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An Examination of the Impacts that Parental Actions have on the Athletic Experience of their Children.

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An Examination of the Impacts that Parental Action have on the Athletic Experience of their Children.

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ABSTRACT

As athletic competition at all levels has become more prominent over the last 10-15 years, so has the involvement of parents in many aspects (Frankl, 2004). The purpose of this study was to examine the impacts that parental actions have on the athletic experience of their children at the college level. This study involved 108 student-athletes and 17 coaches, at an NCAA Division III school, who completed separate questionnaires sharing their perspectives on parental involvement, ranging from past experiences to present-day situations in college. The findings may be useful in helping administrators at post-secondary schools identify various trends, enhance the student-athlete/coach experience and better solve potential issues in the future. Results mostly aligned with past research, suggesting that coaches view parents slightly less favorably, and more realistically, than student-athletes do, although the total results were fairly positive in most areas.

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STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Each year, more than 30 million children, 4.5 million coaches and 1.5 million administrators become involved in various programs or leagues for youth athletics (Frankl, 2004). As a result, many participants have been affected by excessive cases of parental misconduct as these parents can fall into a trap of emotional and over-financial involvement. Of all sports fans, parents of younger athletes have the tendency to become the most dedicated and emotionally invested (Frankl, 2004). Many kids become involved in athletics for different reasons, such as finding a path in life, seeking competition, trying to make friends, joining because others are participating or being pushed into playing by a parent (Frankl, 2004). Different outlooks on athletics between parents and their children have the ability to create conflict and negative situations for those involved (Frankl, 2004). These unfortunate situations can arise from youth athletics and remain relevant as the athlete progresses through high school and into the college ranks.

As Frankl stated above, many have witnessed unfortunate situations and shocking stories throughout high school and college experiences (2004). As a high school and college basketball player, the researcher played with and against many athletes that had overbearing, over-involved and unrealistic parents. Some of these parents obviously overstep their grounds when it came to their child's playing time, role on the team, relationship with coaches and teammates, their own relationships with fellow parents, and other general experiences. We have seen many teammates ask their parents to "back off" and settle down. In addition to the researcher's undergraduate experiences, his awareness of this issue dramatically increased after working at a small liberal-arts university as a Sports Information Director (SID). SID's are a critical liaisons between varsity sport programs and the outside public, consisting of media, fans, conference offices,

administrators from other schools, and parents.

We as a society, specifically parents and coaches, continue to face the challenge of assuring the athlete a positive experience throughout their years of athletics. Some of these kids may emerge into prolific athletes, while most others will play for the “love of the game” and eventually move onto another passion by the time they graduate from school. Nearly 70 percent of kids decide to quit playing sports by the time they reach age 13, and the percentage only increases by the time they turn 15 (Abrams, 2002). When asked why they quit, most answer that practices and games are no longer fun because parents and/or coaches imposed too much pressure, often yelling at them for making errors (Abrams, 2002). This adult-induced dropout rate often cancels the opportunity to teach valuable lessons to millions of younger athletes as they continue to evolve.

As youth athletics, elementary through high school, continues to evolve, it becomes increasingly important to “coach” the parents involved. Parents are a vital piece of the equation, often volunteering time to help transport younger athletes from event to event or dedicate time to coaching/instructing. It is more necessary than ever for coaches and league administrators to seek new and effective strategies that help refocus the energies of parents, such as examining the coach’s role, setting a code of conduct for the parents, and finding ways to effectively relay that message (NASPE, 2014). The main focus should be to find a proper balance between pushing your child to be successful, while also allowing for a fun and low-stress experience. Succeeding in this can eliminate possibilities of negative situations occurring once the athlete enters high school and college. Doing a poor job has the ability to encourage damaging behaviors and instill poor principles in athletes once they arrive at any post-secondary setting.

College administrators have the responsibility of handling many negative situations

involving parents. Developing a better understanding of what ignites these situations, and the most prevalent issues that exist, will create an easier process of effectively handling these occurrences. Parents and families of athletes play a vital role in in the attributes of an athletic scene, oftentimes making up a nice portion of crowds and turning into donors for various campus projects. It's important to foster good relationships with this population, but equally important to not allow them to become too impactful. Looking ahead to the future, it will become vital to try and stay ahead of the game, making sure we have the proper knowledge and ideas to help prevent any small issues from ballooning into larger problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PARENT MISCONDUCT

A Canadian youth league, the Vancouver Island Amateur Hockey Association, began taking aim at parents earlier this year by removing children from the league in which their parents acted inappropriately (Bains, 2015). The league, consisting of kids ages 11-13, was forced to handle more and more difficult situations with parents demonstrating poor sportsmanship and causing up to 60 referees to quit. League officials say that, while the children are able to let go of a loss and mingle with other players after games, the parents often become nasty and hold grudges. Bains notes that mayhem from these parents generally arises when children become nine or ten years old, a time when they often develop the ability to play for competitive leagues or travel teams.

