

Game Plans



Coaching Advancement Program Newsletter

Michigan Coaches Address Current Issues in Interscholastic Athletics

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This article highlights several findings from focus group interviews conducted with Michigan's coaches. The ISYS invites you to offer your opinions in a short survey on our web site. The survey, and the full summary report are located at: www.youthsports.msu.edu



INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2005, the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports (ISYS) initiated a study designed to identify the major issues, concerns, and challenges facing Michigan's high school sports leaders and their athletes today. Results of this study are being used in several ways including: (1) to help guide curricular development efforts of the MHSAA Coaches Advancement Program; (2) to identify the most pressing practical issues on which researchers from the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports should conduct further research; and (3) to add to the body of scientific knowledge relative to promoting positive youth development through educational athletics.

HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

As Phase 1 of a larger project, a series of focus group interviews have been conducted with the coaches, principals, athletic directors, parents, and student athletes involved in Michigan high school sports. The purpose of these 5-8 person focus group interviews has been to identify participants' views on issues and challenges in high school sports today and their percep-

tions of the problems facing student athletes. This article summarizes the interviews with two focus groups of coaches, specifically 14 Presidents of Michigan High School Coaches Associations. Two interviews of approximately one hour in duration were held.

Key questions asked of each group included:

1. What are the best or most rewarding things about being a high school coach today?
2. What are the worst or least rewarding things about being a high school coach today?
3. What are the biggest challenges coaches face when working with high school athletes today?
4. What are the biggest issues facing high school student athletes today?
5. What are the "life skill" needs of today's high school athletes?

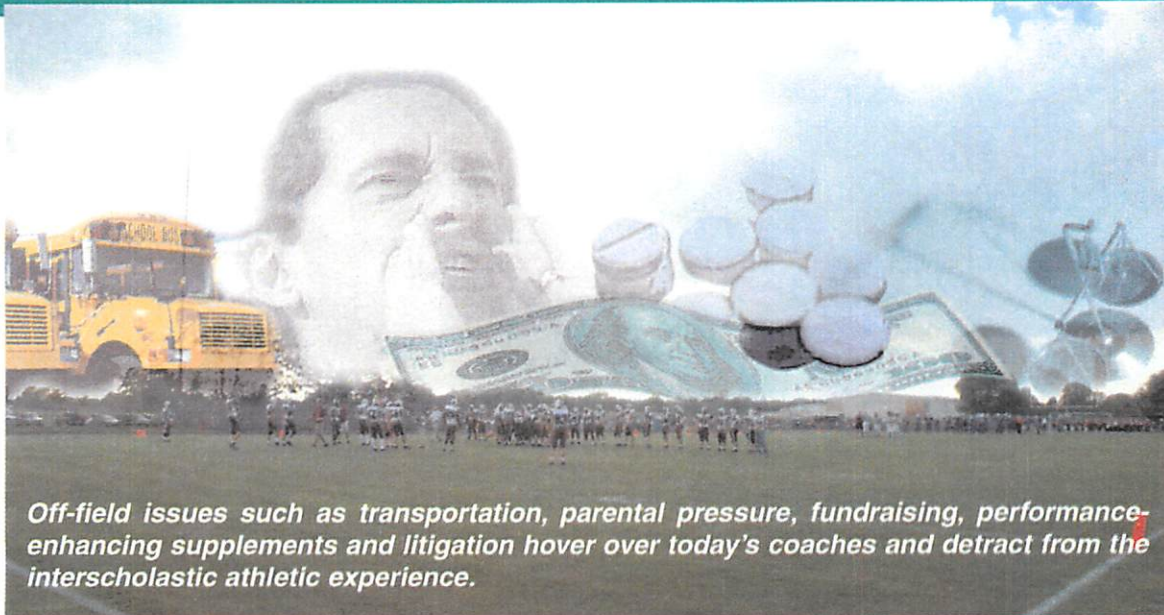
Who Was Studied?

