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Recommended Educational Experiences for High School Athletic Directors (ADs)

Robert C. Schneider and William F. Stier, Jr.

Abstract

A national study of 400 high school principals was conducted to determine their recommendations in terms of the most appropriate informal and formal education (experiences) for would-be high school athletics directors. Specifically, the principals were asked to rate each of 19 items/questions relating to formal or informal education efforts or achievements by means of a 5-point likert scale. A secondary purpose was to ascertain how the respondents rated each of the then proposed sport management core content areas (areas of formal course work), as recommended by the Sport Management Program Review Council. Only two core content areas — (1) legal aspects of sport and (2) budget and finance in sport — were deemed to be essential or very important by a majority of 233 respondents (58.25% return). The formal course work that the largest number of principals felt was not very important/irrelevant was research in sport.

Recommended Educational Experiences for High School Athletic Directors

Introduction

The modern athletic director is a very important individual when considering the overall success or failure of any secondary athletic program in this country. Today, close scrutiny is being paid to the abilities, qualities, competencies, and the skills — and thus the education — of the men and women who assume the leadership role for their high school sports programs.

One of the reasons why the position of athletic director in our public and private schools is so important is because the high school sports

programs can play such a major role in the educational scheme of things in this country. Another equally important reason is that sports competition at the secondary level has expanded and developed into a truly involved and complicated experience, resulting in programs that are frequently challenging and difficult to manage and operate. In fact, interscholastic athletic competition has evolved into such a complicated process that overseeing such programs has become more and more difficult and requires greater skills, training (education) and experience than ever before. And the most appropriate type of education and training that athletic directors should possess, as viewed by high school principals, is the topic of this article.

The Growth of High School Athletic Programs

There was not always a demand for highly trained, educated and experienced interscholastic athletic directors because the early high school sports programs were more simplistic in terms of numbers of sports and participants. Although a few New England private schools began to expand their high school sports programs in the early 1800s, it was not until the late 1890s that the state of Michigan initiated high school competition for boys and the Michigan State Athletic Association was created a few years later (Masteralexis and Hums, 1998, p. 159).

By 1900 the state of Indiana and Illinois followed suit and provided organized sports competition at the secondary level. A few years later, both states also established state athletic associations. The New York City Public School Athletic League, providing athletic competition for boys, was initiated in 1903. In 1905

competitive sports were made available for girls under a distinct branch of this same Public School Athletic League (Bucher and Krotee, 1998, p. 173). The organizational structure of high school athletics quickly expanded so by 1920 there was a national organization, consisting of five states, called the National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations. Today, all states hold membership in this Federation.

Just as high school competitive sports were expanding, the position of director of interscholastic sports was also evolving into a professional position within the schools, culminating in 1969 with the formation of the *National Council of Secondary School Athletic Directors*. At the present time, the council is charged with providing services and assistance to the men and women who have the responsibility of administering, organizing and directing this nation's school sports programs (Keller and Forsythe, 1984, p3).

The Evolution of the Position of Interscholastic Athletic Director

With the significant growth of competitive sports in our high schools it became obvious that competent administrators and managers were needed to oversee this growth and the day-to-day operation of these sports programs. As a result, most medium and large high schools by the 1960s had athletic directors who were formally given the responsibility for overall day-to-day operations of the athletic programs. During the 1970s the position of director of interscholastic sports became associated with ever increasing professional status (Keller and Forsythe, 1984, p. 6).

Several additional events took place in the 1970s regarding high school athletic directors that helped move the position of AD to a more professional status. The National Federation of State High School Associations began to sponsor special educational conferences for interscholastic athletic directors in 1971. And five years later, in 1976, the National Interscholastic Athletic

Administrators Association (NIAAA) was established (Youngblood, 1980, p. 3).

During the past half-century, the responsibilities and expectations associated with high school athletic directors have increased tremendously, primarily because of the rapid growth in the number of sports made available at the secondary level and also because of the increase in the number of young people who desired to be a part in competitive sports at this level. With the expansion of the number of sports coupled with a greater number of athletes came a corresponding expansion in the workload and complexity of the challenges being faced by the typical athletic director.

