

A Study to Examine The Nature And Scope Of High School And Middle School Athletic Director Positions In The State Of Virginia

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Comfort(2005) reports that there are over 200 sport management professional preparation programs at colleges and universities in the United States. Each year several new sport management programs are created with many graduates seeking jobs in the sports industry. Parks and Quarterman (2002), Masteralexis, Barr and Hums (2005)and Field (1999) describe a number of potential career path options for sport management graduates. Most of the positions that they describe are in traditional sport management career paths in college athletics and professional sports. As more and more sport management graduates enter the job market, new employment opportunities will need to be identified in order to accommodate the many new sport management graduates who will be seeking employment in future years. One career path that has been discussed in the past but not given much attention is the area of high school and middle school athletic director positions (ADs). Very little is known about these positions and whether they match the competencies and education provided in college sport management programs.

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature and scope of high school and middle school athletic director positions in the State of Virginia in an effort to determine if such positions are potential career paths for sport management graduates. Essential competencies related to high school athletic director positions were also examined. An online survey instrument was developed and reviewed by a jury of experts who were current and former high school athletic directors. The online survey instrument contained a total of thirty questions. An online survey was made available to athletic directors and school principals through e-mail lists provided by the state high school athletic association. A total of 274 responses were received out of a potential sample of 520 for a 53% response rate. Over 98% of the respondents were athletic directors or principals in public high schools and middle schools in the State of Virginia. Over 76% of the respondents indicated that athletic directors were located in both the high schools and middle schools within their school district. A high percentage of the positions were full-time positions. Some districts had as many as 20 AD positions for the high schools and middle schools. 42% of the respondents were from AAA or large schools. 72% of the schools required a minimum of a bachelor's degree to be an AD and 25% of the respondents required a master's degree. 89% of the respondents reported that applicants for AD positions needed to have a teaching license.

The average salary for middle school and high school ADs in the State of Virginia was listed at approximately \$50,000. A select number of ADs made over \$80,000. A majority of the online survey respondents indicated that they majored in either physical education or a teaching specialization (e.g., math) as an undergraduate and in school administration, a teaching content area or sport management in graduate school. Within the school, 96% of the respondents noted that one AD serviced both the boys and girls athletic programs. The AD position was considered to be an administrative position within the schools 64% of the time. Over 70% of the respondents indicated that they were not responsible for intramurals and recreational sport programs within their schools. When asked if the ADs were required to obtain additional certifications, the answer was 'no' 74% of the time. Educational administration and NIAAA were the certifications sought most often. Over 80% of the ADs who responded were males who indicated that over 75% of their typical workday involved direct administration of the school's athletic program and not assigned duties in teaching classes, etc. The average age of the respondents was 48 years with an average of 11 years of administrative experience. Less than 10% of the respondents reported that they were ADs from a racial minority group.

In terms of essential skills and competencies needed for the position of school AD, sound judgment, knowledge of state high school rules and policies, ability to multi-task, ethical decision making, leadership and delegation skills, budgeting knowledge and skills, time management skills, problem solving abilities, event management competencies, risk management skills and personnel supervision abilities were all rated in the very important to essential range. Planning and organizing skills, knowledge of legal liability, public relations, oral/written communication skills, staffing and hiring were also highly rated in the very important range. The lowest rated competency/skill for an athletic director in the schools was actual athletic playing experience.

The findings of this study suggest that athletic director positions in high school and middle school athletics is a viable career path options for sport management majors. The high school AD career path will involve extensive advising and pre-planning with efforts made to obtain a teaching license along with a sport management degree. The AD career path at the high school level may be more reasonable for students who are seeking master's degrees in sport management. An undergraduate teaching degree (perhaps in physical education and sport management) would be a better choice if students truly desire careers in high school or middle school athletic administration. The master's degree would then be an excellent match for a sport management athletic administration career. The skills and competencies identified for a career in high school athletic administration match closely the many skills and competencies advocated in the former NASSM/NASPE program review requirements and the

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certifications available through NIAAA. Although the results of this study apply directly to the State of Virginia, additional future studies will determine trends in other states.