

Coaching Behaviors to Impact Interpersonal Communications and Athlete Coping Skills Among
Undergraduate Populations

by

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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education—Coaching

Greenville University

Summer 2021

Abstract

The effects of coaching behaviors were examined in a survey of intercollegiate student-athletes at a small, private Christian institution, competing in the NCAA's Division 3. The researcher set out to find how coaches are behaving to impact their interpersonal communications with, and the coping skills of, student-athletes under their tutelage. Student-athletes stated that they have been both positively and negatively affected by the past behaviors of their coaches throughout their playing careers. Quantitative data suggests that an overwhelming majority of student-athletes surveyed, believe their coaches have had an impact on their coping skills, both positively and negatively. Qualitative data suggests that student-athletes can pinpoint behaviors exhibited by coaches and speak to the positive or negative impact of those behaviors. Together, these findings can help guide the future of coaching and how coaches choose to interact with their student-athletes, knowing the implications of their daily behaviors.

Keywords: coaching, student-athlete, coping skills, behaviors, communication, mental health, interpersonal

Dedication

To my parents, for their love and support. To the coaches I played for, for all of the life lessons. To the coaches I've coached with, for your example. To my student-athletes, past, present, and future, for believing in me and allowing me to impact your life, while simultaneously impacting mine. To those struggling with their mental health, I promise it gets better and that those who hurt you do not have any influence on who you choose to become. Keep fighting, the time to rise is now!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Manos for her unwavering support and guidance, and for her positive energy in stressful times. Thank you to the athletics staff at the university for your help in the distribution of surveys. Thank you to those who participated, for your very real and raw responses.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

The coach-athlete relationship can be one that is complex. In the article *The Three D's*, the NCAA Division 3 athletics boast about developing their student-athletes into well-rounded adults for life after competitive sport (2014). This, then, must mean that coaches are interacting in such a way with their student-athletes, that they are fostering growth in areas that would pertain to becoming a well-rounded adult. These coaching interactions must extend beyond physical performance, as many student-athletes will not participate in athletic competition once they have graduated and enter the workforce (Brown 2014, p.69). One particular area of life that must be addressed is that of mental health for student-athletes.

Due to the recent increase in, or at least the increase in awareness of, issues of mental health, “there has been increasing attention by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to the importance of supporting the psychological well-being of student-athletes” (Roxas & Ridinger, 2016, p. 95-96). In fact, in 2014, the NCAA released a guide entitled *Mind, Body and Sport—Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Wellness*. The conversation on student-athlete mental wellness has begun, but the question remains: what are the actions being taken to understand and support undergraduates throughout athletics experiences?

Background, Context, and Theoretical Framework for the Problem

Athletics, at its core, is all about the physical. Spectators see the games unfolding before their eyes and can physically see what is happening through the movement of bodies and objects. Ercis (2018) states that “achievement of sport skills depend on three readiness factors; physical, skill-based and mental issues” (p. 72). Ercis (2018) goes on to say, “It seems that difference

between the champions' performance is roughly relied on athletes' mental readiness" (p. 72). This must mean that somewhere within athletics, psychological skills are being developed in addition to the necessary physical skills required for gameplay.

In "Mind, Body and Sport" (2014), Hainline, NCAA Chief Medical Officer, states that that the most significant challenges for student-athletes, when it comes to health and safety, is mental health and wellness (p. v.). Because of the natural scope of physicality within athletics and the prevalence of physical injury, it is alarming that the most significant challenges do not come from the physical aspects of sport, but rather in the realm of the student-athletes' psychological well-being (Hainline 2014, p. v.). Hainline (2014) goes on to say that "while student-athletes may play games, being a student-athlete isn't a game at all" (p. v.). This speaks to the serious nature of being a student-athlete.

In his article, *Best Practices for Athletics Departments* (2014), Klenck states that "individuals charged with caring for student-athletes need help recognizing and managing these [mental health] concerns" (p. 101). Coaches would fall into this category of individuals. In the athletics department, student-athletes spend the majority of their time with teammates and coaches. Because of this, it is important to be aware of the coach-athlete relationship. Kayhan (2020) states "the relationship between the [coaches] and their athletes is an important element [sic] in order to raise successful and mentally healthy athletes" (p. 232). One way this is true is that coaches can assist in fostering positive emotions and satisfaction with life circumstances (Kayhan 2020, p. 232).

Statement of the Problem

The NCAA's (Brown 2014) purpose for the release of "*Mind, Body and Sport*" was to help member institutions figure out how to "provide the services and care to help each student-

athlete reach his or her full potential” (p. 113). As the primary contact for student-athletes on campus, coaches need to know and apply actionable steps they can take as they work to provide a quality interpersonal relationship and support system for their student-athletes.

Hypothesis:

H₁ - Coaching behaviors can positively impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

H₂ – Coaching behaviors can negatively impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

H_{NULL} – Coaching behaviors do not impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

It is the goal of the proposed study to investigate student-athletes and which coaching behaviors have a positive impact on their well-being. Additionally, the study will investigate which coaching behaviors may have negative impacts in these areas.

Research Questions

It is essential to find out what is driving the psychological well-being of an organization’s members. In collegiate athletics, the primary leadership is the coaching staff, and their followers are the student-athletes. In what ways are coaches behaving to impact their interpersonal communications with, and the coping skills of, student-athletes under their tutelage?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance

There is significant research on the topic of mental health. There is even significant research on the topic of mental health among college students, even narrowed down to mental health of college student-athletes (House, Neal & Kolb, 2020; Puri & Sood, 2018). This research

tends to focus on why student-athlete mental health is negatively affected, usually based on the fact that they have a much greater demand on their time and on their bodies and minds than do the general population. There is some research about coach-athlete relationship and its impact on overall well-being (Powers et al, 2020, p. 174). However, there is little research on the specific coaching behaviors that impact student-athletes.

Nature of the Proposed Study

The study was conducted using a mixed-methods research design, utilizing qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive data analysis. Surveys were distributed to student-athletes and coaches who will combine both quantitative and qualitative components. Interviews will be conducted with student-athletes and coaches. Additionally, a focus group comprised of coaches and a separate focus of group comprised of student-athletes will also be utilized.