Successful Interscholastic Sports Programs Need Competent Athletic Directors

If a school is to provide a quality athletic program for its students it behooves the administrators of that school to select a suitable, qualified and competent AD. This is a very important challenge facing every school administration. High school principals, who must work with high school athletic directors almost on a daily basis, typically assume a major role in the appointment of qualified, experienced and trained athletic directors. Every person who assumes the position of high school athletic director must be a competent, trained and experienced administrator, one who is professional in every respect, if the sports program is to be truly successful.

The Essentials of Administering a High School Sports Program

It doesn't matter whether one is an athletic director at a high school, a junior college or a college/university—the elements of managing and administering the sports program remains essentially the same. Whether one works in a large complex sports program or in a smaller and less complicated program, the essential skills, competencies and attributes required of the person holding the title of athletic director remain, essentially, the same (Jensen, 1992, p. 181).

Administration is administration is administration” (Kinder, 1998, p. 4). “The process of management is basically the same for all activities, whether it is business, government, education, fitness, recreation or sport. Therefore, when one teaches the basic tenets of management it applies to all fields — management is management (Sawyer and Smith, 1999, P. iii). Stier (1999, p. 5) indicates that “management is management and administration is administration: regardless of the setting, the principles and concepts remain essentially the same.”

Management/Administration Defined

Theorists, practitioners and educators alike have proposed numerous definitions of management. An early definition of management stated that the process of management involves all the “duties and functions that pertain to the initiation of an enterprise, its financing, the establishment of all major policies, the provision of all necessary equipment, the outlining of the general form of organization under which the enterprise is to operate and the selection of the principle officers” (Kimball and Kimball, 1947, p. 147).

More recent definitions include Jensen’s (1992, p. 35) statement that “an administrator is one who gets things done through people” while Railey and Tschauner (1993, p. 25) described management as the process of “getting the right things done and to get things done right.” Another definition stated “administration is the management of human behavior through good leadership skills and the manipulation of resources toward recognized and agreed upon objectives or goals” (Stier, 1996).

Management — An Art and a Science

There is an art and a science to managing any sport organization. Management is a science because there are fundamental, scientific principles and a body of knowledge that are associated with the running of any organization. These principles and body of knowledge are applicable in any number of different organizations, situa-

tions and circumstances. The art aspect to managing is due to the fact that the implementation of various administrative techniques and managerial strategies and tactics are affected through the creative and innovative use of managerial principles and the successful application of administrative knowledge (Stier 1999, p. 6).

The Role of the High School Athletic Director

The athletic director is viewed as the resident expert in terms of managing the sports program. The AD can and should exert significant influence over the total athletic program through expert recommendations, opinions and options shared with central administrators (principals and superintendents) as well as the board of education (Stier, 1983). Another essential responsibility of the athletic director is to implement the athletic policies that are established by central administration and the state in which the school is located (Bucher and Krotee, 1998, p 136). “Managers are usually concerned with how things get done, leaders are concerned with what things mean to people, and that the two approaches are complementary” (Zaleznik, 1977, p. 67).

Professional Training of Athletic Directors

A major distinction between the early view of the secondary athletic director and the current perception of the position is that today there is an overwhelming recognition of the need for professional training and education for the person assuming the role of AD. It was not that long ago that all someone had to do to assume the position of athletic director was to have been a successful coach. Bridges and Roquemore (1996, p. 9) estimated that 98% of all first time managers (in all types of organizations) are placed in their first supervisory jobs without being trained to manage first. The trend today, in an effort to counteract this unfortunate situation, is to seek out candidates for the position of AD who are *trained and who have meaningful experience* in the management and administration of sports programs. Bucher and Krotee (1998, p. 138) recommend that

all athletic directors be professionally trained in the body of knowledge of management and sport.