The 14 coaches averaged 49 years of age (ranging from 34 to 59 years) and all were Caucasian. The coaches had an average of 26 years of coaching experience. Four of the coaches were certified through the MHSAA PACE program. All participants had completed a Master's Degree. Eleven of the 12 coaches were certified teachers, with seven having a major in physical education or a minor in coaching.

What Was Found?

The two focus groups were tape-recorded and transcriptions were studied by the investigative team. Answers to the interview questions were summarized as follows:

1. What are the best (most rewarding) things about being a high school coach today?
 - A. Developing Special Relationships: "The interaction with a variety of



Off-field issues such as transportation, parental pressure, fundraising, performance-enhancing supplements and litigation hover over today's coaches and detract from the interscholastic athletic experience.

- kids...The relationships you have with the kids last for years... you get to know families well because of time between games..."
- B. Experiencing the Unique Benefits of Working in a Sport Context: "You get to know kids in non-academic settings...you are with them more than their parents... extracurricular activities are places where kids want to be and you see them in these settings..."
- C. Opportunities to Observe and Nurture Student-Athlete Growth and Development: "Mentoring: ...The natural emotional highs and lows that come with sport involvement allow you to help shape the character of the youngsters...Sport allows kids to develop lifelong friendships and a sense of belonging...Helping kids develop confidence...Developing life skills – like cooperation, communication, leadership, commitment...As a coach you get kids connected to lifetime activities...They develop a lifelong love of the sport and activity that you as a coach get to start."
2. What are the least rewarding things about coaching high school sports today?
- A. Inadequate Program Funding: "The cost — you can't run a program on money the school gives you...Financial cutbacks make it impossible to have adequate supervision ..."
- B. Parental Issues: "Parents have over inflated views of their children's talent and feel college scholarships grow on trees. Parents do not see sport as a place for fun and growth...this is causing young officials and coaches to leave sport...Need more sportsmanlike behaviors from parents...Parents get the ear of some administrators who are unfamiliar with how athletics operate... Parents need to check into things – go through the proper channels before criticizing the coach..."
- C. Increasing Off-Field Coaching Demands: " Need to find people to coach who really understand the game and also the dangers and liability...You worry more about non-coaching stuff and have less time to coach because of that stuff."
- D. Time Commitment Coaching Requires: "Coaching is now a year-round endeavor...Keeping coaches in the sport: Coaches don't coach as long as they once did."
- E. Negative Influences of (non-school) Club Coaches: "High School coaches and non-school club coaches are not on the same page, which can lead to over-training and burnout of athletes...there is a sense of losing control of how you can run your program ..."
- F. Unappreciative Kids: "Kids you work really hard with don't show appreciation for all the time you are spending with them."
4. What are the biggest challenges coaches face when working with high school athletes today?
- A. Dealing With Funding Issues: "Fundraising: Most coaches are trying to figure out a way to raise money for their kids as already inadequate athletic budgets get cut... Some try to solve this issue through pay for play programs, but this affects poor kids. Everyone fund-raises for their sport and competes with one another versus having an overall fund raising effort for the entire program..."
- B. Dealing with Special Needs of Today's Student Athlete: "The home life of some student athletes is taxing: Some kids must be a caretaker at home, go to practice, study, etc...Kids are less active/motivated to participate in sport. It is easier to watch television. Society in general is pulling kids away from activity-especially at younger age...Teaching kids (getting them to understand) that the ends don't justify means—this is a challenge because they see the 'ends justify the means' orientation in college and especially the pros..."
5. What are the biggest issues facing high school student athletes today?
- A. Increased Expectations and Pressure: "Expectations and Pressure: Parental pressure for the child to perform/they have unrealistic expectations...Parental pressure to specialize...Higher expectations not just on playing field – expectations socially and in general."

B. High academic expectations: (There was some concern that it is difficult for children to keep grades up – meet today's high academic expectation-) when they participate in multiple sports. However, most of the coaches felt kids get better grades when playing sports.)

C. Pressure to get into college and the right college: "... there is more pressure on kids to achieve. So, some kids do not participate because they do not want to fail. We are losing a lot of the middle-level ability kids in this regard..."

