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## How Can Coaches Properly Prepare Student-Athletes for a Career After Athletics?

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How can coaches properly prepare student-athletes for a  
career after athletics?

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Department of Leadership Education

College of Education

of Winona State University

by

Joel T. Krenz

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## **Abstract**

Most of the time a student-athlete's athletic career will end after college, but what then? So many collegiate athletes have put so much focus into their sport over the previous 10-15 years that they tend to struggle when faced with the reality that they are done. No collegiate athlete can make the transition from sport to career alone, which is why coaches, administrators, and teachers need to know how to properly prepare student-athletes for a career after athletics. This study will look to find the best ways that the faculty of an institution who work closely with student-athletes can help them succeed later in life.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

An issue many student-athletes today face is that they are not prepared for a career after athletics (Navarro, 2015). A student-athlete can get caught up in their sport that they forget the main purpose of college is to prepare for a career. Coaches have the most contact with student-athletes and should be equipped with the knowledge of how to mentor them on a career after athletics.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Incoming student-athletes tend to struggle with sport-identity and fail to focus on many of the other opportunity's college has to offer (Lally & Kerr, 2005). College is normally the first time a young adult gets a change to live without their parents, which can lead to a lack of focus and questionable decisions (Lally & Kerr, 2005). A problem arises when it comes time for the student to graduate and they still do not know what they want to do with their life. Navarro (2015) suggests freshman athletes tend to pick degrees that fit their athletics schedule but may not be applicable to what they want to do in life.

Due to the rigors of playing sports, student-athletes should have the mental fortitude to accomplish almost anything. Collegiate sports can push one to the brink of their physical and mental limits. In high school, participation in athletics has been shown to better connect students to school (Kennedy, 2008), but the higher levels of sleep loss, mood swings, and decreased self-confidence can be detrimental to a student-athlete's performance in the classroom (Henderson, 2020). Student-athletes are connected to their specific sports program and what it represents for the school, but they fail to make academics a priority.

During the transitional phase, athletes often experience high levels of anxiety, along with a low level of self-worth and depression (Stokowski, Paule-Koba, Kaunert, 2019). A difficult

transition out of athletics may be brought on by a high level of athletic identity (Hardin & Smith, 2018). Coaches can have a strong influence on the life skill development student-athletes whether the athlete knows it or not (Camiré, Trudel & Forneris, 2012). The general problem is that coaches do not always understand that they play an essential role in motivating student-athletes (Camiré, Trudel & Forneris, 2012). When a student-athlete does not have a healthy relationship with their coach it can lead to a more difficult transition in their post-athletic career (Fuller, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to find out what methods are most effective for coaching staff when helping an athlete transition out of sports, and to identify what outside influences contribute to a student-athlete's mindset on a career after athletics. Coaches do not always know how to prepare student-athletes at different stages of development for a transition out of athletics (Johnson, et al., 2011). Proper motivational tactics can have a positive effect on transition over time (Válková, 2017). Post-athletic transition is very difficult for many student-athletes, and coaches can have a large effect on that transition (McKnight, et al, 2009). The results of this study examining the methods coaches can use to help prepare student-athletes for a career after athletics will have a strong influence on how both coaches and athletes view the transition.

### **Background of the Problem**

Leonard and Schimmel's (2016) Theory of Work Adjustment speaks on the fact that student-athletes struggle after athletics because they are not fully prepared for a transition into the work world. Ending an athletic career is very stressful, and many student-athletes will compare their situations to those of their non-athletic peers who may have already started on their careers (McKnight, et al., 2009). When a student-athlete is in athletics, they may not be as likely to explore career options outside of athletics (Moiseichik, Stokowski, Hinsey, & Turk,

2019). When transitioning out of athletics, student-athletes must be able to look past the athletic career field and realize there are other options out there.

Transitioning out of college sports means transitioning one's identity (Stokowski, Paule-Koba & Kaunert, 2019). A college athlete, especially one at a higher level, has dedicated their life to their sport, and when they finish, they can feel a large identity loss and experience great difficulty when transitioning into the workplace (Hardin & Smith, 2018). Stokowski, Paule-Koba & Kaunert (2019) speak on the fact that a transition into the work force does not have to be a negative one. By transferring the skills (time management, communication, leadership, etc.) they learned from their sport, student-athletes can move into a career transition with ease.

Outside influences such as friends, family, and coaches have a strong influence on the ability for a student-athlete to have a positive transition out of athletics (Hardin & Smith, 2018). A major part of a positive transition for student-athletes is the support they get. Coaches and families are the two most prominent support figures for student-athletes (Fuller, 2014). An individual's athletic identity may be harmful to their transition out of athletics (Tyranee, 2010). Following their time as a college athlete, an individual can feel a large identity loss due to the fact they do not have their sport anymore. While in school, a student-athlete should branch out and join a group or club outside of their sport (Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick, 1998). This will help form other identities outside of athletics, which may lead to a smoother transition.

### **Research Questions**

This research will answer the following questions:

RQ1: What methods are most effective for coaching staff when helping an athlete transition out of sports?

RQ2: What outside influences contribute to a student-athlete's mindset on a career after athletics?

### **Limitations/Delimitations**

This study was limited to the students and coaches at one mid-sized midwestern institution. While the survey was sent out to all 340 athletes of the institution, they were not obligated to respond. While a follow up email was sent, many student-athletes still failed to respond to the survey. Due to multiple coaches without enough experience at the institution, and with not all coaches willing to be interviewed, only three interviews were done with head coaches. Only four student-athletes were able to be interviewed.

### **Summary**

Following this chapter will be a review of the literature, along with a history of the problem and some current resources to deal with it. Future solutions to this issue will be talked about along with the theoretical framework why the methodology for this study was chosen.

## **Chapter II: Review of the Literature**

College is a steppingstone towards a career. The goal of college is to give the student the knowledge and experiences they need to have a successful life after graduation. Over 500,000 (Wimmer-Schwarb, 2018) college students across the nation are tasked with focusing not just on social life and school but participating in a sport. Student-athletes have the added pressure of succeeding in the classroom and on the playing field as well. Due to this pressure, student-athletes tend to put their entire identity into their sport and put less of a priority on school. Athletics is a great way for students-athletes to build the tools to succeed in a career, such as work ethic, leadership qualities, commitment, and balance (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). The key to success is learning how to transition these traits from athletics to a post-graduate career.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Only about 3.4% of collegiate student-athletes go on to play at the professional level (NCAA, 2014). Because of the unlikeliness of competing professionally, athletes must prepare for their transition out of athletics long before they have finished their career. Transition from college athletics to a post-athletic career is difficult because the energy devoted to athletics has to be redistributed to whatever it is the student-athlete does next (Baillie & Danish, 1992). Rosenberg (1981) states that the more continuity in the life of an athletic retiree, the higher chance of a better adjustment. This continuity theory predicts that a difficult transition will occur for those individuals too focused on the role they are currently in (Baillie & Danish, 1992). This theory applies directly to collegiate athletes.

A high level of athletic identity creates a challenge for many student-athletes, as all the energy they used to focus on their sport does not necessarily translate to a career role (Horton & Mack, 2000). While the transition out of athletics may be a short time in an individual's life,

some may experience a lot of stress and struggle (Baillie & Danish, 1992). Coaches play an important role in a student-athlete's life, and it is part of their job to prepare that athlete to cope with their transition out of athletics (Wimmer-Schwarb, 2015). Encouraging student-athlete's to focus on activities outside of their sport will help them learn how to focus their identity and energy away from athletics easier, thus creating an easier transition.

