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The recruitment and retention of high school sport officials in Minnesota: An Exploratory Analysis

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RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF OFFICIALS

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, ST. PAUL

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

COLLEGE OF KINESIOLOGY

The recruitment and retention of high school sport officials in Minnesota:

An Exploratory Analysis

A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

M.S Coaching and Athletic Administration

by

Zackary Qual

St. Paul, Minnesota

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Dedications

I would like to dedicate this capstone to my patient and loving wife Christine and my son Archer. Both have allowed me to chase my dreams and have sacrificed time for me to accomplish that. I also would like to dedicate this to the hardworking high school officials in Minnesota.

Abstract

The issue that this proposal study will address is the current officiating shortage for Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) sanctioned events. High school games are being rescheduled and at times canceled altogether due to the lack of available registered officials needed to ensure games are officiated correctly and with quality. In order to address this problem, the purpose of this proposed study will be to explore the types of interactions, both positive and negative, that registered MSHSL officials have had with players, coaches, and fans at events they have officiated. To gather the data, an online survey would be conducted and completed by current MSHSL registered officials. This proposed study would have a plethora of audiences that deem to benefit from its findings. Athletes, administrators, coaches, fans, and the officials would all benefit from a more quality gameday experience when examining the data retrieved from this study and in turn, help reverse the trend of the officiating shortage in Minnesota.

Keywords: *MSHSL, officials, high school sports, retention*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Capstone Project

When surveyed regarding retention, employees mentioned enjoying the work involved in serving customers, liking what they do as an employee, and having fun while on the job (Hausknecht & Howard, 2009). Making employees feel valued while properly training them can increase the likelihood of them enjoying the work they do. Investing in employee development may create a dynamic relationship where employees may work harder because they have a greater sense of job satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Lee & Bruvold, 2003).

Significance of the Study/Rationale

“It’s no secret that high school sports are facing a serious issue when it comes to officials. The hard truth is that there aren’t enough people certified to officiate, and that’s the case in Minnesota as well as around the nation” (Millea, 2023, para.1). The careers of young officials are becoming increasingly shorter, while older officials are retiring from officiating as well. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) reported that more than half of all officials (51.9%) were involved for less than five years. Further, less than one-third of officials (27.2%) had 10 years or more experience (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013). A recent report by the National Federation of High Schools stated there were roughly 30,000 less officials in the United States than in 2019 (Niehoff, 2022). This lack of officials is turning into a crisis in amateur sports throughout the nation.

Research has identified factors that affect the retention of officials in Minnesota to include personal job demands, poor sportsmanship by participants, poor sportsmanship by spectators, time away from family and friends, and low game fees (Tieman, 2017). Fewer individuals are choosing to give up their time in order to officiate high school contests in the

state of Minnesota. When given the choice between officiating and other activities, these individuals are choosing the latter. This trend is causing administrators of participating schools in the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) to find alternative days and methods to complete their high school schedules. In the state of Minnesota, contests are being canceled and rescheduled at alarming rates due to a lack of qualified and licensed officials (Millea, 2023). The main factors for the lack of recruiting new high school officials and retaining current high school officials in the state of Minnesota has yet to be determined.

Officials play a key role in the sport industry workforce; therefore, it is important to understand the factors associated with their retention so that sport organizers can develop strategies to more effectively recruit and retain officials (Ridinger et al., 2017). From a service perspective, officials ensure that competitions are conducted safely and in accordance with sanctioned rules and regulations (Warner & Kellett, 2013). In order for the quantity and quality of high school contests in the state of Minnesota to remain high, the retention rate of officials needs to be addressed. Retaining officials at a higher rate will allow the youth athletes throughout Minnesota to accomplish goals, participate in activities with their friends, and produce an overall higher quality of life for those who would like to participate in after school activities.

This study will be similar to one conducted by Rainey (1999). Rainey's (1999) research focused on participants in an Ohio high school officiating league regarding stress and burnout in basketball officials. The participants carried an age range of 20 years to 72 years, with a mean of 41.9 years of age. These ages are similar to the age range this project will be seeking. Officials would be recruited for this proposed study due to their knowledge of officiating games at the

high school level in the state of Minnesota and their experience being a participant in the competitive setting.

Research Question

The purpose of this study will be to investigate the cause of the officiating shortage in the state of Minnesota to add insight as to what can be done to curb this downward trend. The research question guiding this project will be: What are the main contributing factors to the retirement of high school officials in Minnesota? This project will seek to determine what could be done differently to recruit and retain officials moving forward. Officials will be recruited to participate by electronic flyers and word of mouth through the presidents of their respected associations.

