semi-structured interview.

As detailed by Creswell (2014), in addition to securing verbal consent at the beginning of each interview, I asked the subjects if they had any questions about the research study, reviewed the purpose of the study, detailed the general structure of the interview, and provided assurance of confidentiality. The interview questions, which aligned directly with the research questions, explored what affected athletic coaching longevity. While the interview tool was instrumental to the process, I allowed participants to expand on their answers and provide additional, relevant information pertinent to the study. Following each interview, I thanked each participant and offered to share the results of the study. See Appendix A for interview questions.

Documents

Yin (2017) stated that interviews should be validated with further data from additional sources and that the most important advantage of using multiple sources is the development of converging lines of inquiry. The researcher secured a coaching philosophy statement from each of the participants involved in the study herein. Obtaining a coaching philosophy statement permitted the researcher to assess the leadership style of the athletic coach. A coaching philosophy statement also provided the researcher with evidence of the athletic coach’s purpose for serving as a coach.

Data Analysis

Maxwell (2013) indicated there was no single correct way to analyze qualitative data because it was modified repeatedly throughout the process to answer the research questions and address validity challenges. Leavy (2017) stated that data analysis helps create ‘intelligible accounts’ of the data and shared that data did not speak for itself, but rather the researcher must speak for the data. The preferred method in qualitative research was for data collection and data analysis to coincide with each other (Merriam & Tisdall, 2015).

Member checks were completed with the participants to ensure their respective views were accurately represented in the summaries (Candela, 2019; Koelsch, 2013). After transcribing and verifying the transcripts of each of the head athletic coaches, I read all the interviews and immersed myself in the details trying to get a sense of the details before breaking them into parts (Agar, 1980).

The researcher began coding after the conclusion of each interview with an athletic coach. I coded each interview transcript searching for values, attitudes, and beliefs regarding leadership philosophies and burnout. After each interview was coded, the researcher stored and organized the data sources using electronic means as suggested by Saldana (2021). Further, I administered an iterative process, which allowed the data to drive the study. Common themes were noted and paraphrased at the bottom of each transcribed interview. From the interpreted themes, the researcher continued the process of connecting the main ideas with the themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To ensure a viable level of trustworthiness and rich data, Dr. Vassa Grichko served as a second coder.

Trustworthiness

According to Leavy (2017), trustworthiness or validity addressed the quality of the research project, the exactness of the methodology, and whether the readers have confidence in the findings. In qualitative research, trustworthiness consists of four criteria. These include: (a) credibility; (b) transferability; (c) dependability; and (d) confirmability.

Credibility

My time as a head coach enhanced my credibility with athletic coaches in the conference. My former role as a head athletic coach in the GPAC worked to inform this study. Namely, I established rapport with leaders and athletic coaches during my stint as a head athletic coach. My previous experience allowed me to build mutual trust with the research participants. I was clear my role in this research study was to secure data that might assist current and future administrators and coaches in eliminating barriers that adversely affect athletic coaching longevity in the small college setting.

I was transparent with all participants about my research agenda and motivations. Yin (2017) and Leavy (2017) both asserted that researchers need to be conscious of reflexivity, a threat where the researcher's own perspectives could influence a participant's response. I was aware of using leading questions, interjecting my own thoughts, and displaying minimal body language to ameliorate this threat. I included confidentiality as part of my agreement in being a participant in the study.

The researcher adhered to the advice of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and secured a qualified and impartial colleague to review the data, methods, and findings associated with this research study. Thus, peer debriefing was implemented to establish credibility and enhance the validity of the research study. This method of triangulation reduces research bias that may arise with one

researcher (Morgan, 2022). Lastly, member checks were part of the coding process as was having the perspective of a second coder.

Transferability

Leavy (2017) stated that transferability was “the ability to transfer research findings from one context to another. In other words, transferability is a way of making research useful in other contexts, thereby extending the research beyond your own data” (p. 155). Further, Geertz (1973) assessed it was the responsibility of a researcher to provide a ‘thick’ and ‘rich’ description of a study that moved beyond mere facts but also encapsulated commentary and interpretations that add substance and girth to a research study and is applicable to researchers across a myriad of contexts. The researcher was able to provide this rich description by listening intently to the participants and ‘reading between the lines’ when interpreting themes the data revealed.

Dependability

The researcher worked diligently to address all ethical issues. The athletic coaches were aware of the risk of my learning their leadership styles and the support they might or might not have at their current institutions. To minimize the fear of risk, each participant was assured of confidentiality. I used pseudonyms and the institutions they served at were not identified in any way. Additionally, member checks were completed with the participants to ensure their respective views were accurately represented in their summaries (Candela, 2019; Koelsch, 2013). To further enhance the dependability of the research study, double coding was utilized to better understand the categories and themes that emerged from the participant interviews (Richards & Hemphill, 2018).

Confirmability

Per Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability occurred when credibility, transferability, and dependability were met. To achieve confirmability and objectivity, the researcher utilized a reflexive journal to document findings, processes, and questions associated with the study. The reflexive journal added elements of accountability, richness, and clarity to the research study. In addition, member checking, a second coder, peer debriefing, and the securing of coaching philosophy statements all enhance the confirmability of the research study.

Assumptions

The most relevant assumption of this study was that participants shared their experiences and opinions on what helped and hindered athletic coaching longevity, and if leadership affected career burnout. As each participant had at least 15 years of athletic coaching experience, it seemed plausible that years of experience affect perceptions. Furthermore, due to the researcher's previous experience in athletic coaching, assumptions of the study herein included the impact of success on athletic coaching longevity, as well as colleges providing relevant perks to those in the profession at least 15 years. An overriding assumption was that athletic coaches who served for at least 15 years potentially had philosophical perspectives aligned with transformational leadership. As transformational leadership and spillover relate to athletic coaching, it was speculated that athletic coaches who were intrinsically motivated and supported by their colleges would invariably remain in their athletic coaching positions for a long span of time. Conversely, athletic coaches that elected to utilize a transactional employment model, would not experience the feelings of autonomy, empowerment, and affirmation that transactional coaches reported.

Ethics

The athletic coaches were aware of the risks of my learning about their leadership philosophies and styles and what supports, if any, they received at their current institutions. My relationship with athletic coaches in the GPAC had established rapport, and I sought to diligently maintain the integrity of those relationships throughout this study. To minimize the fear of risk, each participant was assured of confidentiality. Participants were repeatedly informed they could leave the study any time they were uncomfortable with research procedures. Pseudonyms for each subject were used and the institutions they served at were not identified.

The researcher adhered to the advice of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and secured a qualified and impartial colleague to review the data, methods, and findings associated with this research study. Thus, peer debriefing was implemented to establish credibility and enhance the validity of the research study. To achieve objectivity, the researcher utilized a reflexive journal to document findings, processes, and questions associated with the study. The reflexive journal added elements of accountability, richness, and clarity to the research study.