A Youth Sports Research Council at Rutgers University (N.J.) has begun looking closely at situations of "sports rage" throughout the last 10-15 years, citing many occurrences of violence that are ravaging the sports landscape (Heinzmann, 2002). Many wondered if this was a growing trend or just simple media hype, but the continuous cases over the years are hard to

ignore. Instead of looking at individual stories, because some facts or reported details can be misleading, the council chose to examine what exactly causes parents to misbehave. Many explanations of why rage occurs are a bit shortsighted, but it's important to establish the difference between rage and anger. The people at Rutgers came to the conclusion that anger is a bit more natural while rage is violent, uncontrollable and generally has a trigger of something specific. One negative role model can ruin someone's experience or outlook, and parents can often start seeing their child's athletics as more of an investment, with college scholarships, other perks and a multitude of attention at hand. In summation, the youth sports council at Rutgers suggests that parents who act inappropriately at sporting events do so for a handful of reasons, most notably personality factors, the rapid pace of modern society, and underlying societal pressures, rather than circumstances inherent to sports. Other societal factors include the influence of technology, negative role models and an entertainment industry that markets violence. (Heinzmann, 2002)

OPINIONS OF CHILDREN AND COACHES

The Youth Sport Research Consortium at the University of Minnesota Conducted research to gain an understanding of parent/spectator behavior at sporting events (Omli, LaVoi and Wise-Bjornstal, 2008). The emotional bond between parents and children, along with the heat of competition, suggests that conflicts through sports are not always easy to avoid. Watching a child play sports can be a stressful experience for some parents, but one note to remember is that the feelings of the child are more important. Swearing tirades, berating officials, brawling with other parents or confronting a coach does not enhance the experience of your child in any way. Observation data through this research stated that the percentage of parent comments that are negative range from 23-45 percent, depending on the sport. Another piece of

observational data cited within this research illustrates that 35 percent of coaches feel parent involvement prohibits player development in some way. (Omli, et al., 2008)

Although little research has been conducted, the research that has been conducted suggests children prefer a supportive parent who does not morph into a crazed fan or demanding coach (Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, and Power, 2005). These four professors representing Division I institutions performed a study to assess the frequency of good and poor sports behaviors from the athlete perspective. A total of 803 middle-school aged kids, representing 10 different sports, completed a behavioral and attitudinal survey. In addition, 189 parents and 61 coaches were also polled. This study examined the perspectives that coaches, athletes and parents all had relating to one another. The data demonstrated that approximately 14 percent of parents tend to get angry at their child when he/she does not perform well. Another telling statistic was 21 percent of children admitting that they prefer their parent(s) stay home when they compete in athletics. Nearly 40 percent of athletes said they have been embarrassed by the action of a spectator at some point.

A Sports Illustrated article, titled "Taking the Fun Out of the Game," highlights how kids begin playing sports because they enjoy them, but that parents tend to have many other possible reasons for wanting the same thing (Underwood, 1975). The article was one of the first pieces of national literature addressing this area of concern in athletics and society. Underwood cites many different youth-sport leagues and the specifics of their rules and regulations. Some have positive characteristics, while others may not seem as up to par. More important are the various nuances that go on within each league and reported culture stemming from actions of those running them. It lists a few statistics regarding parent involvement, but more so just shows how prevalent this issue can be all across the country.

A 2007 study through the *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* polled 676 athletes in grades 5-8, a span selected because this is most often the time when competitive sports become school-sponsored (Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, and Power, 2007). The study used a seven-section, survey-style questionnaire featuring 53 total questions that helped gain insight into a variety of areas. Section topics included poor behavior, athlete attitude regarding poor sportsmanship, predicted teammate behavior, perceived poor sportsmanship of the coaches, perceived poor sportsmanship of spectators, and the norm of parental attitudes and sportsmanship. The advantages of the study include reaching a larger audience and covering a wide variety of topics, but disadvantages could be the concern that not everyone would be completely truthful or make it through the longer questionnaire. A one-way ANOVA test was conducted and it was determined that poor behavior by coaches and spectators matters most to athletes. Poor behavior from coaches was noted as the highest response while a spectators' poor behavior followed just behind. It is worth noting that most spectators at youth or high school sporting events are generally parents and other family members (Shields et al., 2007).