The position of athletic director in our high schools is just too important and too complicated to be assumed by someone who lacks formal education and training in the management, administration and supervision of competitive sports programs. The previous "good old boy" or "good old girl" approach to hiring the all-important athletic director of a school's sports program is fast becoming obsolete, if it has not become so already. Today, it is almost universally recognized that it is very important to have as an athletic director an individual who is an *expert in administration* of sports programs.

The Beginnings of Formal Preparation of Sport Managers/Administrators

The formal training (formal course work within a college/university) of sport managers and athletic administrators can be traced to the efforts of Dr. James G. Mason, commonly referred to as the "father of sport management." It was Dr. Mason, now professor emeritus at the University of Texas at El Paso, who initiated the very first sport management program (masters level) at Ohio University in 1966 (Stier, 1999).

Essential Ingredients for a Successful Athletic Director

Successful athletic directors generally are associated with three common elements or ingredients. First, they possess exceptional professional skills and positive personal qualities. Second, they have had some form of formal and informal education in the discipline of sport management/athletic administration. And third, they have had some type of real life experience in terms of managing sports programs (typically through internships and/or practical experiences as part of their college/university work). Of course, the professional skills and personal qualities that athletic directors are expected to possess are typically the direct outcomes of quality sport

management education and training as well as meaningful athletic administrative experiences.

Formal Education—Including Pre-Service Field Experiences (Internships)

Stier (1999) reiterated the need for both formal and informal education (curricula) combined with practical experience (internships and practical experiences) in the management of sport (athletic) programs. The \$64,000 question insofar as education and training for future athletic directors is to *determine what type of formal educational experiences and training "would-be athletic directors" should undergo in order to be able to successfully assume leadership roles in sport programs at the secondary level.*

At the national level, it was not until 1986 that a concerted effort evolved in terms of examining the type of education sport managers and athletic administrators should receive in order to facilitate their success in the real world of managing sport and athletic programs. In that year the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) established a Sport Management Task Force. This entity had the responsibility to begin the process of developing *curricular guidelines*. The next year this Task Force presented such curricular guidelines in its publication "Guidelines for Programs Preparing Undergraduate and Graduate students for Careers in Sport Management" (1987). Many colleges and universities have utilized these guidelines in revising existing programs as well as initiating new professional preparation programs at the collegiate level (NASPE/NASSM Joint Task Force, 1993).

This Task Force later became the NASPE/NASSM Joint Task Force composed of NASPE and members representing the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM). And, the approach to identifying curricular standards was changed from the approach used in the earlier 1987 publication with the dissemination of a 1989 document that contained a *comprehensive set of minimum competency areas*. These minimum

competency (content) areas involved academic offerings at the baccalaureate as well as the masters and doctoral sport management degree programs (NASPE/NASSM Joint Task Force, 1993).

In 1998 the *Sport Management Program Review Council* proposed *new sport management curriculum core content areas* for undergraduate programs, figure 1, (Stier and Schneider, 2000) and also *new sport management curriculum core content areas* for graduate programs, figure 2, (Schneider and Stier, 2000). These proposed *core content areas* include areas of study that future sport managers (including athletic directors) should experience in their pursuit of an undergraduate and/or graduate degree in athletic administration or sport management.

The Goal of the Study

The objective of this national study was to determine the type of educational experiences, formal and informal, that interscholastic athletic directors should possess, as recommended by their high school principals. A great deal of anecdotal information is available on this topic in the popular literature. However, prior to this study, there had been no similar national research investigation in which secondary principals were anonymously surveyed regarding their opinions of the most appropriate education that high school athletic directors should possess.

Methodology

In an attempt to determine the most appropriate informal and formal education for would-be high school athletic directors, the researchers conducted a national survey of principals at both public and private high schools. Principals were chosen as recipients of the survey instrument because in the vast majority of high schools it is the principal to whom individual athletic directors report to in the chain of command (Stier and Schneider, in press).

No similar research investigation was revealed by a thorough search of the professional litera-

ture. A list of desirable educational courses and experiences for successful athletic directors was gleaned from the library sources as well as from interviews with experts in the field. The experts interviewed for this purpose included university level professors involved in the formal preparation (undergraduate and graduate levels) of high school athletic directors as well as experienced athletic directors at the high school, junior college, and college/university levels.