Summary

This study was born from the researcher's desire to understand ways to assist athletic coaches to experience fulfillment in their professions at small colleges. Specifically, the researcher sought to learn if leadership affected burnout in athletic coaches and what supports kept athletic coaches in their positions for at least 15 years. As such, I detailed the study design, the sample, the data collection, the analysis procedures, and potential ethical challenges. By examining the concepts of leadership and career burnout, the aim of this dissertation was to add breadth and knowledge to the existing literature on these topics.

CHAPTER IV

Findings and Discussion

A case study was conducted to identify barriers and supports that affected athletic coaching longevity in the GPAC. This study specifically focused on athletic coaches at small colleges. Data were collected in May and June of 2023. Eight athletic coaches were part of this study, and each was a head coach at one's current institution for at least 15 years. All names herein, including institutions and locations, are pseudonyms. The following themes emerged from the interviews and coaching leadership philosophy documents coaches submitted: (a) familiarity; (b) supportive relationships; (c) impact on student-athletes; and (d) balance & flexibility. These themes are summarized in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Summary of Themes

Familiarity <i>Family Inspiration</i> <i>Loyalty to Small Colleges</i>	Supportive Relationships <i>Family Support</i> <i>Institutional Support</i> <i>Colleagues Support</i>	Impact on Student-Athletes <i>Satisfaction</i> <i>Modeling</i>	Flexibility & Balance <i>Flexibility</i> <i>Balance</i>
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Familiarity

A life calling gave meaning, purpose, and significance to one's occupation (French & Domene, 2010). Accordingly, this theme encompassed the inspiration and motivation behind pursuing coaching and being familiar with coaching. All of the eight participants commented how their familiarity with the coaching profession prompted them to embark upon careers in athletic coaching at small colleges. As such, familiarity encompassed loyalty to small college

coaching based on coaches' experiences at small colleges as well as family members who had careers in athletic coaching.

Family Inspiration

Several athletic coaches had fathers who were in the coaching profession, which left an indelible impression on the coaches. Matthew stated, "My dad was an athletic coach, and, growing up, I was in the gym all the time, so it is just kind of a family tradition I guess, and something that I have always wanted to do." John shared a similar experience: "My father was a high school coach for many years, and originally that was the trajectory I was planning on, and somewhere along the way I got caught up into college coaching and have really loved it." Simon noted the impact his father had on him becoming an athletic coach, "With my dad being a coach, I just saw it." Luke also noted the influence his family had on him becoming an athletic coach:

I come from an athletic family. My dad is still a high school coach. My mom runs the [volleyball club]. My sister is a college volleyball coach, and my wife is the head high school volleyball coach at the high school, and so I just think that you just connect with [coaching].

Loyalty to Small Colleges

Additionally, several participants expressed their desires to serve as athletic coaches at the small college level because they were exposed to them as collegiate athletes themselves. Having experienced the benefits of small college athletics during their formative college years, the coaches appreciated the size of small colleges and the manner small colleges impacted young people. When talking about small college athletics, Mark noted, "It was kind of all I knew and that was what I wanted to do. I didn't really have aspirations to coach at a different level." Matthew had similar sentiments regarding his own small college experience when he stated, "I

think knowing my experience and how much I loved it was something that I wanted to be able to help other people experience and help them grow just like I did.”

Andrew appreciated his undergraduate years and saw his coaching career as an extension of his collegiate experience when he said, “The same things that appealed to me as a student-athlete would be the opportunity to get to know some of my peers and other people here on campus maybe on a slightly deeper level.” Philip was an alumnus and former collegiate athlete at the institution where he was coaching. His preference for the small college level was apparent when he said, “I think we should appreciate every day that we get to be at this level.”

The geographical footprint of the GPAC did not overlap with many NCAA DI institutions. Thus, people who resided within the geographical footprint of the GPAC were often graduates of GPAC institutions or fans who were loyal to the local GPAC institution in their communities. This contributed to several athletic coaches desiring to be part of small college athletics. Simon had a father who coached in the GPAC which allowed Simon to network with people within the GPAC when he was in high school and college; this fostered an appreciation for small college coaching:

Growing up in [city], you went to the local college events, so I was just around that size of school and I think being around it now, the people on campus you just get to know. I have so many connections with people on campus and I feel like I can connect with them, and know them. So, I think it’s a combination of the relationships that I have here at Clover State and that I grew up around small colleges.

Athletic coaches developed contact networks while attending college and early in their coaching careers. Notably, each of the athletic coaches in this study graduated from small

colleges. Familiarity with small college athletics was pivotal in the coaches electing to serve at their current institutions—which were small colleges.

Loyalty to their current institutions was a trait that emerged from the athletic coaches. Of the eight athletic coaches who participated in this study, five played and graduated from the institutions they were serving. Mark noted this intimate connection to his remaining at his current institution when he articulated, “I’m a graduate and my wife is a graduate, so I do think that is a contributing factor that helps me keep going.” Andrew echoed those sentiments about feeling attached to his alma mater and why he remained in his current position, “I think it means a little bit more to me and I think it’s maybe slightly harder to leave than it would be for someone who has no previous tie to the position.”

Supportive Relationships

Athletic coaching was an arduous profession with irregular hours, public scrutiny, and pressure from the administration to be successful (Raedeka et al., 2000). All eight athletic coaches interviewed spoke of numerous supports which aided and motivated them in their work. From the interviews, sub-themes that appeared were family, institutional support, and flexibility.

Family Support

Each athletic coach that participated in the study noted the significance of familial support. In addition, the athletic coaches also commented on the importance of including family members in team functions. Simon succinctly summarized what each of the coaches in the study conveyed, “If you have family support, I think that makes the difference. You need to have their support.” Mark stated, “I am fortunate because I have a wife that probably did a better job of mitigating burnout than me. The team was a cornerstone of her life too in terms of coming to the games.” Philip expressed a similar sentiment when he said, “I think there is value in your wife

and children being a part of your program because you get to see each other more often. I believe it just doesn't become about you."

Supportive spouses were vital to career longevity and spouses who were part of the fabric of both the campus and community they resided in affected coaches' longevities. Andrew shared, "My wife loves the community. I love the community, too, but she has a lot of ties here." Philip had a wife who became ill and witnessed the local community supporting the family through her treatments. As Philip noted, this was impactful for his spouse feeling attached to the community. Philip commented, "At one point, Jane had [illness]. I saw the university step up and help her. The people in our community were incredible, too."

All of the coaches interviewed credited their spouses for supporting them by keeping their children's schedules aligned, being understanding of the irregular hours, and being subjected to public criticism when their husband's team did not perform well. James shared how his wife was understanding of the rigors of the profession and his drive to be successful:

There are great coaches' wives, and then there are exes. I am on a 10-month contract and my wife says I have never worked just 10 months out of the year. At the end of the day, to be cutting edge, there has to be some of that drive in you.