Bob Bigelow, one of the most prominent youth sports speakers in the country, has spent the last 20 years researching and conducting lectures about organized youth sports and its effects on both children and adults (2001). A 2006 survey conducted by Bigelow featured 225 responses from adults, ages 36-45, involved in youth sports for various amounts of time; 95 percent for at least four years and 49 percent for at least 10 years. The subjects weighed in on topics regarding the improvement of youth athletics as a whole. The areas of the study that were rated most positive included equitable playing time, fairness of referees, number of games, emphasis on fun and the number of practices. The five areas that rated somewhat or mostly negative were

retention of kids as they get older, training of coaches, opportunities for late bloomers, impact of travel programs on kids and the behavior of parents at games.

ATTENTION IN THE MEDIA

Although there is no research on this specific issue in the media, anecdotal examples are present. The issue is now so relevant that Ray Lewis, a former NFL linebacker, is co-hosting a show titled “Coaching Bad” on Spike TV. With youth sports, a large chunk of coaches are parents of kids on the team. Good coaches and parents inspire us, but there is an obvious growing epidemic of these same adults with various issues spreading across today’s sports landscape. Lewis, along with an anger-management specialist, tackles this problem during the show and attempt to change unacceptable behaviors. Regardless of how the show is configured or how much is actually authentic, the fact remains that this topic is relevant enough to develop a television series.

Going hand in hand with “Coaching Bad” is a show on the *Esquire Network* titled “Friday Night Tykes.” This series, now in its second season, follows a youth football league and discusses the valuable lessons parents believe the sport teaches their children. However, these parent responses raise questions to viewers such as how much competition is too much, and at what price are parents pushing their kids to win? The foundation of parent-child relationships within sports begins at a young age, but a fine line exists between how and what we teach kids during these youth moments. Finally, an HBO documentary titled “State of Play”, premiering in December of 2013, documents parents trying to turn their children into superstar athletes. This show takes on complex themes throughout sports and exploring how the actions relate to a larger society.

REASONS FOR JOINING ATHLETICS

Once athletes reach middle school or high school, it can become easier to get more detailed responses to help identify how parental involvement correlates with their experience and future decisions as college approaches. In 1989, J.G. Nicholls began developing a concept called ‘Goal Theory,’ suggesting and explaining how and why a person wants to demonstrate their ability in achievement situations (Shields, et al., 2007). This concept postulates that a main reason an individual chooses to participate in athletics is to demonstrate competence. Competition can bring out a unique side of individuals playing sport, who generally strive for validation in this area and have a hard time not comparing themselves to others. Sometimes, when our plan or expectation does not go as planned, it can be easy to act out and demonstrate poor sportsmanship. This is applicable not just to athletes, but also to their parents, who oftentimes create their own expectations or ideas of how things should go once their child begins playing organized sports.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

A study through *The Psychology of Sport and Exercise* helps examine parental involvement in these types of settings (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn and Wall, 2008). Methods of data collection were different than the previously studies, focusing first on observing families and then the youth league as a whole. Data was collected from four different families through individual interviews, audio diaries and first-hand observations over 120 hours. Phase two then involved observing a youth soccer league setting. Although it did not involve a large sample size, as only four families were interviewed and observed, it does provide a chance to observe on a more direct and first-hand basis. This provides an opportunity to gain raw, authentic data.

The ultimate purpose of this study was to identify the most commonly cited “negative

events or circumstances” that are brought forward by student-athletes and coaches, considering the role of parents can change once their child reaches the college level (Galluci, 2012). Parents are called on to support the child but may not be in as much control, instead providing the necessary freedom for their kids to mature and handle growing responsibilities with school, work and ultimately their professional lives. Accepting the developmental timeline and relinquishing control is critical (Galluci, 2012).

RESEARCH QUESTION

The focus of the research question was to explore and determine the most important, underlying issues regarding parental involvement in their children’s athletic endeavors, and the impact it has on the student. In addition, the study seeks input from coaches. As it relates to athletic administrators, it is critical that any staff member within a collegiate athletic department understands the nature of how, and what, parental actions can both positively and negatively affect the experience.

HYPOTHESIS

Due to the scarce amount of literature regarding parental issues at the small-college level, it was still slightly unclear as to what should be expected from the research. However, based on the literature that was accessible regarding youth athletics, it is expected that results should be fairly similar to previous findings and appear to line-up with past trends. In other words, the researcher expects to find that coaches believe parents place a much higher importance on areas such as playing time and statistics than the student-athletes will say, and, that student-athletes will be somewhat favorable to parents, but not entirely.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

Coaches and student-athletes were recruited to voluntarily participate in this study, with no incentives offered in exchange for completing the questionnaires. The participants were selected from a small Midwest liberal arts university at the Division III level using a convenience sample. The research study had the goal of receiving 225 student responses, which would equate to 50 percent of the approximate 450 student-athletes attending the school (the number is closer to 500 if you were to count dual-sport athletes twice). In addition, completed questionnaires from the 28 full-time, part-time or seasonally-paid coaches, responding to similar questions, would add to the findings and provide a varying perspective for ensuing data analysis. While every student-athlete or coach in this population possesses different individual characteristics, they all share the same characteristic of competing in athletics and experiencing the world of competitive sports, at one point or another. Everyone has different experiences, but all subjects possess the common ground necessary to be considered a valued participant in the survey. Their experiences are what make them unique and useful.

