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Understanding the modern athletic director: Investigating the roles and preparedness of New Jersey high school ADs

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Abstract

American culture deeply values sports, with millions of students engaging in athletic activities annually. High school sports play a prominent role in the educational process and their operation requires qualified professionals who play various roles. Behind the scenes, athletic directors (ADs) are unsung heroes, shaping the athletic department's direction. Responsibilities include crafting schedules, hiring coaches, ensuring compliance, and representing the school at various events. However, job postings for AD positions in New Jersey public high schools lack depth and detail, raising questions about preparedness and the evolving nature of the role. Utilizing a 30-question survey, this study sought to investigate the roles and preparedness of these professionals. Findings indicated that ADs prioritize management, administration, and coaching knowledge over law, medicine, and accounting. The evolving landscape of high school athletics suggests potential changes in AD roles, requiring adaptability to future challenges. While current findings from this study may not explicitly detail a perceived lack of legal, medical, and technological skills, the proactive reassessment of AD needs is crucial for navigating an ever-evolving sports landscape.

Keywords: High school athletics, athletic director, sport management

Introduction

American culture is deeply rooted in the ideals of sports (Ripley, 2013)^[8]. Each year, millions of American students enroll in various athletic activities, ranging from track and field to wrestling, with football shining as a prominent star. According to data from the Aspen Institute's Project Play (2020)^[15], in 2019, 56.1 percent of children aged 6-17 participated in at least one after-school sporting activity. This participation is a fundamental aspect of American culture, serving as a rite of passage and a social construct that imparts valuable social skills, teamwork, and a lasting love for physical activity (Ripley, 2013)^[8].

For the 56.1 percent of American youth engaging in after-school athletics, the worlds of sports and education are intertwined. The desire and demand for high school-level athletics necessitate well-qualified, highly skilled, and professional members of the athletic support team. In most cases, well-trained coaches play a pivotal role in creating cohesive, championship-winning teams. Coaches are the visible figures in the organization, serving as motivators, inspirations, and the driving force behind team dynamics, whether positive or negative.

What often remains unseen is the extensive work carried out behind the scenes by the athletic director (AD), who plays a central role in making everything run smoothly. From crafting schedules to selecting coaches, ADs are the lifeblood of the athletic department and, like coaches, significantly shape the organization's direction. ADs bear the responsibility of representing the school's athletics program at public functions, board of education meetings, sporting events, and more. They are tasked with hiring exceptional coaching staff, ensuring compliance with conference and state regulations, and guaranteeing the safety and fairness of student-athlete competition.

Upon reviewing four current job postings for New Jersey public high school athletic director positions, it is striking to discover that the qualifications for ADs are relatively basic and have seen only minimal changes over the past six decades (Schneider & Stier, 2001)^[10].

Despite an ever-evolving political and social climate, alongside modern technologies and updated laws, it is surprising that current job postings for this crucial supervisory role in New Jersey lack the depth and detail one might expect. Beyond educational requirements, these postings offer little insight into what candidates are expected to bring to the role, leaving job seekers uncertain about the job's exact demands.

These findings raise intriguing questions that have remained unexplored for the past two decades: Are ADs receiving adequate training to meet the job's multifaceted expectations? Do they believe that the job postings accurately reflect the responsibilities they shoulder? Given the evolution of the role and changes in sports over the last sixty years, are prerequisites such as coaching experience and a master's degree as crucial as familiarity with administrative practices, management principles, legal basics, accounting, and medical knowledge? Most importantly, what do the ADs actively performing the job daily consider the most critical skills and experiences necessary for their role?

This study posits that expectations for athletic directors diverge significantly from what is outlined in job postings, emphasizing administrative and technological skills over prior coaching or teaching experience. Furthermore, we anticipate that surveyed athletic directors will concur that the job necessitates more profound knowledge in law and medicine than is typically outlined in job descriptions and postings.