### **Historical Overview of Collegiate-Athlete Transition**

Collegiate athletics is an enormous part of today's society. Take for example the NCAA men's basketball tournament, which brings in upwards of \$700-plus million dollars each year (Hobson, 2014). While many assume collegiate athletics has just gained a lot of attention over the past 20-30 years, collegiate athletic programs have been a priority for schools since the early 1900's (Edwards & Thelin, n.d.). In some cases, athletics became too much of a priority, as the University of Chicago board of trustees voted 32-0 in 1939 to cut their esteemed program. They felt as though the athletes were too focused on their sport, and that would cause them to forget their academic responsibilities (Culpepper, 2019).

While the University of Chicago's football program would eventually come back, their board of trustees had made a statement. Athletics at the University of Chicago would never outshine their academics. The statement made by the University of Chicago is one that, in a sense, still should hold true today. Unless a student-athlete is going professional, and only around 2% will (NCAA, 2014), they need to have a strong focus on how they are preparing for life after athletics. Getting a degree isn't the issue, as just over 81% of collegiate athletes will get a degree (NCAA, 2020), the issue is whether or not the graduate knows what to do with that degree.

## **Current Resources to Help with the Student-Athletes**

Student-athletes, especially first-or second-year students, may be confused as to what resources they have in regards to looking for a post-graduate career. The first place to look for help is an academic advisor. It is their job to not only help students set their schedule up, but to also advise them on how their classes and college experience can lead them to a career (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015). Every student is assigned an advisor and setting up a meeting with them is as easy as sending an email.

Another resource student-athletes have is their own athletic staff. Coaches and athletic administrators are not just there to help student-athletes succeed in their sport; they want to help the athlete succeed after their sport is over. Wimmer-Schwarb (2015) speaks on the fact that coaches and athletic administrators are brilliant in helping student-athletes translate the skills they learned throughout their athletic careers into the workforce. Becoming close with an institution's coaches and administrators is a way of making connections, and there is a good chance they will use their own personal connections to help land a student-athlete a job.

## **Coaches Role Outside of Sports**

Coaches are some of the most influential people in a student-athlete's life while they are in school (Fuller, 2014). A coach can have a major impact on a student-athlete not just in their sport, but outside of it as well. Coaches have knowledge that can be transferred to post-graduate life (Camiré, Trudel & Forneris, 2012). A healthy student-athlete-to-coach relationship is very important for the successful transition of a student-athlete (Fuller, 2014).

Coaches have a unique opportunity to teach young adults life skills in a way many non-athletes may not understand (Johnson, et al, 2011). Quality communication is a key skill many student-athletes excel in. When a coach communicates career information to their student-

athletes, they absorb feedback and transfer it into their post-graduate profession. Coaches normally have a large social network, which can lead to professional work connections for a student-athlete (Johnson, et al, 2011). A negative relationship with a coach does not just affect an individual's performance on the field, but it effects their performance outside of their sport as well (Tyrance, 2010).

### **Outside Influences**

There are factors that influence a student-athlete outside of their sport, including coaches, family members, and colleagues. Coaches, due to their role and time spent in an athlete's life, have an extremely high level of influence on a student-athlete (Fuller, 2014). Along with coaches, student-athletes who have support from friends, family members and colleagues are more likely to have a positive transition out of athletics (Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouqereau, 2006). A strong family support system gives a student-athlete confidence to succeed both on and off the playing field.

A student-athlete's academics can influence them in a variety of ways. Being committed to academic success is shown to help with the transition out of athletics (Smith & Hardin, 2018). Athletes who struggle with academics while in their sport's season struggle with keeping positive relationship with their coaches and teammates (McKnight, et al., 2009). Activities also play a major role in influencing a student-athlete's mindset on transition. Student-athletes who join clubs or organizations outside of their sport have found that it makes balancing work and personal life easier when they are retired from athletics (Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouqereau, 2006). Clubs and organizations allow student-athletes to have an identity outside of athletics. This helps with their transition out of athletics, making it easier to lose that athletic identity because that is not the only identity they have.

## **Athletic Identity**

Athletic identity at its core is the degree at which an athlete identifies with their sport (Stokowski, Paule-Koba & Kaunert, 2019). There can be both positive and negative effects of having a high athletic identity when transitioning out of athletics (Horton & Mack, 2000). Too much of a commitment to athletics can make it difficult to shake an athletic identity. Athletic identity is a wonderful thing to have while an individual is still playing their sport but may be detrimental when transitioning out of athletics and forming career plans (Tyrance, 2010). Results from a study by Webb, Nasco, Riley and Hendrick (1998) showed that athletes with a higher sense of athletic identity were more likely to struggle and find early failure when retiring from their sport.

Not all aspects of athletic identity are negative. Horton and Mack (2000) did a study on marathon runners that looked to examine the effect of athletic identity on sport performance. The study consisted of 236 marathon runners (176 males, 60 females) who all ranged from ages 19-72. Each runner was given the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) and answered a questionnaire that focused on demographics such as age, gender, athletic experience, and social network. The study found that runners with a high level of athletic identity were able to balance their everyday life just fine with their running habits. Along with a strong level of balance, runners with a higher level of athletic identity were found to have a larger social network. A large social network for an athlete coming out of college could be key to landing a quality job, which can help with an easier transition.

## **Summary**

Chapter two discussed the history of collegiate-athlete transition, current resources to help student-athletes, a coach's role outside of sports, outside influences on a student-athlete, and

athletic identity. Chapter three will speak on the research process for this study. It mentions the design of the study as well as why certain individuals were chosen to be interviewed for this study. Chapter three will also mention how the research was conducted, what the informed consent was, and how the data was analyzed.

### **Chapter III: Research Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to find out what methods are most effective for coaching staff when helping an athlete transition out of sports, and to identify what outside influences contribute to a student-athlete's mindset on a career after athletics.

#### **Research Design**

In this study a qualitative research approach was used to identify how coaches can prepare their student-athletes for a career after athletics. Qualitative research is effective for this study because it seeks to gain an understanding on why individuals do the things they do (Madrigal & McLain, 2012). This research will be completed using interviews and a survey.

The qualitative research method allowed the researcher to interpret and understand the beliefs of each individual subject (Jena, Kalra & Pathak, 2013). A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study since the researcher is seeking to understand how coaches can best prepare their student-athletes for a career after athletics. Qualitative data allowed the researcher to identify specific themes throughout the study (Fuller, 2014).

#### **Sample and Setting**

The target population for this study is college coaches and student-athletes. Purposeful sampling was used to identify six coaches and six student-athletes for interviews. All individuals participating in the study either work at or are a student at a mid-sized Midwest university. The university has about 8,800 undergraduate students and participates in NCAA DII athletics. The college is in a town of around 27,000 on the Mississippi River.

Selection criteria for the coaches included over 15 years of total coaching experience, five or more years at the institution they are currently at now, and that they have had a winning record for more than half of their years coaching. Student-athlete criteria was that they were at

least a four-year athlete, participated in at least 75% of their team's games, and were in good academic standing.

### **Instruments**

This study involved both the use of surveys and interviews. A 10-question survey (see Appendix A) with a combination of short answer and multiple-choice questions was sent to 340 athletes at the institution. The survey was sent out using Qualtrics, an online survey software that allows for ease of data collection. The goal of the survey was to look for a connection between a student-athlete's year in school and their thought process on a career after athletics. Before the survey was sent out to all student-athletes, it was piloted by three individuals that had previously been athletes.

Interviews were also conducted because when talking in person with someone they will normally be more open about their true thoughts and feelings (Tyranee, Harris & Post, 2013). Four student-athletes were interviewed to expand understanding on the survey questions. Open ended interview questions are included in Appendix A.

