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**SETTING THE FIELD: A FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP SUCCESS
ON AND OFF THE ATHLETIC FIELD...AND WHY IT MATTERS**

by

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ABSTRACT

Navigating the difficulties of adolescence and young adulthood has been an age-old subject studied in fields like psychology, sociology, biology, and education, to name a few, as well as significantly addressed in literature and other aspects of culture. But, there is an important and often-overlooked area where much can be done to help this age group thrive and go on to become productive and successful adults, good citizens and quality stewards of the world in which they live. It is the participation in athletic-team sports at school.

Because of the hyper-pace of life today resulting from ever-advancing technology, our youth must be more adept than ever at making rapid, yet sound, decisions. They must be able to think critically, react rationally and appropriately to often life-changing situations, and respond with composure and moral clarity. Participation in team sports has been shown to be one of the best ways to acquire such psychosocial skills and to develop outstanding future leaders in society. However, such success is dependent on and must be facilitated by quality coaches. These coaches not only need to understand their traditional roles in the tactical instruction required for successful team play, but they must first and foremost become familiar with the human-growth characteristics of adolescents and the successful emotional development of these young people who are entrusted to them. As the chief adult, they play a pivotal role in shaping the character and leadership skills of each team member. They must serve as mentors and counselors who instill values, discipline, and teamwork in the athletes, thereby fostering personal growth and creating a culture of excellence both on and off the field. Good leadership skills learned through school athletics translate to life beyond graduation in a myriad of essential ways. Coaches are essential in setting the field

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INTRODUCTION

The great Jackie Joyner-Kersey said, “*The ONLY person who can stop you from achieving your goals, is YOU!*” She was ranked among the all-time greatest athletes in the heptathlon. The heptathlon is a track and field event in which each competitor takes part in the same prescribed seven events including 100-meter hurdles, high jump, shot put, 200-meter dash, long jump, javelin, and 800-meter run. Jackie won the silver medal in the 1984 Olympic Games for this event. Seeing Jackie Joyner-Kersey run was simply amazing, but to see her compete in such a grueling event as the heptathlon seemed to be nothing short of a miracle.

I was fourteen years old in 1984 and was involved in several team sports. I remember watching the Summer and Winter Olympic Games and enjoying hearing about the different athletes’ stories and their journeys in achieving such success. It was incredible how hard they worked, how much they and their families had to sacrifice, and who inspired them along the way. I have been an athlete my entire life. For as long as I can remember, I am able to recall the sports I have played, the places sports have taken me, the adventures afforded me, but most of all I remember my teammates and my coaches. My teams were my family; I spent much of my time with them and learned much. My coaches in particular made me who I am today.

At the end of practice or before a big game, our coaches would often tell us about famous athletes, share quotes from successful sports figures, and try to inspire us to follow the great ones who came before. We were encouraged to believe in each other and participate in something bigger than ourselves and become the best possible version of ourselves.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective Coaching

Understanding Adolescent Development

The most effective and memorable sports-team coaches understand that their role in working with adolescents on the playing field or court reaches far beyond just teaching sport-specific physical skills and techniques. Whether they realize it or not, coaches of our youth in society play a huge role in shaping future citizens. This is a tremendous responsibility.

The best coaches realize the impact that they have on their players and students and eagerly engage in ongoing self-assessment and education with a desire to improve their instruction. One way to do this is to learn more about the emotional and psychological growth of young people.

They must acknowledge the need to stay abreast of information and best practices by taking advantage of continuing education opportunities as well as the vast amount of media available to them through technology.

One example is a podcast entitled “Ilovetowatchyouplay.com,” founded and hosted by youth sports advocate and former coach, Asia Mape, who interviews renowned researchers, authors, trainers, psychologists, and coaches to help share ideas to “...do youth sports better.” (Mape 0:19). One guest, James Lowe, also known as “Coach Ballgame,” relates his experiences in becoming a pre-eminent coach and shares his “secrets” on how to make coaching fun and

engaging in order to maximize success while aiding in the maturation and healthy emotional development of his players.

He is the Ambassador of "Play Ball" which partners with Major League Baseball youth sports camps. As a four-year starter and team captain at Brown at University, All Ivy League, he left the playing field and has made a career of coaching youth sports and helping other coaches to succeed. His career accomplishments include such experiences as partnering with the Chicago Cubs and Fox Sports producing clinics for young athletes. According to the podcast host, "He has a unique ability to engage kids of all ages through the use of music, poetry and enthusiasm" (Mape 0:57).

Coach Ballgame shares examples of both successes and difficulties he has faced: "I had 30 kids on my field, and I'm running a really good clinic...everything's going as planned, but there's this one disruptive kid. He won't do anything I say. He's being disrespectful to me. He's using foul language towards the other kids." (Mape 10:04). Lowe relates the story of how he becomes overwhelmingly frustrated until his mentor, another coach, taught him an invaluable lesson on empathy.