Review of Literature

1. History of Athletic Directing in Secondary Schools

It is challenging to imagine a time when sports were not an integral part of the stereotypical high school experience. However, the inclusion of recreational athletic programs was not integrated into the secondary school curriculum until the 1890s (Schneider & Stier, 2001) ^[10]. Historical records trace the inception of high school boys' competitions to Michigan, ultimately leading to the establishment of a formal league to govern and organize high school-level athletic competition by the late 1890s (Masteralexis & Hums, 1998) ^[5]. As school programs expanded, with more students showing interest and participating in after-school athletic activities, the need for oversight and organization of these competitions became more pronounced, giving rise to the role of the athletic director (AD) (Schneider & Stier, 2001) ^[10].

By 1969, significant changes had occurred, including the establishment of various organizations and, notably, the National Council of Secondary School Athletic Directors. Additionally, more schools began to include girls in athletic programs, and the scope of athletic offerings expanded. Consequently, the role of the athletic director became more formalized and professional (Keller & Forsythe, 1984; Schneider & Stier, 2001) ^[3, 10]. Initially, the position was predominantly occupied by white males who had experience in coaching football (Whisenant *et al.*, 2005) ^[13], and other qualifications were of lesser relevance. As time passed, the need for highly qualified individuals became imperative, leading to a more diverse candidate pool and more specific expectations.

The most extensive research on the qualifications of modern-day ADs took place in studies conducted in 2000 and 2001. Earlier studies compared the historical qualifications of ADs to the contemporary demands of the position, as well as the expectations of hiring managers, typically school principals (Schneider & Stier, 2000) ^[11].

In their initial study, the authors distributed a comprehensive

questionnaire to hiring managers, who are typically responsible for selecting ADs. This survey targeted administrators in secondary education institutions across the United States, seeking feedback on the importance of specific qualifications when evaluating Athletic Director candidates. The findings indicated that the ability to collaborate effectively with others was deemed the most crucial quality in an AD, followed by the capacity to work harmoniously with parents and the ability to establish and maintain a positive working environment with teachers. Interestingly, attributes such as having a winning coaching record, fundraising prowess, and creating departmental handbooks received lower scores (Schneider & Stier, 2000) ^[11].

Additionally, this study delved into more specific qualifications, such as job experiences, education, and career accomplishments, to ascertain how principals ranked these criteria. Principals overwhelmingly agreed that the most essential professional experience for a candidate was a high school teaching degree, followed by experience as a head coach of high school-level sports and familiarity with athletics department handbooks (Schneider & Stier, 2000) ^[11]. These findings underscore the enduring importance of having worked as a head coach, in line with the position's original design in the 1900s. Despite the primary focus on departmental management and supervision, hiring managers continued to emphasize teaching and coaching as vital experiences.

The second study aimed to investigate the skills and competencies necessary for a successful AD. The authors hypothesized that individuals capable of managing a business, department, or group of people should be equally adept at managing an athletic department. They posited that administrative skills applicable to other industries could also lead to success in an athletic department. They viewed management and administration as universal disciplines that could be applied across various levels of athletic directing, from youth sports to collegiate levels (Schneider & Stier, 2001) ^[10]. In essence, the basic principles should remain consistent across these different levels.

Remarkably, in 2001, principals overwhelmingly agreed that a bachelor's degree was generally deemed acceptable for the AD position, with only 30 percent of principals considering a master's degree to be important. The findings also suggested that a coaching background was a critical factor for success, aligning with the conclusions from the authors' previous study. Two notable aspects that were not emphasized in the first study but had significant implications were the need for professionalism and the importance of continuing education. Both qualities were deemed essential by the principals surveyed, reflecting a notable transformation in the position from 1969 to 2001 (Schneider & Stier, 2001) ^[10].

During the 1960s and 1970s, as athletic directors became more integrated into the school structure, the expectation was that the position would become more professional. However, many schools still hired individuals primarily based on their track record of winning coaching rather than their ability to manage and conduct themselves professionally (Schneider & Stier, 2001) ^[10]. Additionally, the education provided to prospective athletic directors during that era was limited, and there was minimal emphasis on continuing education after assuming the role. In 2001, principals recognized the need for ADs to possess more education and professional experience. They also placed a significant emphasis on ongoing education post-employment, a concept that was virtually unheard of forty years prior.