D. Substance Abuse Issues: "Alcohol, drugs, and peer pressure to use them. The performance enhancing drug situations are getting worse...The big difference today for substance use (drinking) is the major sanctions that accompany infractions and the publicity that goes with those sanctions - there is a harsher reality for kids who get caught experimenting and that puts even more pressure on kids..."

E. Overemphasized Outcome Focus: "The ends justifying the means orientation characterizing today's society (e.g., pro baseball sanctions are not really that harsh—sort of a joke). We see this more today... The media (ESPN) focuses on "winners" and just a select group of sports. This result is a push to focus in on specialization."

F. Inappropriate Behaviors and Attitudes: "Poor sportsmanship emphasized in media coverage...This negative pro-athlete influence is trickling down to colleges and this then affects the high schools... Most coaches are aware of hazing problems...Trash-talking and taunting are not a big problem because the sanctions are very severe."

G. Single and Early Sports Specialization: This may be the biggest problem facing sports today...Younger coaches do not see specialization as a problem (this relates to the problem of a lack of coach training...Some coaches and parents push children to specialize...Many of those involved in non-school sport don't seem to understand the value of cross-training."

H. School/Non-school Sport Conflicts: Kids are getting pulled in many directions regarding scholarships – AAU. Not everyone is on the same page...This leads to burnout or kids not being interested in sports. Coaches of school and non-school programs give different input to the child."

6. What are the "life skills" needs of today's high school athletes?

Lack of commitment/determination (to make things better): Kids don't want to play if a team is not good, versus an 'I can make this team better if I play' orientation...To help an athlete be proud of whatever skill set they achieve – it is not just about the scholarship. It's about how to deal with people – show respect when running up a big score on other team.

7. Have things changed relative to teaching life skills to players?

"Today parents more often expect coaches to take over the parental role...Parenting abilities today are less than they were in the past...Kids are basically the same, but the environment is different...Kids have more choices today (given technology), so they are not as committed to physically exerting themselves...There are more single parent families today...Harder for kids who try to pick up sports later—its much harder for them to catch up."

8. Do you feel most coaches have the same kind of feelings that you do about teaching life skills to their athletes?

"Most do, but some are out for themselves...As presidents of coaching associations, we try to get our coaches to be a positive influence...Non-educator coaches do not have the educational background to realize the influence they are having on young people, so they often focus only on win-loss issues...We can't say for sure that our members feel the same about life skills because it is never verbalized in meetings...however, coaches who have been in it a long time believe in teaching life skills."

RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGING FROM THE DISCUSSIONS:

- As a new coach, go to other games and help the parents understand what to cheer for in the game – subtly train par-

ents. In preseason meetings, cover special transportation issues when schools no longer provide transportation.

- Get older kids to pass on expectations (can work really well or have a very negative influence). Peer leadership and modeling can be very powerful.

- We cannot turn back the clock on specialization or reduce today's pressure on kids to achieve, but we must find ways to more effectively deal with these issues.

- High schools should hire full-time fundraisers to help coaches.

- Some coaches said "pay-for-play" options are okay, but they must be kept within reason (and develop a mechanism for poor kids to participate). Others felt that pay to play causes some kids to not come out – they are embarrassed to say they cannot afford the fee. Coaches learn about this from the kids' friends.

- As educators we need to use positive propaganda to highlight the positive aspects of high school sports.

- We need to do a better job of selling the values of multi-sport participation—it helps prevent burnout, overtraining, and injury.

- To combat specialization show the list of all-state kids and point out that most are two sport athletes. Emphasize different but complimentary skill sets that come from multi-sport participation.

- HS sport is the best game in town, but we do a lousy job of highlighting the positive aspects of high school sports. As educators we need to use positive propaganda to highlight the positive aspects of high school sports.

- Educate coaches on the benefits of cross training (to reduce injuries).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The investigative team would like to thank Kathy Vruggink Westdorp, MHSAA Assistant Director, for helping organize the focus group sessions. We would also like to acknowledge the 14 coaches who shared their opinions with us.