Biases and Assumptions

This proposal is being developed and would be led by a professional that works within the dynamics of officials within the MSHSL organization. The professional that would lead this proposal have their own biases and assumptions of why there is an officiating shortage for MSHSL events including their own background while directly working with officials. The data collected in this proposal would all be from individuals who have officiated contests for the MSHSL organization, while at the same time there would be no data collected from players, coaches, or fans possibly disallowing certain groups' viewpoints to be represented. To remove the potential biases, the proposed study would undergo a review from the IRB board through Concordia St. Paul University and would be in collaboration with the executive director of the MSHSL.

Limitations

As with any study, this study will have some limitations due to its qualitative nature. Per Creswell (2018), any qualitative study that provides indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees will be limited (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Any qualitative study that provides information in a designated place, in this case the electronic survey, rather than the natural field setting will be limited (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Any qualitative study that focuses on human subjects, in this case a group of high school officials, will be limited because not all people are equally articulate and perceptive (Creswell, 2018). Any qualitative study that gathers data electronically may be difficult for participants to interpret (Creswell, 2018). All of these qualitative limitations could apply to this proposed study.

Conclusion

Many facets of the officiating shortage in Minnesota being investigated is the purpose of this study. With officials playing a key role in the outcome and completion of contests, the significance of this study could be large and help determine why there is a shortage and avenues that can take place in order to reverse the trend. As with any study, there are limitations and biases that need to be accounted for including the researcher's background and the type of research being done.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study will be to determine the possible reasons for the officiating shortage for MSHSL sanctioned events throughout Minnesota. This study has significance for a large group of people that are affected by officiating throughout the school year, including administrators, fans, players, and coaches. This chapter will discuss who would be a part of this study, the instrument used to collect the data provided, the procedures that would take place throughout the study, the type of data that would be derived from the study, and any ethical considerations throughout the course of the study. A qualitative method will be used for this study, as it includes open ended questions that focus largely on the experiences provided by the participants.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, between 50 and 100 officials involved in various sports who are registered high school officials in the state of Minnesota will be recruited. The goal will be to have officials for each of the following age ranges participate: 20-29 years, 30-39 years, 40-49 years, and 50 years and older. The widened age range will allow this study to explore the recruitment portion of the study with the lower age ranges and allow the researcher to explore the retention aspect of the study with the later age ranges.

Instruments

To obtain data relevant to the experiences of MSHSL registered sport officials in Minnesota, an online Google Form survey was created (Appendix A). The survey begins with an informed consent statement, followed by a series of demographic questions and six questions

that focus on the personal experiences of the participants. The first two questions ask age and number of years' experience officiating MSHSL events. These two questions will place each official in the applicable category when analyzing data. The questions provided will be semi structured, designed to examine their experiences within their role as an official. Strauss and Corbin (1994) suggested that in order to understand a particular group, theory needs to be generated directly from the experiences and frames of reference of the individuals within that group (Phillips & Fairley, 2014).

The survey will aim to summarize the experiences of the high school officials in Minnesota and get direct quotes from them in order to search for the reasons for the official shortage. Many school districts use google as their main platform, and this includes Athletic Directors. Athletic Directors often use their google mail accounts to contact and organize the officials that will work their contests. Therefore, the Google Forms will allow participants to use a platform that most of them are familiar with. This will also allow the researcher to access answers submitted immediately and will allow participants to remain anonymous, giving them the confidence to answer honestly and directly without the pressure of repercussions. In order to access the survey, participants who choose to volunteer will need an email address and access to a device that has access to the internet in order to type in their answers and submit their finished survey electronically.

Completing the survey electronically will also allow more officials throughout the state of Minnesota the opportunity to be included in the study, therefore eliminating the possible region bias that may occur if the survey was to be delivered in person and the questions asked in a face-to-face format. Using an electronic online survey will allow officials of various sports to

participate as well as some sports are more accessible in different regions in the state of Minnesota.

Procedures

Officials will be recruited to participate by electronic flyers and word of mouth through the presidents of their respected associations. All officials that participate in the study will do so voluntarily with no compensation provided for their services. The officials recruited can come from varying backgrounds and locations throughout the state of Minnesota. In addition, these officials can vary in the sports that they officiate including football, basketball, softball, hockey and others. All of the officials who will participate will be required to have at least two years of experience officiating MSHSL sanctioned events.