2. Benefits of Legal Background

Athletic directors who possess a strong understanding of laws and their legal implications play a crucial role in safeguarding their school districts against frivolous lawsuits and tragic accidents. At the collegiate level, universities often appoint Athletic Compliance Directors to ensure compliance with NCAA rules and regulations. Employing such professionals enables colleges to prevent major scandals that can tarnish the institution's reputation and, in turn, affect enrollment levels (Fuller, 2009) ^[2].

In contrast, high schools in the United States typically do not have dedicated staff members responsible for maintaining compliance. This responsibility often falls on the shoulders of the athletic director, further underscoring the importance of their role. However, it is worth noting that this individual may not necessarily have a background in law or possess sufficient information to adeptly handle this aspect of their job.

Contracting companies for various services is among the multifaceted responsibilities of an athletic director. These contracts can encompass tasks such as maintaining athletic equipment and tending to practice fields. A pertinent example is the lawsuit filed by Meriweather Mowing Service against St. Anne School in April 2000 for a breach of contract. The dispute arose when the school terminated their contract to maintain athletic fields and hired a new company without providing proper notice. Meriweather Mowing Service had entered into a three-year contract with the school and was blindsided by the abrupt change. The athletic department, seeking cost savings, swiftly made the switch without fully comprehending the legal ramifications that would ensue (Sawyer, 2002) ^[9].

Given that athletic directors are signatories to contracts, it is imperative that they remain updated on the intricacies of contract execution and termination. Had the athletic director at St. Anne's School possessed a comprehensive understanding of the contract and the repercussions of prematurely discontinuing the services of Meriweather Mowing Service, the school could have avoided incurring significant legal expenses (Sawyer, 2002) ^[9].

In recent years, the intersection of gender and sports has become a contentious issue in both collegiate and high school athletics. While the passage of Title IX in 1972 granted women the opportunity to participate in sports, questions have arisen regarding the integration of traditionally male-dominated sports. Can female athletes join the football team, for instance? If they do, what potential legal consequences could arise in the event of injury or team exclusion (Masin, 2003)? ^[4] Without a foundational understanding of the law, the average athletic director faces considerable challenges in navigating such situations and making decisions that mitigate the risk of lawsuits.

Comprehensive knowledge of compliance regulations and an awareness of the consequences of non-compliance are essential not only for the legal protection of the institution but also for the health and safety of individuals involved. An illustrative case is that of a high school student in Kentucky in 2001 who was struck in the head by a pitch during baseball practice. While such injuries are not uncommon, the student was not wearing a helmet during supervised batting practice, resulting in a severe injury. Safety regulations stipulate the mandatory use of helmets during batting practice. Since the coach was supervising the practice when the athlete was injured, the parents filed a lawsuit against the school, citing non-compliance with state-mandated regulations (Yanero V. Davis, 2001) ^[14].

It falls upon athletic directors to oversee, monitor, and educate their staff members, including coaches, physical education teachers, athletic trainers, and sometimes health teachers, regarding evolving laws and maintaining compliance throughout the department. A sound understanding of the law equips athletic directors to fulfill this aspect of their role effectively and enhances their ability to provide informed guidance on matters of safety.

3. Importance of Medical Knowledge and Education in Athletics

Today's ADs have a variety of major issues with which they must contend. One of the most significant issues to impact the youth sports landscape in the past decade has been the heightened awareness of the consequences associated with concussions. Head injuries, often challenging to diagnose, have garnered considerable attention from athletic directors due to their potential long-term effects on the neurodevelopment of young individuals (Register-Mihalik *et al.*, 2013) ^[7].

The primary challenge that athletic directors confront regarding concussions revolves around educating coaches, athletes, and parents about the potential signs and symptoms of concussive events. Historically, a blow to the head during a game was not typically regarded as a severe injury and frequently went unreported. This led to situations where athletes, especially those engaged in contact sports, were exposed to repeated head traumas, known to impact the cognitive development of young brains. Notably, a cross-sectional survey revealed that 48.8 percent of concussions sustained by student athletes went unreported and untreated (Register-Mihalik, *et al.*, 2013) ^[7].