The older man took the boy to the bleachers where they sat for two hours. He explained later to Coach Ballgame that he had just listened to the young man talk about his homelife, parents, school, and other things that were important to or bothering him. Afterwards, the young player came back engaged, listening, and upbeat.

When asked what his secret was, the mentor said that he had just shown empathy, and given what he said that he had never had: "unconditional love." Trust was built. And, trust is key to healthy human development.

Lowe realized then that “win at all cost” and focusing on the most talented players was not the right approach for coaches to take. He concluded that only a very small percentage of team members would go on to become career athletes, but “...all of them will be adults and servers of their community, and brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers” (Mape 12:12).

This podcast is only one example of the multitude of available resources and literature that enables coaches to understand human growth and examine their role in the development of young players. Why is attention to the topic of “human growth” so important for coaches to understand? Because, as Coach Ballgame mentioned, the best gift a coach can give adolescent players is to help ensure a better future for them in becoming productive, successful, and well-adjusted members of society.

What does *psychosocial* wellness look like in a student athlete? Coaches must understand adolescent development in order to foster it in their players. A key tenet of human growth and development is *emotional intelligence*. It is defined in the article, “The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Effective Leadership,” as...the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one’s own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. It is a crucial quality for effective leadership, as leaders need to be able to manage their own emotions and empathize with the emotions of their team members” (Jain and Ackerson).

This concept was first introduced by psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990, and it since has become widely recognized as an essential indicator of good mental health (Mayer and Salovey). It is made up of four key components:

- **Self-awareness**: understanding one’s own emotions, strengths and weaknesses, vulnerabilities.

- **Self-regulation:** ability to manage one's own emotions and reactions appropriate to a specific situation using self-awareness.
- **Social awareness:** ability to identify the needs and perspectives of others and to empathize with them.
- **Relationship management:** using self-awareness and self-regulation, as well as empathy and understanding, to build healthy relationships, effective communication, and successful conflict resolution (Mayer and Salovey).

Individuals with high emotional intelligence are adept at communication inspiring and motivating others, resolving conflicts, and adapting to change. "Adolescence is a crucial period for developing social and emotional habits important for mental well-being" (Hoffman, *et al*).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), poor mental health has been cited as one of the leading predictors of disability and economic burden in societies across the world. Specifically, "Depression, anxiety and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents" (Reddy 1). However, participation in team sports has been found to provide a way to combat deficient mental health and increase emotional intelligence in addition to helping players stay psychosocially healthy. To this end, the WHO has defined the achievement of developing successful life skills as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (Sahu and Gupta).

Unfortunately, though, 70 percent of young athletes drop out of team sports by the age 13, saying that lack of “fun” is their main reason for quitting (DeAngelis 26). That makes it incumbent upon coaches to view themselves not just as drillmasters who show up to teach children to excel in the physical aspects of the game and focus primarily on victory, but as mentors who must foster a climate that nurtures young people in cultivating emotional intelligence and the attributes that enhance lifelong mental health. Coaches must realize what “fun” means to young people. It is far more involved than just creating a “good-time” atmosphere. It involves ensuring that there is a positive environment that enhances enjoyment in practical ways such as making the young individuals feel that they belong, and feel accepted and supported by teammates and coaches (DeAngelis 26).

This is significant because, as highlighted in a study titled “Associations between organized sport participation and mental health difficulties: Data from over 11,000 U.S children and adolescents” it was found that “...a recent study noted that adolescents who participated in team sports appeared to have better psychosocial health, such a lower anxiety, depression, and social problems, compared to those who participated in non-team sports” (Hoffman, *et al*). That is the primary objective for most student coaches. While they may not be in a position to train students to become professional athletes, they have the ability to influence young people's lives, ultimately making a meaningful impact on society.

According to the article, “Effects of Early Sport Participation on Self-Esteem and Happiness” in *The Sport Journal*, “active sports participation has been shown to bring better

outcomes across lifespans of adolescents regarding physical, mental, social, and emotional health” (Collins, *et al*). Increased emotional health gained on the playing field enhances self confidence. In *Psychology Today*, Dr. Barbara Markaway wrote, “Self-confidence is linked to almost every element involved in a happy and fulfilling life” (Markway).

Effective Coaching

Teaching and Modeling

To achieve the goal of ensuring that the young athletes of today can develop into successful adults, the good citizens and leaders of tomorrow, coaches must themselves model behaviors that demonstrate the mastery of major life skills that lead to productive and healthy futures. Some of the most beneficial psychosocial attributes that students learn on the field or court are gained by observing their coach’s actions. Those actions include effective communication, empathy, and humility.

Communication

One of the most important of such attributes that young people may learn while engaging in team play is effective communication. “Teaching your players effective communication in sports will help you build a winning team. It will also help prepare your athletes to be successful in other areas of their life” (*Lead ‘Em Up*).