INSTRUMENTS

Two separate questionnaires (see appendices A and B) were used to help collect data in this research study. A 14-question survey was provided to each student-athlete while a 16-question survey was electronically distributed to every coach. The student-athletes were asked to answer questions, based off previous research and the ideas of the researcher, regarding their experiences within athletics at both the youth and collegiate level. Questions regarding the athletes' youth and college experiences, specifically regarding the most important actions a parent can take that negatively and positively affect their experience, highlighted the

questionnaire. In addition, questions regarding the athlete perspective on how their parents view statistics and playing time, and whether they have witnessed altercations of some kind, were also included. Coaches were asked to complete a similar questionnaire. These tactics allow the researcher to adequately compare the student-athlete viewpoints from youth to college sports, along with comparing responses from coaches and their players on the same topic matters. The questionnaires were developed using 'Survey Planet' (www.surveypplanet.com) and emailed to each participant. These instruments ask the questions to ultimately obtain direct responses for the study.

During this stage, the researcher also sought out the help of a few volunteer-assistant coaches to serve as pilot testers and take the coaching questionnaire. At the same time, the researcher acquired the help of a close friend (and former college athlete) to take the student-athlete questionnaire. This quick process helped illustrate a few issues and allowed for small tweaks to be made before officially distributing to current student-athletes.

To enhance the reliability and validity of qualitative research, the Delphi Technique has been a widely-used approach to seek advice from others with knowledge on a certain topic. This technique is an accepted method of contacting certain individuals with an expertise in your field or topic of interest, and allowing them to critically analyze your methods (Hsu and Sandford, 2007). This process aims to achieve a convergence of opinions and can determine a range of possible program alternatives. In this instance, the questionnaire was sent to Bob Bigelow, an expert in the field who has previously done youth research (2001), seeking feedback on the questions asked and general flow of the survey. The researcher reached out and made contact with Bob Bigelow, explaining the background of the research project and asking for any advice regarding the design of the questionnaires, which had been included for his review. Bigelow

responded with a phone call, but it did not come until shortly after this project was completed.

PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION

After receiving IRB approval, the researcher made contact with the university's Director of Athletics to sit down and explain the project. After obtaining permission, the researcher then spoke to coaches at the institution asking to attend an organized team function (practice, lifting, film session) to briefly introduce himself, the general study and explain the basic intentions.

The researcher attended a team function to give a quick briefing, and explain that an electronic questionnaire is soon forthcoming via email to help make the athletes more aware and comfortable. The researcher's goal was to get the entire team together, explain exactly who they are and that they had permission for the project from the university and the Director of Athletics. This ultimately was to help increase the response rate. Before departing, the researcher left an introductory letter for each athlete to pick up and take with them. This letter contains most of the same information that was just shared, but allows them to take a hard copy with them and look back with any questions.

The email begins with a quick reiteration of the project and how their results would be helpful, while reiterating that their participation was completely voluntary, confidential and unidentifiable to the researcher. Near the end of the email was a consent notification, explaining that, by clicking forward, the subject agrees to take part in the survey but can also stop at any time if they do not feel like finishing. A link going directly to the survey was provided as the final item on the email (student-athletes and coaches had different links). The researcher sent the email and accompanying link to survey within a few days of speaking to each team. By doing this, the recent conversation at their team function was still fresh in their minds. With this approach, it was important to not wait longer than one week in sending the email.