Familial support was critical to the success and longevity of the athletic coaches. Whether it was understanding children who positively coped with their fathers routinely being absent from their activities or a spouse that ate meals in the evening without her husband, receiving backing from the family unit was noted as being instrumental in athletic coaches remaining in the profession.

Institutional Support

In addition to receiving support from their families, support on-campus was also noted as essential to the career longevity of coaches in the GPAC. Institutional support came out in

comments coaches made about having ample staffing, quality facilities, and athletic scholarship funds necessary to be successful. Mark shared, “It is amazing in terms of administrative support because we had a new president and received a lot of support. I feel supported in terms of facilities and in terms of scholarships.” John noted, “The college has always really supported me. Jim was a fantastic president to me.” Luke shared a story about his initial interaction with his president and the profound effect his president’s perspective had on him accepting the offer to serve at his institution:

When I was on my interview in [year], I met different people throughout the day, the president, and others. Then I did a practice with the team and when we were done with our practice, President Smith says to me and I will always remember this, he said, “Luke, I love winning as much as anyone does, but you will not be fired if you don’t win. Your number one job is to take care of these young women.” To know that the pressure of winning wasn’t there was significant. I feel like our administration values my contributions. When people feel valued, I think they’re willing to give their heart to things.

The athletic coaches acknowledged they did not need, nor did they pursue, close relationships with the university presidents, but the coaches wanted to feel affirmed and validated by the institution’s leadership. Feeling connected to, and validated by, upper-administration was motivating for the athletic coaches.

Further, a key ingredient for successful athletic teams was having ample staffing to execute duties associated with administering a successful program. Coaches commented on the importance of delegating duties to competent assistant coaches. Mark noted the value of assistant coaching in his program when we stated, “In about my seventh year, Jeff came to assist me. The

fact that we got a coach together...helped my longevity. Also, a lot of my players that graduated hung around the program for a few years to help coach.” James also commented on the importance of having assistant coaches to share the workload with when he articulated, “I have two guys in place to carry some of the recruiting load. Make sure that you delegate areas when you might be too busy.” John’s sentiments echoed those of James and Mark about having quality assistants taking the lead on overnight recruiting trips: “The things that I don’t like to do, I pass them on. I never spend a night in a hotel recruiting, so I just give it to the guys that aren’t married.” The demands of administering a successful athletic program were many. Dispersing duties among qualified assistants provided head coaches with necessary relief to their demanding roles.

Overall, athletic coaches wanted assurance that if they invested time and energy into their occupations, they could be successful. Andrew succinctly stated, “At the core, I want to be at a place where I feel like the institution provides me with at least the bare minimums necessary to succeed.” Philip summarized the significance of his university supporting athletic coaches in their endeavors by providing head coaches with ample staffing:

As a head coach, you cannot do it all and you must rely on assistant coaches. Leaf State has done a really good job of getting us the tools to hire student assistants and graduate assistants and now a full-time assistant. It might seem like a small thing, but when you are a head coach and you have a staff that all want the same thing, you appreciate that.

Athletic coaches who felt appreciated for their investment in their student-athletes were motivated to remain in the profession and at their current institutions. University presidents and athletic directors who thanked coaches for their service were held in high regards by the coaches.

In short, *people* at institutions mattered and the athletic coaches desired to serve alongside colleagues they valued and connected with.

Colleagues' Support

Viable relationships with student-athletes were paramount for the athletic coaches. In addition to student-athletes, athletic coaches desired to form meaningful relationships with colleagues in their athletic departments and on their campuses. Mark commented, "I do think you need an environment that is willing to work together from one coach to another." Luke also noted the importance of having strong bonds with staff members on his campus when he shared, "Leaf State's strength is interpersonal relationships with students, staff, and faculty. We have policies and procedures, but a lot of it is just because of relationships. We get a lot done just through relationships." Simon remarked he enjoyed serving at his institution because of the sense of community that permeates his campus when he pronounced, "So many of the people [I] have connections with on campus and you feel like you can connect with them." Philip also recognized the importance of having a communal atmosphere on his campus when said shared, "There is great pride in small schools, especially small private schools because the alumni are so connected. I think when you get to experience it, it is priceless." Summarily, athletic coaches appreciated having camaraderie with their colleagues.

The participants in this study also noted few people outside the coaching profession understood the challenges coaches encountered. Having colleagues they could confide in was instrumental in them remaining at their current institutions. Matthew shared he elected to stay at his college because of: "The people that were around me. I didn't want to leave those people and now it's to the point where I love [city] and my kids go to an incredible school." Andrew noted a feeling of support from colleagues when he said, "I think small colleges offer the opportunity to

really celebrate and be a part of a broad-based success with colleagues rallying hard for each other.”

Impact on Student-Athletes

Forming authentic and meaningful relationships with students and colleagues was instrumental for the athletic coaches. Genuine relationships motivated athletic coaches to remain in the profession and at their current institutions. All the participants in the study discussed the significance of having impactful relationships.

The athletic coaches cited having purposeful relationships with student-athletes as being the most rewarding aspect of their careers. Matthew noted, “You grow with these players and then they graduate and leave and it’s hard because you grow to love them and you know that they are not going to be with you forever.” Mark fostered a climate within his program that inspired former players to stay at the institution as assistant coaches after they graduated. He shared, “I have been able to create a lot of intimacy over the years. That feeling led to success and having them stick around and help out.” Luke created an environment in his program that facilitated trust and loyalty between himself and his student-athletes:

I always tell our players, “When you commit to coming to play here, I commit to being in your corner and that commitment is unconditional until you decide to leave that corner. No matter what you go through, I am in your corner and I’m going to do whatever I can to help you.”

Athletic coaches and student-athletes began forming relevant relationships during the recruiting process. Strong bonds formed between the coach and the prospective student-athlete factored into a student-athlete electing to attend an institution. The coaches who participated in

this study continued to cultivate and promote relationships with their student-athletes during the athletes' time in their athletic programs as well.

In addition to fostering relationships with student-athletes with the athletes during their college years, athletic coaches in this study also wanted to continue to positively impact students after graduation. James was intentionally vested in his former athletes and shared, "The oldest I coached are [nearly 50] years old. You share life, ask them about their marriages, and ask them about their children, and they have become my friends." John made this statement about the relationships he continued to advance with his former players when he said, "The year we lost in the national championship, I got emails or texts from former players saying 'Coach, my heart hurts for you,' or 'I just thought I'd let you know to remember you're making a difference.'"

Andrew also spoke of his desire to stay connected with student-athletes after they graduated from his program when he said, "To stay in touch with alums and see them get married or land the job they want or have children and just live a life beyond [sport] is a really fun aspect and what I enjoy." Athletic coaches in this study desired more to provide the student-athletes with positive college experiences, versus striving to win athletic contests.