Proper communication provides cohesiveness which has been shown to be an essential element for sports-team success. But, it also allows the individuals to feel what it is like to be in harmony with their peers on the field, work towards a common goal, and seek out the possibility

of emulating the condition in their lives at large. The hope is that they will strive to introduce it into any environment they find themselves in.

The ability to communicate well is a vital benchmark for a happy life. It is an invaluable gift that coaches may model and develop in adolescents. According to one study that looks at the lives of the elderly, “Poor communication skills can not only evoke anxiety, depression, and stress in older adults but also predispose them to social isolation and loneliness”

(NursMidwiferyStud). Poor communication skills can contribute to anxiety, depression, and stress in older adults because they may struggle to express their needs, feelings, and concerns effectively. When communication is unclear or misunderstood, it can lead to frustration, feelings of inadequacy, and a sense of being unheard or disconnected from others. This emotional distress can, in turn, exacerbate mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Moreover, inadequate communication skills can make it difficult for older adults to maintain social connections. They may avoid interactions for fear of being misunderstood or judged, leading to social isolation. Over time, this isolation can contribute to loneliness, as they become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, and the community, further impacting their mental and emotional well-being.

Also of note is that coaches must be aware of non-verbal communication among teammates which has powerful ramifications for good or ill. According to the blog of one popular organization set up to provide leadership information and workshops for coaches, “...athlete-to-athlete communication is more than words. It’s about body language, tone of voice, and active listening” (*Lead ‘Em Up* “Communication In Sports: Building Winning Teams”).

Seeking cohesion and common purpose with others is one of the greatest assets a citizen could possess in society. It is a willingness to communicate and work with others to agree upon and achieve common goals. When students learn that good communication with others minimizes stress and enhances successful social engagement, their self-confidence increases. In addition, their capacity for empathy is enhanced. The ripples that move through society that are begun when a coach teaches and models good communication are immeasurable. “When athletes feel they are truly being heard, trust also grows. It's important to not interrupt the athlete and instead genuinely listen to what the athlete is saying” (SPMI).

This modeling affects how students interact with other community members, and the premise is that they will carry the good habits into adulthood where it will show benefits and affect those around them including family members and children, the future generations. “Good communication skills empower people to establish a more effective and sustainable communication, whereby they can exchange precise messages and effectively manage familial conflicts and disputes, and thus enjoy a more stable family life, as well as experience less stress under stressful situations” (NurseMidwiyferyStud). Strong communication skills enable individuals to create more effective and lasting communication, allowing them to exchange clear messages and manage family conflicts and disputes more efficiently. This, in turn, leads to a more stable family life and reduced stress during challenging situations.

Feedback from others helps with self- and social-awareness, important factors in contributing to good mental health. The ability for citizens to communicate with each other successfully has far-reaching personal and societal consequences. When youths become more

accomplished in verbal and non-verbal interactions with others, it leads to fewer misunderstandings and ultimately increased self-esteem.

Empathy

Communicating well with other team members also helps young people to develop important psychosocial skills like empathy and humility which enhance traits like good sportsmanship.

According to Andrei Ionescu in his article, “Sports coaches are more effective when they lead with empathy.” Author Peter Sear argues in his book *Empathic Leadership: Lessons From Elite Sport* that “...the time of dictatorial leaders in sports, screaming from the side-lines and insulting their players, has ended. He says we are currently witnessing the emergence of emotionally intelligent and empathic coaches who, by proving a deeper understanding of their players, manage to get efficient results” (Ionescu). Sear interviews coaches from nine different elite sports across the globe and backs it up with the latest research. He found that “empathic leadership motivates teams, encourages loyalty, and significantly improves chances of success” (Ionescu). Sear goes on to say that being an effective leader depends on one’s understanding of people such as “...their emotions, perspectives, and intentions, as well as the relationships you have with them.” It is in these vital areas that empathy will give you an advantage,” according to Sear (Ionescu).

Another way empathy may be defined is “...the process of putting oneself in the place of the other person and looking at events from his perspective, feeling and understanding the feelings and thoughts of the other person correctly, and conveying this situation to him”

(*FrontPsychol*). “Coaches who show empathy can inspire athletes to give more effort, increase their confidence, and even their self-worth” (SPMI).

Humility

There is much discussion and even argument in the field of business as to whether humility in a leader is a beneficial quality or not. When considering the modeling of this trait by a coach for a group of adolescents on a sports team, however, showing some degree of appropriate humbleness and vulnerability can be an invaluable way to build trust with team members. This is not to say that a coach should be indecisive or meek. It is rather a way of teaching young athletes that treating others with respect and a willingness to listen to their points of view leads to healthy outcomes and successful interpersonal relationships. “Humility is an offset of self-awareness and should not be misconstrued as weakness, meekness, or shortcomings” states Brent Gleeson in his *Forbes Magazine* online article “4 Ways To Lead With Humility And Vulnerability In High-Performance Teams” (Gleeson).