PLANNED STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

After receiving all completed questionnaires, the grouping within the statistical analysis will expand to differentiate responses between coaches from male and female sports, along with male and female student-athletes. Every question on the student-athlete survey, and all but one for the coaching questionnaire, provides either multiple choice or scaled answers. This makes it easy to chart and develop tools to analyze. For the scaled responses, a two-sample T-test (at a 95 percent confidence level) was implemented to compare the answers of coaches versus student-athletes. In addition, a paired T-test was utilized when dissecting certain student responses to one another. For example, this comes in useful when comparing how involved a students' parents were in helping them making a college decision to how supportive they were of their child ultimately choosing that school. For the lone open-ended question on the coaching questionnaire, the responses are coded into a smaller number of categories once the results were received and themes began arising. All facts and figures can also be viewed using options of pie charts, bar graphs or line graphs through the *Survey Planet* website.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation with this study was data collection time; finding time to meet with as many teams as possible, and also meet with as many student-athletes on those teams as possible, during the specific time period. To help address these obstacles throughout, the researcher attempted to brief individual coaches on the project as far in advance as possible, giving them adequate time to decide on the best day for the meeting at practice to occur. Because this process started in October, the researcher started by talking to fall-sport coaches and teams, followed by winter-sport programs and so on. The researcher was able to attend a practice for nearly every fall and winter-sport team. Most athletes and coaches were there for this quick session, but not

always every athlete. While at the team function, the researcher asked the coaches and student-athletes in attendance to pass the information along to anyone that may not be present. The primary challenge came with spring-sport programs, which were not “in-season” during this time and, subsequently, were not frequently meeting as a group. Due to many students leaving campus during the holiday break, the researcher was unable to find a time to meet with a handful of spring teams before the data-collection process deadline occurred. Because of these obstacles, men’s and women’s lacrosse, baseball, softball, golf and both track and field teams were not able to participate in the study.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

There were no identified potential risks with this study, although there could possibly be some psychological stress involved in recalling any negative past experiences. Voluntary participation allowed the student-athletes and coaches to stop at any point. In addition, a participant could have felt that a previous encounter or conflict with a parent is a sensitive issue that may be difficult to relive. Again, this potential situation was eased by allowing the participants to stop the survey at any point they felt uncomfortable.

It was also important to establish consistency within a measurement when repeating under identical conditions. The reliability of this survey method directly related to how consistent the researcher was with distributing the questionnaire to the coaches and student-athletes. The researcher did not ask the coaches to directly distribute the survey to his/her respective team to avoid any potential conflict of interests or misinterpretations. Attending a team function was critical, because the researcher may know or be familiar with some student-athletes, but not all of them. The study was explained the same way, each and every time, by the researcher. By doing this, all of the student-athletes and coaches expected the electronic

questionnaire to arrive, had the same understanding of how to complete it, and its ultimate intended use. This increased the overall reliability.

The researcher clearly stated and reassured the potential participants that their involvement was purely optional, and that coaches had no grounds for discipline should they choose not to partake. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the researcher's institution approved the study, as well as the Director of Athletics and all coaches making up the athletic department. They were made aware of these details, approved of this study and target population, and gave consent to proceed.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Overall, 108 student-athletes and 17 coaches participated in the survey. The 108 students (57 males and 51 females) covered 10 varsity sports, representing football, men's and women's soccer, volleyball, men's and women's basketball, men's and women's tennis and, finally, men's and women's cross country. Nearly two-thirds of coaches responded to the survey, with seven holding 1-5 years of experience. Five more had between 6-10 years of experience, three with 11-15 and two others between 16-20 years. Of the group, 11 coached a female sport and six coached males.

STUDENT-ATHLETE FINDINGS

Eighty four out of the 108 student-athletes listed that a parent coached them in a sport growing up, and were then asked to reflect and rate, on a scale of 1-10 (10 always being the highest on this survey) if they would have wanted their parents to coach a youth team. The average response was a 6.78, with 100 answering the question and eight deciding to leave it blank. Other scaled questions that were student-specific included how involved the parents were

in helping with the college decision, and how supportive they ultimately were of that decision. Students rated their parents at an average of 7.5 on involvement and a 9.28 on supportiveness.

When asked to check all that apply, regarding how their parents were involved with their athletic experiences growing up, responses were as follows: attending games (107), paying for lessons (101), transporting to and from events (101), discussions at home (93), helping practice in spare time (75), coaching the team (52) and other (4). When asked to check all that apply, regarding how their parents currently remain involved in their athletic experiences, responses were as follows: attending games (102), discussions over the phone/at home (94), paying for lessons and gear (68), helping practice in spare time (24), coaching the team (2), other (1) and none of the above (1).

Eighty six students said that their parents have never gotten into a confrontation with a coach, while 21 said they have at some point. Of the 21 that said yes, all noted it was a verbal encounter and not a physical one. Only 17 students answered that their parent has gotten into a confrontation with another parent or player, while 91 did not. Of those responses, just one was listed as a physical encounter. When prompted to list what, if any, parental actions embarrass them the most as it relates to athletics, student responses were as follows: none of the above (71), yelling at referees (14), yelling at the student (11), not attending games (6), arguing with parents (4), arguing with a coach (3) and other (3). Ten students left this question blank and all but four of the 108 listed that nobody has ever complained to them about the action of their parent(s).