Definition of Terms

Interpersonal communication – verbal and non-verbal interactions between two or more individuals

Coping skills – tactics used to overcome stressors

Coach-athlete relationship – a dynamic series of interactions between coach and athlete

Coaching behaviors – verbal and non-verbal actions by the coach

Assumptions & Limitations

It is necessary to identify assumptions and potential limitations of the research.

Assumptions include:

1. Coaches and student-athletes will answer questions honestly, both on surveys and in interviews and focus groups.

2. Coaches will be able to accurately identify their own behaviors.
3. Student-athletes will recall how coaching behaviors impacted them.

Limitations include:

1. Lack of participation by student-athletes due to the collection of data being during a semester break.
2. The memory of individuals being questioned.
3. Research will be conducted using the athletic department population of one small-size private higher education institution.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Surveys were distributed to the coaches and student-athletes in May of 2021. Data analyzation began at the conception of data collection and ran through mid-July of 2021. It is the goal to conclude all research by the end of Summer 2021.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

For more than twenty years, researchers in the field of psychology have been studying the coach-athlete relationship, specifically the quality and functions of the behaviors surrounding these interpersonal relationships (Davis et al. 2019).

A coach-athlete relationship has an effect on student-athlete well-being (Powers et al 2020). In addition to the study of the coach-athlete relationship, student-athlete health and wellness has been explored since as early as 1978 (Watson & Kissinger 2007). Kroshus (2016) states that “the World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing” (p. 389). Davis et al. (2019) state that a coach-athlete relationship that is centered around motivation, assurance, satisfaction, comfort, and support can enhance the athletics experience and well-being of the student-athlete. Additionally, “research has also highlighted negative outcomes associated with poor quality coach-athlete relationships” (Davis et al., 2019, p. 2). Student-athlete health and wellness, specifically mental health and wellness, and the coach-athlete relationship make up the backbone of the research that follows.

Theoretical Framework

In 2014, the NCAA released a guide entitled “Mind, Body and Sport—Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Wellness.” This guide details different layers of support and understanding that are believed to be necessary for the mental wellness of the student-athletes competing within the NCAA (Brown 2014, p. ii-iii). These layers provide a look at the problem from the student-athlete point of view and some action steps that can be taken on the part of coaches, athletic trainers, physicians, administrators, etc. (Brown 2014, p. ii-iii).

Jennings et al. (2018) says that typical college students will deal with academic, social, financial, and time-management issues, but “student-athletes also face athletic pressures to perform well in their [respective] sport” (p. 249). Symptoms of these stressors include depression, anxiety, physical illness, lack of quality sleep, or suicidal thoughts (Jennings et al 2018). Sudano et al. (2017) corroborate this, stating, “if left unaddressed, these stressors and mental health issues experienced by the student-athlete may lead to increased anxiety and/or depression” (p. 77). Coaches are the primary point of contact for student-athletes on college campuses. Do they know how to best support their student-athletes? Powers et al. (2020) concludes they do not. “Despite the importance of social support for better mental health outcomes, the influence of social support from the coach, and consequently the coach-athlete relationship, has not been satisfactorily explored” (Powers et al 2020, p. 173).

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

What kinds of support are available for student-athletes? Much research has been conducted in past years. The first of these sub-topics includes research on how student-athletes can be supported by the institutions they attend (Watson & Kissinger 2007; Rodriguez 2014; Kroshus 2016; Sudano et al., 2017). Another sub-topic covered is in regard to student-athletes and their own experiences and perceptions of mental health issues (Barnard 2016; Puri & Sood 2018; Ryan et al., 2018; Whitehead & Senecal 2020). The coach-athlete relationship and that it can affect student-athlete well-being has also been explored somewhat extensively (Davis et al., 2019; Gencer 2020; Kayhan 2020; Powers et al 2020; Yukhymenko-Lescroart et al 2021). Roxas and Ridinger (2016) reviewed extant literature on the connection of coaching behaviors to student-athlete well-being. Student-athlete stressors and mental and coping skills are also discussed (Cosh & Tully 2015; Micoogullari et al., 2017; Ercis 2018; Jennings et al 2018;

Fogaca 2019). Finally, Stamatis et al., (2020) provide some practical steps that can be taken on the part of the student-athletes' stakeholders (coaches, administrators, etc.).

Literature Review

Self-wellness includes several domains: Social Self, Essential Self, Creative Self, Physical Self, and Coping Self, which Watson & Kissinger (2007) studied between student-athletes and nonathletes. It was found that “nonathletes...report higher levels of wellness than did student-athletes” in all factors except for within the Physical Self sub-category of exercise (Watson & Kissinger 2007, p. 156). One area that stands out is the Social Self domain, because this is where student-athletes scored highest, but still lower than nonathletes, providing a suggestion for how counselors can intervene (Watson & Kissinger 2007). Watson & Kissinger (2007) also suggest that student-athletes expand “their perspectives and allow...them[selves] to see beyond their simple self-identification as an athlete” (p. 159). Finally, it is suggested that coaches and athletic staff become familiarized with the *Indivisible Self: An Evidence-Based Model of Wellness (IS-Wel)* model, in order to potentially “benefit the student-athlete academically, athletically, and social” (Watson & Kissinger 2007, p. 160).

International student-athletes were studied by Rodriguez (2014), in which it was detailed that coping mechanisms for stress included socializing among teammates and/or friends, or engaging in other distractions (p. 43). It was found that coaches contributed to the stress levels of these international student-athletes by placing excessive pressure, picking favorites, and using borderline abusive levels of force (Rodriguez 2014).

Cosh and Tully (2015) aimed to study “the stressors to contemporaneously engaging in elite sport and education” and state that “further examination [is required] to understand how to best support athletes in combining sport and education” (p. 2). Four particular stressors were

found: *scheduling* (athletics engagements conflicting with class or study time), *fatigue* (sacrificing sleep for academic/athletic endeavors & physical exhaustion stemming from athletic participation), *coaches* (being inflexible with schedules & demanding too much time), and financial (Cosh & Tully 2015). Student-athletes also cited two major coping mechanisms: support from parents and support from coaches (Cosh & Tully 2015).

A meta-analysis conducted by Roxas and Ridinger (2016) provides some direction for future research, stating that:

additional research could...more specifically identify the extent to which coaching behaviors are associated with a wide range of positive and negative outcomes. This [understanding of coaching behaviors], in turn, could lead to the development of comprehensive coaching education programs geared at promoting positive outcomes [for student-athletes] (p. 105).