The coaches were interviewed to get their viewpoint on how to handle mentoring student-athletes about life after athletics. Smith (2011) spoke about the importance of multiple viewpoints in research. While much of the information in this study came from the student-athletes, the coaches can have good insight on the topic. Questions that were asked of the coaches are in Appendix A.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

To collect the survey information, an email with the survey link was sent to all athletes. A follow up email was sent out one week after the first email. The survey was open for two weeks. All survey data was collected through Qualtrics, and it was then transferred to a password

protected external hard drive that only the researcher had access too. Interviews were conducted over the course of two weeks, with interviewees being emailed the questions beforehand. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Due to the rise of the digital age and the ethics of privacy (Pavlou, 2011), the interview participants were each labeled as an “A” or “C” (athlete & coach) and had a number correlating to the order of their interview after that. This study was approved with exempt status by IRB.

### **Data Analysis**

Survey data was analyzed to determine how students felt about how their coach prepared them for a career, and if any outside influences influenced the student-athlete’s preparation. Within the survey were five multiple-choice and five short answer questions. The multiple-choice questions focused on outside influences while the short answer focused on coaching preparation. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the multiple-choice questions. The researcher looked for common themes in the short answer questions to find out what coaches have done well and what they struggle with.

Interviews were transcribed and cleaned up by the researcher before any analysis was completed. As a researcher, it is important to be unbiased (Hardin & Smith, 2018). The researcher for this study looked at the data objectively, with no bias towards any responses. The interview responses were categorized into themes to answer the research questions. The researcher looked for overlapping themes in the interviews. The interviews were compared to the short answers in the survey to see if the student-athletes in the interviews went along with their peers, and how the coaches’ input compared to that of the student-athletes’.

**Summary**

Chapter three discussed the research design, sample and setting, instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis of the project. Chapter four will look at the results from all the data collected. A description of the sample will be shown, as well as the data analysis and results from each question. Chapter four will talk about the objective results of the survey and interviews, while a discussion of the results will appear in chapter five.

## **Chapter IV: Results**

This qualitative study explored the different ways coaches can better prepare their athletes for a career after athletics. This study included a survey and interviews. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the multiple-choice answers, while the short-answer portion was coded and reviewed for themes. The data analysis for the interviews was done by transcribing all interviews, coding the data, finding themes in the interview transcripts, and writing the results. Common themes were found with the interviews and surveys, which were subsequently combined.

### **Description of Sample**

A survey was sent out to all 340 student-athletes at the institution, with just 11 responding. Seven interviews were completed, with four students and three coaches participating. Each student interviewed had to be at least a four-year athlete at the institution and participated in 75% or more of their team's games during their career. The coaches interviewed had to have at least 20 years of coaching experience with at least 10 of those years being at their current institution. The institution from which the sample came from is a mid-sized Midwest NCAA DII school.

### **Results**

To get a better look at how coaches can properly prepare their student-athletes for a career after athletics, two research questions were proposed:

Research Question One (RQ1): What methods are most effective for coaching staff when helping an athlete transition out of sports?

Research Question Two (RQ2): What outside influences contribute to a student-athlete's mindset on a career after athletics?

Both RQ1 and RQ2 had survey and interview questions that corresponded with each research question proposed. In each question, emerging themes were found. Survey questions 8-10 were the same as questions asked in the athlete interviews.

### ***Research Question One***

Questions used to answer research question 1 are as follows:

Survey Question 7 (SQ7): What sport do you play?

Survey Question 8 (SQ8) and Athlete Interview Questions 2 (AQ2): What have your coaches done to help prepare you for a career after athletics?

Survey Question 9 (SQ9) and Athlete Interview Question 5 (AQ5): What can coaches do better when talking to student-athletes about a career after athletics?

Survey Question 10 (SQ10) and Athlete Interview Questions 6 (AQ6): What would you do differently as an underclassman that could have better prepared you for a career after athletics?

Athlete Interview Question 3 (AQ3): Do you feel prepared for a career after you are done with your sport?

Athlete Interview Question 5 (AQ5): Are you comfortable talking to your coach about topics other than your sport?

Coach Interview Question 3 (CQ3): What have former student-athletes of yours told you they wish they knew about life after athletics while they were still in school?

Coach Interview Question 4 (CQ4): What do you think is the reason some student-athletes struggle after they are done with their sport?

Coach Interview Question 5 (CQ5): What do you and your coaching staff do to prepare student-athletes for a career after athletics?

Coach Interview Question 6 (CQ6): Is there anything you feel coaches can be better at/struggle with when it comes to preparing a student-athlete for a career after athletics?

In response to Survey Question 7 (SQ7), “What sport do you play,” one subject played in each of these sports: soccer, women’s basketball, women’s golf, softball, men’s golf, volleyball, gymnastics, baseball, men’s cross country, and volleyball.

Survey Question 8 (SQ8) and Athlete Interview Question 2 (AQ2) “What have your coaches done to help prepare you for a career after athletics?” brought up a variety of responses. Out of the 13 subjects that answered this question, five (38%) stated that their coaches have not helped them at all. A theme of individuals who had help from their coaches was teaching. SA3 stated that:

The life skills that I am taught by my coach in my sport are definitely skills that can carry over into the real world. My coaches make me understand how to work with a team and how to respond when going through adversity.

Survey Questions 9 (SQ9) and Athlete Interview Question 5 (AQ5), “What can coaches do better when talking to student-athletes about a career after athletics?” brought up themes of looking towards the future and understanding. Nine out of 13 (69%) suggested that coaches can struggle with helping their student-athletes focus on things outside of their sport. Others talked about how coaches do not always realize that student-athletes have other things going on outside of their sport, which is what interviewee #2 (I2) stated:

Coaches need to understand that due to a junior or senior level status in school we may have to put school/work/shadowing/internships above everything else to better my future.

Survey Question 10 (SQ10) and Athlete Interview Questions 6 (AQ6): “What would you do differently as an underclassman that could have better prepared you for a career after athletics?”

showed a major theme of getting involved sooner. Seven of the 12 (58%) subjects who answered this question spoke in some way about getting involved in clubs or preparing for a job sooner.

SA2's response spoke not just on this theme, but also talked about the lack of guidance from their coach,

I wish I would have started looking at job opportunities that are more in my field earlier rather than later and take initiative in that aspect more as I did not get that career advice through my sport.

When asked student-athlete interview question 3 (SQ3), "Do you feel prepared for a career after you are done with your sport," all four athletes interviewed stated that they felt prepared, and one had a job lined up already. Two athletes felt like their sport experiences helped prepare them while one athlete felt as though they were prepared because of what they did, not because of their sport or coach. SA3 felt as though her coach was one of the main factors in her level of preparedness for a career,

I am for sure ready for a career. Because of my coaches I feel much more comfortable being more open and expressing different feelings and opinions to my team. That has given me more confidence overall which will hopefully carry over into my career.

When asked Athlete Interview Question 5 (AQ5): "Are you comfortable talking to your coach about topics other than your sport?" three out of the four student-athletes interviewed had positive responses about their coach. The major theme of the responses was the openness of the coach. The one negative response came when SA2 spoke on the fact that their coach was so sport focused and did not like to talk to his athletes about anything other than athletics. All positive responses spoke on how their coach was very open to speak with them about topics other than athletics, such as other sports, their academics, and life in general. SA2 stated that:

I have a very good relationship with my coaching staff and have been very lucky. If a tough conversation needed to be had it is not weird, awkward, or uncomfortable. I think I

am so comfortable talking with my coaches about anything because they are so open with me about everything.

The first coach interview question that went along with RQ1 was coach interview question 3 (CQ3), which asked “What have former student-athletes of yours told you they wish they knew about life after athletics while they were still in school?” All three coaches interviewed had different responses to this question. C1 talked about how quickly the end comes as a student-athlete. C2 spoke on how important it is to be motivated while playing a sport because that translates to a career. C3 went on different tangent, talking about sleep and time management:

They wish they would have spent more time on learning the art of how to get some sleep. Sleep is a big issue with athletes at the college level. Another thing they mention to me is that they wish they had focused more on time management. Nobody ever talks to them about banking, buying a house, financial kind of stuff. All the sudden you get a new job, and you are talking about buying a house and you have never even heard of a mortgage before.