COACH FINDINGS

All but four coaches said that they had only needed to handle a situation with an unhappy parent once or twice throughout the year. Coaches were prompted to list their opinion on what the single-most positive and negative action a parent can take to affect their child's athletic

experience. On the positive question, 11 said being a supportive listener is the best thing a parent can do, while the others said attending games is the most positive attribute. For the negative aspect, eight coaches said that arguing with your child's coach is the worst action a parent can take. Placing too much pressure or expectation on your child was the second-highest response, with four coaches choosing that option.

All but two coaches said the most common complaint they receive from parents is in regards to playing time for their son/daughter. One coach said the most frequent complaint is their inability to evaluate talent while one other coach said they have never received a parent complaint. Ten of the 17 coaches have been in a verbal confrontation with a parent before, with none experiencing the situation more than four times in their coaching career. All 17 responded that they have never been in a physical confrontation. Only three coaches have witnessed a parent getting into an altercation with another parent at a university event, and of those three, each said they have only seen it occur once. Eleven have witnessed a parent yelling at their child before or after an athletic event, with two seeing it just once, four coaches watching it happen between 2-4 times, three between 5-10 times and one other coach that has watched it happen more than 10 times.

COMPARING STUDENT-ATHLETES AND COACHES

Both student-athletes and coaches were asked identical questions regarding playing time and the importance of statistics, being asked to rate (on a scale of 1-10), the importance that parents place on both the playing time of their child and their accompanying stats. We also compared the responses of questions five and six of the student-athlete questionnaire, which asked how involved their parents were in the decision to attend their university, and how supportive they ultimately were of that choice. See Appendix C for that complete comparison.

On the first T-Test regarding the importance parents place on statistics, you will see that students rated their parents at an average of 4.54 out of 10, while the average rating from coaches was higher, at 6.41. In regards to importance on playing time, students rated their parents at an average of 5.58. On the opposite side, coaches rated parents at an average of 7.53. For the third comparison, students said that their parents were involved with their college decision-making process at 7.50 out of a possible 10, while also following up to say that the average supportiveness was at 9.36.

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

CONCLUSIONS

The research question was answered, with results showing that the most common negative actions taken by parents at the university are yelling at referees and yelling at their own child. The hypothesis was supported as results showed student-athletes rating parents a more favorably than coaches did. The averages on scaled questions are similar to averages and percentages in past research. While the goal of the study was to obtain 225 student-athlete responses, getting 108 to take part resulted in a sufficient sample size for analysis. Although very few spring sports were able to take the survey, the breakdown of male and females spanning all other sports was acceptable. Based on data from media and television shows, it was no surprise that over 75 percent of these student-athletes were coached, at some point, by one of their parents. It also appears that most students had a fairly positive experience being coached by a parent during their youth, as we saw the average rating came in at a 6.78 (out of 10) when asked if they would have wanted their parent(s) to coach a team of theirs. The number initially seemed a bit low, feeling that the experience would rate a little higher. However, when compared to past research (Shields et al., 2007), it becomes apparent that some parents cause problems and others

are sufficient, so a mean of almost seven on this scale is appropriate.

One of the most positive statistics to view was that almost all student-athletes feel that their parents were supportive of their decision to attend their selected school. When viewing those scaled responses, we saw rating of 7.5 regarding involvement on the decision, and a 9.28 on supportiveness. This number reflects that most students begin their college athletic careers on a good note and have the proper backing. When studying the results, it also becomes very noticeable that the most positive ways a parent should affect their child's experiences are by attending games, being a supportive listener and assisting them with miscellaneous expenses when possible/appropriate. These three answers, along with parents helping with practice, were the most frequent from both students and coaches. As aligned with previous research (Abrams, 2002), athletes tend to respond best when parents are present supporters who serve as "utility" players, helping their child with whatever they need. The child is generally negatively affected when their parent begins questioning play calls and coaching decisions, becomes too demanding and creates lofty expectations. As tough as it may be for parents, a college-aged athlete also does not need the parent to push them via practicing as much as they did during younger days. They now have paid coaches, athletic trainers and other instructors to assist with those areas.

Another positive finding was the lack of students who listed their parent as ever getting into an altercation at a sporting event. Less than 20 percent of all athletes noted their parent has ever been in a confrontation, with just one of those admitting that it was a physical encounter. This accompanies the coaching feedback which said 10 of 17 had been in a verbal confrontation at some point, but none more than four times.. Also encouraging is the number of students (71) that said none of the listed parent actions embarrassed them. The highest action, yelling at referees, garnered just 14 votes while 11 said they become bothered when their parents yells at

them. All in all, just four of the 108 students said someone has complained to them about the action of their parents.

