An Exploration of Social Media Use and Its Impact On Canadian Football Coaches

Ryan Clutterbuck, Brock University
Olan Scott, Brock University

Communication - Social Media (Other)  Thursday, May 30, 2019
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  8:30 AM
Abstract 2019-012  Room: Napoleon D1

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and others) on Canadian football coaches across the Long-Term Athlete Development spectrum. In Canada, football coaches are mainly volunteers at community sport organizations, high schools, and universities. Yet there exist professional coaching jobs at both the university level (U Sports) and in the Canadian Football League (CFL). Across the coaching spectrum – from youth sport to U Sports – social media is impacting coaching and athletic administrators. However, little is known as to the extent of the impact on social media on a coach’s day-to-day work and how their jobs have evolved since the proliferation of social media in society. To understand the impact of social media on this group, this study will survey Canadian football coaches at all levels to gauge the workload implications and pressures that might have come up, because of social media. Further, semi-structured interviews with some of these coaches will take place to attain a more robust explanation of the impact of social media on this group.

Research suggests (in different sport settings and contexts) social media usage is fundamentally changing professional roles and responsibilities for both the better and worse (Li, Stokowski, Dittmore, & Scott, 2015). For example, in a study of Chinese sport journalists, Li et al. (2015) noted only 14% of participants indicated social media made their jobs easier, and the majority indicated “their working routines and lives had been altered by the involvement of social media” (p. 12). In their study on football head coaches, Jensen, Ervin, and Dittmore (2014) found that on-field success was the biggest driver in popularity on the Twitter platform. However, their study did not examine the pressures that the coaches’ institutions may have placed on the use of social media to build brand awareness and popularity online. In this current study, we explore the impact of social media on football coaches, and particularly regarding player recruitment, their work security, daily workloads and coach-athlete relationships.

Utilizing an online survey, adapted from the Li et al., 2015 study and semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2015), this study aims to answer the following four research questions: (1) What are Canadian football coaches’ perceptions toward the role of social media in their coaching practice? (2) Are football coaches using Twitter and Facebook for different purposes? (3) How has the engagement of social media impacted coach’s ethics in player recruitment, and (4) How has social media impacted the coach-athlete relationship?

Findings and implications of this study will have benefit for football coaches in Canada and elsewhere. Implications for sport managers, and athletic administrators, who are responsible for monitoring (and policing) social media at universities and high schools are also offered. Further, findings and discussion from this study may benefit U Sports in particular – an organization that does not have a publicly available social media policy at this time.