Since the mid-1980s, the sport management discipline has grown dramatically in size and scope. While the growth of sport management is seen in the increasing number of academic programs and students enrolled, the number and quality of journal outlets available, and the amount of sport management research tracks and presentations at a growing number of academic conferences, the discipline overall still has much to accomplish before the field (collectively) enters a more mature stage of development. One major area where sport management needs to improve is the methods used to conduct research. Generally speaking, sport management researchers have mastered many of the qualitative and quantitative methods necessary to conduct good quality research. Due to a variety of factors (e.g., employment and tenure considerations, internal/external pressure), sport management researchers generally use cross-sectional research designs from which they draw inferences and make generalizations. When comparing the sport management discipline to more mature disciplines, the use of more rigorous research methods, such as conducting longitudinal rather than cross-sectional research, is required. The purpose of this research is to present a methodological framework for conducting longitudinal sport management research. The ongoing implementation of a coaching leadership program is used as the setting and context for this research.

All too often, sport management researchers deploying a survey, collect and analyze the single survey data, draw conclusions, and make generalizations based on the cross-sectional results. Sport coaching education research (see Gilbert, 2006; Hay, Dickens, Crudgington, & Engstrom, 2012), sport policy research (see Ritchie, Shipway & Cleeve, 2009), sport participation and involvement research (see Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008), and sport medical research (see Rimmer, 2001), have provided guidance and calls for more rigorous longitudinal research in sports. Moreover, Balduck, Parmentier and Buelens (2004) found that only 10% of articles published from 1999-2003 in the Journal of Sport Management (JSM), Sport Management Review (SMR), and European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ) utilized longitudinal research. Overall, there is scant sport management research which utilizes rigorous research methodology, and even less research and guidance exists on which sport management researchers can base longitudinal research endeavors. The process of collecting longitudinal sport management research is fraught with pitfalls which can jeopardize the entire research process. Based on information and guidelines provided by Gilbert (2013) and Slater and Simmons (2001), this research reports on the long-term implementation process of a sport coaching leadership program.

The first step in the process of implementing a sport coaching leadership program is to determine if there is any need for the program. Based on evidence from face-to-face meetings with various stakeholders (i.e., national and state government officials, local administrators, coaches, parents and athletes), the current system of coaching education and leadership is at a crossroads. Evidence from local and national sports organizations suggests that sports participation rates continue to increase (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2007; Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association, 2007). As for the coaches and leaders of sports teams, according to the National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education (NCACE, 2011), only 25-30% of interscholastic coaches have relevant coaching training, while the number drops to less than 5% for youth sport coaches. Research suggests that when coaches are untrained, the attrition rate among athletes averages approximately 25%, while the drop-out rate falls to only 5% for athletes coached by trained coaches. These statistics, in addition to comments and feedback received from selected stakeholders, reinforce the notion that sport coaching and leadership education is of paramount importance to the facilitation of positive sports experiences among participants. As a result, a more thorough understanding of the current state of coaching education and leadership is currently being undertaken.

In order to understand current perceptions, the next step, which is currently underway, includes surveying stakeholders (e.g., administration, coaches, parents, and athletes) about sport coaching and leadership education including the “National Standards for Sport Coaches” (see Gilbert, 2013; Newland, Dixon, & Green, 2012). The
A survey (which is currently being used) includes questions and evaluations of eight coaching domains, including (1) philosophy and ethics, (2) safety and injury prevention, (3) physical conditioning, (4) growth and development, (5) teaching and communication, (6) sport skills and tactics, (7) organization and administration, and (8) evaluation. In addition to collecting data on these eight domains, the survey solicits feedback on the areas of sport coaching and leadership education which require more. Before being utilized at the national level, this survey is being piloted at the state-level in reference to administrators, managers, coaches, parents and players at all age- and skill-levels. The results of this pilot study are expected to shed further light on the areas where coaching leadership education can be improved. More importantly, the pilot study survey can be amended if problems arise when the survey is next implemented at the national-level.

As this is the first year of the implementation of the program and related longitudinal data collection, the following reflects the process through which the coaching leadership program is expected to be implemented and when data are expected to be collected. After the state-and national-level implementation of the coaching leadership survey is completed and conclusions drawn, the results will be examined by state- and national-level administrators in addition to sport coaching and leadership experts. Then in work-groups, materials for the coaching program will be created and assembled. After the materials are completed and vetted, the coaching leadership program will be introduced to select educational institutions. Next, the coaching leadership trainers/facilitators will be trained. Following that, data will be collected from the individuals (e.g., coaches and related stakeholders) that attend the coaching leadership training to establish a baseline for their relative levels of knowledge and experience. As individuals complete the coaching leadership training and are deployed in sport organizations and educational institutions, the third data collection will occur which evaluates the effectiveness and feelings of preparedness following the coaching leadership training. Moving forward from that point in time, coaches and stakeholders will periodically be surveyed as to the effectiveness and (potential) improvements to the program.

In summary, the purpose of this research is to report on the longitudinal progress and implementation of a coaching leadership program to date and identify and discuss further implementation issues. Leading sports scholars and researchers have called for sport managers to study human development and social relations in sporting contexts because sports can be a social force which strongly influences society and those who practice and administer sporting activities on a day-to-day basis to people of all ages and conditions (Zeigler, 2010, Shields & Bredemeier, 2009). Coaches play an important role in the sport experience of athletes (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007), and it is imperative that the programs which are used to educate and train current and future coaches reflect the importance of the occupation and opportunities. In addition, for the discipline of sport management to mature, it is imperative that sport managers, academics, practitioners and administrators move away from primarily utilizing cross-sectional single-survey research designs and instead utilize more rigorous longitudinal research methods from which superior conclusions can be drawn. Sports can positively influence society moving forward, however, the current preparation and training of sport coaches, managers, and administrators must evolve and progress. This research reflects the long-term implementation of a sport coaching leadership program and related data collection procedures, while also presenting experiences and guidelines which can be utilized in future longitudinal sport management research.