Educating and Preparing Sport Coaches within a Sport Management Program: The Results and Implications of the Stakeholder Survey

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Relevance and Significance
Over the last ten years, the number of colleges and universities offering Sport Management degree programs has dramatically increased. The North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) website currently lists more than 450 institutions in the United States which offer Sport Management degrees. Unfortunately at many institutions, the growth of Sport Management has taken place at the expense of physical education and sport coaching programs. While physical education programs have frequently been absorbed into Sport Management programs, sport coaching education has survived by being streamlined and implemented as a licensure program or concentration. As a result, many future sport coaches are now primarily educated in Sport Management and business disciplines (e.g., marketing, management, organizational behavior) and less in the knowledge, skills and competencies they will need as sport coaches. While the direct links remain unclear, business concerns now drive large portions of the sport industry, the focus of Sport Management on the “business of sport” has relegated many of the moral and ethical concerns faced by those who work in sport to relative obscurity in Sport Management and sport coaching curriculum (Horine & Stotlar, 2013). As moral and ethical issues faced by sport coaches (i.e., concussions, performance enhancing drug use, academic integrity, violent and criminal activities committed by athletes and coaches) remain a centerpiece of current sports news coverage, an opportunity exists to improve how future sport coaches are educated to meet their modern day needs within the context of Sport Management programs.

Relevant Literature
Recently, Hedlund and Fletcher (2014) proposed the Sport Coaching Education Program (SCEP) model based on a combination of Slater and Simmons (2001) “Peer Coaching Model (PCM),” Gilbert’s (2013) “Integrated Talent Development System (ITDS),” and previously implemented sport development programs (e.g., International Sport Coaching Framework, Canadian Sport for Life) (see Schinke & Hanrahan, 2012; Zeigler, 2011). In line with Gilbert (2013), four stages typify the creation, development and implementation of the SCEP. In the first stage, the program is envisioned, an action plan is formulated, and stakeholders are surveyed. In the second stage, the program is enacted, during which time the program is developed, participants are educated, and the new education program and curriculum is implemented. During the third stage, the program is examined through an analysis and evaluation of survey and program data. In the fourth and final stage, the program is enhanced and improved based on the conclusions drawn from the examinations and evaluation. In this continuation of previous research, the conclusion of the first stage (survey of stakeholders) is reported, and a discussion of the initiation of the second stage is discussed.

Purpose and Objectives
During the first year of the program, two tasks were undertaken, including (1) the development of the SCEP program based on discussions with selected key stakeholders, and (2) a survey of stakeholders regarding their perceptions about how to better educate sport coaches. Now in the second year of program, the purpose of this research is (1) to report on the survey results collected during the first year of the program, (2) to draw conclusions from the stakeholder survey, and (3) to examine how the SCEP program can be implemented to meet and exceed the needs identified by stakeholders.

During the first and beginning of the second year of the program, discussions were conducted with leaders from the six most prominent sport- and coaching-related organizations in the state of New York, including the New York State Education Department (NYSED), New York State Association for Health, Physical Education Recreation and Dance (NYSAHPERD), New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA), New York State
Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS), New York Catholic High School Athletic Association (NYCHSAA), and New York City Public Schools Athletic League (NYC-PSAL). The subject matter covered during the discussions included sport coaches’ certification requirements; sport coaching education opportunities and programs; international, national, state, local, and sport-specific coaching accreditation processes and procedures; and current sport coaching standards. During these discussions, a multitude of factors for further examination were identified by stakeholders. After compiling a list of the recommended areas for further research (see Hedlund & Fletcher, 2014), items based on the National Standards for Athletic/Sport Coaches (NCACE, 1995, 2006) and the International Sport Coaching Framework (ISCF, 2012, 2013) were derived for inclusion in the survey.

Methods
Based on the compiled list of items, three online surveys were created, one for each of the three groups of stakeholders (sport administrators and managers, sport coaches, and parents of student-athletes). Each survey contained approximately 75 total questions, including demographic questions, sport-related experience and education questions, and questions related to the 40 national standards and eight domains included in the National Standards for Sport Coaches (2006). Using an 11-point Likert-type scale anchored by 0 (not important to know) and 10 (most important to know), respondents for all three surveys rated the 40 standards. For the eight domains, respondents rank-ordered these items from 1 (most important) to 8 (least important).