Departments of sports medicine at NCAA member institutions were assessed on their policies for identifying mental health concerns in student-athletes (Kroshus 2016). Kroshus (2016) found that only 39% of these institutions had a plan for identifying mental health issues in student-athletes. Additionally, it was found that 31.5% of the responding institutions did not have screening procedures in place “for any of the 6 mental health concerns” (Kroshus 2016, p. 392).

An interesting piece from Barnard (2016) revealed that when compared to student-athletes, “student nonathletes...are more likely to devalue someone based on the presence of mental illness” (p. 167-169). Additionally, results indicated that “student-athletes are becoming just as likely to seek help [for issues of mental health] as student nonathletes” (Barnard 2016, p. 171).

The intent of the Micoogullari et al. (2017) study was to dive into how psychological well-being (PWB) relates to sport mental toughness (SMT) in a student-athlete sample. It was found that SMT and PWB had a positive correlation (Micoogullari et al., 2017). Micoogullari et al. (2017), found that individuals with a high SMT level “respond positively to critical feedback..., [view] challenges as an opportunity to learn and develop, [prioritize] effectively..., [and] cope and remain calm when under pressure in life or sport situations” (p. 486-487).

Jennings et al (2018) asked both student-athletes and non-student athletes about stress coping behaviors. Results indicated that student-athletes and non-student athletes were similar in their coping behaviors, but that student-athletes were more likely to use exercise as a coping mechanism than were non-student athletes (Jennings et al 2018, p. 253). Limitations of the study included a N of 120, a small sample-size at a faith-based institution which required a lifestyle agreement against negative coping behaviors like smoking and drinking (Jennings et al 2018, p. 254).

Coach-athlete relationships are detailed by Davis et al. (2019), stating that “the quality of relationships coaches and athletes develop and maintain with one another creates a social situation that can be viewed as positive (rewarding, supportive, motivating) or negative (disappointing, unhelpful, uninspiring)” (p. 3). They found that the quality of the relationship between coach and athlete positively predicted athlete satisfaction (Davis et al., 2019). Additionally, “the findings suggest that communication strategies are a mechanism by which relationship quality and satisfaction are associated...[and these] are associated because athletes in good quality relationships are more likely to be able to manage conflict, to express their motivation and more readily show their support” (Davis et al., 2019, p. 7).

Fogaca (2019) states that stress and coping are a transactional model which proposes the importance of coping effectively and that having support from your social circle can help remediate how stressors pertain to overall mental health. Interventions were provided for a group of student-athletes, which trained their mental coping skills over an 8-week period and when compared with the control group at the end of the study, there was a tremendous improvement in anxiety levels and coping skills (Fogaca 2019).

The coach-athlete relationship was examined in congruence with life satisfaction and self-esteem by Gencer (2020). It was found that “positive relationships established between athletes and coaches may promote self-esteem and satisfaction with life of the athletes, and high self-esteem and satisfaction with life may enhance coach-athlete relationships” (Gencer 2020, p. 493). However, Gencer (2020) also states that more studies of a qualitative nature should be conducted to help solidify the understanding of the correlation between the three constructs of self-esteem, satisfaction with life, and the coach-athlete relationship.

Kayhan (2020) believes their study will lead to further research that may reveal more about the coach-athlete relationship. A difference between young and old coaches was found, in that older coaches tend to have less trust in their athletes and that “young coaches are thought to establish positive, optimistic, trusting, and healthy relationships with their athletes” (Kayhan 2020, p. 242). When coaches are negative, their athletes lose self-esteem and confidence, while they also have an increase in their fear of failure (Kayhan 2020). Conversely, a positive approach used by coaches has a positive effect on those same areas (Kayhan 2020).

The purpose of the Stamatis et al (2020) study was to “investigate self-compassion, mental toughness, and mental health in a NCAA environment...and provide practical suggestions for mental health best practice no. 4” (p. 1). Mental health best practice no. 4 is

“education of all stakeholders towards the development of sport cultures that promote student-athletes’ mental health issues management is recommended” (Stamatis et al 2020, p. 2).

“Evidence for Hypothesis 1 (Mental Toughness and Mental Health, Self-Compassion and Mental Health, and Self-Compassion and Mental Toughness are positively correlated) was found” (Stamatis et al 2020, p. 7).

Conclusion

Past literature has revealed that there is interest in student-athlete mental health, stressors, and coping skills. It would also appear that there is interest in the coach-athlete relationship and the interactions between the two parties. However, there is very little research to date on the specific interactions between coaches and student-athletes. More specifically, there is very little research on which specific behaviors coaches exhibit that have an effect on their student-athletes and the student-athletes’ ability to cope with stressors. This study investigated those behaviors and interpersonal communications between the coach and student-athlete.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The proposed research was conducted to determine whether coaching behaviors impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations in a university setting in rural Southern Illinois. Conclusions were drawn from observations of a student-athlete survey. The results of this study add to current research about the coach-athlete relationship and the impact of coaches on student-athletes.

Statement of the Problem

The NCAA's (Brown 2014) purpose for the release of "*Mind, Body and Sport*" was to help member institutions figure out how to "provide the services and care to help each student-athlete reach his or her full potential" (p. 113). As the primary contact for student-athletes on campus, coaches need to know and apply actionable steps they can take as they work to provide a quality interpersonal relationship and support system for their student-athletes.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of the study was to investigate student-athletes and which coaching behaviors have a positive impact on their well-being. Additionally, the study investigated which coaching behaviors may have negative impacts in these areas.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

It is essential to find out what is driving the psychological well-being of an organization's members. In collegiate athletics, the primary leadership is the coaching staff, directing student-athletes. In what ways are coaches behaving to impact their interpersonal communications with, and the coping skills of, student-athletes under their tutelage?

H₁ - Coaching behaviors can positively impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

H₂ – Coaching behaviors can negatively impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

H₀ – Coaching behaviors do not impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

Research Methodology

The study used qualitative and quantitative research methods to determine the impact of coaching behaviors on interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

The quantitative research was conducted as a Likert scale survey of student-athletes from among different sports. Data was analyzed to determine student-athlete perceptions of coaching behavior.

The qualitative research was conducted as a survey and a focus group interview of student-athletes from among different sports. The questions asked to participants were...