More positive results came when reviewing the coach's feedback, although 12 of the 17 hold fewer than 10 years of experience and may not have experience dealing with multiple decades of athletes. Despite polling many less-experienced coaches, it is encouraging to see that no coaches are forced to deal with unhappy-parent situation more than just a few times per year. From these results, you are able to conclude that most coaches have had a generally positive experience relating to their players' parents, with conflicts not occurring very frequently.

The two main cross-over results within these surveys are seeing how student-athletes and coaches view parents when it comes to playing time and statistics. Both populations were asked the same questions; on a scale of 1-10, how much of an importance to your parents place on playing time, and then the same question for statistics. In regards to playing time, the average student response was a 5.58 while the coaching average was 7.53. This gap was expected, although the researcher expected the average from coaches to be higher. From the researcher's experience, and after reviewing previous literature (Bains, 2015), it seems that parents should be much closer to a nine. Students seemed to rate their parents as expected. A similar outcome came in regards to importance on statistics, with students rating their parents at an average of 4.54 while the coaching perspective came in at 6.41. The researcher also expected this gap between the two, but expected the coach's perspective to be a bit higher. Parents do not seem to be as concerned with statistics as they do with playing time, but an average of seven or eight seems more appropriate. Overall, the results fair well for the culture and community of this institution.

LIMITATIONS

The results are limited by having only 24 percent of the student-athlete population take

part. While this response rate provided a small sample size, it does not fully depict the exact views of the students. The response rate of coaches had a higher rate of response, at 61 percent, but several of the participants were new coaches with relatively little experience. The study featured a simple questionnaire and nothing more to garner results. Taking further steps to sit down and personally interview each coach, or attending events to note first-hand observations would expand the possibilities and decrease limitations. Truthfulness is a slight limitation on these results, as there is no actual way of knowing how honest a student will get regarding the behavior of their parents. If the parents are behaving poorly, it can be embarrassing for the athlete to admit. Lastly, when a handful of students marked the “other” category on a few responses, they tended to leave it blank and not provide what that additional answer was.

USE OF RESULTS

These results can benefit players, coaches and parents at the university, illustrating what types of behaviors are considered positive and negative. This study can also be beneficial for athletic administrators at this particular post-secondary school, along with other comparable institutions in the area. However, its generalizability is limited due to setting and small sample size. If the issue of overbearing and entitled parents remains relevant, having a handful of quick statistics and research on your school can keep administrators ahead of the game and ready to address problems as they arise. Athletic administrators generally seek feedback from student-athletes and its staff on a variety of topics. Knowing and understanding certain trends, and having proactive conversations ahead of time helps counteract issues and makes a key difference in the functionality of an athletic department. While this is introductory research, it still lays the foundation for improving culture and keeping an eye on potential trends/movements. This information can be a building block for any post-secondary school that wants to take a closer

look and expand on this issue.

FURTHER RESEARCH

As previously stated, this study can serve as a starting point for future study that examines the trends of parental impact on children's athletic experiences. While 25 percent of the student-athlete population was sufficient in this study, improving that total number to encompass the perspectives of more sports is ideal. In addition, this research could expand outside the walls of this particular setting and include schools within the conference, region, state, and other divisional levels. Additional research could attempt to get parents involved in the picture and thus include views from all three pieces in the equation, not just two. First-hand observations could also be a part of further research. Attending events and witnessing/charting actions would give the research another dimension.

SUMMARY

In summation, the growing trend of negative parental involvement in their children's athletics endeavors is a topic worth keeping an eye on. There is currently not much research on this topic at the college level. This study polled 108 student-athletes and 17 coaches to gain an understanding of trends happening at this university. Topics included ways that parent actions embarrass student-athletes, the importance parents place on statistics and playing time, ways in which parents can positively affect their child's experience, the frequency in which coaches are forced to handle unhappy parents, the frequency in which coaches witness poor parent behavior and the input parents had on the child's decision of where to attend college. In addition to demographics, results were charted both separately for student-athlete and coach responses and also directly compared. This study gave both populations a small voice regarding those areas of parental involvement in their athletic careers. It allows for comparison of parent and student

perspectives and reevaluation going forward towards future research.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT-ATHLETE QUESTIONNAIRE – web based

YOUTH SPORTS REFLECTION:

Did your parent(s) ever coach an athletic team of yours while you were growing up (elementary through high school)? If so, please list the sports and number of years for each.

Sport	Years
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

If no, on a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), would you have wanted your parents to coach a youth team of yours while growing up? Please circle.