One main theme emerged from Coach Interview Question 4 (CQ4), “What do you think is the reason some student-athletes struggle after they are done with their sport?” Athletic identity was mentioned in some form by all three coaches. C1 made a great point about athletic identity:

I think the biggest challenge they have all faced is that they truly identify themselves as athletes, and they have done it their whole lives. It all leads up to that culmination and then it just ends, just like that. They are used to always having that next season but suddenly there is not one.

For Coach Interview Question 5 (CQ5), “What do you and your coaching staff do to prepare student-athletes for a career after athletics?”, all three responses focused on preparation. C1 and C3 brought in outside individuals to talk to their student-athletes about life after athletics, with C1 bringing in alumni and C3 bringing in financial advisors. C2 spoke on what he does individually to help prepare the athletes:

People look at me funny all the time, but I tell people my job here as a coach is to make sure my athletes get a good education, have a great experience, challenge themselves, and

are prepared for life after their sport. We talk all the time about goofy and random things, and I think that makes the team much more comfortable with us a coaching staff. We let them know that they come talk to me all the time, and we can sit down and help them make decisions. I try to really preach that as young Americans and young people, you need to educate yourself, research things, and make the decisions that are best for you, not what everybody else tells you to do.

For Coach Interview Question 6 (CQ6) “Is there anything you feel coaches can be better at or struggle with when it comes to preparing a student-athlete for a career after athletics?”, all three responses were about communication. C1 spoke on proper motivation techniques while C2 talked about openness with players. C3 spoke on effective teaching methods, stating:

I think something we have really worked out as a staff here the last couple years is finding different ways to teach kids more effectively. We have struggled with teaching kids in the past. Yelling commands at kids is not teaching them. You must make sure they understand what and why of the command, that is teaching.

### ***Research Question Two***

Questions used to answer research question 2 are as follows:

Survey Question 1 (SQ1) and Athlete Interview Question 1 (AQ1): What year in school are you academically?

Survey Question 2 (SQ2): On average, how often do you think about life after athletics?

Survey Question 3 (SQ3): Are you a part of any clubs/organizations outside of your sport?

Survey Question 4 (SQ4): How confident are you that you know what you want to do after your athletic career is over?

Survey Question 6 (SQ6): How helpful have your coaches been when talking to you about a career after athletics?

Survey Question 10 (SQ10) and Athlete Interview Questions 6 (AQ6): What would you do differently as an underclassman that could have better prepared you for a career after athletics?

Coach Interview Question 1 (CQ1): How many years have you been a head coach?

Coach Interview Question 2 (CQ2): What have you seen student-athletes who have had successful careers after their sport do while still in school that helped them succeed?

Survey Question 1 (SQ1) and Athlete Interview Question 1 (AQ1) asked, “What year in school are you academically?” Subjects included one freshman, three sophomores, three juniors, six seniors, and two graduate students.

For Survey Question 2 (SQ2): “On average, how often do you think about life after athletics?” students were asked to answer options that ranged from every day to never. Of the 11 individuals who answered, eight (73%) stated that they think about life after athletics every day, while three (27%) subjects thought about life after athletics 1-2 times a week.

Survey Question 3 (SQ3) asked, “Are you part of any clubs/organizations outside of your sport?” Three of the 11 (27%) subjects surveyed answer yes, while the other eight (73%) answered no.

Survey Question 4 (SQ4) asked, “How confident are you that you know what you want to do when your athletic career is over?” Six of the 11 (55%) subjects surveyed answered that they were very confident while four (36%) subjects responded they are somewhat confident. Only one (9%) subject stated that they were not sure what they were doing yet. This was most likely due to the age of the individuals answering, as all six of the subjects who answered that they were very confident were either upperclassman or a graduate student.

Survey Question 6 (SQ6) asked, “How helpful have your coaches been when talking to you about a career after athletics?” Five (45%) subjects reported that their coaches had been either extremely helpful or somewhat helpful, while six (55%) subjects reported that their coaches offered little to no help at all.

Survey Question 10 (SQ10) and Athlete Interview Question 6 (AQ6) asked, “What would you do differently as an underclassman that could have better prepared you for a career after athletics?” Three of the student-athletes interviewed talked about not taking their time as an athlete for granted. SA1 stated that:

I wish I would not have taken the opportunity as a student-athlete for granted. I feel like there were certain times in the middle of my career where I did not have the perspective or the mindset on how short of a time, I actually have to play my sport. I wish I would have had a better attitude and perspective on my time here. I want to know that when I am post-sports and in the real world, I won't have any regrets from my time playing my sport.

Coach Interview Question 1 (CQ1) asked, “How many years have you been a head coach?” Coaching experience ranged from 21, 26, and 31 years.

Coach Interview Question 2 (CQ2) asked, “What have you seen student athletes who have had successful careers after their sport do while they were still in school that helped them succeed?” All three coaches interviewed talked about the fact that successful student-athletes knew the real purpose of being in school was to succeed academically and prepare for a career. C2 stated that:

They were all very good students. The biggest characteristic, I think, was that they were disciplined, motivated, dedicated, and understood what they were here to do. They were here to go to school first, and then they were here to play their sport. They understood that while it is possible to go play their sport professionally, it isn't an extremely likely option. The successful individuals who have come through this program understood that academics come first.

## **Summary**

Chapter four gave a detailed description of what survey and interview questions went with each research question and provided the results. Chapter five will discuss the themes found. Comparisons will be made to other studies, and new information found will be noted. The researcher will talk about the leadership implications of this project and what future research might hold.

## Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to find out what methods are most effective for coaching staff when helping an athlete transition out of sports, and to identify what outside influences contribute to a student-athlete's mindset on a career after athletics.

### Discussion and Conclusions

The research questions posed to ask how coaches can properly prepare student-athletes for a career after athletics are as follows:

**RQ1:** What methods are most effective for coaching staff when helping an athlete transition out of sports?

**RQ2:** What outside influences contribute to a student-athlete's mindset on a career after athletics?

The theme identified in RQ1 was personal connection. The themes that emerged from RQ2 were getting involved early and support.

### Theoretical Connection

The transition period between the end of athletics and a career is an important part of a student-athlete's life. The questions in this study revolved around the continuity theory, which states that the energy devoted previously to a major role is then redistributed among remaining roles (Rosenberg, 1981; Baillie & Danish, 1992). The less dramatic the change, the easier the transition will be (Baillie & Danish, 1992). Coaches, through demonstration, instruction, and practice, play an influential role in how skills learned from athletics are transferred into career fields (Camiré, Trudel & Forneris, 2012). When talking about life skills in the interviews, all the positive responses lined up with this statement. Participants talked about how coaches helped them develop skills such as leadership, time management, accountability, and discipline. The

coaches that were interviewed also spoke on the student-athlete transition. All three coaches mentioned that their former student-athletes who were successful in their post-athletic careers were disciplined and hard workers. When coaches can make their student-athletes excited for what is to come after graduation, those students become more motivated to move on to a career (Stokowski, Paule-Koba, Kaunert, 2019).