Research Design

A mixed-methods survey using Google Forms, including yes/no questions and open-ended questions was used to determine student-athletes' perceptions of coaching behaviors and their impact on interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills. This survey helped to investigate which coaching behaviors impact student-athletes, if coaching behaviors are consistent across different sports, and how student-athletes view coaching behaviors.

The data was analyzed to test the hypothesis that coaching behaviors can have both a positive and negative effect on student-athlete interpersonal communications and coping skills.

Target Population, Sampling Method, and Related Procedures

The target population of this study is undergraduate student-athletes in a rural Southern Illinois private, faith-based university. The study is being used to identify the impact of coaching behaviors on student-athlete interpersonal communications and coping skills.

The survey was developed by the main researcher to help pinpoint the specific behaviors of coaches that student-athletes deem to be helpful or harmful to their coping skills and interpersonal communications. Additionally, the survey allowed for a short-answer response for the student-athletes to elaborate on their interactions with coaches.

Instrumentation and Sources of Data

A Google Forms survey was developed and distributed via email to all student-athletes at the university. The student-athletes voluntarily responded to the survey. Once responses were submitted, the data was compiled by the Google Forms application. The student-athletes were asked at the end of the survey if they would be willing to participate in the focus group.

Data Collection and Baseline Data

Baseline data is not available, nor required for the present study.

Field Test

There was not a need for a field test in this study.

Pilot Test

There was not a need for a pilot test in this study.

Management of Variables

This study encountered many variables effecting data collection . A list of assumptions and limitations would include but not be limited to the following;

Athletes had accurate memories of the experiences.

Athletes responded with honesty.

Athletes responded in a complete manner to the question prompts.

Surveys were completed before submission.

The setting of focus groups was close to identical.

Data Analysis Procedures

Responses to the survey were reviewed to analyze the data. This process occurred after the survey had been distributed via email and enough time had been given for responses to come in. Types of coaching behaviors identified by the student-athletes were noted and reviewed to determine any similarities and differences in the responses. Positive, negative, and neutral feelings towards coaching behaviors were analyzed.

Internal Validity

The survey was distributed via email to all student-athletes at the institution and participation was volunteer random, which may skew results. Student-athletes from different sports with different coaches participated, which would lead to participants having different experiences throughout their athletic career.

External Validity

The findings of this study can be generalized towards other private faith-based institutions. The information can help other coaches gain an understanding of coaching behaviors that are impacting their student-athletes. The research sample matches the general population of college athletes in 4-year higher education institutions.

Expected Findings

The expected findings of the research are based on the assumption that coaching behaviors have both a positive and negative effect on student-athlete interpersonal communications and coping skills in an undergraduate faith-based university. Program improvement is an important aspect of coaching. This study may help in that process.

Ethical Issues

The results of the survey redacted personally identifiable information. Information will not be shared with the coaching staff or university and athletic administration. The approach to gathering the data was done in an unbiased manner. The questions on the survey were conveyed in a non-abrasive manner so that student-athletes will feel safe to provide honest responses. No lasting benefits or harm were experienced by any of the participants. All data was kept secure on the researchers' password-protected laptop.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DATA ANALYSIS

Study Setting

The study was conducted at a private, faith-based university, in rural southern Illinois whose student population is primarily composed of student-athletes across 19 different NCAA-sanctioned or club sports.

Population

The population of undergraduate students enrolled at the university in the 2020-2021 academic school year was comprised of 35% female students and 65% male students.

The population of student-athletes competing for the university in the 2020-2021 academic school year totaled 401. Female student-athletes numbered 130, comprising 32.4% of the student-athlete population, while male student-athletes numbered 271, comprising 67.5% of the student-athlete population.

The male sport with the largest percentage of participants was Football at 21.2%. The female sport with the largest percentage of participants was Women's Track & Field at 6.5%.

Other Researchers

No other researchers were part of the study. The main researcher designed, gathered, and analyzed all data.

Study Timeline

The survey was sent to student-athletes on June 16, 2021. An additional email was sent to the sport coaches on June 17, 2021 to ask them to follow-up with and inform their student-athletes of the email that they had received with the survey attached. A follow-up email was sent to coaches on July 6, 2021, to again ask them to reach out to their student-athletes one last time before the conclusion of the research on July 10, 2021. Student-athletes had approximately 25

days to complete the survey. During the first two weeks of July, the researcher gathered demographic data of the population.

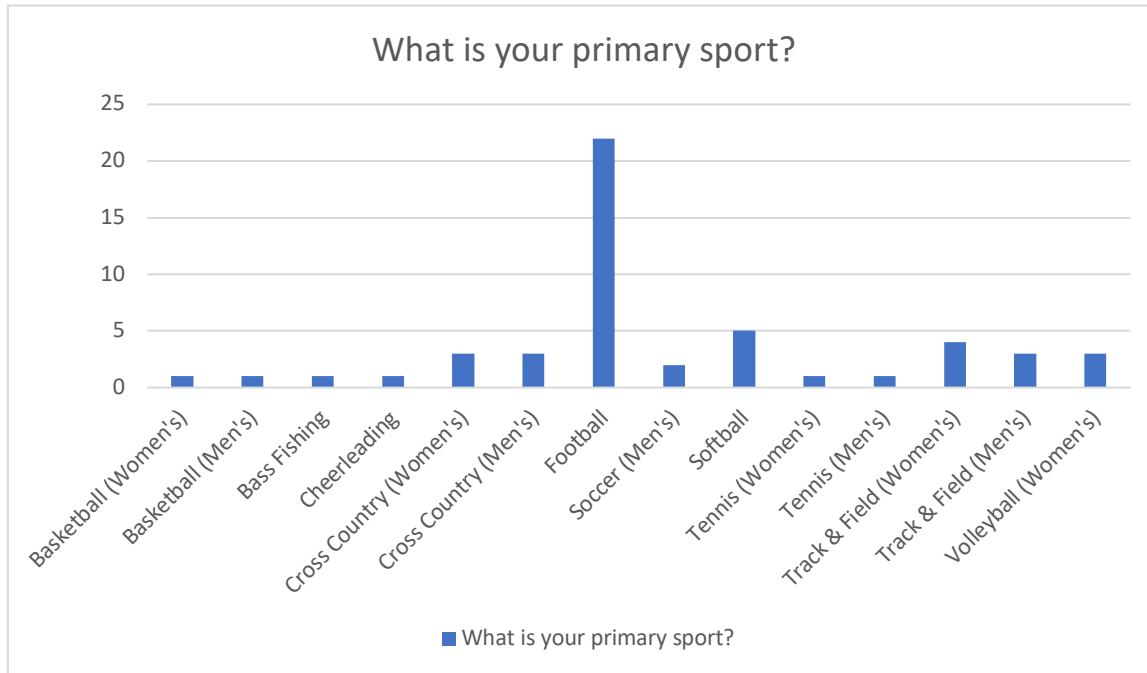
Data Summary of Demographics

Fifty-two student-athletes responded to the survey. Fifty-one student-athletes agreed to participate in the survey. This was 12.7% of the overall student-athlete population. The survey had 33 male respondents, 64.7% of the total respondents, and there were 18 female respondents, 35.3% of the total respondents.