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 - 10

In which ways did your parent(s) stayed involved with your athletic experiences growing up? Check all that apply.

- Coaching the team
- Helping you practice in spare time
- Attending games
- Discussions at home
- OTHER (please list: _____)

Identify any parent actions that embarrassed you during youth athletics (elementary, middle school, high school). Check all that apply.

- Yelling at Referees
- Yelling at you (either before, during or after) on what you can do better
- Arguing with your coach
- Arguing with other parents

- Not attending games
 OTHER (please list: _____)

COLLEGE SPORTS REFLECTION:

On a scale of 1-10, how involved were your parents in helping you make a decision on where to play college sports? Please circle one.

Not involved 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 *Very involved*

Overall, would you say that your parent(s) supported your decision to attend Otterbein? Please circle one.

Absolutely, Not 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 *Absolutely, Yes*

Please identify the ways that your parent(s) currently stay involved with your athletic experience. Check all that apply.

- Helping you practice in spare time
 Attending games
 Discussions at home/over the phone
 Assist with finding individual instruction
 Coaching the team
 OTHER (please list: _____)

Identify any parent actions that embarrass you as it currently relates to playing sports. Check all that apply

- Yelling at Referees
 Yelling at you (either before, during or after) on what you can do better
 Arguing with your coach
 Arguing with other parents
 Not attending games
 None of the above
 OTHER (please list: _____)

GENERAL REFLECTION:

On a scale of 1-10, how concerned are your parents are in regards to your athletics statistics?

Not at all 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 *Very concerned*

On a scale of 1-10, how concerned are your parents with your amount of playing time?

Not at all 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 *Very concerned*

Has your parent ever gotten into a confrontation with a coach? Check all that apply.

- Yes, Verbal
- Yes, Physical
- No

Has your parent ever gotten into a confrontation with another parent or player? Check all that apply.

- Yes, Verbal
- Yes, Physical
- No

Has anyone ever complained to you about the actions of your parent(s) at a sporting event?

- Yes
- No

What is your gender? (please choose one)

Male Female

APPENDIX B

Coach Questionnaire – web based

Approximately how many times per season are you confronted with the need to handle a situation with an unhappy parent? Please check one.

- 0
 1-2
 3-4
 4-5
 6 or more

In your opinion, what is the single-most important action that a parent can take to *positively* affect their child's athletic experience? Please check just one.

- Attend Games
 Supportive Listener
 Pay for individual instruction
 Help practice in spare time
 OTHER: (Please list: _____)

In your opinion, what is the single-worst action that a parent can take to *negatively* affect their child's athletic experience?

- Argue with the coach
 Argue with other spectators at events
 Yell at referees
 Place too much pressure/expectation on their child
 Not attend games
 OTHER (Please list: _____)

What is the most common complaint you or your coaching staff receives from a parent?

Have you ever been in a verbal confrontation with a parent?

- Yes
 No

If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, how many times have you experienced this?

- 1

If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, how many times have you witnessed this action?

- 1
- 2-4
- 5-7
- 8-10
- More than 10

What is the gender of the sport that you coach?

- Male
- Female

APPENDIX C

Compared Results

1. Two-Sample T-Test and CI: Statistics - Student vs. Coach

Two-sample T for Importance of Statistics:

Student/Coach	#	Mean	StDev	SE Mean
Coach	17	6.41	2.29	0.56
Student	93	4.54	2.53	0.26

Difference = μ (Coach) - μ (Student)

Estimate for difference: 1.874

95% CI for difference: (0.602, 3.147)

T-Test of difference = 0 (vs not =): T-Value = 3.05 P-Value = 0.006 DF = 23

2. Two-Sample T-Test and CI: Playing Time – Student vs. Coach

Two-sample T for playing time:

Student/Coach	#	Mean	StDev	SE Mean
Coach	17	7.53	1.81	0.44
Student	96	5.58	2.35	0.24

Difference = μ (Coach) - μ (Student)

Estimate for difference: 1.951

95% CI for difference: (0.925, 2.978)

T-Test of difference = 0 (vs not =): T-Value = 3.91 P-Value = 0.001 DF = 26

3. Paired T-Test and CI: Q5 – Question 5 vs. Question 6 on Student Questionnaire

Paired T for Q5/Q6 - Parent Involvement on College Decision/Parent Support on Decision

	#	Mean	StDev	SE Mean
Q5 - On a scale of 1-10	105	7.50	10.42	1.02
Q6 - On a scale of 1-10	105	9.36	1.37	0.13
Difference	105	-1.86	10.39	1.01

95% CI for mean difference: (-3.87, 0.15)

T-Test of mean difference = 0 (vs not = 0): T-Value = -1.83 P-Value = 0.070