Comprehending the signs and symptoms of concussions is a pivotal element in preventing them. Athletic directors, armed with greater medical knowledge, are well-positioned to effectively educate their staff, students, and parents about the genuine dangers associated with traumatic head injuries. Moreover, an enhanced understanding of other common medical emergencies can help prevent such incidents. For instance, consider the tragic case of a high school football player in Wilkes-Barre, PA, who succumbed to leg cramps after a strenuous day of practice in high temperatures. Although the athlete received limited breaks and hydration, he was repeatedly returned to practice without being advised to seek medical attention. Tragically, he collapsed and passed away after the afternoon practice, a tragedy that might have been averted had prompt medical intervention been mandated (Burden v. Wilkes-Barre Area School District, 1998) ^[1].

When athletic directors possess sound medical knowledge, they are better equipped to implement protocols aimed at preventing serious injuries or fatalities. Additionally, their expertise, coupled with additional training in medical policies and procedures, enables athletic directors to provide comprehensive education to coaches on preventive measures, ensuring the safety of practices and empowering coaches to make informed, life-saving decisions.

Methodology

The objective of this study was to ascertain the relative importance of qualifications in contemporary athletic directing. To achieve this, a survey was administered to a group of New Jersey Public High School Athletic Directors (NJAD). The survey sought to gather essential demographic information while also providing insights into the daily responsibilities within the field. The survey encompassed

thirty questions, twenty-nine multiple-choice questions and one open-ended.

1. Current Job Postings

An analysis of four job postings for vacant positions in New Jersey public high schools was conducted to identify the prevailing qualifications that principals prioritize when hiring an Athletic Director (AD). Consistent with prior research findings, all these postings stipulate the necessity of possessing a New Jersey teaching certificate and coaching experience. Notably, a departure from the 2001 study is evident, with the current prerequisites for the AD role emphasizing the attainment of a master's degree and a supervisory certificate, in contrast to the previous requirement of a bachelor's degree (Schneider & Stier, 2001)^[10].

Notably, none of the postings made explicit mention of requirements related to administrative expertise (scheduling, communication, coordination), legal proficiency (compliance, state reporting), or medical knowledge (concussion awareness, first aid, CPR). However, it can be argued that competence in these domains constitutes critical elements of the contemporary AD role.

Further examination of supplementary information regarding the job responsibilities revealed several noteworthy details:

1. The AD is tasked with the recruitment of coaching and physical education staff.
2. The AD is responsible for ensuring that all athletes are adequately covered by medical insurance and have received annual physical examinations.
3. The AD is expected to address all Title IX regulations and continuously ensure compliance.
4. The AD is responsible for organizing and overseeing all medical examinations, from routine check-ups to emergency procedures.

These four fundamental responsibilities are integral to the role of an AD. Nevertheless, none of the listed qualifications explicitly correspond to these requirements. This information bears significance for two primary reasons: first, there exists a misalignment between the job description and the stated qualifications. While the postings typically request "five years of related experience," they do not consistently delineate what types of experiences are considered relevant or essential for effectively fulfilling the role. For instance, it remains unclear whether experience as an office coordinator is deemed "related" enough or if the job posters are specifically seeking sports-related experience. Second, this divergence between expectations and postings suggests that candidates may be unprepared for additional duties not explicitly mentioned in the job listings. This incongruity highlights the need for improved clarity and specificity in job postings to ensure that both candidates and employers have a shared understanding of the expectations associated with the AD position.

2. Participant Sampling

New Jersey was exclusively selected as the sole state of focus in the survey. Each state maintains its own distinct guidelines for the education and oversight of athletic directors. Consequently, the survey was confined to individuals exclusively operating within the state of New Jersey.

Moreover, a conscious decision was taken to restrict survey participation solely to individuals employed in public New Jersey high schools. Much like the variances in educational governance across states, public and private schools operate under distinct regulatory frameworks. Public schools,

financed by New Jersey tax dollars, fall under the purview of state governance and are subject to rigorous policies concerning curriculum, sports compliance, and athlete recruitment.

In contrast, private schools, funded by tuition and donations, operate with comparatively lesser state oversight, affording them greater flexibility in matters of hiring, athlete eligibility and compliance, and the recruitment of athletes. Given the autonomy of private schools and the inherent variability in their rules and policies, they were excluded from the purview of this study.