According to retired Navy SEAL Mathew Lehnig, “Being vulnerable enough to admit you do not know everything can be difficult. It exposes you; however, being humble enough to admit you're not the smartest person in the room and that you need your team can elevate you amongst your peers” (Gleeson).

A team culture of humility can encourage youths to focus on the success and well-being of the whole team instead of individuals fixating on their own success and glory.

Michael Austin, Ph.D., professor of philosophy at Eastern Kentucky University, posted the following on the *Psychology Today* website: “The humble coach will realize his need for

others to give input, to challenge him, to bring their own unique experiences and expertise to bear on the team in order to help it succeed” (Austin).

David Wilkinson, in his article “Leader Humility: Definition and Explanation,” noted that there are three key traits that are in authentically humble leaders:

1. Self-awareness or the ability to be able to understand one’s own strengths and weaknesses from a more objective and external standpoint.
2. Openness or a willingness to explore and take on new ideas, thinking, knowledge and behaviors in the light of external evidence.
3. Transcendence or the ability to be able to move away from one’s subjective perspective and take on an inclusive and more objective perspective of both themselves and the context. (Wilkinson)

Conflict management

Closely tied to adept communication is *conflict management*. Conflicts in life are inevitable and may arise in any situation. Learning to effectively resolve conflicts as young people on the field or court produces successful leaders who are adept at managing conflicts later in life when the stakes are higher. From becoming victims in incidents of road rage to helping angry neighbors resolve problems, to getting all the board members in a corporation to agree to multi-million-dollar deals, conflict resolution skills are invaluable.

According to Nadia Kyba, MSW, TruSport expert and president of Now What Facilitation, “Whether your athletes are shouting at each other, not speaking at all, or fighting on the field, conflict is a natural part of any team dynamic. But as coach, you can take steps to make

sure that when conflicts do arise, there are systems in place to both solve them and make the team stronger” (TruSport).

Conflicts offer an opportunity for coaches to model skills and offer an alternative to “losing one’s cool.” Staying calm and composed during tense situations, empathizing with the conflicting parties, and suggesting “win-win” outcomes are ways coaches can teach the young people to handle interpersonal crises and employ emotional intelligence to find solutions that address the needs of all parties involved.

Kyba also notes that conflict among team members is actually helpful if handled well, “Even if your team doesn’t voice conflict, it’s inevitable. If a team is so conditioned to pretend that it doesn’t exist, there’s a problem in communication and the team will ultimately suffer” (TruSport). She encourages coaches to recognize what conflict looks like early, before it becomes verbal or physical, and stay in tune with the players to pick up on troubles before they fester and become less manageable. What starts with teammates smirking at each other can take on a life of its own and create enormous difficulties. According to parenting writer and author Lisa Cohn and sports psychologist Dr. Patrick Cohen, on their *Youth Sports Psychology* website, “Not only does conflict affect young athletes, it can create tension with..coaches, family, and friends outside the sport” (*Youth Sports Psychology*). They also warn that coaches must be trained and use successful conflict resolution techniques because, “Team conflict can affect how young athletes feel about their team, how much they enjoy the sport and how intensely they pursue their goals” (*Youth Sports Psychology*). Learning conflict resolution skills can encourage

other attributes like cohesion and the importance of individuals to adapt to changing situations gracefully and willingly be flexible in their thoughts and actions.

Knowledge of the components of human growth and development helps coaches create competent and inspiring leaders. Stephen M. R. Covey, author of *Trust and Inspire: How Truly Great Leaders Unleash Greatness in Others*, specifically addresses the importance of good workplace management: “This workforce demands a new kind of leader—a leader who can see, develop, and unleash greatness in every person. A leader who can model authentic behavior with humility and courage. A leader who can inspire others to willingly give their hearts and minds because they want to contribute meaningfully to something that matters” (Covey p. 13 -14).