Remaining with the same institution for prolonged periods of time allowed athletic coaches to have relevant relationships with former student-athletes. This was significant for athletic coaches as they desired to maintain ties with former players, something that would be difficult if they departed their positions. John disclosed a benefit of remaining at one institution was continued relationships with past players when he said, "If you are moving from place to place or you are climbing the professional ladder, nobody tracks you down. But when you are in one place long enough, you have an opportunity to have that." The loyalty of the participants

increased as they recognized the opportunity to exact influence. Philip shared how his loyalty to his alma mater permitted him to impact multiple stakeholders when he shared:

I have stayed here because it is not just my home but, it is also my wife's home and our family's home. Being here is something that I feel like we have bought into. I have stayed here because I believe that I can make a difference in not just my players' lives, but I can make a difference on this campus. I played at Leaf State so when I said I bleed the school colors, I literally believe that.

Satisfaction

Athletic coaches derived satisfaction by assisting student-athletes in their personal development. John shared, "I think what is most rewarding is having someone come into the program and after four or five years, seeing him graduate and just seeing the young men they become and hearing from them years later." Simon also articulated how he enjoyed observing the maturation process of his student-athletes when he said, "They are really looking to find a certain profession, or they want to get married. All of that is just fun to watch. I would say that is really rewarding."

Experiencing a sense of satisfaction motivated athletic coaches to enter or remain in the profession. Andrew noted, "I just think it is such a microcosm of life and I think that's one thing that really led me to want to coach." Matthew gained satisfaction by helping student-athletes realize their potential as young people when he shared, "Seeing a player that had some struggles and challenges in terms of their character really grow during their time here." Mark summarized best what most of the athletic coaches alluded to when he shared:

I think if you were to ask me what was most rewarding when I first started coaching versus what is most rewarding now, I think the answer changes. Sure, you want to be

successful, but I think the impact that you want to make is the rewarding part of it. It is when you see young men that are moldable. It is not always easy, but when you see them progress, that is rewarding.

The coaching profession afforded the opportunity for athletic coaches to positively impact student-athletes, their campuses, and the communities in which they resided. Each of the coaches exhibited the qualities of transformational leaders, which was further reinforced by their coaching philosophies. The coaches in this study detailed their desire to positively impact others and were satisfied when people around them benefitted from their leadership.

Modeling

The coaches expressed the desire to impact student-athletes under their charge by modeling appropriate behavior and demonstrating effective citizenship. Athletic coaches were aware their actions affected their student-athletes and wanted to be positive examples for them. Athletic coaches recognized they were in the public eye and wanted to use their platforms to impact the student-athletes they came into contact with.

John said this about modeling, “They see how you live your life, so they need to be able to be around you enough to see how you live your life and how that correlates with what they do.” James succinctly said, “I get to encourage young people to develop healthy and holy habits. [Sport] is my tool, the classroom is my tool, and hopefully, I am modeling that.” Luke elaborated on how modeling was important to him and that he wanted his team to influence people who watched them play:

Our number one asset in this world is the impact we have on others. I think God made us for other people, he did not make me for me, he made me to have an impact on other people, and I can do that in the coaching world and I think it is the same with our players.

We impact other people by the way we play and our style of play of [sport] inspires people that they say, 'I loved watching that team.' That is such a greater cause than winning and I hope that defines me.

Athletic coaches encountered challenging scenarios with their teams and believed those moments afforded them the opportunities to instill life lessons in their teams by modeling how to navigate adversity. Andrew shared how the departure of a team member in mid-season forced him to be a better leader and model for his team on how to appropriately respond when an athlete displayed a lack of commitment when he said, "Me being an optimist and having a growth mindset and being pragmatic and intentional in building culture were essential during that time."

Matthew valued the opportunity to connect with other students on his campus and use his position of influence when he commented, "I do teach a few classes, but I can choose not to teach them if I want. I really enjoy being able to teach to hopefully impact other people that are not on my team."

Athletic coaches had to display strong work ethics to their student-athletes to earn credibility. Mark shared the need for athletic coaches to diligently model industriousness for his student-athletes when he said, "I do think you have to work hard, because it is really difficult to come down on them when they don't feel that you are not working hard, or you do not have their best interest in mind." Athletic coaches were under close observation by their student-athletes who wanted to see their athletic coaches demonstrate consistency by having their words and actions align. Effective modeling allowed athletic coaches to deeply impact their student-athletes.

Athletic coaches articulated their desires to holistically impact their student-athletes. Possessing a transformational approach was motivating for them as they wanted to profoundly

impact their players. As a reminder, the GPAC was comprised of 12 faith-based institutions. Thus, some coaches were drawn to serve at colleges where they could cultivate the spiritual development of their student-athletes.

John shared his desire to see his players grow spiritually during their times in his program when he said, “I tell them I try to live a seamless life. I try to mentor our guys as much as possible and then just direct them to what a relationship with Jesus Christ looks like.” Simon echoed similar sentiments when he commented, “I enjoy helping them grow in their faith and I enjoy helping them grow as people as well as players. I take pride in those things.” Most athletic coaches in this study had the keen desire to impart values to their student-athletes in addition to skills and strategies necessary for athletic success.

A number of athletic coaches believed that intentional holistic development promoted tighter personal bonds within the team. Luke alluded to this when he said, “Watching them grow and overcome things and just being a small part of that, and to be part of a culture where players lift each other up and are shoulder to shoulder walking through life together.” Philip supported Luke’s assertion when shared, “Some of the most rewarding experiences have been seeing a guy I bet against walk across the stage to get his diploma and feel like some of the things we taught him played a big role in his life.” Mark noted he is fulfilled when he assisted his players in accomplishing personal goals. His comments about that maturation process were:

I had a few kids that were recruited and they were on academic probation on entry and ended up becoming All-Americans. I think when you put that together when you holistically see a guy not just on the baseball field get better, but take the academic part of it seriously, and then you see him grow in regards to valuing servant leadership. I think

when you see that progression across the board, that is when the self-fulfillment really sets in for me.

The participants in this study desired to see the student-athletes under their charge grow in all facets of their lives.

Balance & Flexibility

The athletic coaching profession had irregular hours that included late nights and weekends. While oftentimes coaches invested 70+ hours a week, many noted the latitude and flexibility their professions offered them. Athletic coaching often did not have established hours. Instead, there were established tasks and duties that had to be executed at appropriate times.

Flexibility

Having the liberty to work fewer hours per week during the off-season or have lunch with their children at school was noted as a perk for being in the coaching profession. Matthew stated, “There are times of flexibility like being able to go home for lunch every day and eat with [my wife] and [children].” Luke expressed similar sentiments when he said, “I’m so thankful that I can bring my daughter to school in the morning right now and she is going to be driving soon so now I can meet her for lunch.” James commented that he had time to attend his children’s events during their school day, “Rose State has allowed me to still make family first.” Because coaches were required to be present for practices and games, which often transpired in late afternoons and evenings, being afforded the freedom to be present at family functions during the day was significant to the athletic coaches.