3. Demographics of the state of New Jersey

The state of New Jersey is comprised of twenty-one counties which can be divided into three regions: northern, central, and southern. For the purpose of this study, it is agreed that the state is divided into three sections, each with seven counties. The breakdown of this can be found in the table below:

NJ County	Region (Northern, Central, Southern)	Schools Contacted
Atlantic	Southern	5
Bergen	Northern	4
Burlington	Southern	5
Camden	Southern	5
Cape May	Southern	5
Cumberland	Southern	4
Essex	Northern	4
Gloucester	Southern	5
Hudson	Northern	4
Hunterdon	Central	4
Mercer	Central	5
Middlesex	Central	5
Monmouth	Central	5
Morris	Northern	5
Ocean	Central	5
Passaic	Northern	5
Salem	Southern	5
Somerset	Central	4
Sussex	Northern	5
Union	Central	5
Warren	Northern	5
	Total	99

New Jersey is a diverse state with variations in ethnicity, religion, age, and a large population. Information from the 2020 census shows that New Jersey is comprised of more than nine million people, 61.6 percent white, 12.4 percent black, 18.7 percent Hispanic, 6 percent Asian, 1.1 percent American Indian or Native Alaskan, 0.2 percent Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 8.4 percent other race, and 10.2 percent two or more races. This diversity has increased from 54.9 percent in the former census to an astonishing 61.1 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021)^[12].

With a large population and high levels of diversity, the state offers the opportunity for a diverse and representative sample. Additionally, the state also has numerous public schools which provide a great number of potential subjects. There are a total of 686 school districts in the state (New Jersey Department of Education, 2021)^[6]. By picking a region with a large population, great diversity, and numerous school districts, a wide variety of responses were obtained.

4. The Instrument

The research instrument employed in this study consisted of a thirty-question survey designed for ease of completion within a fifteen-minute timeframe. The survey was thoughtfully

crafted by drawing from queries found in prior research and identifying gaps within contemporary job postings. It encompassed a range of topics, including personal demographics -the respondent's geographic region, age bracket, gender, and educational attainment, inquiries related to the nature of their occupational responsibilities - the proportion of time spent on administrative tasks, legal matters, and medical concerns, and opinion-based questions aimed at clarifying the respondent's perspective on the most and least vital aspects of their role.

Notably, each question featured a "prefer not to answer" option to respect the respondent's autonomy and allow them to withhold information if they so wished. The survey was developed using Google Forms, facilitating its distribution via a link to an extensive array of potential participants. Importantly, this platform enabled the preservation of respondent anonymity, ensuring that only their responses were recorded. Furthermore, the creator had the capacity to set a predetermined time limit for accepting responses, thereby enabling the closure of the survey once the designated timeframe had elapsed.

5. Athletic Directors of New Jersey Selection

Candidates were meticulously chosen through a methodical process that involved a thorough examination of public schools across all twenty-one counties in New Jersey. From this extensive pool, five schools were randomly selected from each county. Subsequently, email addresses were procured from the individual websites of these selected schools, as listed in their public staff contact information.

A comprehensive chart was meticulously constructed to monitor and manage information pertaining to each school, encompassing details such as the athletic director's name, email address, and the status of email delivery. A singular email, discreetly blind-copying one hundred and five athletic directors, was dispatched. This email included a formal request for their active participation in the study, along with the provision of a hyperlink to access the Google Form survey. Additionally, the email featured an informative, passive informed consent form, outlining the research project's objectives and any potential associated risks.

Out of the one hundred and five email addresses targeted, six were returned as undeliverable or out of office. Consequently, the number of successfully delivered surveys amounted to ninety-nine.

Results and Conclusion

1. Respondents

Out of 99 surveys distributed via email, 23 ADs took the time to participate in the study during its two-week availability making the response rate 23.2 percent. The respondents were fairly diversified in terms of location with participants representing each area of the state: 47.8 percent from northern New Jersey, 30.4 percent central New Jersey, 17.4 percent from southern New Jersey, and leaving only 4.4 percent who chose not to disclose the information. Of those who answered, 100 percent identified as male though surveys were sent out to both male and female AD's. 95.7 percent of those who participated identified as white, though it is important to note that at the time of distribution, there was not an option for those of Hispanic or Latinx ethnicity. Age groups were fairly distributed with the largest number of respondents being in the 36-45 group (43.5%), followed by the 46-55 group (26.1%), 56 and over group (17.4%), and 20-35 group (13%).