In order to distribute the survey to the largest number of potential respondents, the leadership of NYSAHPERD, NYSPHSAA, NYSAIS, and NYC-PSAL agreed to directly distribute a link to the survey through mass emails to their membership and post the same information on their website. The ongoing data collection has, to date, received 241 fully completed responses (sport coaches, n=170; sport administrators and managers, n=53; parents of student-athletes, n=18) and 202 partially completed responses (sport coaches, n=138; sport administrators and managers, n=46; parents of student-athletes, n=26).

Discussion and Implications
To date, the combined results indicate that the top five most important standards for effective sport coaches are: (1) “The ability to demonstrate ethical conduct in all facets of the sport program” (M=9.66), (2) “The ability to identify, model, and teach positive values learned through sport participation” (M=9.61), (3) “The ability to provide a positive learning environment that is appropriate to the characteristics of the athletes and goals of the program” (M=9.53), (4) “The ability to use effective communication skills to enhance individual learning, group success, and enjoyment in the sport experience” (M=9.50), and (5) “The ability to plan and implement daily practice activities that maximize time on task and available resources” (M=9.49). In terms of the eight domains, the most important domain was (1) “Teaching and Communication” (M=3.15), followed by (2) “Safety and Injury Prevention” (M=3.46), (3) “Philosophy and Ethics” (M=3.92), (4) “Sport Skills and Tactics” (M=4.38), (5) “Growth and Development” (M=4.57), (6) “Physical Conditioning” (M=4.96), (7) “Evaluation” (M=5.61), and (8) “Organization and Administration” (M=5.95).

When the results are separated by the three surveys (sport administrators and managers, sport coaches, and parents of student-athletes), the results are quite similar. For example, based on comparisons of the mean scores, sport administrators/managers and coaches both rank “The ability to demonstrate ethical conduct in all facets of the sport program” as most important, while parents rank it as the fifth most important. The rankings of the eight domains are almost identical, except that parents rank “Evaluation” as number six and “Physical Conditioning” as number seven. It is important to note that the data continues to be collected, so the results are evolving.

As further data is collected, additional analyses will be possible to compare and contrast the results based on (1) different sports, (2) different roles (e.g., head, assistant and volunteer coaches), (3) different levels (e.g., professional, college, high school and elementary school), and (4) different levels/years of experience (e.g., novice, intermediate and advanced). It is expected that the results facilitate the opportunity to identify the areas of most relevance to stakeholders, and then these areas can be prioritized within the SCEP.

Contributions
Current sport coaching education is strongly based on teaching the “Xs and Os” of coaching specific sports, and there is often a lack of emphasis on the athlete-centered approach. Athlete-centered coaching is based on
recognizing the needs of the athlete, and planning and delivering a practice and competition program in-line with the needs of the athlete over the long-term. The current state of most high school athletic programs in the United States is not athlete-centered with the short-term development based on a winning record in many cases. Coaching should be informed by an understanding of the process of long-term athlete development (LTAD) (Gilbert, 2013; ISCF, 2013).

Based on the results to date, the initial model for SCEP is being revised (prior to implementation) based on the feedback and responses from stakeholders. For example, as students are being educated and prepared (inside and outside the classroom) to become sport coaches, additional education and training about how to properly teach and communicate with student athletes, how to create a safe training environment and space, and the importance of creating and adhering to high ethical standards where positive values are taught and reinforced, are being prioritized within the SCEP model. In addition, less emphasis will be placed on teaching and developing specialized managerial and administrative skills.

In the next one to two years, the SCEP program will be implemented with selected groups of future sport coaches. In order for the SCEP program to be successful and sustainable, it must be responsive to the needs of a broad range of constituents. Continuing to collect data and opinions from local and national stakeholders is important as the potential exists for the SCEP to become a model for local, national and international sport coaching education programs. In the coming years more data will be collected, and the results will be used to identify ways to strengthen and broaden the scope and efficacy of the SCEP.