Institutions that granted athletic coaches flexibility demonstrated trust and confidence in the athletic coaches and increased the likelihood of the coaches remaining at their institutions. Simon spoke about this when he said, “I think Clover State has allowed me to do what I want to

do with this program and has given me the parameters to have flexibility. I would say [the administration] has not micromanaged me.” Andrew elaborated on how he learned to take advantage of the flexibility his institution permitted:

I have tried to do a better job of taking advantage of the benefits of the position. Right now, if we have an open Saturday in the fall schedule (when the team is not playing a contest), I am going to take that day off. Or, if a player wants to visit after practice, I’m not going to talk unless it’s an emergency, and we can wait until tomorrow so that I can get home and eat dinner with my family and make sure that they know that I’m putting them first.

A number of the athletic coaches commented that having fewer non-coaching duties at their institutions permitted them to have more flexibility in their schedules.

Balance

Athletic coaches did not prioritize success or winning but were process-oriented as they administered functional athletic programs. Moreover, the coaches not only exuded a balanced view on winning but also on life. Mark supported this when he shared, “The whole thing about winning and losing—you are never as good as you think when you are winning, and you are never as bad as you think you are when you are losing—is true.” As an athletic coach, remaining even-keeled throughout the course of a season was imperative to a healthy psyche, especially if the team incurred difficult losses. Luke noted, “I feel like have gotten to where it doesn’t bother me that much. The challenge is keeping those distractions of losing out. Creating an environment where winning and losing is not the motivation is key.” John, supported Mark and Luke when he discussed a healthy perspective on winning: “I am doing all this just to win a game? Really, in the big picture, it is not that huge.”

In addition to having a balanced perspective on winning and losing, the athletic coaches in this study also possessed the desire to have a balanced perspective toward understanding current student-athletes. Matthew detailed the need to have a healthy perspective on differences between present student-athletes versus when he began the profession nearly two decades ago:

A lot of people, as they get older, want to stay the same. If you don't look at it like, 'Hey they are changing, but not in a negative way, they are just changing.' You continue to see the positive in them. There are going to be challenging times, but trying to see the positive is important. If you continue to look at them and say, 'They are normal people and I am just here to help them grow in different ways,' then I think you are okay.

Athletic coaches viewed it as their responsibility to effectively relate to current student-athletes, rather than put the onus on the players to understand the veteran coaches.

Theoretical Coding

This research aimed to learn if transformational leadership had an effect on burnout and if a coach's support network contributed to career longevity. Burnout had long plagued the coaching profession and the effects of burnout were felt by student-athletes whom the coaches led (Altfeld et al., 2018). In addition, this study desired to know if spillover transpired within the athletic coaching profession and if the work-life relationship conflicted with each other. Notably, transformational leadership and spillover were found to affect the careers of the athletic coaches who participated in this study.

Transformational Leadership

The athletic coaches interviewed for this research study shared that they entered the coaching profession due to their familiarity with the vocation, they coveted authentic relationships, their desires to impact student-athletes, and the flexibility their careers offered.

Furthermore, the aspiration to positively influence young people illustrated the participants were transformational leaders. Kouzes and Posner (2017) noted leadership practices that were consistent with transformational leaders: (a) exemplary leaders modeled the way; (b) inspired a shared vision; (c) challenged processes; (d) empowered others to act; and (e) recognized accomplishments. Notably, the coaches' philosophies, which six of the coaches provided, aligned with the athletic coaches' interviews, where they recognized themselves as transformational leaders.

Accordingly, each of the coaches who participated in this study exemplified these marks of transformational leadership. Mark summarized the sentiment of participants in this study when he said, "When you focus on people holistically, good things happen." Thus, these coaches modeled the way, especially for their student-athletes.

Investing in relationships was a common practice among athletic coaches. By striving to provide student-athletes with impactful experiences, and not merely trying to win championships, athletic coaches demonstrated they possessed the qualities of transformational leaders. Matthew noted that each season he was motivated to work diligently to provide an enriching experience for his student-athletes: "You go into the season with the notion that you are coaching for them, and wanting to be great for them. I think that if you don't have that relationship, then you ask, 'What am I doing this for?'" Andrew made it a priority to listen to and relate to his student-athletes when he said, "At the core, I see myself as a player's coach, and I think my leadership style is relational. I feel like the best way to impact people is to understand them. I think my leadership style is growth-oriented."

Athletic coaches in this study desired to see their student-athletes be successful in their future life experiences and wanted their athletic experiences to positively affect student-athletes

even after they graduated from college. Simon alluded to this when he stated, “I am going to try to help these girls be as good as I can make them and challenge them to grow in their faith. I’m going to challenge them to have great habits in every area of life.” Philip best summarized what the athletic coaches articulated during their interviews when he spoke of his desire to see his student-athletes experience success in their future endeavors:

Some of the most rewarding aspects are being a major presence in someone’s life. You appreciate trophies, you appreciate team pictures, you appreciate celebrating wins with your players, but what you really appreciate is when 10 years down the road and you get a player that comes back and says the things we did in your program made me a better husband or a better dad because of what you taught me 10 years ago.

Thus, Philip went beyond recognizing accomplishments. John echoed Philip’s desire to profoundly impact student-athletes when he shared, “I think it’s those stories where guys come back and say, ‘You helped me become the person I am,’ I think those things are the most impactful for me.”

In this study, athletic coaches shared how they inspired and motivated their student-athletes. Luke also noted how his coaching staff and athletes inspired him, and that he was driven to do the same with the student-athletes under his charge:

I’ve seen tremendous blessings in my life. The things I’ve learned from the coaches that I’ve coached with, the colleagues that I’ve had, and specifically the players that I have coached, have transformed who I am as a person, so it’s been a tremendous blessing for me. I always tell my team, other than being with my family, I like who I am best when I’m coaching my team as they bring out the best in me, and so that’s the platform God has put in front of me, and it’s been a tremendous honor.

The participants in this study were strategic in their teaching and desired to influence their student-athletes by imparting values and habits that benefited their athletes after they graduated from college. When asked to describe his leadership style, James commented, “I would say intentional, purposeful, and live with the end in sight. Meet people where they are and call them higher. I think I am encouraging.” Each of the eight athletic coaches in this study exhibited traits and qualities that were indicative of transformational leaders. Six of the eight further reinforced their identities as transformational leaders by exhibiting such leaders’ traits throughout their coaching philosophies. In addition, all eight participants acknowledged that spillover between their work life and personal life transpired.

Spillover Theory

Interest in spillover theory in the field of education and athletics became more prevalent since 2005 (Bopp et al., 2015). Hyun (2020) stated that spillover occurred when the two domains of work life and personal life were affected by each other’s routines and habits. Participants in this study consistently spoke about how excessive hours of athletic coaching created an imbalance between time spent on their coaching careers and the hours they could invest in their families.

Athletic coaches routinely had irregular hours because athletic practices and contests were held in the evenings and on weekends. Given the abnormal and excessive hours that athletic coaches in this study experienced, spillover occurred as the routines of work-life collided with their personal lives. Matthew supported this when he said the hours he dedicated to his coaching career far outweighed what he could commit to his family: “There is definitely an imbalance. As a coach, it’s nearly impossible to have a balance. But you have to work at it to be a great coach and a great husband and a great dad.”