As seen in **Figure 1**, the highest-represented sport on campus was Football. Twenty-two football players responded, comprising 43.1% of the sample size. There were five respondents from Softball (9.8%), another four from the women's Track & Field team (7.8%), and another three each from women's Volleyball (5.9%), men's Track & Field (5.9%), women's Cross Country (5.9%), and men's Cross Country (5.9%). Two responses came from the men's Soccer team (3.9%). Additionally, there was one respondent each (2%) from the following sports: women's Tennis, men's Tennis, women's Basketball, men's Basketball, Bass Fishing, and Cheerleading.

Figure 1

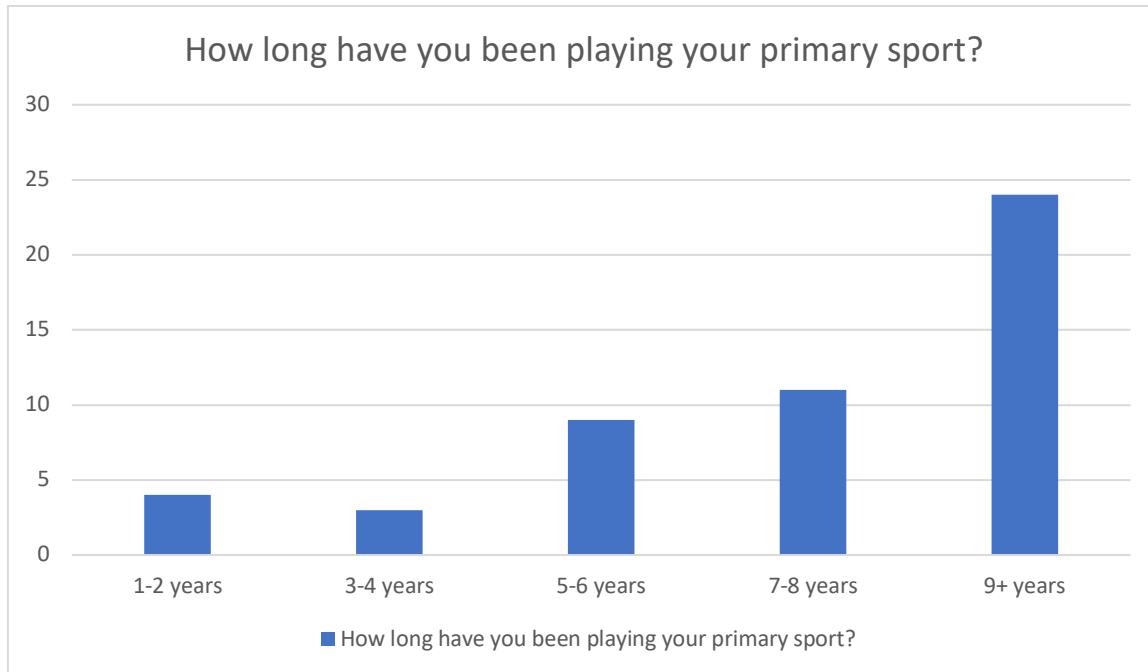
What is your primary sport?



As seen in **Figure 2**, participants were asked how many years they have been participating in the sport that they are currently participating in at the university. Twenty-four respondents (47.1%) stated that they have been participating in their sport for 9+ years. Eleven (26.1%) have been participating for 7-8 years, nine (17.6%) for 5-6 years, three (5.9%) for 3-4 years, and four (7.8%) for 1-2 years.

Figure 2

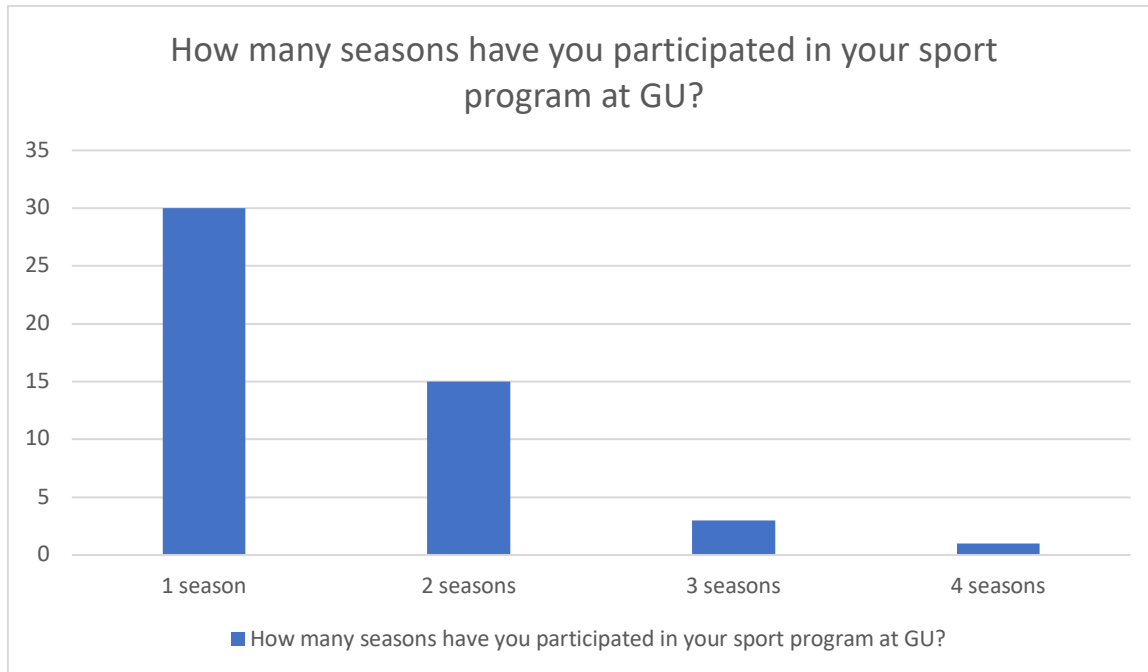
How long have you been playing your primary sport?