A survey instrument was subsequently constructed in consultation with experts in the field and field tested with eleven (11) of these experts, consisting of college professors (preparing athletic directors for the secondary level), successful high school athletic directors and successful college/university athletic directors. The researchers' University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the revised survey instrument as the study involved human subjects.

The final version of the revised (anonymous) survey instrument contained a total of 19 questions relating to the type (and level) of education that interscholastic athletic directors should possess in order to be successful in their jobs. The surveys were mailed to a total of 400 high school principals who were randomly selected using a table of random numbers. Along with the survey instrument, each principal received a personal cover letter and a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Selected high schools in all 50 states received the survey instrument. The principals surveyed were asked their opinions as to how they would rate, in terms of importance, each of 19 educational experiences or factors for successful athletic directors. Specifically, the principals were asked to rate each of the items relating to formal or informal education efforts or achievements by means of a Likert scale, (1) essential, (2) very important, (3) important, (4) not very important, and (5) irrelevant. There were a total of 233 useable survey instruments returned by the principals, a return rate of 58.25%. Public school principals who participated in the study repre-

sented 79.4% (185 schools) while private school principals accounted for 20.6% (48 schools) of the total principals surveyed.

Results of the Study

The principals were asked how important specific degrees, i.e., baccalaureate, masters, specialists, and doctoral degrees are for individuals assuming the position of interscholastic athletic director. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of principals (81%) responded that having the baccalaureate degree was very important (17.6%) or essential (63.4%). At the graduate level, only slightly more than half of the respondents (53.6%) indicated that it was very important (16.3%) or essential (37.3%) that ADs possess the masters' degree. An additional 30% felt that the masters' degree was merely important. It is interesting to note that a significant percentage of principals (16.3%) felt that possession of the masters' degree was either not very important or was irrelevant.

The need for ADs to possess some type of administrative certificate, beyond the masters' degree, was thought to be essential by only 3% of the principals. An additional 14.2% felt it was very important while 26.2% felt such a certificate was important. At the other end of the spectrum, 28.8% of the principals felt that such a certificate was irrelevant while another 31% felt the advance certificate was not very important.

Possessing the specialist's degree was deemed to be very important by only 5.6% of the principals while 20.6% indicated that they felt such a degree was important. However, the vast majority of the respondents revealed that they thought such a degree was either not very important or was totally irrelevant (73.8%) in terms of being successful as a high school athletic director.

Similarly, possessing a doctoral degree was deemed irrelevant or not important by a very large percentage (89%) of the respondents. Only 11.2% indicated that such a degree was important (8.6%)

or very important (2.6%) for the athletic director at the secondary level.

Informal and formal Educational Experiences

An integral part of any athletic directors education, once the person is appointed to the position, is meeting the challenge of remaining at the cutting edge in terms of knowledge and information pertinent to the administration of athletic programs. An overwhelming number of the principals (72.5%) agreed that consistent *attendance at sport and/or administrative workshops and clinics* was very important (27.5%) or essential (45.1%). Similarly, *professional reading*, on a consistent basis, was deemed to be essential (16.7%) or very important (49.4%) for the high school athletic director by 66.1% of high school principals.

Figure 3 illustrates the categories of undergraduate and graduate courses (proposed sport management *core content areas*), in rank order, that principals indicated were appropriate for athletic directors and would-be ADs. Only two categories of formal course work — *legal aspects of sport* (61.8%) and *budget and finance in sport* (53.6%)—were selected by the majority of principals as being essential or very important. At the other end of the spectrum, the three categories (content areas) of course work that received the least support (viewed as being not very important or irrelevant) were *socio-cultural dimensions in sport* (34.8%), *marketing in sport* (34.8%), and *research (methods) in sports* (44.6%).

Conclusions

Athletic directors and would-be athletic directors need to be at the cutting edge of their discipline, i.e., the administration of sports programs. Toward this end, it is imperative that they continue to be up-to-date in terms of knowledge that can help them to make wise decisions based upon an appropriate knowledge base. Part of the process of being up-to-date (at the cutting edge) involves professional reading as

well as attendance at appropriate professional workshops, conferences and clinics.