Because this study will involve human subjects, it will go through Concordia University of St. Paul's IRB prior to being sent out to the certified officials. The survey will be disseminated using a google survey. The dissemination will be done in collaboration with the lead researcher and the executive director of the MSHSL. The data will be obtained electronically through the platform Google Forms. Participants will access the survey through an email which shares the informed consent statement before beginning the questions. Total participation will take between 20 to 30 minutes depending on the length of the answers and the time spent analyzing each question by the participants. Participants will be allowed to answer the survey in any setting they choose, with access to the internet of their choosing. The survey will be administered to the participants only once, therefore allowing them to submit their answers only once. The participants will be required to complete the survey in one sitting. The study will be available to the participants for three weeks and they may take and submit the survey at any point within the

three-week window. Once answers have been submitted, the participants' role in the study is complete.

Design & Statistical Analysis

This proposed study will be a form of qualitative research called phenomenological research. Per Creswell, this type of research focuses on the lived experiences of individuals as described by the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study would focus on using qualitative interviews, a process where open-ended questions are intended to draw forth the opinions and views of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The open-ended nature of the questions can provide the researchers the opportunity to focus on the meaning the participants hold about the problem of the officiating shortage in Minnesota.

The proposed study will also be holistic in nature. Per Creswell and Creswell (2018), this type of research creates a complex picture of the problem. Due to the varying demographics of the participants, many perspectives and factors can be considered when trying to find why there is a shortage of officials in Minnesota. Collecting the demographic data will allow future data analysis to sort the themes into different categories such as male/female, urban/suburban, and age.

Ethical Considerations

As with all research, this study has ethical issues to address. First, the proposed study will be reviewed and approved by the IRB at Concordia University, St. Paul. In order to meet their protocols, participants' rights and privacy will be protected by keeping all data collected confidential with all identifiers removed. As noted in the survey (Appendix A), informed consent will be obtained prior to the collection of any data, and participation of the study will be

voluntary. Participants may choose to exit the survey and not complete it if they wish. There will not be any risks associated with the study.

Conclusion

The proposed study would be qualitative in nature with a focus in phenomenology. The proposed study would include an online survey to be completed by the participants. In order to gain participants for the study, flyers and word of mouth through respective officiating associations would be used. To curb any ethical concerns of the study focusing on human subjects, the study would need the approval of the IRB through Concordia St. Paul and would include the executive director of the MSHSL.

Chapter 3: Discussion & Conclusion

Introduction

This study aims to find the potential reasons behind the officiating shortage of high school sports in the state of Minnesota. The shortage of officials is causing various issues including scheduling and cancellations. In order to determine the reasons why there are fewer and fewer officials available to officiate, an electronic survey would be conducted and passed forward to current registered MSHSL officials allowing them a chance to share their experiences anonymously. The results of the study could be applied in multiple ways including the analysis of the MSHSL officiating programs, the programs in place to help retain and recruit officials, and help others such as student athletes who are affected by this phenomenon. There are limitations with this study, however those limitations can lead to further research not only in Minnesota but other states that are experiencing similar issues as well.

Practical Applications

If this study were to be carried out, there are a variety of beneficial applications for the data collected in this project. The results of this study would apply to the landscape of high school athletics in the state of Minnesota, specifically to officiating. The findings could help develop programs to help the retention of high school officials in Minnesota, depending on the answers provided by the participants.

The results of this study can also help in the recruitment effort of new officials. Individuals can use this study to determine what made their current officials continue to officiate and focus on those aspects of their development program in regard to recruiting new high school officials. High School Athletic Directors can use the findings from this study to put into place

strategies at their locations to help ensure official's needs are being met and their facilities can give their officials quality working environments. Athletic Directors may be able to also use this study to ensure that high school contests can continue on their scheduled and traditional nights. This would avoid situations such as football games being played on Thursdays and Saturdays versus the traditional Friday night. Finally, the results of this study may be able to ensure that the quality and quantity of high school contests in Minnesota are able to increase rather than decrease. With the information provided in this study, high school athletes may benefit the most as their game experiences may be able to be enhanced with the changes applied.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study may include the lack of inclusion of officials who have recently left the officiating profession, the difference in the number of officials who officiate specific sports, and lack of representation of officials from specific regions of the state of Minnesota. Including officials who have left the profession is a restriction that would be placed on the study by the researcher. Due to the difficulty in contacting different officials who are no longer officiating, the study will focus on answers provided by the officials who are still currently a part of an officiating association. The main means of contacting the officials to hand out surveys will be through the contact directory of the officiating associations throughout the state of Minnesota. Another possible limitation is the number of officials that represent the different possible sports being surveyed. This limitation is the result of circumstances of the study and is unintended. For example, basketball and football are much more popular sports for athletes in Minnesota than a sport such as tennis. Therefore, the number of officials are going to be larger in those popular sports due to popularity and need in order to cover the contests being played. Basketball, football, volleyball, and baseball/softball are the most common and most