Student-athletes often time struggle when they are done playing their sport due to their high athletic identity (Tyrance, 2010). Many student-athletes base their entire life around their sport, which leads to high athletic identity and can lead to a difficult transition out of athletics (Stokowski, Paule-Koba & Kaunert, 2019). All the participants in this study spoke about how important support from coaches is when it comes to transitioning to life after athletics. The student-athletes who had a negative experience with a coach felt as though their coach failed to support them in endeavors outside of their sport. Lack of support leads to a lack of identity outside of athletics, which contributes to a challenging transition. On the other hand, the student-athletes who had positive experiences with coaches spoke about how supportive their coaches were when it came to opportunities outside of athletics. Their coaches encouraged them to get involved, which led to a greater relationship overall. All three coaches interviewed spoke on the fact that the main part of their job is preparing the student-athletes for a career after athletics and supporting them in all their experiences outside of their sport.

### **Research Question One Discussion**

Research question one asked, “what methods are most effective for coaching staff when helping an athlete transition out of sports?” To answer this question, the researcher synthesized the interview and survey results. The most effective methods for coaches to use to help athletes

transition out of their sports are to put a focus on academics, have an open-door policy, and to bring in outside help when teaching athletes things such as finance and career planning.

***RQ1 Theme: Personal Connection***

This theme focused on the coach's responsibility in the transition process of a student athlete. Whether they had a positive or negative experience, all participants who answered this set of questions talked about the coach-student relationship. Coaches who are involved in their student-athlete's life outside of their sport see both a more positive player-coach relationship as well as an easier transition to the career field (Smith, 2011). In four interviews, three subjects were comfortable talking to their coach about topics other than athletics, while one was not.

SA2, who did not feel very comfortable, said:

I can occasionally talk openly with my coach, but usually not. My coach isn't an individual I feel very comfortable small talking with.

Multiple subjects cited their coach specifically as part of the reason they felt prepared for a career. The student-athlete to coach relationship is vital to an easier transition out of athletics (Fuller, 2014). The students who felt they had a good relationship with their coach felt much more prepared than those who did not. Based on the data, a student-athlete who was more comfortable being open around their coach had a more positive outlook on a career after athletics. An individual's coach is the adult they will probably see the most while in college. For student-athletes, especially underclassman, having an adult who they feel comfortable talking to about topics outside of athletics is vital in the growth of that student.

The three coaches interviewed all felt that coaches need to get better at communicating and understanding their athletes. Creating a personal connection between coaches and athletes is important in helping a student-athlete transfer the life skills learned from their sport into their

post-athletic life (Camiré, Trudel & Forneris, 2012). The coaches felt as though they had each gotten better at creating a quality personal connection with their athletes over the years. It is important for coaches to understand that they are teachers. Being the most visible adult to most of the student-athletes is a big responsibility, and many of those athletes will take what their coach does and apply it to their daily life. If a coach creates a culture of openness and communication, their student-athlete will bring that culture into their daily life.

### **Research Question Two Discussion**

Research question two asked, “what outside influence contribute to a student-athlete’s mindset on a career after athletics?” To answer this question, the researcher synthesized the interview and survey results. The most important outside influences on a student-athlete were the clubs and organizations joined, and the support they received from coaches, friends, family, and colleagues.

#### ***RQ2 Theme: Getting Involved Early***

Due to high athletic identity, it can be difficult for some student-athletes to transition their identity into their career after they have finished playing their sport (Smith, 2011). By getting involved in clubs and activities outside of their sport, student-athletes are more equipped and prepared to transfer their identity into something other than athletics, such as a career (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). Nearly all students surveyed and interviewed talked about regretting that they had not gotten involved in activities outside of their sport earlier. Getting involved early allows a student-athlete the opportunity to not just make more friends and connections, but to learn how to transfer their identity to something other than their sport as well. When a student-athlete finishes their athletic career, they need to know how to devote their time and energy into something other than athletics. Activities such as joining a club, having a part-

time job, and volunteering are ways in which athletes can get involved in something other than athletics while in college.

Coaches that were interviewed spoke about how they encourage their athletes to get involved in outside activities early on. When asked CQ4, C1 had a great response:

The biggest challenge athletes all face is that they truly identify themselves as athletes, and they've done it their whole lives. They have always had the next season to prepare for, and when they are seniors, it is just done. When they get out of school, they can't be an All-American nurse or an All-Conference banker. That is why it is so important for kids to get involved in something outside of their sport while in college, so they understand early on that you don't have to always strive for something just to win a championship or an award. You work for something because you love to do it, not because you may be awarded for it.

The transition out of athletics will be easier if an athlete has the understanding that the rewards do not come later in life as much as they do in college. An individual strives for a championship every athletic season, as well as the post-season individual awards. By getting involved in an outside activity, it helps the student-athlete devote their energy into something other than athletics. They need to understand how to work for something that does not necessarily have a grand finale attached to it.

### ***RQ2 Theme: Support***

Support is a key factor in a student-athlete's transition out of athletics. Support comes from coaches, family, friends, teammates, and more. Having a strong support system gives a student-athlete confidence that their abilities will translate to the post-athletic world (Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouqereau, 2006). Based on the research, support becomes more important as upperclassman start to look for post-athletic careers. Students who did not have a strong support system struggled when finding jobs and felt as though they did not have many resources to work with. Students who had strong support systems, especially from coaches, felt comfortable

looking for a post-athletic career were more optimistic on their abilities to find a job out of school. The theme of support touches on the mentality of an individual. A lack of support brings about a mentality that people do not care, and rejection is inevitable. Quality support provides a mentality of a positive outlook on situations that occur, such as accepting a job or being rejected.

### **Conclusions**

After conducting a survey and interviewing four student-athletes and three coaches, reviewing the literature, and analyzing the findings in chapter four, the researcher came up with these three conclusions:

1. Coaches must have an open-door policy with their student-athletes.
2. Coaches need to emphasize skills that can be transferred from athletics to a career, and when teaching something they are unfamiliar with, outside help should be brought in.
3. Joining outside clubs and organizations while in school is key in creating a non-athletic identity.
4. A strong support system is crucial to a positive mindset on the transition out of athletics.

### **Leadership Implications**

This study emphasizes the fact that coaches need to be leaders to their team, not just coaches. A coach who is a leader focuses not only on winning on the field but winning off the field as well. Coaches lead by example, so if a student-athlete has a good relationship with their coach, that will allow the student-athletes to better grow as leaders themselves. Participants in this study talked about the importance of learning transferrable skills in their sport, how those skills should be administered to the athletes, and what student-athletes can do early on in their college careers to jumpstart their post-athletic career search.

***Conclusion 1:*** Coaches must have an open-door policy with their student-athletes

**Implication:** While in school, a coach is almost always the authority figure that will spend the most time around an athlete, so a quality student-athlete to coach relationship is extremely important. Good relationships between student-athletes and coaches builds a good team culture, which leads to success both on and off the field. When a coach is open with their athletes, it gives the athlete the confidence that they can go to their coach with any issue or question. College students will always have questions, especially about life after graduation, so having an authority figure they know and trust at school to ask questions to is vital to their post-athletic preparedness. Confidence to talk to an authority figure in college translates to confidence to ask questions to a boss in a post-athletic career.

**Conclusion 2:** Coaches need to emphasize skills that can be transferred from athletics to a career, and when teaching something they are unfamiliar with, outside help should be brought in.

**Implication:** There are so many skills learned in athletics that can be transferred into a post-athletic career. Coaches need to continuously emphasize what those skills are and how they can be used outside of athletics, because not all student-athletes will recognize those skills. College coaches need to also be teachers, helping guide their athletes down a path of success. It is important throughout the year to have meetings with athletes to discuss life skills, such as money management, homeownership, applying for jobs, and handling interviews. A coach should also understand when they do not have the knowledge needed to teach their athletes certain topics. This is when the coach should bring in outside help, such as alumni or individuals from local businesses, to talk to the athletes about specific life skills. This shows the student-athletes how much the coach cares, thus helping build that student-athlete to coach relationship. Along with that it also helps teach the athletes how to create connections, which is vital in a post-athletic career.