The many hours necessary each week to execute coaching duties made work-life imbalance the chief reason athletic coaches desired to leave the profession. Philip noted this when he said, “The most challenging part is the work-life balance and it’s not even close.” Andrew reiterated Philip’s perspective about finding it difficult to not be consumed with coaching when he commented, “I struggle with the idea of turning off this job. I think it is just hard to shut it off when you want to be better and when you want to achieve, and I struggle to have that balance.” John mentioned that arduous hours were expected when one entered the coaching profession and that an athletic coach recognized more hours would be devoted to their careers than their families: “The concept of a 40-hour work week is there, but you quit counting hours and have no idea how much time you’re putting in. I do think there is a work-life imbalance, but it just becomes what you do.”

The athletic coaches in this study were keenly aware their irregular and excessive hours conflicted with their home life and that spillover transpired. Even though athletic coaches attempted to ameliorate their occupational hours, the long and inconsistent hours were unavoidable. Mark succinctly summarized this when he elaborated on the many hours the athletic coaching profession required:

As much as we would love it to be an 8:00–5:00 job, that is not the reality. With practice times, recruiting, and other duties, you are working a lot outside of the realm of what the typical person works. And, you are working regular hours, too, so that is just the overall load. On top of that, more importantly, I have a wife and I have kids. I want to be a good husband and I want to be a good dad. And, how to do that? That was most difficult—just trying to keep those things balanced.

Both Philip and Mark conveyed they attempted to combat the disparity of hours between their professional and personal lives by including their families in athletic team functions.

Further, athletic coaches shared that cell phone usage was vital to their profession, and subsequently, their success. Having the capacity to communicate quickly with their current student-athletes was essential. Sharing pertinent information about practice times, scouting reports, video sessions, and academic progress was pivotal for team success. Cell phones were also necessary for the recruitment of prospective student-athletes. Athletic coaches noted the importance of being disciplined and turning off their phones, devoting time, and being mentally present with their families. Luke was mindful and intentional about creating phone usage limits and boundaries for himself in order to maximize time with his family:

Then with my family, just date nights with my wife and trying to protect family dinners. It's pruning. I talk to my players about it all the time, and I say, 'Pruning is cutting up good branches, pruning is cutting off living branches to channel energy to branches that are more important.' So, pruning in our life is cutting off things that are not necessarily bad, but they're sapping energy from the more important things in your life, and so for me, I don't have any social media. I've never had Facebook, [X], or Instagram. I don't have the internet on my phone. I can check my email but that's it. I have to put up hedges because if I have video games on my phone, I could go for hours. I protect myself from getting overextended and in the coaching world, you can do that to yourself.

Like Luke, Simon was aware not to allow himself to overuse his cell phone and developed strategies and habits to ensure his coaching life did not adversely affect his home life:

I learned to put my phone away for a certain stretch of time at night. I think you do have to be intentional if you're married not to cut out time for your family because your wife

does need your time as well and in this profession, you could spend an endless amount of time with tasks associated with your job.

Establishing boundaries and parameters and not deviating from set guidelines were important for coaches in order to have meaningful experiences with their families. Athletic coaching can be a consuming profession and if frameworks were not firmly established, time with family was compromised. James made it a priority to attend family functions knowing that doing so limited the success of his teams: “I think the thing that about killed me was my children got busy with their activities. I elected to go to my children’s things and I will never regret that, but it did impact my team.”

Overall, athletic coaching and spillover were congruent with each other in this study. The athletic coaches were able to create additional time with their families by establishing guidelines to ensure they devoted necessary time to their families. Nonetheless, athletic coaches knew spillover was inevitable and planned accordingly to mitigate limited time with their families.

Discussion

This study of eight athletic coaches at the small college level revealed themes pertinent to coaching longevity: (a) familiarity; (b) supportive relationships; (c) impact on student-athletes; and (d) balance & flexibility. Each of the eight athletic coaches interviewed graduated from small colleges and five were currently serving at their alma maters. Supportive relationships were valued by the eight athletic coaches as they cited family members, colleagues, and college administration as being vital to their longevity at their current institutions. All eight athletic coaches noted their desire to impact the student-athletes in their programs and articulated the satisfaction they derived from positively affecting their students. As defined by Kouzes & Posner

(2017), each of the eight athletic coaches interviewed for this study was deemed a transformational coach.

Each of the athletic coaches commented on the irregular and excessive hours the coaching profession calls for but appreciated the personal flexibility they had within the framework of their workflow. Thus, for coaches to experience career longevity (15+ years) at small colleges, there needed to be strong relationships with the community, college, and student-athletes as well as flexibility and balance supplemented by familiarity with the unique traits of small colleges.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on the data from this study, university presidents and athletic directors at small colleges should consider inserting questions into their hiring processes that strive to ascertain if candidates for athletic coaching positions are transformational leaders if the small college's goal is to aid the development of student-athletes as opposed to prioritizing winning. In addition to a line of questioning that begs to understand whether a candidate possesses transformational qualities, presidents and athletic directors might contemplate requesting a copy of the candidate's coaching philosophy. A coaching philosophy could potentially reveal if a coach has transformational leadership traits. In addition, university presidents and athletic directors, during the hiring process, would be prudent to learn how the athletic coach intersects their family with their career to the extent that is legally permissible in the hiring process. In sum, these results can help small colleges understand what traits to look for in potential coaching candidates to help ensure a long-term coaching commitment.

Acquiring athletic coaches who possess transformational leadership qualities can help safeguard against burnout and turnover. To retain athletic coaches, leaders at small colleges

should consider ameliorating non-coaching duties. Brown (2020) noted that non-coaching duties coaches were required to perform were the greatest contributor to athletic coaching burnout. Coaches in this study consistently noted the burden of needing to execute non-coaching duties and how their duties compromised their time with their student-athletes and families. Several participants commented on their appreciation for their universities removing non-coaching duties from their job descriptions. Small college leaders should also be cognizant of establishing initiatives and programs that help spouses and children acclimate to the campus community and local community. Because athletic coaches work irregular and long hours and are often away from home during their sports seasons, it is imperative spouses feel connected to their communities. In short, limiting non-coaching duties and ensuring spouses are connected to the local community substantially increase the prospect of the athletic coach remaining in their current position.

Limitations and Future Research

This case study of eight athletic coaches with at least 15 years of experience in the GPAC explored supports and barriers to career longevity. Prominent themes from the study emerged that can aid university presidents and athletic directors as they seek to retain athletic coaching staff. The results and conclusions from this study also lend itself to future research.

One limitation of this study is that it encapsulated all sports offerings within the GPAC. Thus, future research should look at specific sports within small colleges. There are potential differences in career longevity that are specific to certain sports.