2. Education and Prior Experience

The study prioritized understanding the educational requirements for the position and evaluating respondents' perceptions of the practical utility of their education in their day-to-day activities. According to the results, an overwhelming 95.7 percent indicated that their highest level of education was a master's degree, with only one respondent reporting a doctoral degree. This finding is significant, especially considering that not every job posting for a New Jersey Athletic Director (NJAD) explicitly lists a master's degree as a prerequisite, although it is evidently a qualification acquired by the vast majority in the profession. Additionally, possessing a New Jersey State Teaching Certificate, while not consistently specified in job postings, emerged as a common and necessary achievement based on respondents' insights. Furthermore, a New Jersey Supervisory Certificate, although not uniformly mandated, was held by 95.7 percent of participants, showcasing its prevalence as an additional endorsement.

Specific inquiries were directed at gauging the prior experiences that Athletic Directors (ADs) brought to their roles to enhance their capacity to address contemporary challenges and meet the requirements of high school sports. Five questions aimed at uncovering these experiences included:

1. Do you have prior experience coaching youth sports?
2. Do you have prior experience in any administrative roles besides your current job?
3. Do you have prior experience as an athletic trainer or a medical background?
4. Do you have prior experience in law or legal services?
5. Do you have prior experience in human resources?

Results revealed that 95.7 percent of respondents answered affirmatively to question one, indicating participation in youth sports. Understanding athletic dynamics from a player's perspective can potentially influence ADs in making decisions that directly impact athletes. Regarding question two, 17.4 percent admitted to lacking prior administrative experience before assuming the role of AD, while 82.6 percent possessed such experience. For questions three and four, 95.7 percent acknowledged having no background in law, athletic training, or medicine, highlighting a potential gap in addressing legal and medical issues related to high school sports. Lastly, 87 percent of participants had no prior experience in human resources, leaving only 13 percent with some level of experience beyond their current positions.

These findings collectively present a comprehensive view of the qualifications deemed important for a well-rounded candidate aspiring to be a high school AD. The data suggests a potential emphasis on the value of prior experience in sports participation and administration over expertise in human resources, legal services, or medical training. Alternatively, it may indicate that the current training for ADs does not sufficiently address these additional areas of expertise. Further research and analysis are recommended to explore these hypotheses and inform future considerations in AD training programs.

3. Job Functions

The formulation of these questions aimed to determine the Athletic Directors' perspectives on the most crucial aspects of their job and the predominant tasks occupying their time. Conversely, it was equally vital to determine their views on elements they perceived as less significant, facilitating a

nuanced understanding of potential misconceptions.

Table 1: Which experience do you feel is the most important to be a successful high school athletic director?

Answer Options	% Of Respondents
Coaching background	45.5%
Management background	27.3%
Administration background	22.7%
None of the above	4.5%
Legal background	0.0%
Prefer not to answer	0.0%

Table 2: Which experience do you feel is the least important to be a successful high school athletic director?

Answer Options	% Of Respondents
Legal background	47.8%
Administration background	17.4%
Management background	13.0%
None of the above	13.0%
Coaching background	8.7%
Prefer not to answer	0.0%

Table 3: What do you believe is your strongest skill?

Answer Options	% Of Respondents
Management/Supervisory	47.8%
Scheduling/Logistics	21.7%
Sports Knowledge	13.0%
Administration	13.0%
Time Management	4.5%

Table 4: What do you believe is your weakest skill?

Answer Options	% Of Respondents
Time Management	40.9%
Prefer not to Answer	27.3%
Administration	13.6%
Sports Knowledge	9.1%
Scheduling/Logistics	5.1%
Management/Supervisory	5.0%

Table 5: What do you feel your job is most focused on right now

Answer Options	% Of Respondents
Scheduling & Admin Work	65.2%
Student Participation in Sports	17.4%
Health and Safety of Athletes and Spectators	13.0%
Prefer Not to Answer	4.4%

Table 6: Do you feel the job posting for your position was accurate to what is expected of you?