As seen in **Figure 3**, student-athletes were asked how long they have been participating in their athletics program at the university. Thirty respondents (61.2%) said they have completed 1 season, fifteen (30.6%) have completed 2 seasons, three (6.1%) have completed three seasons, and one (2%) have completed four seasons. Two participants did not answer the question.

Figure 3

How many seasons have you participated in your sport program at GU?



Data Analysis of Coaching Behaviors

The next portion of the survey asked questions specifically about the participants' experiences with coaches and how coaching behaviors have affected them. They were first asked to give a *Yes* or *No* answer on the effect of coaching behaviors, followed by an opportunity to give specific examples of coaching behaviors that led to their *Yes* or *No* response.

Question 5 asked: *Has a coach's behavior (any interaction/observation you have had with a coach) ever had a positive impact on your coping skills (how you handle stressors, ability/willingness to push through adversity)?* Forty-seven (92.2%) of the respondents said *Yes*, and four (7.8%) of the respondents said *No*.

Question 6, a follow-up to Question 5, stated: *If yes, please provide examples of these coaching behaviors and how they positively impacted you and your coping skills.* The 41 responses could be categorized into the following:

- Development
 - Holding us accountable and working us

- My coaches have taught me to keep my head up and focus instead of letting adversity get to me.
- ATD- attention to detail. One of the philosophies that the program i participated in the coach always preached that skill it allowed to see and hear the directions better to get through the challenge
- When Coach [sic] was here he was able to be strict on you, but be able to help you learn in a positive way!
- Things with my forehand
- How to handle stress and not understanding my plays and how to work on it
- Being able to see situations differently than what I used too.
- Made me understand my main assignment
- My coach has always looked on the positive for every athlete on the team, explaining to us how he wants us to improve not in our sport, but to our lives during our team meetings.
- My coaches have always told us that adversity is inevitable and you just have to keep your head down and push through it and you'll come out on top.
- I'm sometimes hard on myself but some of my coach's help me calm down and just get better at not getting frustrated
- The ability to put others over self. Because it allowed me to have a better relationship with my teammate by helping improve my teammate game and giving them great motivation.
- They took time to correct my game instead of yelling and degrading and moving on
- Pushing you over your limits, pointing out mistakes and how to fix them
- From a young age I was taught how to take criticism and turn it into motivation. What others would find "harsh" coaching, I would find motivating.
- When I am being pushed to the max, I tend to forget about the stress and push through the adversity that may be thrown at me.
- When he stayed after meetings to help me with plays
-
- Example
 - Pushing through their own personal adversities, and not letting their problems be a factor in how they did their jobs or how they taught me personally.
 - When you are competing, you push yourself harder when your coach holds you to a high standard and holds himself to a high standard. I want to play for a leader with a dog mentality, coaches with that kind of attitude inspire me to push myself farther than I would on my own.
 - ATD= Attention to detail
 - Being a disciple of Christ and leading Gods children to the kingdom
 - there is positive vibes
 - I learned to be calm when dealing with tough conversations.
 -
- Communication

- My coach is someone I can always go to. If I am going through something he will help me through it. He's the best coach I've ever had. Under his program I've accomplished more than I ever realized I could.
- The coaches on the Track team were very helpful my first semester as I was falling behind in classes. While this happened, I also lost my father and they helped me grow closer to God. They talked me through everything and made sure that I knew that I was going to be okay but I still needed to work.
- Encouraging coaches= I am encouraged Coaches who make an effort to show they care make me want to work harder to please them (there's not a pressure to do so though)
- The coaches prayed for me and all hugged me during a very tragic moment in my life and it made it easier for me knowing that they cared.
- High school and college coaches—made it known that we are a family and should turn to each other for help.
- For one, Coach [sic] is one of the coaches that I could just talk to about problems that I was having. This was both school and with the football program itself. He made me feel more involved and really just let me say what I needed to be said. From him allowing me to talk about my issues, I feel more comfortable in school and the program.
- One time the coach was very open and didn't yell or cuss so it made me feel as the team was open and kind.
- [sic] asking us how we were and making sure we were ok if he noticed us being off a little bit.
- understanding, supportive
- Suggesting therapy and having Bible studies; helped me grow spiritually and mature as a man.
- Coach [sic] has helped me through many life problems and always knows the right words to say
- There are plenty of times where coach[sic], coach [sic], and coach [sic] have been there for me when I have personal issues. Coach [sic] has even went as far as helping me with planning my wedding.
- Believing in me and giving motivation
- Highlighting a positive skill after a bad/ good game
- During an injury or stressful week of school, coaches at practice time always take time to talk and see what's going on and provide great company and advice during those times.
- I've had many coaches that seek out a personal relationship with their players, which has made my experience as a student athlete much better. By seeking that relationship beyond my sport, they have shown that I am more than my performance on the field, and has taken a lot of stress out of my life. Once these relationships have been developed, I feel that I can trust them with stressful issues that occur in any area of my life, allowing me to open up and providing an outlet to work through difficult situations with support.
- Any coach that gives out at least some compliments towards their players especially when they are feeling down goes a long way and helps the player to want to continue on.

- When I'm in a slump a words of encouragement and being calmly talked to.

Question 7 asked for an extension of Question 5: *Has a coach's behavior (any interaction/observation you have had with a coach) ever had a negative impact on your coping skills (how you handle stressors, ability/willingness to push through adversity)?* Twenty-eight (54.9%) of the respondents said "Yes," and 23 (45.1%) of the respondents said "No."

