

A Coaching Education and Internship Program for Female High School Student-Athletes

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The implementation of Title IX in 1972 brought excitement and hope to the world of girls' and women's athletics. The purpose of Title IX was to diminish the disparity between the sexes in availability and opportunity for girls and women in public education, which included sport participation. While opportunities to participate in athletics have increased dramatically for females since 1972 in terms of number of programs and sports (Weiss and Hayashi, 1996), opportunities in coaching, officiating and administration have decreased at the college and high school levels (e.g., Acosta and Carpenter, 1985a; 1994; True, 1986; Weiss et al., 1991).

Acosta and Carpenter (1985a; 1985b; 1994) documented the number of women in sport leadership positions over the past two decades. Almost all states surveyed over the past 20 years showed a steady decline. In 1972, 90 percent of women's NCAA sports were coached by women, but by 1990 that number had dropped to 47.3 percent and in 1994 it was 49.4 percent (Acosta and Carpenter, 1994). Why the decline in women leaders when women are just as qualified as males and Title IX was supposed to increase opportunity? Proposed reasons range from social issues and structures to low perceptions of competence in female coaches. Acosta and Carpenter (1985a) note that the increase in the number of sports offered

to girls and women increased the demand for coaches, and many of these new coaching positions were filled by men. As pay increased for women's head coaches, these positions also became more attractive to men.

In a survey of athletic administrators, responses reflected overwhelming support that women coaches are needed as role models for female athletes (Acosta and Carpenter, 1985b). Despite positive attitudes concerning the importance of female coaches for girls, it appears that creating change to provide more role models has not been easy. One solution is to socialize females into the coaching role through training opportunities in the form of workshops and internships (Lirgg, 1992; Sisley and Capel, 1986; Sisley et al., 1990; Weiss et al., 1991). Solutions advocated are coaching certification (Lopiano, 1986; Partlow, 1992) and mentorship programs that provide education and training (Abney, 1991; Depauw et al., 1991). Successful examples of such programs include Colorado's "Sport Needs You" model (Schafer, 1987) and an internship program in Oregon (Sisley et al., 1990; Weiss et al., 1991).

The success of coach education and internship programs suggests that these are viable solutions to the dilemma of decreasing numbers of women in athletic leadership positions. The purpose of this study was: (1) to provide a coach

education program and opportunities for coaching to high school female athletes; and (2) to expose youth sport participants to these coaches. Specifically, female high school athletes were recruited to participate in a coach education program. They were trained in a one-week workshop and subsequently coached elementary school-aged youth basketball teams. Post-internship interviews of these coaches revealed their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their experience.

Method

Participants

Six current or former student-athletes from a large high school in Oregon volunteered to participate in the coaching program. Of the two former athletes, one was forced out due to injury and the other due to financial constraints. Four participants were seniors and two were juniors ranging in age from 16 to 18 years. Arrangements were made with a local youth sports agency for these student-athletes to coach elementary-age youth in a seasonal basketball program.

Permission to contact student-athletes was obtained through approval by the high school principal and athletic director, and the school district research compliance office. Prior to student contact, it was arranged with the high school that participants would re-

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ceive community service credits toward their graduation requirements. Recruiting took place over a two-week period by posting flyers in the high school halls and including information in the daily announcements.

Procedure

Coach Education Workshop. The American Sport Education Program (ASEP), formerly known as American Coaching Effectiveness Program (ACEP), is a widely used coach education program in the United States (Partlow, 1992). ASEP is designed to meet the needs of coaches at various levels: volunteer, leader and master. The Rookie Coaches course involves a coach's guidebook (ACEP, 1993) and instruction on topics ranging from sport-specific rules and tactics to effective communication. The Rookie Coaches Course consists of four 90-minute sessions for a total of six hours. After completion of training, participants in this study took a written test and received certificates upon attaining a passing score.

Each participant was given a *Coaching Youth Basketball* (ASEP, 1991) book, a whistle, a spiral notebook and a coach's packet provided by the youth sports agency. In addition, because only one participant had a strong basketball background, handouts were issued with practice plans and designed plays to help the student-athletes get started. At the request of the participants, two additional hours of on-court training time were provided.