Answer Options	% Of Respondents
Yes	56.6%
No	21.7%
Somewhat	17.4%
I Don't Remember	4.3%

Based on the outcomes derived from the survey questions, it is evident that Athletic Directors (ADs) surveyed consider coaching experience as integral to their daily responsibilities, yet intriguingly, they do not regard sports knowledge as their primary skill. The majority identifies time management as a key weakness, contrasting with their strengths predominantly centered on management and supervisory capacities. This pattern aligns with the findings of earlier research conducted by Schneider and Stier in 2000^[11].

Of particular interest is the discovery that a notable proportion of respondents expressed a perception that their job

description did not align well with their expectations. Although the survey questions did not pinpoint specific disparities between the job description and the actual responsibilities, it does highlight that a substantial number of ADs feel they were not provided with a comprehensive understanding of their role upon commencement of employment. This insight underscores the significance of enhancing clarity and communication in the hiring and onboarding processes for individuals occupying AD positions.

4. Open-ended Comments and Discussion

Perhaps the most intriguing and unexpected insights surfaced during the open-ended section of the survey, where Athletic Directors (ADs) were encouraged to share comments, feedback, or suggestions to offer a more comprehensive understanding of their job responsibilities. Of the 23 participants, only five chose to provide their perspectives, yet the comments offered were notably insightful.

One AD challenged the initial hypothesis that coaching experience should not be as crucial as a background in management or administration. He revealed that his strong coaching experience played a pivotal role in earning trust from coaches, parents, and students regarding program decisions. Moreover, he highlighted how his firsthand knowledge of the sports he coached facilitated effective decision-making, as coaches sought his advice due to his on-field experience.

Another AD underscored a valuable point not previously addressed in the survey or existing research. He emphasized the importance of public relations and customer service skills in an athletic director's role, citing instances of dealing with upset parents or presenting budget proposals to the board of education. This dimension, although omitted in the study, introduces a compelling aspect to the role, prompting reflection on other potentially overlooked duties.

A respondent echoed this sentiment, asserting that the survey failed to encompass numerous essential tasks integral to daily responsibilities. Unfortunately, specific details regarding these tasks were not provided. This underscores the need for future studies to delve into the comprehensive spectrum of duties associated with the AD position, ensuring a more thorough understanding of the role's multifaceted nature.

5. Conclusion

The initial hypothesis framing this study projected a significant disparity between the expectations for Athletic Directors (ADs) and the content of job postings, suggesting a greater emphasis on administrative and technological skills over prior coaching and teaching experiences. Contrary to this assumption, responses gathered from the survey indicate a stark divergence from this notion. While ADs acknowledged the importance of administrative and management skills, a notable 45.5 percent affirmed that having coached at least one sport was the most crucial experience for success in their role. One AD underscored this perspective, emphasizing that their coaching experience builds trust among parents, students, and coaches. Despite 87 percent considering themselves technologically savvy, none deemed it the standout quality for success. This suggests that while technological and administrative facets have evolved within the AD's role, fundamental coaching experiences remain paramount.

The second hypothesis posited that ADs would recognize the job's demand for knowledge in law, medicine, and accounting, surpassing what is typically outlined in job descriptions. Yet, survey responses refuted this hypothesis,

with the majority asserting that management, administration, and coaching knowledge took precedence over the relevance of law, medicine, and accounting. Notably, one AD highlighted the omission of public relations as an essential part of their position. The ever-changing nature of the role and the disparities across districts underscore the need for ADs to adapt to varying demands. While current perspectives may downplay the significance of medical knowledge, future shifts in policies, safety considerations, and budget constraints may necessitate revisiting these qualifications.