Adolescents who are developing the above psychosocial traits and increasing their emotional intelligence, will find that other important life skills like discipline, work ethic, responsibility, goal setting, and accountability, among others, will become easier to achieve. Participation in team sports has been shown to significantly enhance the possibility for such success if coaches recognize the vital role they play and the gravity of their responsibility in setting the field for their athletes’ futures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research for this study used a primarily qualitative approach to examine the significant benefits that playing team sports have on adolescent development, and, to provide evidence that demonstrates how vital a coach's role is in ensuring successful outcomes for these young people. This involved observing real-life examples in order to collect data that is then used to support the rationale for the techniques and processes discussed in this paper. The premise is that coaches must have some understanding of how young players develop psychologically and emotionally, and subsequently employ the most effective teaching and training methods to ensure that each team member has the capacity to thrive and flourish. The outcomes were based on the use of descriptive research to monitor and evaluate best practices derived by the researcher through decades of firsthand experience and involvement. In addition, this study examines quantitative and qualitative methods that coaches who actively engage in self-assessment and seek feedback from players might use. By regularly evaluating their own performance, coaches can identify areas where they excel and areas that need development, ensuring they remain adaptable and responsive to the evolving needs of the team. Using assessments to solicit feedback from players not only helps coaches gain valuable insights into how their coaching methods are perceived, but it also empowers athletes by giving them a voice in the coaching process. This two-way communication builds trust and fosters a collaborative environment where both the coach and players are invested in mutual growth. Ultimately, these practices lead to more refined coaching strategies, stronger relationships, and improved team performance.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Coaches play a pivotal role in not only shaping the athletic prowess of their players, but also in the development of their character and values. Through real-life examples and experiences, one may witness the profound impact coaches have on their athletes beyond the confines of the playing field. Whether it is instilling qualities like resilience, teamwork, or leadership, coaches often serve as mentors who guide their players through challenges both on and off the court. Through inspirational pep talks, leading by example, coaches can forge lasting impressions that shape the moral fiber and integrity of these players. Coaches, as the ultimate leaders themselves, need to understand and develop certain qualities. As role models, it is especially important to remember that these skills are the ones that the adolescents will be watching and will emulate. The hope is that consistently applying these methods will increase the likelihood that they will develop into habits for the team members. They found the psychosocial bases that would enable the young athletes to go on to become good citizens, productive, well-adjusted happy members of society. As an educator and coach for over thirty years, this researcher has found that some of the most important tenets a coach must be aware of include the following:

1. Effective Communication: Coaches need to become excellent communicators, able to convey complex concepts in simple terms and ensure that their instructions are clear and actionable. They also should listen actively, valuing input from their athletes and making adjustments based on feedback.

2. *Empathy*: Good coaches deeply understand their athletes, recognizing the emotional and mental states that influence performance. Empathy allows them to provide personalized support, whether through motivation, reassurance, or “tough love,” depending on what the situation demands.

3. *Humility*: Humble coaches prioritize the development of athletes over personal accolades. They are willing to admit when they don’t have all the answers, seek advice, and learn continuously. This humility fosters a team culture where growth and learning are valued over ego.

4. *Adaptability and Flexibility*: Situations in sports can change rapidly, and good coaches remain adaptable, adjusting strategies and tactics to meet evolving challenges. They are not rigid in their approach but instead are open to new ideas and methods that could benefit the team.

5. *Consistency and Discipline*: Successful coaches maintain consistent standards and expectations, ensuring that their athletes know what is required of them at all times. They also model discipline, showing up prepared and committed, which sets the tone for the entire team.

6. *Inspirational Leadership*: Coaches need to motivate and inspire their athletes to push beyond their limits. They set a vision for the team, instilling a sense of purpose and shared goals that drive collective effort and individual dedication.

7. Technical Knowledge and Expertise: Expertise in the sport is essential. Skilled coaches have a deep understanding of the game, the strategies involved to prevail, and the technical skills required. They use this knowledge to develop training programs that maximize the potential of each athlete.

8. Patience and Perseverance: Coaching is a long-term commitment that requires patience. Good coaches understand that progress can be slow and that setbacks are part of the journey. They encourage perseverance in their athletes, helping them navigate challenges and maintain focus on their goals.

9. Positive Role Modeling: Finally, outstanding coaches lead by example, embodying the values, work ethic, and sportsmanship they wish to instill in their athletes. Their behavior both on and off the field serves as a template for how their athletes should conduct themselves. These characteristics are observed through direct involvement with coaches who exhibit these traits, consistently leading to positive outcomes for their athletes and teams. Looking closely at how a coach handles tough losses, players making the same mistakes over and over, players wanting to give up, and an overall culture of “we never win anyway” can reveal how important it is to cultivate leadership through these key tenets of human growth and development: emotional intelligence, humility, communication, trust, and connectedness.

Coaches should exemplify all the strong attributes of a dynamic leader, and yet need to understand the importance of showing humanity and a degree of vulnerability because it plays a crucial role in fostering a positive and supportive environment for athletes.

The researcher, as a coach, assigns paramount importance to modeling compassion and understanding. She creates a safe space where her players feel valued and respected. A coach should build a rapport with team members. One way is to greet and personally address each player individually near the beginning of practice. She may ask, “How is your day going?”, “How did your test go?”, or make comments like, “You did great in the play this weekend!”, etc. These specific interactions illustrate how personally she knows her players. She is committed to them on and off the field and takes the time to be a part of their lives. This openness encourages her athletes to express their own challenges and emotions, promoting mental and emotional well-being.

By demonstrating such vulnerability, coaches build trust and authentic connections with their teams, which can lead to increased motivation and a stronger sense of camaraderie. Moreover, compassionate coaching helps athletes learn empathy and the importance of supporting one another, both on and off the field. Ultimately, a coach who leads with heart and understanding not only develops better athletes but also nurtures well-rounded, emotionally intelligent individuals.