accessible sports for the majority of the high school athletes in Minnesota, which means there is a real chance of a lack of representation of officials who are not officiating these five most accessible sports. Lastly, a third limitation that could occur is the lack of representation of certain officials from various regions due to the lack of availability of certain sports to specific school districts. This is also a limitation that is circumstantial and is unintended by the researcher. Swimming, hockey, gymnastics are just a few of the less accessible sports to high school athletes in throughout the state of Minnesota depending on what region of Minnesota they are located in. Furthermore, this may adjust the data because of the varying percentages of representation of officials.

Recommendations for Further Research

As the study will focus on officials in the state of Minnesota as a whole and the data is being collected by surveying current officials, it is recommended that future research be done on the officiating shortages of specific sports, the officiating shortages of specific regions in the state, and information be collected from former officials who are no longer officiating Minnesota high school sports. The differences in sports may be able to pinpoint the direct problems in that specific activity in order to help officials be recruited and retained at a higher rate. There is a chance that the officiating shortage is only affecting some sports while others are not being as affected by the officiating shortage. Doing a focused study on each individual sport would allow officiating associations to focus solely on the information that the study on their specific sport provides. A research study that focuses on the specific regions of the state of Minnesota may be able to pinpoint if there is a higher rate of officiating shortages in certain parts of the state versus others. With this information, the study could find the reasons that may be unique to the regions they are studying. Finally, a research study similar to this one that includes responses from

retired officials would be something that is also recommended. The responses given by retired officials could vary greatly from the responses from current officials who may just be speculating or using information they believe to be accurate. Retired officials would bring a different level of perspective to the study as they have their specific reasons for choosing retirement.

Conclusion

Conducting this proposed study will be important as its results have the ability to enhance the quality and quantity of high school sporting contests in the state of Minnesota. Researchers will be able to investigate the reason that high school officials are choosing not to continue officiating high school sports and the challenges behind recruiting new officials. The use of an online survey will allow youth sport officials to express their opinions in a world where oftentimes the opinion of an official is not ever considered. Anonymity of the participants of the study and their ability to complete the survey within the comfort of their own home will allow the participants to feel comfortable in how they answer and provide the researcher with honest and thoughtful answers. Overall, the reasons why the recruitment and retention rates of high school officials in Minnesota need to be found so that the trend can be reversed.

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Appendix A

MSHSL Sport Official Survey

This survey is being conducted for the purpose of a research proposal done by Zack Qual, a Master's student at Concordia St. Paul University. By submitting answers to the following survey, participants are providing their consent for the research team to include the information in their study. All personal information will be kept confidential and answers provided will remain anonymous.

1. What is your age?

Please check one:

- Less than 20 years
- 20-29 years
- 30-39 years
- 40-49 years
- 50 years and older

2. What is your sex?

Please check one:

- Male
- Female

3. Which of the following best describes you?

Please check one:

- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino

- Native American or Alaska Native
- White or Caucasian
- A race not listed above

4. How many years have you been an official for high school sports in Minnesota?

Please check one:

- 2-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15-19 years
- 20 or more years

5. How many more years do you plan to continue being an official for high school sports in Minnesota?

Please check one:

- 2-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15-19 years
- 20 or more years

6. Please provide an example of a positive interaction you have had with players at an MSHSL sanctioned event. If you do not have one to provide, please leave it blank.

7. Please provide an example of a positive interaction you have had with coaches at an MSHSL sanctioned event. If you do not have one to provide, please leave it blank.

8. Please provide an example of a positive interaction you have had with fans at an MSHSL sanctioned event. If you do not have one to provide, please leave it blank.
9. Please provide an example of a negative interaction you have had with players at an MSHSL sanctioned event. If you do not have one to provide, please leave it blank.
10. Please provide an example of a negative interaction you have had with coaches at an MSHSL sanctioned event. If you do not have one to provide, please leave it blank.
11. Please provide an example of a negative interaction you have had with fans at an MSHSL sanctioned event. If you do not have one to provide, please leave it blank.