In essence, while current qualifications may not explicitly emphasize skills in law, accounting, medicine, and technology on a daily basis, the evolving landscape suggests a potential for ADs to wear multiple hats in the future. Changes in policies, program adjustments, and the evolving nature of sports require a proactive reassessment of the needs of schools and the preparedness of ADs to undertake unforeseen tasks. The prominent and vital position of ADs necessitates a forward-looking approach, acknowledging the potential for adaptation to future challenges in an ever-evolving educational landscape.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The greatest limitation in this study was the lack of diversity in respondents. Parameters were quite specific in who would be surveyed and who would not qualify, so the ability to get diverse candidates is limited to who is hired for the position. For example, if a list of every public high school in New Jersey was generated and athletic directors were identified, the idea that the ratio of male to female or white to black to Asian to Hispanic would be equal and represent fair diversity is not probable. In short, diversity could not be as forced for this survey as it could in other studies.

Every public high school is different. From the way the administration runs the organization to the student body population, it can be challenging to compare and contrast different schools and their athletic programs. One school which can be referred to as "School A" may have a student body of 1,200 and contest a total of twenty-five sports throughout the school year. Another school which could be referred to as "School B" may only have a student body of 800 students and contest a mere ten sports per school year. This type of difference can be challenging to factor into analysis. Athletic directors in both schools may have different responsibilities because of the size of their student population as well as the number of sports they are involved in. School A may have to focus more on scheduling whereas School B may spend more time working on funding for the few sports they have.

The job title may be the same: School A and School B both have athletic directors to build and monitor their athletic programs. However, just because the title is the same does not mean that the workload and responsibilities are the same. It is challenging to find a way to capture those differences while keeping the survey anonymous.

Defining the term high school athletic director is also a limitation because there are so many variations of the job. Similar to the struggles of schools being different, the title of athletic director itself may come with alternate responsibilities. Some schools require their athletic directors to only supervise and schedule athletic activities whereas others have more involved expectations. Many schools have their ADs also oversee the physical education program, health programs, or even act as vice principals. Because there are so

many variations of duties, not all AD's have the same perspective.

Think of it like this: those who not only oversee the extra-curricular athletics but also function as the supervisor of physical education and health may find that they spend a lot more time on their administrative role. Those who only work with the athletics program may find coaching to be something they spend more time dealing with. The demands of the job differ, and so capturing the true scope of work is a challenge. There is no one set definition of high school athletic director, just as there is no set diversity standard or population for a school. When there are so many differentiating factors, it makes the researcher have to get creative with the way questions are posed as well as making them reconsider what information they look to take away from the study.

Districts with varying budgets may have the ability to hire qualified professionals such as athletic trainers to monitor the health and wellness of student athletes. In cases like this, the AD would not be as involved in the medical issues and clearances of the athlete, and therefore would not deem medical knowledge as something they need to worry about. Those schools who have less discretionary money to spend on hiring a full-time athletic trainer may require more of their athletic staff including coaches and AD's. Because this study did not go in depth to look if each district surveyed did have an athletic trainer on staff, it alters the scope of work the AD may have. In addition, if the school has effective lawyers and accountants in the district, the AD will not have to focus on these skills. Overall, the variation of district balance sheets makes it challenging to get standard answers with few deviations.

In the future, it would be incredibly beneficial for the scope of this study to be broader and include more in-depth questions. Participants were asked to fill out a thirty-question multiple choice and one short answer question for the simple reason that these professionals are busy people: asking them to carve out an hour or more of their time to participate in a study would be a challenging request and would most likely result in far less participation.

It would also be interesting to perform the same study on a group of private school AD's and see what the difference is between the two. As stated previously, the job of a private school AD and public-school AD differs in the fact that one is governed by the state and the other is, to a degree, a lot less. To compare the similarities and differences between the two jobs could be beneficial when educating and training future AD's.

The greatest area of benefit future research could assist is in the training of future AD's. When in school there are very few teachers or professors who are able to help students understand the true difference between each level of athletic directing, and what each would require. Just as public and private schools operate differently, so do division 1, 2, and 3 colleges as well as high schools, middle schools, and private leagues. Often times these are all lumped together under the broad term "sport administration." If more defined, definite qualifications and experiences were set for each of the diverse types of athletic directors, it would greatly help those in training to know exactly what they need to pursue their dream career. By expanding this study to not only get a more in depth look at public schools and private schools, but to also evaluate the various levels of college sports it would ensure that the next generation of athletic directors are getting the training and guidance they need in order to be successful.

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