**Conclusion 3:** Joining outside clubs and organizations while in school is key in creating a non-athletic identity.

**Implication:** Student-athletes cannot be focused on their sport all the time; other influences will play a big factor in their life. Coaches need to encourage student-athletes to join clubs and outside organizations early on in their athletic careers as it will help them transition their athletic identity to a career smoother after graduation. Getting involved in an activity outside of their sport creates an identity that is more realistic with that of the post-athletic world. Student-athletes involved in outside activities are more prepared for the end of their athletic careers as they have a better understanding of working towards something that does not necessarily have championship implications. Joining outside clubs and organizations also leads to more connections, friendships, and a better college experience.

**Conclusion 4:** A strong support system is crucial to a positive mindset on the transition out of athletics.

**Implication:** When a student-athlete has a strong support system, the process of finding a post-athletic career does not feel like a chore, it feels like an opportunity. Coaches, family, friends, colleagues, and teachers are all a part of a student-athlete's support system while in college. A strong support system helps keep the athlete focused on the right things, such as their academics, work ethic, and preparing for a career after graduation. While at school, a coach may have the biggest influence on a student-athlete as they are the adult that the athlete interacts with the most. A key component of quality support is understanding. A coach needs to understand that instead of immediately punishing an athlete for poor performance, they should talk to the individual and find out what they can do to best help them succeed. When a support system continuously shows their belief in an individual, it gives that individual a mindset of success in what they are doing.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should be done on how academics impact a student-athlete's mindset on a career after athletics, as many of the students surveyed and interviewed failed to mention anything involving that subject. Additional research with a larger sample size is necessary to find more information on this subject. A larger sample size should include multiple schools as many coaches at one school may have the same mindset on many things. Future research should focus on interviews, as survey information did not contribute much to the findings in this study. Future research could investigate the mindset of coaches and athletes at DI and DIII schools as well.

## **Summary**

Coaches play a major role in a student-athlete's life. They can have a positive or negative influence on an athlete and their post-athletic mindset. Teaching student-athletes the importance of finding a career after athletics may not always be easy, but it will always be worth it. Taking the time to be open with student-athletes and teach them life skills may not always be easy, but it will always be worth it. The focus for a coach should always be to win, both on and off the field. Winning on the field comes in terms of wins and losses, winning off the field is how well prepared a coach's athletes are when they graduate and move on to a career.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Qualtrics Survey**

Hello, I am conducting a survey to determine how coaches can help prepare student athletes for a career after athletics as part of my master's degree in Leadership Education/Sports Management. The completion of the questionnaire implies that the participant has given consent to participate in the study. This study is designed to find out what methods are effective when preparing a student for a career after athletics, as well as look to see what outside influences contribute to a student-athlete's mindset about a career after athletics. In this survey you will be asked a range of questions regarding a career after athletics. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. If you decide not to participate or wish to stop the survey before it is complete, you can do so without consequences. The results of the survey may be published or otherwise disseminated but your identity will remain anonymous and no identifying information will be made known to any outside part. The aggregate data downloaded will be maintained on a WSU password protected device with access limited to the principal investigator and sponsor. The data will be deleted after the completion of the research process.

Contact Information: If you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact me at [joel.krenz@go.winona.edu](mailto:joel.krenz@go.winona.edu). You can also contact my faculty advisor at [twaterbury@winona.edu](mailto:twaterbury@winona.edu). If you have questions or concerns about your participation in the study, contact the Human Protections Administrator Brett Ayers at 507-457-5519 or [bayers@winona.edu](mailto:bayers@winona.edu). This project has been reviewed by the Winona State University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects.

1. What year in school are you academically?
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
  - e. Graduate Student
  
2. On average, how often do you think about life after athletics?
  - a. Every day
  - b. 1-2 times a week
  - c. 1-2 times a month
  - d. 3-4 times a year
  - e. Never
  
3. Are you a part of any clubs/organizations outside of your sport?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. How confident are you that you know what you want to do after your athletic career is over?
  - a. Very confident
  - b. Somewhat confident
  - c. Have some ideas but not sure yet
  - d. I have no clue what I want to do after school is over
  
5. How helpful have your coaches been when talking to you about a career after athletics?

- a. Extremely helpful
  - b. Somewhat helpful
  - c. Neither helpful nor unhelpful
  - d. No help at all
6. How comfortable are you talking to your coach about a career after athletics?
- a. Extremely comfortable
  - b. Somewhat comfortable
  - c. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
  - d. Somewhat uncomfortable
  - e. Extremely uncomfortable
7. What sport do you play?
8. What have your coaches done to help prepare you for a career after athletics?
9. What can coaches do better when talking to student-athletes about a career after athletics?
10. What would you do differently as an underclassman that could have better prepared you for a career after athletics? (For upperclassman only)

## **Appendix B**

### **Athlete Interview**

1. What year are you in school academically?
2. What has your coaching staff done to prepare you and your team for a career after athletics?
3. Do you feel prepared for a career after you are done with your sport?
4. Are you comfortable talking to your coach about topics other than your sport?
5. What can coaches be better at when preparing their student-athletes for a career after athletics?
6. What would you tell yourself as a freshman that may have helped you better prepare for a career after athletics?

### **Coach Interview**

1. How many years have you been a head coach?
2. What have you seen student-athletes who have had successful careers after their sport do while they were still in school that helped them succeed?
3. What have former student-athletes of yours told you they wish they knew about life after athletics while they were still in school?
4. Why do you think some student-athletes struggle after they are done with their sport?
5. What do you and your coaching staff do to prepare student-athletes for a career after athletics?
6. Is there anything you feel coaches struggle with when it comes to preparing a student-athlete for a career after athletics?

## Appendix C

### Interview Transcriptions

#### Student-athlete 1

Interviewer: What year are you academically in school.

SA1: I'm a senior academically.

Interviewer: What has your coaching staff done to help prepare you and your team for a career after athletics.

SA1: I think they have really challenged us. Obviously, their job is to challenge us physically, but to prepare us for post-graduation I think they also do a really good job challenging us mentally and emotionally. They force us to get out of our comfort zone. They like to see how we respond to different environments by introducing us to new aspects of the game. They really like to see how we can take that as our own and kind of be a better leader. Whether it is different drills or practice plans, they really let us make it our own kind of thing. They teach us how to be independent, which will be really valuable after we graduate.

Interviewer: Do you feel prepared right now for a career?

SA1: I think I am. They do a great job preparing us for the real world, and they make sure we realize we only have four or five years of playing before we move on into a career. They have really prepared us in a teamwork setting working with other people handling criticism. Like I said, adapting to change, I think they put us in a good place there to kind of prepare ourselves to be able to take hard criticism from our boss someday or to work with team members that we might not necessarily get along with or have many things in common with.

Interviewer: Are you comfortable talking to your coach about topics, other than other than volleyball.

SA1: Yeah, for sure. With all my coaches, especially our head coach, we have a great relationship. We have a lot of one-on-one meetings and we honestly rarely talk about our sport in practice in those. He usually he asks me about my schoolwork, family and other relationships. Because of that I feel comfortable asking those same questions to him. He really wants to know what he can do to help us be better and achieve, so I think I can bring lots of concerns to him and I feel comfortable expressing those. It's great that I'm able to do that, so if I'm not having the best week personal wise he's aware of that and just knows what's going on in my head too.

Interviewer: Is there anything that you know your coaches, or other coaches in general, could do better when preparing their athletes for a career after athletics?

SA1: Our coaches do a really good job, I think, compared to what I've heard from other friends who have coaches. I have a job right now, too, and I think at my job they do a great job of like talking about our goals and what we need to do to get to where we want to be. I think my coaches could help us make goals for ourselves but instead of just talking about it verbally we could write them down so we could remember them. We do talk about our goals and what we want to do, but rarely come back and figure out if they actually got done or not.