Coaching Field Experience. Following the workshop and completion of the certification, participants were assigned to one of three youth sport basketball teams. "Teams" of coaches were allowed to enhance their motivation and confidence by working with peers. Three participants coached fourth-grade girls, two coached fifth-grade girls and one coached third-grade boys. (In the solo case, the participant's mother acted as an

assistant coach.) Girls' teams were the target groups to be coached by the study participants, but not enough girls' teams had vacant coaching positions. This resulted in a boys' team being used. The researchers also attended the first few practices to act as a resource for any questions that might arise from the coaches.

One of the suggested tips for ASEP's effectiveness was to provide follow-up meetings to the training sessions. To guide the coaches during their field experience, the researchers observed practice sessions and provided feedback three to four times throughout the youth sport season. In addition, the researchers' work and home phone numbers were made available for any immediate concerns.

Post-Season Interviews

All post-season interviews took place within two weeks following completion of the coaching experience. The interview schedule and format were patterned after those in Weiss et al. (1991), given the similar purpose and questions regarding coaching experiences. The interviewer was trained in probing techniques and general interviewing skills. The interview was designed to elicit participants' thoughts and feelings about their coaching experience.

Interview Analysis

Inductive content analysis was used to assess interview data, which allows for the emergence of underlying themes or dimensions. Transcriptions were thoroughly read and relevant quotes (raw data themes) were selected. Quotes represented meaningful answers to questions about positive and negative aspects. The researchers discussed each quote and reached consensus on which quotes to include in the next level of analysis. To create lower-order themes, quotes were grouped based on similarity and then labeled to reflect the underlying meaning of each grouping. Related

lower-order themes were grouped according to similarity, from which higher-order themes were created.

Results and Discussion

Participant Profiles

The participants had diverse and active backgrounds. Based on the interview data, a brief sketch of each coach was provided to offer a personal introduction of each participant in the study. The actual names of participants were changed to retain anonymity.

Robyn, an 18-year-old senior and a soccer player, enjoyed coaching, giving advice, learning basketball and working with her peers (co-coaches). Coordinating ideas at practice with two other coaches was a particular challenge. Highlights of her experience revolved around getting to know the players and their parents and learning how to say things in different ways. Some difficult aspects were going to practice right after work and learning how to get the players' attention. Robyn felt it was "really good for young women athletes to see other women athletes who are still competing...They need to see that females can also play sports and are good at them."

Edith, a 17-year-old junior soccer player, found that practices were positive because they were a place to go and focus just on coaching. She felt good that she was doing something for the players and that they were having fun. Edith felt that coordinating with other coaches was a particular difficulty, as was gaining the players' attention. Edith said coaching was fun and "even the bad things are good. You learn. It's like you're learning the whole time you're there, and it's not like learning subjects or something. You learn about yourself, you learn about people, you learn about games, you just learn."

Rhea, a 17-year-old former volleyball player, tried to be a "positive role model" with her players. "It felt good to

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model — “players looked up to me” — and talking about sport and non-sport things. These themes revolved around providing leadership, especially for girls, and the ability to develop coach-player rapport. This rapport, defined by talking about sport and non-sport things, was captured in the quote: “Having little kids look up to you...be a positive role model...we would talk about everything, not only basketball, but about their boyfriends and their brothers and things like school and what teachers they liked...so it was definitely fun to see that happening.”

The coaches in this study indicated many positive experiences, with particular highs being improved coaching skills, working with kids and having fun.

7. *Family Interactions* had two lower-order themes of parental support and getting to know families. Parental support was appreciated by the coaches and helped make the experience positive. The second theme dealt with the enjoyment of meeting people.

In general, positive aspects were parallel to those identified by other researchers (Acosta and Carpenter, 1994; Weiss et al., 1991). These similarities included the theme of fun, development of self and development of others. Interpersonal development and working with kids were common to Weiss et al. (1991), which also dealt with novice coaches.

As with Weiss et al.'s (1991) study of adult women interns, development of coaching skills in these high school girls reflected feelings of increased knowledge and competence. Sport-specific knowledge can be a valuable factor in women's decisions to continue coaching, as sport knowledge and abilities are cited as weaknesses and a reason for discontinuing coaching (Weiss et al., 1991; Weiss and

Sisley, 1984; Weiss and Stevens, 1993). Thus, it is encouraging that coaches in this study cited increases in sport knowledge and competence as a positive aspect. *Negative Aspects of Coaching*. In response to the question “What were the negative aspects of your coaching experience?”, seven higher-order themes emerged:

1. *Lack of Communication Skills* was the most pervasive theme, with four lower-order themes: getting players' attention, lack of authority, being frustrated instead of being constructive and controlling temper. These themes revolved around the challenges of working with young athletes.