Coaches must set the field in several ways, one of which is getting the team mentally, not just physically, ready to play. In order to do this, it is important to know the players. Each athlete is different and knowing who is being taught or coached is key to getting them to be the best version of themselves. Earning their trust is one of the first things that needs to happen. Meeting

the athletes exactly where they are is a good way to earn their trust. They will work harder and try their best, if they know the coach cares and respects them. Showing compassion and grace when they are struggling with a skill or a concept can foster a strong, trusting relationship.

One example of what this coach does is remind them that sometimes it is hard to learn something new, but it is worth their effort. She tells her team that it takes time and practice and that they just need to give it some time. Coaches want to challenge players past their comfort zone into a place of safe and supported learning. Modeling trusting behavior will help the entire team and they will begin to trust one another. This approach helps the entire team develop mutual trust as they observe and learn from the example set by the trusting adult. When a coach takes the time to genuinely get to know the players, it fosters a healthy team culture built on respect and trust. This strong foundation of trust and positive relationships contributes to a healthy culture that sets the field for success.

Another way this coach earns trust and demonstrates empathy is to meet the athletes exactly where they are by using the “100% Challenge.” Ask them at the beginning of practice to give 100% of whatever amount they are capable of that day. When an athlete gives their “100%,” it means they are putting forth their maximum effort relative to their current physical, mental, and emotional state. On days when they feel their best, this might equate to an exceptional performance, while on days when they are fatigued, stressed, or dealing with minor injuries, their best effort might fall short of their peak capability. However, the essence of giving 100% is in the commitment to push through challenges and perform to the best of their ability regardless of the circumstances. This mindset ensures that they maintain consistency, resilience, and a strong work ethic, which are crucial for long-term success and improvement. It also shows how the

coach cares and understands that every day is not going to be the best because life is hard, but to quit or not show up is not an option.

Many life lessons can be learned when participating in a sport. Playing sports offers valuable insights that extend beyond the playing field. Through teamwork, individuals learn the importance of collaboration and how to work effectively with others towards a common goal. Discipline and perseverance are developed as athletes push through physical and mental challenges, learning that success often comes from consistent effort and resilience in the face of setbacks. Involvement in sports also teaches time management, as balancing practice, games, and a personal life requires planning and prioritization. Furthermore, handling both victory and defeat gracefully fosters emotional maturity, helping individuals to stay humble in success and resilient in failure. Overall, the experiences and skills gained from playing sports contribute significantly to personal growth and development. When a coach is intentional about teaching the parallels between a sport and life, the impact on athletes can be profound and far-reaching. This approach helps players understand that the lessons learned on the field are directly applicable to everyday life. Athletes become more adept at handling pressure, making decisions under stress, and managing time effectively. They learn the value of hard work, perseverance, and the importance of setting and achieving goals. Modeling these behaviors and the flexibility it takes to face the struggles of life, is of paramount importance. The players are watching and imitating their coaches. A great example of this is how healthy nonverbal communication between coaches and players is crucial for building trust, respect, and a positive team environment. When this coach uses encouraging gestures, maintains eye contact, and displays open body language, it fosters a sense of support and confidence among players. These positive

nonverbal cues reinforce verbal instructions, making players feel understood and valued, which enhances their motivation and performance. In contrast, unhealthy nonverbal communication—such as crossed arms, dismissive gestures, or a lack of eye contact—can create tension and misunderstandings. These negative cues can lead players to feel disrespected, discouraged, or uncertain, undermining team cohesion and potentially eroding the trust needed for effective coaching. Therefore, maintaining healthy nonverbal communication is essential for creating a positive and productive team dynamic. This holistic teaching fosters a deeper sense of responsibility and self-awareness, as athletes begin to see the broader implications of their actions both in sports and in their personal and professional lives. By emphasizing these connections, coaches not only enhance the athletic performance of their players but also equip them with essential life skills, preparing them for success beyond the game.

It has been found that when a coach is intentional about creating a tight-knit team, the athletes often find success both on and off the field. By fostering a sense of camaraderie, trust, and mutual respect, the coach helps build a supportive environment where athletes feel valued and motivated. This cohesive team dynamic enhances communication and cooperation during competitions, leading to improved performance. Off the field, the bonds formed among teammates can translate into lifelong friendships, providing a strong support network that benefits their personal and academic lives. The skills and values learned in such a close-knit team setting—like teamwork, perseverance, and empathy—equip athletes with tools that are essential for success beyond their sporting endeavors.

An example of that done by this coach is an activity which is designed to foster team unity and boost morale by highlighting the positive contributions and qualities of each team

member. To begin, each person is secretly assigned the name of a teammate and tasked with writing down five positive things about how that person helps the team and their positive traits in general. During the activity, the team forms a circle, and one person sits in the middle. The person who was assigned the teammate in the middle reads their list of positive comments aloud. After this, everyone in the circle takes turns adding their own positive comments about the person in the middle. This process is repeated until everyone has had a turn in the center. This activity encourages recognition and appreciation of each individual's unique contributions, strengthens bonds, and creates a supportive team environment.