Further, a future study that differentiates male and female sports is warranted. In this study, coaches of both male and female sports were studied. Overall, of the eight athletic coaches in this study, five coached a men's athletic team, while three coached women's athletic teams.

Thus, a study should look at how coaching longevity is affected based on who the coaches student-athletes are.

Conducting a similar study to this one among colleges and universities that comprise the Crossroad League and The Sun Conference would also be beneficial. Along with the GPAC, the Crossroads League, and The Sun Conference are regarded as the three prominent conferences in the NAIA. Securing data from each of the three leagues would be invaluable for all NAIA member institutions as this would help discern any conference-specific promoters of or barriers to coaching longevity.

Finally, a future study comparing NCAA I universities to GPAC institutions would be prudent. Understanding if there are unique differences between smaller and larger colleges could be essential to promoting coaching longevity as many factors differ based on conference size, such as salaries. Thus, a comparison case study between the NCAA and GPAC could be beneficial to research in this field.

CHAPTER 5

Podcast Transcript and Rationale

The researcher used an alternative platform—a podcast—to share conclusions and results from this study. The chief aim of this study was to impact the athletic coaching profession by providing university presidents and athletic directors with relevant data pertaining to coaching longevity at small colleges so they could effectively hire and retain athletic coaches at their institutions. Additionally, this research strived to promote a positive and enriching experience for coaches who served at their small colleges. Lastly, a final goal of this study was for athletic coaches to learn strategies and methods that promote longevity in the coaching profession.

Podcasts are popular and readily used in athletic circles. The lifestyle and daily routines of athletic directors and coaches make it difficult for them to read for a length of time. Thus, the intended audience is expected to be more apt to listen to a podcast than read a dissertation. The conclusions and results of this research study are expected to be more impactful and career-altering via a podcast platform than a traditional doctoral dissertation as a podcast allows athletic directors and coaches to readily access the content. As such, please find the below podcast transcript.

Podcast Transcript

Host:

On our Defender Discussions podcast, we are taking a step outside of talking with coaches and instead, we are visiting with Dordt University Director of Athletics, Ross Douma, and the title, if you will, is “Identifying Barriers to the Longevity of Athletic Coaching: A Case Study of a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.” Well, Ross Douma has been

involved in a doctoral study and when this is all said and done, do we put a doctor in front of your name or not?

Ross Douma:

Well, there are those letters, but we are not going to put them in front of my name, nor will I be referred to as a doctor.

Host:

You put in the work for this. What motivated you to research and write on athletic coaching longevity in the GPAC?

Ross Douma:

Thanks for having me on your podcast and for allowing me to share what I have uncovered about coaching longevity in the GPAC. When I began serving as head men's basketball coach at Dordt in 2009, it didn't take long to realize the longevity I observed as a high school coach did not exist within the GPAC. I coached from 2009–2018, and during that time 31 individuals served as head men's basketball coaches in the GPAC, so coaching turnover was high in that sport. In addition, I observed turnover to be high in the GPAC in other sports as well. Very few coaches were retiring, and most who left their coaching posts were changing careers. So, when deciding on what topic to research and write on for my dissertation, I was motivated to learn why some coaches in the GPAC were able to remain in their positions for an extended period.

Host:

How much previous research was there on this topic, on coaching longevity?

Ross Douma:

A great deal of research existed on career longevity and burnout, but very little research on athletic coaching longevity at the small college level. Burnout is a chronic condition with a large

scope. It is hard to measure and pinpoint but is typically defined by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Longitudinal studies on athletic coaching burnout are rare as most people who experienced burnout left the profession and desired not to be part of long-term studies.

Host:

Is that why you elected to pursue this topic to study specifically on the Great Plains Athletic Conference?

Ross Douma:

Yes, absolutely. I feel positively about the presidents, athletic directors, coaches, and especially the athletes who comprise the GPAC. It is a league with well-intentioned leaders and student-athletes who view sports from a proper lens. My chief aim was to identify barriers that affected coaching longevity so presidents and athletic directors can make adaptations on their respective campuses to better support their coaches. In addition, I wanted to learn if coaching style and coaching philosophy, particularly transformational leadership, played a role in athletic coaching longevity.

Host:

Okay, so you have a topic. Now, you have got to find willing participants. How do you go about selecting participants for this study?

Ross Douma:

To begin, there is not a current GPAC president or athletic director who was in either of these roles when the conference was formed in 2000. Moreover, only one current head coach was in that same position in 2000. There are approximately 145 head coaches in the GPAC. There are currently 19 head coaches in the GPAC who have been in their current roles for at least 15 years. I initially conducted a pilot study that consisted of three coaches, and then for this research study, I interviewed eight head coaches who have served in their current positions for at least 15 years.

Host:

Okay, so you did that. You got together with these coaches via Zoom or some of them in-person. Tell me about your research. What were the results?

Ross Douma:

I interviewed each of the head coaches via Zoom. For starters, my research study really centered around two overarching questions: 1) Does leadership style affect coaching burnout at small colleges, and 2) what support is needed to enhance coaching longevity at small colleges?

The participants were asked a series of 11 questions pertaining to burnout, longevity, and family support. Using their cumulative responses, I organized their answers into themes. Four primary themes emerged from the data: 1) familiarity; 2) supportive relationships; 3) impact on student-athletes, and 4) flexibility & balance. First, familiarity. I thought it was very interesting that several athletic coaches had fathers who were in the coaching profession. Their fathers' joy for coaching was observed by their children and motivated their children to coach. Coaching is a lifestyle, and the children were acutely aware of how much time was needed to be dedicated to the profession and learned that coaches have irregular hours, as we know. A sub-theme of familiarity that emerged was loyalty to small colleges. Interestingly, each of the eight coaches I interviewed attended small colleges, and five were head coaches at institutions they graduated from. These coaches had positive experiences on small campuses as undergrads. Loyalty to their alma mater was mentioned on several occasions. Another theme I alluded to was supportive relationships. Several sub-themes emerged from the umbrella of supportive relationships, and one was family support. Each of the eight coaches commented on the importance of their spouses supporting their coaching endeavors. Many stated how they included their family in team

activities, so the family could spend more time together. Several of the coaches talked about institutional support, and when we talk about institutional support we are essentially saying ample staffing, competitive athletic scholarships, and adequate facilities. Coaches felt they needed to have these raw materials to be successful. And, coaches wanted to feel appreciated. To be routinely thanked and recognized for their service by the university president and athletic director was shared by several of the coaches who were interviewed. Then, finally, so far as supportive relationships are concerned, several coaches mentioned the support of colleagues. Few people outside of the coaching profession keenly understand what coaches encounter. Having colleagues they can trust and confide in is invaluable. The coaches in this study enjoyed working with their coaching peers.