Interviewer: Knowing all that you know now, what would you tell what would you tell yourself as a freshman that may have helped you better prepare for a career after athletics?

SA1: I wish I wouldn't have taken the opportunity as a student-athlete for granted. I feel like there were certain times in the middle of my career where I didn't have the perspective or the mindset on how short of a time I actually have to play my sport. I wish I would have had a better attitude about morning workouts I do wish I had a better perspective outlook on my time here so that when I am post sport and in the real world, I know I don't have any regrets I left it all out there.

**Student-athlete 2**

Interviewer: Academically what year in school are you?

SA2: Graduate student.

Interviewer: What is your coaching staff done to help prepare you and your team for career after athletics?

SA2: They have helped me develop my leadership and time management skills by reading select books that further the discussion about how to develop well as a young adult. To be honest most of what we do is just sport focused. We work on mentality and mental health stuff which is beneficial for life in general, but nothing really related to academics or my career.

Interviewer: Do you feel do you feel prepared for a career after you are done with your sport?

SA2: I feel prepared because on my own time I have gotten the experiences needed for my career. My coaching staff has never really talked about anything related to school or future career planning.

Interviewer: Are you comfortable talking to your coach about topics other than your sport?

SA2: Somewhat, but usually not. My coach isn't an individual I feel very comfortable small talking with.

Interviewer: What can your coaches do better with when preparing their student-athletes for a career after athletics?

SA2: They should emphasize academics more and understand that we're most likely not going to become professional athletes. They should focus more on helping us understand how the skills we learn in our sport can translate into our career. They can also do a better job understanding that academics can sometimes bleed into soccer and affect our play as well as focusing how to teach us to build connections and networking components.

Interviewer: Knowing all you know now what would you tell yourself as a freshman that may have helped you prepare better for a career after athletics?

SA2: I wish I would have started looking at job opportunities that are more in my field earlier rather than later, and take initiative in that aspect more, as I did not get that career advice through my sport.

**Student-athlete 3**

Interviewer: What year are you in school academically.

SA3: I am a fifth year senior.

Interviewer: What has your coaching staff done to help prepare you and your team for a career after athletics?

SA3: The life skills that I am taught in my sport are definitely skills that can carry over to the real world. My coaches make we understand how to work with a team and how to respond when going through adversity.

Interviewer: Do you feel prepared for a career once you're done with your sport?

SA3: For sure I am. Because of my coaches I feel much more comfortable being more open and express different feelings and opinions to my team which will hopefully carry over into my career.

Interviewer: Are you comfortable talking to your coach about topics other than your sport?

SA3: Of course. I have a very good relationship with my coaching staff and I've been very lucky. If a tough conversation needed to be had it isn't weird or awkward or uncomfortable. I think I am so comfortable talking with my coaches about anything because they are so open with me about everything.

Interviewer: You know, is there anything you think that our coaches could do better when preparing athletes for a career after athletics?

SA3: It can get very tricky when a male coaches a female sport because there can be a lot of issues with that. Male coaches need to make sure they keep their female athletes empowered and feeling like they can do things that a lot of other people don't think that they can do.

Interviewer: Knowing all that you know now, what would you tell yourself to do as a freshman may have help prepare you for post-athletic life?

SA3: If I could talk to myself as a freshman I would say to just trust the process. I wanted to quit a lot of things because I never really gave anyone or anything a chance, but now I'm just a completely different person. I give a lot of credit to my teammates but especially my coaching staff for breaking me out of that little silo that I was in. I would also tell myself to not be afraid, just to be yourself and speak how you feel. It's okay to be the leader, even though a lot of people don't want to be the leader just with the responsibility that comes with it.

**Student-athlete 4**

Interviewer: What year are you in school academically?

SA4: Sixth year senior.

Interviewer: What have your coaches done to help prepare you for a career after athletics?

SA4: Two of the big things they have taught me and preach are discipline and accountability. A lot of new kids coming into the program will show up late at some point, and the coaches always make sure they know that that won't fly in the real world. So the big thing is just being accountable and having the discipline to show up and get to get done what needs to be done.

Interviewer: Do you feel prepared for a career after you are done playing your sport?

SA4: I had a handful job interviews and I felt prepared going into all of them. A big thing they really liked that I had was the athletic background. It shows good time management skills and discipline. I got the job I wanted, so I'd say I feel pretty confident.

Interviewer: Are you comfortable talking to your coach about topics other than your sport?

SA4: Oh for sure. Coach is really laid back and down to earth. I can talk about anything I want and he's always there for me. It can be advice about life, about a fishing trip I had, really anything I need and he's open to it. I'm in my sixth year here and live alone, so when I'm bored sometimes I will just stop by my coach's office and we'll have a spur of the moment conversation for 20 minutes, person-to-person, not player-to-coach.

Interviewer: What can coaches do better when preparing athletes for a career after athletics?

SA4: An issue is when coaches don't address issues with their players directly. Sometimes this means talking about a player behind their back, and other times it is addressing that player in front of the entire team instead of in a personal meeting.

Interviewer: Knowing all that you know now, what would you tell yourself as a freshman that may have helped you prepare for a career after athletics?

SA4: I really wish I had gotten to know more people earlier. I came into school from a small town, graduated high school with like 70 kids, and when I came here, I didn't really branch out much early on. I didn't realize that my teammates would be my friends, and when I started to realize that it was great, because that's an entire team of friends right there who like to do the same things I do. Knowing more people is also great for networking, which is how I ended up getting the job I have set up after graduation. I also wish I had focused on enjoying my time with my teammates more, because that's what I will remember when all this is over.

**Coach 1**

Interviewer: How many years have you been a head coach.

C1: This is my 21st season as a head coach.

Interviewer: What have you seen former student athletes who have had successful careers after their sport do while they were still in school that may have helped them prepare for a career after athletics?

C1: You know I think for us there has not been any one thing. There hasn't been one magic bullet that leaves them in that transition from successful athlete to successful professional. thing I think the one connecting fiber would just be that they are hard workers. We we've always had grinders and that's kind of how we coach in our program and I think that's the kind of the fiber that stays with them when they go to the next step in their lives. Working hard is just their nature, and they become successful on the other side of graduation because they're just used to working hard at everything that they do.

Interviewer: What have former student-athletes of yours told you they wish they knew about life after athletics while they were still in school?

C1: The questions we get are never really geared around what I should have done it's more, what do I do now and, and I think they're searching more for that. All sudden you get to the end of your senior year and you play that last game, and you wake up the next morning and you're just like what do you do now? I think that is a hard reality that there's no way to prepare for as an athlete. You don't get it as a freshman until you're a senior and because you always think I have more time and there's no way to make them feel what seniors feel, but they always talk about how they wish they appreciated it more when they were underclassman.

Interviewer: What do you think is the reason some student-athletes struggle after they are done with their sport?

C1: I think the biggest challenge they've all faced is that they truly identify themselves as athletes and they've done it their whole lives. It all leads up to that culmination and then it just ends and there is, you know you always have the next season and suddenly there isn't one. They've always been told that they're good at something, and you know you don't get to go out and be an All-American nurse, you don't get to go out and be an All-Conference banker. They don't have that same motivation to go out and be the best nurse, banker, or teacher that they had with that daily grind of athletics. I don't want to call it a pat on the back, but you know they're searching for that motivation piece that they always had, that carrot that was always in front of them as an athlete. They want to be the best version of themselves athletically every day and we don't talk about winning championships, we talk about being better today than you were yesterday. I think they missed the tangible part of it, because they don't have any tangible things when they are teachers, bankers, and nurses that that measures success for them.