Question 8, a follow-up to Question 7, stated: *If yes, please provide examples of these coaching behaviors and how they negatively impacted you and your coping skills.* The 21 responses could be categorized into the following:

- Development
 - With our new coach she came in and changed how we were all taught and it became difficult for us to get along and learn about one another
 - Neglected correction on technique
 - In high school some coaches only cared about some students the ones that tried there best never got the help they needed and just being ignored and forgotten about
 - Not enough time given to be a student/human; practice, meetings, workouts for the sport leaves little time to handle your personal life
 - Coaches that just use terminology like "just get better" or similar statements without any suggestions to get better or ideas of specific areas that need work make that sport more stressful, which can easily bleed into other areas of life outside of the sport.
- Example
 - When coaches I have played for in the past don't bring energy or effort into practice or anything will have that impact on confidence and well being.
 - Motivation provided by the team
 - At my old school. Coaching was a part of me losing my love for the game
 - A coach at an other school had a bad attitude which rubbed off on the rest of the group.
 - [sic] in general.
 - Having a coach manipulate your entire team into not speaking up about what [sic] put us through and having administration ignore everything you tell them was pretty demeaning to be honest. I no longer trust the judgement of [sic]. I think that's pretty negative.
 - not being positive and being rude
 - Different treatment among each player led to supposed words not being true. Not practicing what has been preached.

- Communication
 - One time my coach talked badly about me crying over not being able to run bc I was injured again in front of people and it was not fun for me :/ it's okay now though
 - Keeping things to themselves and not reaching out for help within the team and the people they trust, high school coaches especially.
 - yelling, nitpicking
 - When nothing is said or expected when team goes wrong
 - Communication
 - If they weren't happy with me makes me perform worse
 - Highlighting a bad skill after a good or bad game
 - I've had multiple negative coaches that brought me down by never giving out compliments, only encouraging certain players, and not even acknowledging the "non- favorite" players causing me to have a negative impact on my coping skills.

The next portion of the survey asked participants if they believe coaching behaviors can affect their coping skills and to provide examples of the specific behaviors that coaches do, or could, exhibit that would have an effect on their athletes.

Question 9 stated: *Regardless of your past experiences, do you believe there are behaviors that coaches could exhibit, that would more positively impact your coping skills?*

Forty-one (80.4%) of the respondents said "Yes," and ten (19.6%) of the respondents said "No."

Question 10, a follow-up to Question 9, stated: *If yes, please provide examples of such behaviors.* The 29 responses could be categorized into the following:

- Development
 - Talk to the athlete about how to improve in the future in a certain event to position and give them an idea of how he or she can accomplish that feat.
 - Put the sport adversity situation into a real world situation.
 - willingness, challenges, positive and negative criticism to build up on
 - we become better people, students and athletes
 - For anyone there's room for progress not perfection.
- Example
 - Coaches should be positive. It does not help to be negative. If an athlete is present and participating, then they have the same goal as the coach. They want to get better. That's why positivity matters. It's hard to understand why someone is

- being negative and accosting you when you are trying to be the best athlete you can be.
- Overall happiness and a sense that they care about me.
- Keeping your head up, and reaching out for support within their community and showing their players that it is ok to be vulnerable within the circle of people they trust.
- The attitude they express reflects on others.
- Leadership, toughness, and pride in your program.
- Leadership
- Leadership
- Coaches that are capable of staying calm in heated situations would definitely have a positive impact on my coping skills. Inflamed situations are only made worse when one or more parties choose to escalate situations by not regulating their emotions and words.
- Being fair to every player. Keeping a just and fair program.
- Communication
 - I believe coaches that encourage you to get better help me want to focus on the positive rather than the negative.
 - A coach that is able to be you best friend and mentor and also be your coach and teacher
 - Be more raw, be more into the game, show more of that in order to get that correct motivation
 - Be invested in your athletes lives outside the sport as well Give attention to the athletes who aren't necessarily the best and make them feel just as valued as MVPs
 - Helping with personal issues and mental issues.
 - Being able to relate to players
 - One thing that coaches either do or could do better is just listening to their players. An example would just be issues that they have, either school, family, football, etc.
 - Checking in regularly and being open with us
 - Grace
 - Less intrusive, active listening
 - Treating all players equally. Knowing basic coaching/people skills.
 - Believing
 - Coaches should exhibit great listening skills and a profound interest in the athlete as a athlete and a person.
 - Being more intentional with time and having personal relationships rather than “at school” or “on the field” relationships.
 - Making sure that every player feels included with the team and not having certain smaller groups form. Also getting some positive feedback every now and then.

Question 11 stated: *Regardless of your past experiences, do you believe there are behaviors that coaches could exhibit, that would more negatively impact your coping skills?*

Thirty-four (66.7%) of the respondents said “Yes,” and seventeen (33.3%) of the respondents said “No.”

Question 12, a follow-up to Question 11, stated: *If yes, please provide examples of such behaviors.* The 24 responses could be categorized into the following:

- Development
 - Try to implement the sport as the ‘plan’ to deal with stress or coping. The sport itself should not be the way of coping
 - Not putting players in situations of adversity so they do not deal with it
 - Repeating the same style of coaching as last year.
 - Coaches that focus on their "favorites" or a specific few players that get more coaching would make pushing through adversity much more difficult if you're not one of those players.
 - Only focusing on the benefit of a handful of players and not caring that much about the rest.
- Example
 - If a coach shows that he doesn’t care then the players will follow behind that because he/she is the leader.
 - Same as from above, if coaches don’t show that same love for the sport, there will be negative impacts
 - If a coach has a bad attitude it will reflect on his players tremendously
 - Quitting on the team and struggling alone, because that shows the team that the coach can’t trust them and that they shouldn’t be vulnerable within that community.
 - If coaches put off a hateful and non-caring attitude is when trust in coaches diminishes.
 - A coach is a leader. Players look up to and respect good coaches. On the other hand, they despise bad ones. A coaches job is to lead and put his team in the best position to win. Being led by a poor leader could cause issues of trust, respect, and willingness to compete or listen to others in the future.
 - Lack of patience
- Communication
 - Adversely, being negative in your critiques and communication can be very harmful.
 - Coaches that constantly criticize or get mad at failure would make me overthink my actions and be scared to mess up.
 - Having favorites and not taking in consideration others opinions and caring about what their athlete think

- Special treatment to the “good” people
Making your athletes feel like you’re genuinely mad at them for how they performed
- Disappointment and having a sense that they do not care.
- A coach giving harsh comments to an athlete after a tough meet and getting a place that the coach did not want him or her to get.
- Yelling and cussing doesn’t help.
- No regards for our feeling and yelling at us even when they know we are hurting
- poor coaching tactics, favoritism, poor communication, silent treatment during games
- Be easy on the athletes
- Being overly passionate about the player's athletic talents without taking a interest in them of the field or court.
- Giving superior treatment to different players.