The third theme was impact on student-athletes. Forming authentic and meaningful relationships with students was instrumental for the athletic coaches. Genuine relationships motivated athletic coaches to remain in the profession and at their current institution. All the participants in the study discussed the significance of having impactful relationships. The coaches in this study derived a sense of satisfaction from assisting student-athletes in their personal development. A significant finding in this study was that each of the eight coaches in this study was a transformational leader. They gained joy from assisting and developing young people and were motivated to stay in the profession because of the opportunity to impact young people. Most coaches noted their desire to spiritually develop their athletes. I thought that was telling as well. Then, the last area I noted was flexibility and balance. The coaching profession, and you know this as well as anyone, has irregular hours that include late nights and weekends. While oftentimes coaches invested 70+ hours a week, many noted the latitude and flexibility their professions offered them. Athletic coaching often did not have established office hours, if you

will. Because coaches were required to be present for practices and games, which often transpired in late afternoons and evenings, being afforded the freedom to be present at family functions during the day was significant to the athletic coaches. Several of the athletic coaches commented that having fewer non-coaching duties at their institution permitted them to have more flexibility in their schedules and spend time with their families. Athletic coaches did not prioritize success or winning but were process-oriented as they administered functional athletic programs. In addition to having a balanced perspective on winning and losing, the athletic coaches in this study also possessed the desire to have a balanced perspective toward understanding current student-athletes. Athletic coaches in this study viewed it as their responsibility to effectively relate to current student-athletes, rather than put the onus on the players to understand the veteran coaches.

Host:

So, that is a lot of information from these interviews in terms of the themes that emerged and the many hours that go into these interviews, and then you have got to decipher what is important. I would imagine from these one-hour to 90-minute conversations you have to start drawing conclusions. What conclusions were you able to make?

Ross Douma:

Being a transformational leader promotes coaching longevity as transformational leaders tend to focus on the needs of others, which is invigorating. Each of the eight coaches in the study was a transformational leader. Because of the excessive and irregular hours associated with the coaching profession, spillover between the coach's professional and personal life transpires. Thus, having a supportive spouse and family is essential. Several coaches noted how their families are included in team activities. Coaches in this study are familiar with, and appreciate,

being on small campuses. Finally, the coaches in this study had very few non-coaching responsibilities on their campuses. Those are really the four stark conclusions I was able to draw from research.

Host:

So, you complete this study. You have drawn conclusions. You have an idea of what this means, and you have a cross-section to understand where people are coming from. Based on the research you conducted, what recommendations would you make?

Ross Douma:

The genesis behind this research study is how it can positively impact institutions, primarily those in the GPAC, in the future. Based on the data from this study, I believe that university presidents and athletic directors should consider inserting questions into their hiring processes that ascertain if candidates are transformational leaders. This can be done through an intentional line of questioning, and by asking candidates to provide a copy of their coaching philosophy. Also, recruiting candidates who attended small colleges might be a good strategy to utilize. Seventeen of the 19 coaches in the GPAC with at least 15 years of experience received their undergraduate degrees from small colleges and 12 of the 19 coaches are graduates of institutions they are currently serving at. Thus, targeting alumni would be wise, as well. In addition, university presidents and athletic directors, during the hiring process, would be prudent to learn how the athletic coach intersects their family with their career. Compartmentalizing personal and professional lives does not appear to transpire, according to the research. So, learning how a prospective coach does that well might be helpful to know. Small college leaders should also be cognizant of establishing initiatives and programs that help spouses and children acclimate to the campus and local communities in which they reside. Finally, to retain athletic coaches, leaders at

small colleges should consider reducing non-coaching duties. Previous research has concluded that non-coaching duties coaches were required to perform were the greatest contributor to coaching burnout. Coaches in this study consistently noted the burden of needing to execute non-coaching duties and how their duties compromised their time with their student-athletes and families. Several participants commented on their appreciation for their university removing non-coaching duties from their job descriptions. Certainly, there are budget implications university leaders must weigh, but research is conclusive about non-coaching duties affecting burnout and longevity.

Host:

You obviously have looked at previous studies and similar studies, but not this honed in on maybe one conference. When people look back and read your document and look at how it could impact future studies, what can this research provide for future studies?

Ross Douma:

I certainly hope there are studies that come along, you know, as years go by that can take what I've learned and then also add to it so the student-athlete experience can be accentuated. One limitation of this study is that it encapsulated all sports offerings within the GPAC. Thus, future research should look at specific sports in the small college ranks. There are potential differences in career longevity that are pertinent to certain sports. Further, a future study that differentiates male and female sports is warranted. In this study, coaches of both male and female sports were studied. Overall, of the eight athletic coaches in this study, five coached a men's athletic team, while three coached women's athletic teams. Conducting a similar study to this one among colleges and universities that comprise the Crossroad League and The Sun Conference would also be beneficial. Along with the GPAC, the Crossroads League, and The Sun Conference are

regarded as the three prominent conferences in the NAIA. Securing data from each of the three leagues would be invaluable for all NAIA member institutions. Finally, a future study comparing NCAA I universities to GPAC institutions would be prudent. Understanding if there are unique differences between smaller and larger colleges could be essential to promoting coaching longevity. Thus, a comparison case study between the NCAA and GPAC could be beneficial to research in this field.

Host:

“Identifying Barriers to the Longevity of Athletic Coaching: A Case Study of a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.” Ross Douma, you have spent a lot of hours, I am not going to ask how many because it would be scary but I’m guessing a project like this, yes, you talk to the people, which I enjoy talking with people who have been in their profession and are successful and have done it for a long time and always curious about what makes them tick so to speak, but then it gets your brain working and sometimes it is hard to turn that off and so how long did you spend? It’s not really fair to say because when you’re driving in the car and thinking about it does that count or not I think it does but you have devoted a pretty significant piece of the last 12 months, and I’m hopeful that now there is some information out there, we always knew it was out there, was this mist or this fog out there.

Ross Douma:

A lot of what we observe is anecdotal evidence, right? It is things that we observe but we are not able to really measure and this gut feeling, if you will, that we have is something that for me I just really yearned to understand it more from a certainty standpoint. Some of the folks who have stood the test of time in our conference really put in perspective what goes into athletic coaching

and more importantly how we can retain folks and provide them with a joy-filled experience.

Thanks for having me, Mike. I really appreciate your time.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What led up to you deciding to become an athletic coach? (RQ 1)
2. What made you decide to become a coach at a small college? (RQ 1)
3. What is the most rewarding and challenging part of your job? (RQ 1 and RQ 2)
4. What five words would you use to describe your leadership style? (RQ 1)
5. Tell me a story that is most reflective of your leadership style. (RQ 1)
6. What do you believe are contributors to burnout? (RQ 1)
7. What do you do to address burnout? (RQ 1)
8. What has kept you as a coach so long at your current institution? (RQ 2)
9. What support have you received from your current institution that keeps you in your current position? (RQ 2)
10. If you were to leave your current institution tomorrow, what would be the three primary reasons why? (RQ 2)
11. Do you feel your athletic coaching duties create a work-life imbalance for you? (RQ 2)
12. Is there anything you would like to add that I did not ask about?