An equally important element in being knowledgeable in one's profession rests in obtaining formal education through college/university courses, courses geared specifically to help prepare individuals to meet the myriad of challenges of administering an interscholastic sports program. Although the core content areas (categories of courses) put forth by the *Sport Management Program Review Council* have been proposed (recommended) as appropriate educational experiences for those individuals who seek to become (remain) competent in the role of sport manager (athletic director), the high school principals surveyed did not wholeheartedly endorse all of these content areas.

The findings of this study would speak to a very real need to inform and educate those high school principals, who fail to appreciate the value of these content areas (category of courses) for those individuals who would assume the role of interscholastic athletic director, as to the importance of such courses (content areas). The fact that only 41.6% of the respondents felt it advisable for athletic directors to have course work in the area of *ethics of sport (management)* is significant. This is especially true in light of the ever-increasing challenges being faced by ADs in terms of ethical behavior by participants and supporters within the sports programs. Similarly, the fact that only 33.0% of these same principals felt *venue and event management* would be an advantageous area of formal study speaks to a possible unawareness of the importance that appropriate home event management can be to the total well being of an athletic program.

Finally, the responses of the principals surveyed in this study points to a disagreement between what the principals view to be important educational factors (experiences) for ADs and "would-be ADs" when compared to those faculty and administrators at the college and university level who have established and endorsed the core content areas as outlined above (figures 1 and 2).

Either the principals are in error or misinformed in this area or those responsible for developing the recommended (proposed) sport management *core content areas* are uninformed as to the realistic educational expectations for athletic directors in the high schools in this country.

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Undergraduate Content Areas
1. Socio-Cultural Dimensions in Sport
2. Management and Leadership in Sport
3. Ethics in Sport Management
4. Marketing in Sport
5. Communications in Sport
6. Budget and Finance in Sport
7. Legal Aspects of Sport
8. Economics in Sport
9. Venue and Event Management in Sport
10. Governance in Sport
11. Field Experience in Sport Management

Figure 1: Recommended Undergraduate Content Areas by the Sport Management Program Review Council

Graduate Content Areas
1. Socio-Cultural Dimensions in Sport
2. Management and Leadership in Sport
3. Ethics in Sport Management
4. Marketing in Sport
5. Communications in Sport
6. Financial Management in Sport
7. Legal Aspects of Sport
8. Research in Sport
9. Venue and Event Management in Sport
10. Field Experience in Sport Management

Figure 2: Recommended Graduate Content Areas by the Sport Management Program Review Council

<u>Content Areas of Course Work Undergraduate (U) and Graduate (G)</u>	<u>Essential or Very Important</u>	<u>Not Very Important or Irrelevant</u>
1. <u>Legal Aspects of Sport (U/G)</u>	61.8%	14.2%
2. <u>Budget and Finance in Sport (U/G)</u>	53.6%	17.6%
3. <u>Management and Leadership in Sport (U/G)</u>	48.1%	21.0%
4. <u>Communication in Sport (U/G)</u>	42.5%	20.6%
5. <u>Marketing in Sport (U/G)</u>	42.3%	34.8%
6. <u>Ethics in Sport Management (U/G)</u>	41.6%	17.2%
7. <u>Venue and Event Management in Sport (U/G)</u>	33.0%	27.9%
8. <u>Economics in Sport (U)</u>	31.0%	31.3%
9. <u>Field Experience in Sport Management (U/G)</u>	28.3%	33.5%
10. <u>Governance in Sport (U/G)</u>	26.2%	30.9%
11. <u>Socio-Cultural Dimensions in Sport (U/G)</u>	25.8%	34.8%
12. <u>Research in Sport (G)</u>	13.7%	44.6%

(U) Undergraduate level courses
(G) Graduate level courses

Figure 3: Opinions of Principals Regarding the Appropriateness of Specific Undergraduate/Graduate Level Courses for Successful Interscholastic Athletic Directors