A coach who prioritizes giving athletes space and time to give themselves grace and instill a growth mindset profoundly impacts their development and well-being. By encouraging athletes to acknowledge their efforts and understand that setbacks are part of the learning process, the coach fosters an environment where self-compassion is paramount. This approach helps athletes manage stress and maintain motivation, as they learn to see mistakes not as failures but as opportunities for growth. Emphasizing the concept of "not yet" reinforces the idea that abilities and skills can be developed over time with persistence and hard work. This mindset shift from fixed to growth allows athletes to embrace challenges, persevere through difficulties, and ultimately achieve greater success both in sports and in life.

The intentional language of a coach can profoundly influence the mindset and performance of their athletes. By emphasizing positive self-talk and strictly avoiding negative words during practice, a coach creates an atmosphere of encouragement and resilience. This conscious choice in communication helps athletes build self-confidence and maintain a focus on improvement rather than shortcomings. During practice, instead of highlighting mistakes with

phrases like "don't do that" or "that's wrong," the coach uses constructive feedback such as "try this approach" or "you can improve by doing this." This positive reinforcement ensures that athletes feel supported and motivated to push their limits. Moreover, during challenging moments, such as halftime of a losing game, the coach's use of positive language and shout-outs becomes even more crucial. Recognizing and celebrating small victories, effort, and teamwork despite the score can uplift the team's spirit and reignite their determination. For instance, pointing out a player's exceptional hustle, a well-executed play, or even the team's perseverance in difficult circumstances can shift the focus from the current score to the potential for a strong comeback. This intentional and positive language not only boosts morale but also instills a growth mindset, where athletes learn to view setbacks as temporary and surmountable. By consistently applying these principles, the coach helps the team develop resilience, unity, and a belief in their collective and individual potential, leading to better performance and a healthier team culture. Healthy nonverbal communication between coaches and players is crucial for building trust, respect, and a positive team environment. For example, when this coach uses encouraging gestures, maintains eye contact, and displays open body language, it fosters a sense of support and confidence among players. These positive nonverbal cues reinforce verbal instructions, making players feel understood and valued, which enhances their motivation and performance. In contrast, unhealthy nonverbal communication—such as crossed arms, dismissive gestures, or a lack of eye contact—can create tension and misunderstandings. These negative cues can lead players to feel disrespected, discouraged, or uncertain, undermining team cohesion and potentially eroding the trust needed for effective coaching. Therefore, maintaining

healthy nonverbal communication is essential for creating a positive and productive team dynamic.

Sometimes, when a team faces a formidable opponent and the chances of winning the game seem slim, this coach employs a strategy of breaking the game down into quarters to maintain focus and motivation. By intentionally shifting the team's mindset to winning within each quarter rather than fixating on the daunting prospect of the entire game, the coach can help athletes stay engaged and competitive. This approach allows the team to set achievable goals and measure progress incrementally, making the challenge feel more manageable. During each quarter, the coach emphasizes specific objectives and celebrates small victories, such as improved defense, successful plays, or increased effort and coordination. This not only keeps the team concentrated on the immediate task at hand but also fosters a sense of accomplishment and resilience. At the end of each quarter, the coach highlights the progress made, reinforcing positive efforts and adjustments, and setting new targets for the next segment of the game. This method of compartmentalizing the game into smaller, more digestible parts can uplift the team's morale, maintain their competitive edge, and even spark a potential comeback. By focusing on incremental successes and continuous improvement, the coach helps the team develop a growth mindset and the mental fortitude to persist through challenging situations, ultimately building a stronger, more cohesive unit.

Self-reflection is paramount in coaching because it allows coaches to understand their own biases, strengths, and areas for improvement, fostering emotional intelligence that is essential in guiding athletes effectively. When coaches regularly reflect on their actions and decisions, they become more attuned to the emotional and mental needs of their athletes, creating

an environment where athletes feel understood and supported. This practice not only helps coaches to adapt their strategies to meet the individual needs of their athletes but also models the importance of introspection and emotional resilience for the athletes themselves. As a result, athletes are better equipped to handle tough situations after graduating, having learned through their coach's example how to assess their emotions, navigate challenges, and grow from adversity. Self evaluations and/or surveys as seen in figure 1 are one way to reflect on that season's coaching.

Another way to evaluate coaches is to survey the players as seen in figure 2. Asking some questions like: How effective was coaching in helping you achieve your goals? How well did I help you explore what was important to you? How well did I get the balance of supporting you, yet challenging you? How would you rate my skills as a coach? Surveying players at the end of a season is essential for a coach because it provides valuable insights into the team's dynamics, player experiences, and areas for improvement. This feedback allows the coach to understand how their strategies, communication, and overall approach impacted the players, giving them a clearer picture of what worked well and what needs adjustment. Additionally, surveys empower players to voice their opinions and feel heard, fostering a culture of openness and mutual respect. By using this feedback to refine their coaching methods, a coach can better meet the needs of their players, enhance team performance, and build a stronger, more cohesive team for future seasons.