Interviewer: What do you and your coaching staff do to prepare student-athletes for a career after athletics?

C1: We always say constantly there are a lot of people who would give anything to be standing here and putting on that uniform one more time. We have our current players reach out to our alumni to talk to the athletes about their life on both sides of it, what was they're life was like when they were you were an athlete, and what life was like after their athletic days were over. The alumni try to help the current athletes by talking about the challenges they faced going from being an athlete to going out in the professional world. We try to make sure our players have some realization that this game is temporary. Connecting with the alumni is a cool thing, but it's

much cooler for the alumni because the current kids it's just a homework assignment. None of the alumni talk about their accolades or their stats, they're talking about bus rides they're talking about life after practice, they're talking about hotel rooms on road trips. All the things that they miss about being an athlete has nothing to do with the wins and losses.

Interviewer: Is there anything you feel like coaches can be better at or struggle with when it comes to preparing student athlete for career after athletics?

C1: I think what I've gotten better with as a coach is understanding what that struggle of being a student-athlete. In the beginning I was trying to use the struggle as a motivating tool, by saying that the game is going to leave you so you should give more. My biggest motivation to my athletes originally was that that this game is temporary and I was using it almost as a negative. Now I realize that we actually have to address the concept of their playing career ending, talk about it, and prepare them for the other side. I now make sure they look at every day as a new opportunity to get better, not because they're career will be over soon, but because that kind of self-motivation will stick with someone for their entire life. I now make sure I understand how much their academics affect their athletic performance, so I am much more open now to talk about class schedules and academics than I was early in my coaching career. By the end of their careers they're more talking with me instead of to me, and it's not coming to me with an issue, it's sitting down and actually talking as people that are in a different phase in their lives. and again you think about 18 year olds that come in here and all they're worried about is and i'm not worried about anything you know, really. I have come to the understanding that while I see tons of players go through this program, for them I am their only coach and they can't just be another number to me. I make sure that when an athlete comes to me with an issue I am fully focused on it and will do my best to help them, because they have shown their own confidence in me that I

can help them with what they need.

**Coach 2**

Interviewer: How many years have you been a head coach?

C2: This will be my 31st year as a head coach.

Interviewer: What have you seen student-athletes who have had successful careers after their sport do while still in school that helped them succeed?

C2: Well, first off, they are very good, students, you know and some of them were really good students, but the biggest characteristic, I think, is that they were disciplined, motivated, dedicated, and understood what they were here to do. They were here to go to school first, and then they were here to play their sport. They understand that while it is possible to go play their sport professionally, it isn't an extremely likely option. The successful individuals who have come through this program understood that academics came first.

Interviewer: What have former student-athletes of yours told you they wish they knew about life after athletics while they were still in school?

C2: The biggest thing I think they realize is that you have to be dedicated and motivated to whatever you are doing. It is one thing to be motivated to play your sport, but it is another thing to be motivated to completing a task for a job. Our graduation rate is pretty good, and I think that is because my athletes know why they are here.

Interviewer: What do you think is the reason some student-athletes struggle after they are done with their sport?

C2: They normally aren't in the right area of study when they are in school, so when they get out into the professional world they don't enjoy it as much as they thought they would. There is also a lack of support in the real world compared to when you are an athlete. Without having their sport in their lives there is a lack of structure that they are normally used to. As a student they

knew that they were going to class and then they're going to practice and they're going to games. When they get to the real world, it is just their job and that's it. They have to learn how to handle their spare time without structure.

Interviewer: What do you and your coaching staff do to prepare student-athletes for a career after athletics?

C2: People look at me all the time funny but I tell people my job here as a coach is to make sure my athletes get a good education, have a great experience, challenge themselves, and are prepared for life after their sport. We talk all the time about goofy and random things, and I think that makes the team much more comfortable with us as a coaching staff. We let them know that they come talk to me all the time, and we can sit down and can help them make decisions. I try to really preach that as young Americans and young people, you need to educate yourself, research things, and make the decisions that are best for you, not what everybody else tells you to do.

Interviewer: Is there anything you feel coaches can be better at/struggle with when it comes to preparing a student-athlete for a career after athletics?

C2: I think my staff does a very good job in the fact that we are very open with our players, they know the open door policy and can come in and talk to us about anything. I always joke with them that there's only one way to do things and that's the right way, and if you don't know what the right way is come see me I'll tell you what it is. Coaches have to be open with their players, or else the team chemistry will be thrown off, which can mess with people's individual lives as well.



**Coach 3**

Interviewer: How many years have you been a head coach?

C3: 26 years

Interviewer: What have you seen student athletes who have had successful careers after their sport do while they were still in school that seemed to help them succeed.

C3: A lot of our athletes do internships, and we're always trying to get our athletes connected with other people who are professionals in their area of study. I think part time work is important. A lot of people think that you can't get a great job right out of college and that's not always the case. I think that working part time helps athletes learn to handle and manage their time well outside of the structure of our sport. One example is an individual who is now a doctor for a collegiate football team. This individual volunteered at the hospital all for all four years while in school. This person also worked with students with disabilities, too, so I mean that extra work paid off this individual get into the grad school he wanted to. Kids who have succeeded almost always volunteered and showed that their community was important to them.

Interviewer: What have former student-athletes of yours told you they wish they knew about life after athletics while they were still in school?

C3: They wish to be to spend more time on learning the art of how to get some sleep. Sleep is a big issue with athletics, of course, at the College level. Another thing they mention to me is that they wish they had focused more on time management. Nobody ever talks to them about banking, buying a house, financial kind of stuff and all of a sudden you get a new job and you're talking about buying a house and you've never even heard of a mortgage before.

Interviewer: What do you think is the reason some student-athletes to struggle after they are done with their sport?

C3: I really believe that kids have an unrealistic view and goal about what their future is going to be when they come into play college athletics. We have way too many athletes that truly believe they are going to play professionally. I think that's a good thing for their workouts and all that kind of stuff when they are trying to be a better athlete, but their chance of actually going to play professionally is so slim. It's hard to break down how difficult it is to go professional with them. It's not just the athletes who think it either, it's their mom, dad, cousin Bob, and they're friend jimmy who are all convinced this athlete will play professionally. They may know someone who already plays professionally, so they get this mindset like they know that's the way out or that's they're going to take care of their family. At bigger schools that may be a realistic possibility, but that isn't the reason they come to this school. It is extremely tough to keep them motivated to work their hardest while also being realistic that they probably won't go professional. Social media has really warped their minds that anyone can go professional. It just doesn't happen like that.

Interviewer: What do you and your coaching staff do to prepare student-athletes for a career after athletics?

C3: We have we have a full program that we kind of launched it over the last couple years that is really a career based program where freshmen meet with a career panel, Sophomores have another criteria, juniors start working on resume building and job opportunities and internships, and then seniors really get to be where you have a alumni mentor. The freshman panel is extremely important because they will learn the major areas of different professions and can get four years of thinking and working out their possible careers after athletics.

Interviewer: Is there anything you feel coaches can be better at/struggle with when it comes to preparing a student-athlete for a career after athletics?

C3: I think something we've really worked out as a staff here the last couple years is finding different ways to teach kids more effectively. We have struggled with teaching kids in the past. Yelling commands at kids isn't teaching them, making sure they understand the what and why of the command is teaching. In our old teaching model we kind of did what we did just because we had been doing it for so long, there wasn't much change. I call it the new model "coaching depth." To get a better idea of your athlete you have to know their family, know their habits, be open with them, and make sure they know you are there for anything and everything they need. When you coach depth you build a stronger trust, and trust is huge, I mean if they trust you they're going to listen to you a lot more. I think something that's always been on the back of my mind has been teaching culture, and not just a holler and scream.