2. *Parents* reflected some of the difficulties coaches encountered. One salient quote was: “We have one specific parent who is extreme-

ly overbearing...whenever he came to practices he kind of tended to just take over...I try to avoid confrontation...to talk to him and say, it bothers me when you do this.”

3. *Self-Doubts about Ability* entailed the coach's perceptions of whether she had the skills, abilities and/or knowledge to be an effective coach.

4. *Lack of Athlete Motivation* was derived from lower-order themes of getting players to understand the work ethic, doing drills they don't like and lack of effort. The first two themes dealt with the effort players expended (or didn't expend).

5. *Lack of Skill* had lower-order themes consisting of looking unskilled and losing. These themes focused on not matching up competitively and the outcomes that resulted. Looking unskilled held a particularly salient quote: “It was frustrating to see all these...Michael Jordans coming out onto the court and then playing my kids where we don't have any stars on the team...competing against

them, but I just had to remember that... if they got 10 points it was cool.”

6. *Time Demands* included lower-order themes of being distracted, time commitment, practice after work or school and missing practice. One coach summed it up like this: “It took a lot of time and a lot of commitment as far as having to get there and having to get it all together...we had three hours of practice a week and then we had a game either once...or twice a weekend... plus planning practices and calling parents and getting everybody organized.”

This dimension also revolved around the negative effect of coaching with an already busy schedule and the inability to focus on coaching on certain days. Occasionally, these other constraints resulted in having to miss practice. These coaches were generally surprised at how much time it took to not only be at practice and games but to organize them as well.

7. *Coordination Difficulties* were identified as the problems associated with having three coaches on one team; specifically, the difficulties in coordinating practice. These coaches expressed some of the frustrations involving athletes behaving inappropriately and the uncertainty in disciplining poor athlete behavior.

The negative aspects identified were consistent with previous studies with older participants. Specifically, time demands and self-doubts about ability are pervasive and salient themes cited as reasons for females dropping out of coaching (Acosta and Carpenter, 1992; Hart et al., 1986; Weiss et al., 1991; Weiss and Sisley, 1984). In comparison to results in Weiss et al., coaches in both studies indicated doubts about their ability to effectively teach a sport and commented on the amount of time involved. In addition, coaches in both studies reflected on difficult interactions with kids, such as player behaviors.

Summary and Conclusions

Because women in positions of athletic leadership remain scarce, efforts have been extended to mitigate these circumstances. This project incorporated an educational portion prior to a coaching experience in an attempt to provide information and strategies to novice coaches. A related goal was that the student-coaches would serve as role models for youth sport participants. Specifically, this study was an extension of Weiss et al.'s (1991) study that indicated a need for intervention programs to enhance the experiences of novice female coaches.

The coaches in this study indicated many positive experiences, with particular highs being improved coaching skills, working with kids and having fun. Conversely, a common negative aspect identified by these coaches was communication skills needed to maintain a controlled environment, especially gaining the players' attention. Time demands and lack of player motivation were also mentioned as difficulties.

An additional way to evaluate the overall effectiveness of this program was asking the coaches if they wanted to coach in the future. All coaches replied with an affirmative response, with five of the six saying that they would "definitely" or "absolutely" coach again. One coach summed up the experience like this: "I just think it was a lot of fun and...somebody should implement [it]...in the high schools, and even the colleges in the area....I think it would be a good program." In sum, information gleaned from this study supports research and recommendations regarding coach education (Acosta and Carpenter, 1994; Schafer, 1987; Sisley and Capel, 1986; Sisley et al., 1990; Weiss et al., 1991).

Targeting high school students was one of the unique aspects of the project. It provided an interesting place to start

the socialization of young female student-athletes into the role of coach instead of waiting until post-collegiate days or parenthood. Thus, programs such as this one provide a fundamental way to change the status of women in sport leadership positions. These results and those from Sisley et al. (1990) and Weiss et al. (1991) show that these programs need to be implemented more frequently, and the structure and strategies evaluated and modified to meet the needs of the participants. In doing so, female coaches are provided knowledge, skills and confidence to succeed in sport leadership positions. ●

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