Eliminated Data

Participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in a focus-group regarding this survey and their responses. Thirteen participants said that they would be willing and provided their contact information. However, upon follow-up, the researcher did not receive email responses from those who said they were interested. Thus, the focus group’s personal information for contact will be eliminated.

Protocol Changes

Due to lack of responses and interest in participating in a focus group, the researcher did not conduct the focus group as was originally planned.

Mitigating Events

The research occurred during summer break when students were not on campus and not in consistent communication with their coaches. This time frame caused a delay or default in the respondent rate.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

Conclusions

Results showed that student-athletes believe coaching behaviors can have both a positive and negative effect on student-athlete coping skills. Additionally, many of the participants were able to look back on their past experiences with coaches and point to behaviors that had a positive or negative effect on their own coping skills. Regardless of their experiences, many of the participants were also able to identify coaching behaviors that affect student-athlete coping skills.

It may be beneficial for coaches to use this data to help guide their own behaviors and interactions with their student-athletes, in an effort to give student-athletes a more positive experience while under their tutelage.

Study Strengths

Within the qualitative data, there are some rich responses from the participants. Because the majority of the university's population is student-athletes, the sample size is representative of the greater university student population.

Study Weaknesses

The study was conducted during summer break for the university. It is the belief of the researcher that participation would have been higher if school was in session.

Validity

Internal validity was strong. The use of an original survey and the specific population helped ensure this. The survey was completely voluntary. No reward was offered. Thus, responses were from student-athletes more interested in the subject and lacking those who are less interested. The survey was not normed and did not have a test iteration. The survey was

composed by a collegiate coaching professional who has the expertise and experience to construct such a survey instrument. The external validity was also strong because all respondents meet the general criteria for being undergraduate student-athletes enrolled at a private, faith-based university located in rural southern Illinois.

Setting Impact

This study was conducted completely online. There was no in-person aspect to this study. Participants received a Google Forms link via email and submitted the completed survey online. The online setting may have limited some participation in the research study.

Hypotheses & Results

H₁ - Coaching behaviors can positively impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

H₂ – Coaching behaviors can negatively impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

H₀ – Coaching behaviors do not impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.

Result – Coaching behaviors do impact interpersonal communications and student-athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations, both positively and negatively. Thus, both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 are confirmed.

Recommendations

It will be beneficial for coaches to use this data to help guide their own behaviors and interactions with their student-athletes, in an effort to give student-athletes a more positive experience while under their tutelage. The data was categorized into three different areas of importance for the student-athletes (development, example, and communication). Coaches

should make it a point to focus on these three areas. Student-athletes desire to be developed, so coaches should be telling them what they can do in order to make that development happen, giving clear expectations for performance. Coaches should also understand that their student-athletes expect them to set the example for right behavior, and the eyes of the student-athlete are always watching and will mimic the behaviors of the coach. Finally, it is crucial for coaches to be in communication with their student-athletes on many levels, taking an interest in the human being and the heart behind the jersey.

While this particular study was conducted in an undergraduate population, it may be wise to pursue the same study among different populations, including professional, high school, and youth athletics settings.

Recommendations for further research would include ensuring the research is conducted when student-athletes are on campus and classes are in session. Students more actively check their school email accounts when on campus and taking classes. Additionally, they will be in contact with their coaches more regularly during these times, and the coaches can help to act as a middleman for the researcher. Another email could have been sent to the student-athlete population, in an effort to gain more responses. Coaches could have been contacted in a more personal way than just via email, been given the details and possible implications of the research, and this could have increased their willingness to get their student-athletes to complete the survey.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Administrative Approval

June 1, 2021

Institutional Review Board Greenville University
315 E. College Avenue Greenville, IL 62246

To Whom It May Concern:

As Athletic Director of Greenville University, I give permission for Trey Stille to recruit participants and collect data on our campus for the study entitled “Coaching behaviors to impact interpersonal communications and athlete coping skills among undergraduate populations.” I have been fully informed about the purpose and scope of the project, and I have been provided with copies of all study related documents, recruitment materials, and data collection instruments.

Sincerely,

[Handwritten signature of school official] Tom Ackerman

Athletic Director, Greenville University

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Recruitment Statement for Coaching Behaviors to Impact Interpersonal Communications and Athlete Coping Skills Among Undergraduate Populations

1. Trey Stille, a student enrolled in the EDUC 583 course at Greenville University, under the supervision of Dr. Mary Ann Manos, invites you to participate in this research study.
2. The title of this study is “Coaching Behaviors to Impact Interpersonal Communications and Athlete Coping Skills Among Undergraduate Populations.” The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding how coach’s behaviors affect their student-athletes.
3. Your participation in this study will involve the completion of a survey. Optional participation in a focus group is possible as well, if desired. Additionally, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. Participation will take approximately 10 minutes.
4. The potential risks associated with participation in this study are minimal and include loss of anonymity regarding study participation, loss of time and possible boredom with the questions. Efforts to alleviate these risks include making the survey as brief and interesting as possible. Because you will not provide your name on any questionnaire, the risk for loss of anonymity is minimal.
5. The results of this study will be publicly presented to Greenville University’s IRB. Additionally, the results may be published in scientific research journals and/or presented at professional research conferences. However, your name and identity will not be revealed, and your responses will remain anonymous. No names or other personally identifying information will appear on any questionnaire or data gathering instrument, so there is no possibility of your responses being linked back to you.
6. Participation in this study will not benefit you directly. Your participation may benefit others by contributing to knowledge of coaching behaviors and student-athletes’

perceptions of coaching behaviors. This knowledge may help educators, educational administrators, and other researchers determine effective means of coaching.

7. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will not be a penalty to you or loss of any benefit to which you are otherwise entitled. If you consent to participate now, you may still withdraw from this study at any time.

8. If you have any questions about this research study, you may call Trey Stille (618)978-8739, or Dr. Mary Ann Manos (309)258-4159.

Appendix C: Survey

<https://forms.gle/i5gXUoXWGeA6QESG7>