Resolving conflicts between players requires a balanced and thoughtful approach, emphasizing open communication and mutual respect. The first step is to address the issue promptly and privately, allowing each player involved to share their perspective without

interruption. As a coach, it's important to remain neutral, listening carefully to understand the root of the conflict. Encouraging players to express their feelings and concerns fosters a sense of understanding and empathy between them. Once the issues are clear, guide the players toward finding common ground and collaborating on a solution that satisfies both parties. Reinforce the values of teamwork, respect, and sportsmanship, reminding players that their collective success depends on working together harmoniously. By facilitating a resolution that all parties can agree upon, coaches can help maintain a positive team dynamic and prevent future conflicts.

A great example of coaches modeling flexibility occurs during a game when a key player gets injured or the team's strategy isn't working as planned. Imagine a basketball coach who has spent the entire week preparing the team to play a fast-paced, full-court press defense. However, during the first quarter, the opposing team effectively counters this strategy, causing the coach's team to fall behind by double digits. Instead of sticking rigidly to the original game plan, the coach quickly recognizes that the situation calls for an adjustment. At the next timeout, the coach calmly gathers the team and explains the need to shift tactics. They decide to switch to a more controlled, half-court defense, focusing on slowing down the game and playing to the team's strengths. The coach emphasizes the importance of staying adaptable and encourages the players to embrace the change with a positive attitude. By modeling flexibility in this way—acknowledging that the initial plan isn't working, making a strategic pivot, and communicating the change clearly and confidently—the coach demonstrates to the players that adaptability is crucial in overcoming obstacles. The players, seeing their coach's composed response to adversity, are more likely to stay focused and resilient, ultimately improving their chances of turning the game around.

CONCLUSION

Furthermore, the researcher highlights the importance of school coaches maintaining continuous education and encourages them to actively engage with diverse media outlets to receive and share valuable information and ideas. There are many venues for this such as blogs, podcasts, professional journals, and online articles. The characteristics of an exceptional coach are systematically described and evaluated in this thesis.

Coaches can be encouraged to look in areas other than the education field in order to learn more about the students playing on their teams. Exploring the psychology of adolescence by taking classes, participating in webinars, or listening to podcasts, is a way to better understand human nature and how to best handle situations that might arise. Sometimes grants are available to help fund this kind of study or schools may help defray any costs. Collaborating with coaches from other schools to explore what they are doing and exchange ideas can be very helpful. This kind of collaboration is invaluable as it brings new perspectives and new ideas to the table, or playing field. Continuing education is essential for coaches to remain effective and up-to-date with the latest strategies, techniques, and developments in their field.

Coaches can expand their knowledge and stay informed about evolving trends and best practices. These opportunities not only provide fresh perspectives and innovative ideas but also allow coaches to refine their skills, adapt to new challenges, and offer the most relevant guidance to their athletes. Additionally, networking with peers from different schools fosters a community of learning and support, enhancing the overall quality of coaching across the board. This commitment to ongoing education ensures that coaches continue to grow professionally and can provide the best possible environment for their athletes to succeed.

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COACHING SELF EVALUATION FORM

Group:

Date:

Venue:

Strategy/Characteristic	Rating (1 = never; 5 = all the time)				
I listened to my athletes	1	2	3	4	5
I was well prepared for the session	1	2	3	4	5
I was positive	1	2	3	4	5
I gave effective feedback	1	2	3	4	5
I was enthusiastic	1	2	3	4	5
I kept my cool	1	2	3	4	5
Athletes were treated equally	1	2	3	4	5
Athletes had good learning experiences	1	2	3	4	5
Athletes enjoyed the session	1	2	3	4	5
Athletes were enabled to make decisions	1	2	3	4	5
Athletes were given optimum practice time	1	2	3	4	5
The session was individualized	1	2	3	4	5
I used effective questioning	1	2	3	4	5
I used body language well	1	2	3	4	5

One thing that I did really well during this session was:

One thing that I want to remember for next time is:

Coaching Tool Kit: Feedback form

Evaluation form – how successful was your coach?

In order to help me continue to develop my skills, please can you provide some feedback on your experience of being coached by me?

Your name:		Date:	
Coach's name:			

Please score the following questions: low = 1 high = 4

	1	2	3	4	Comments
How effective was coaching in helping you achieve your goals?					
How well did I help you explore what was important to you?					
How well did I get the balance of supporting you, yet challenging you?					
How would you rate my skills as a coach?					
How likely are you to recommend me as a coach?					

<p>What actions will you take as a result of the coaching?</p>	
<p>If you were to change anything about your coaching experience what would it be and why?</p>	
<p>Is there anything else you would want to share with me to help me be a better coach?</p>	