CAP ATTENDANCE

Through Feb. 15, 2006

Recent CAP Graduates (ALL LEVEL 3)

BRONSON
Mark Skinner

FLAT ROCK
David Ballard

QUINCY
Tracy Bailey
Trina Craig

CASSOPOLIS
Floyd Foston
A Scott Marshall
Erin Westrate

NEW BOSTON HURON
David E Lawrence

COACHES ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM OUTLINE

CAP 1 6 Hours

1 ½ hours: Coaches Make the Difference: MHSAA Philosophy and Regulations

2 hours: Effective Instruction: The Coach as Teacher

2 ½ hours: Sports Medicine and First Aid

CAP 2 6 Hours

2 ½ hours: Effective Communication: Characteristics of Coaches

Who are Great Communicators

1 ½ hours: Legal Responsibilities of Coaches

2 hours: Psychology of Coaching

CAP 3 6 Hours

2 ½ hours: Teaching Technical & Tactical Skills/Effective Instruction Progression

2 hours: Effectively Working with Parents

1 ½ hours: The Coach as a Performer: Managing Your Time and Energy Level

CAP 4 6 Hours

2 hours: Strength and Conditioning

2 hours: Administrative Responsibilities of the Coach

2 hours: Resolving Conflicts that Occur in Athletics

CAP 5 6 Hours

2 hours: Mental Preparation: Preparing for Success

2 hours: Chemical Health Education

2 hours: Current Issues in Educational Athletics

CAP 6 6 Hours

2 hours: Teaching Emotional Toughness

2 hours: Instructional Games in Athletics

2 hours: Current Issues in Educational Athletics

Coaches Advancement Program Certification

CAP Beginning Certification = 12 hours

CAP Intermediate Certification = 18 hours

CAP Advanced Certification = 24 hours

CAP Masters Certification = 30 hours

CAP Masters Elite Certification = 36 hours

Certification would occur after the first 12 hours with subsequent increments of 6 hours for a total of 36 hours available. Additional units could be written and received after the first 36 hours have been completed.

NOTE: A coach who has completed Level 1 of the former "PACE" program may advance to Level 2 in CAP. A coach who has completed Level 1 and 2 from the PACE program may advance to Level 3 in CAP.

CAP 1 PROGRAMS ATTENDANCE

MHSAA	14
Saline HS	12
Rochester Comm. Schools	15
Saginaw Heritage HS	15
Highland Park HS	19
Comstock HS	20
Petoskey HS	11
Bloomfield Hills Lahser HS	21
MHSAA	8
Benzie Central HS	29
Pontiac Northern HS	28
Oscoda HS	18
BCAM at MHSAA	19
Lowell HS	7
Quincy HS	16
Sturgis HS	27
MHSAA	27
Alpena HS	13
Bellevue HS	19
Maxfield Training Center	15
MHSAA (WISL)	18
TOTAL - 19 PROGRAMS	371

CAP 2 PROGRAMS ATTENDANCE

Highland Park HS	17
Comstock HS	19
Saginaw Heritage HS	19
Houghton Lake HS	6
Petoskey HS	8
Rochester Comm. Schools	19
Northville HS	37
BCAM at MHSAA	10
Pontiac Northern HS	15
Oscoda HS	22
Quincy HS	10
Alpena HS	12
Britton-Macon HS	14
MHSAA (WISL)	13
TOTAL - 13 PROGRAMS	221

CAP 3 PROGRAMS ATTENDANCE

Saginaw Heritage HS	12
Rochester Comm. Schools	18
MHSAA	6
Grayling HS	30
Quincy HS	10
MHSAA (WISL)	9
TOTAL - 4 PROGRAMS	85

CAP1, CAP2, CAP3 TOTALS 677

COLLEGE LEVEL PROGRAMS ATT.

Central Michigan University	40
Monroe County Community College	7
Saginaw Valley State University	14
COLLEGE TOTAL	61

GRAND TOTAL TO DATE: 738