Interview & Reflection of Sport Professional Chris O’Donnell

Brad Loomis

Indiana University
**Logistics of the interview**

Throughout this class, the idea of being a professional has been preached time and time again. Clarifying or understanding the logistics of an interview or any other type of meeting for that matter is a vital yet simple part of being a professional. Punctuality is important because it shows that you care enough and are giving at least some sort of effort. Time management comes into play because you have to not only schedule the interview around the interviewee’s busy day but your agenda and other daily tasks as well.

In this particular interview, I had to schedule the interview to be over the phone because the person I’m interviewing works in Los Angeles which is three time zones away. This is actually easier to schedule than let’s say an interview in person because you have to find enough time that accounts for travel both to and from the place where you would choose to meet. Over the phone allows to conduct the interview from almost anywhere and you only need to find a small, time slot where you don’t have anything to do. I conducted the interview on Thursday November 9th at 3 PM ET. However, when I initially called him he told me to wait for him to call me back because he was in the middle of an unexpected Mission League meeting so I got the initial impression that being a high school athletic director could be more busy and unpredictable than I initially anticipated. So, I waited in my dorm room for a good hour where he called around four o’clock and I conducted the interview like I normally planned. I thanked him for his time
and insight at the beginning as well as apologized for interrupting his
meeting. The interview lasted just short of thirty minutes.

The sport professional’s name is Chris O’Donnell and he is the athletic
director at Loyola High School of Los Angeles. He runs an athletics program
rich with history and tradition as well as being filled with plenty of current
success making it the cream of the crop in the state of California. In the last
fifteen years, Loyola, an all-boys school, has won a record nine boys CIF-SS
(California Interscholastic Federation – Southern Section) Commissioners
Cups, which is an award given to the best athletic program for that year
based on the success of the school in each sport. Being a part of the Loyola
Football program for four years I have interacted with Mr. O’Donnell on
multiple occasions. Even if I weren’t associated with Loyola athletics, he
would’ve been more than willing to help a former Cub out. Loyola is a very
special community which includes an extensive and successful alumni
network that prides itself in helping former alumni out. Having the majority
of leaders in Los Angeles be graduates if not very familiar with high regards
of your alma mater will definitely be an advantage for me in life. This
relates to what we’ve talked about in class that it’s more about who you
know more than what you know when it comes to getting your foot into the
sport industry door.

I didn’t choose to interview Chris O’Donnell because I want to be a
high school athletic director when I grow up, I just wanted to interview
someone who is successful at whatever job they had inside the sports
industry. My only objective was to get a small taste of what it takes and I felt as though I accomplished that goal and got some really good information from the interview.

**Information about the sport professional/position**

I didn’t get too creative with the questions I asked him. However, I did try to keep the interview more of a dialogue in order to allow me to go off script to get more information. For the most part the questions I asked, as you’ll see in the appendix, fell in line with the information I needed to attain based on the assignment sheet.

His first job was at the YMCA in Westchester where he gave swimming lessons when he was sixteen or seventeen years old. After he graduated from Loyola he went to UCLA and then started coaching at Loyola right away. He coached for five years doing swimming and water polo. One job he did not particularly enjoy was the UCLA bookstore because it was very monotonous and boring. However, we concluded that with any type you a number of particular skills. You can learn what not to do from both yourself and other people. We also agreed that we can learn every day. Which can relate to networking with the attitude of trying to gain knowledge rather than get a job. He had a tough time deciding whether coaching at Loyola for ten years or teaching there for five years benefitted him the most career wise. In the end, he chose coaching because it taught him patience and that there wasn’t just one way to get anything. He was enabled to extend his teaching to beyond the classroom.
He said the type of skills needed to be a high school athletic director depends on the type of environment and/or type of sport industry. Loyola is an all-boys, private school that’s the type of school that doesn’t worry about a bus. Where as a place like Alemany, another school in our league may not be as affluent plus they are coed which may require a different type of skill set. He emphatically exclaimed that you better be ready to work hard and give up a lot of time if you’re going to work in sport. Which brought up the topic of potential family life conflicts with not only the but the events you must attend because you have the job. In terms of education, some type of administration graduate degree could really help you in the long run. In terms of managerial skills, time management and multi-tasking are the kinds of skills that came up. As an athletic director, he has to deal with multiple coaches at a time throughout any season and/or offseason.

The textbook (Pederson) defines planning as “developing and implementing goals, objectives, strategies, procedures, policies, and rules to produce goods and services in the most effective and efficient manner.” (p. 114) Mr. O’Donnell’s example of planning was scheduling the games and making the practice calendars. The book also defines staffing as “recruiting, selecting, orienting, training, developing, and replacing employees to produce goods and services in the most effective and efficient manner.” Mr. O’Donnell says that even though he allows the head coaches he hires to hire assistants, he still had to make sure all the assistants fulfill all the requirements and meet all of the certifications. Evaluating is determining
“whether the employees are on task and making progress toward achieving the goals and adhering to the guidelines and standards for producing goods and services in the most effective and efficient manner.” Mr. Donnell does indeed go over evaluations of both the team and coaches at the end of each season. Directing is considered “influencing others as individuals and as groups to produce goods and services in the most effective and efficient manner.” As the athletic director, there are certain events he is required or at least highly recommended to go. Lastly organizing is “arranging resources” and Mr. O’Donnell works within a budget to manage the equipment.

I challenged Mr. O’Donnell by asking him to put to words what Loyola Athletics’ mission and values. He said they in line with the school’s values in combination with competition all while trying to build character within the student athlete. It would be also important to note that he oversees all the coaches, training staff, and office workers totaling sum two hundred something workers. The best advice he gave me was that if wanted to get into the sport industry was to start getting involved early. He said this because the best thing he ever did was start coaching at Loyola while in college or early. He said you should put your foot in the door now and said, “now as in yesterday”.

**Integrate what you learned with content from the course**

In the interview, we talked about the duties of “the high school athletic director position [which] is a very hands-on position, where the
individual prepares budgets, hires and evaluates coaches, and acts as facility and event manager." (p. 3) Just like Robinson said and how we’ve talked about in class, a management position in the sports industry should involves planning, staffing, organizing, directing, and evaluating. The one day Luke came to class and talked about the key attributes for being a good leader and asked the class for words, Chris O’Donnell probably would’ve mentioned have patience and being an understanding communicator. Lopiano also adds to this saying that a good leader should be “able to explain tasks clearly and inspire others of varying capacities, educational backgrounds, and philosophical perspectives.” (p. 5) The fact these same concepts come up in class, interviews, and published sources can only imply that these concepts are a consensus throughout the industry. If I were teaching, I would really emphasize the skills needed because if the industry the just doesn’t fit with your personality then the sports industry is just for you. Another important thing to take away from all of this is that this industry is honestly cutthroat and it’s not only difficult to get your foot in the door but it’s challenging to stay inside as well.
References


Appendix
Potential Interview

Bradley Loomis <boloomis@umail.iu.edu>  Nov 5 (11 days ago)

to codonnel

Dear Mr. O’Donnell,

My name is Brad Loomis and I am currently a freshman at Indiana University. I am currently taking Intro to Sports Management and one of the big projects requires me to interview a business professional. I was wondering if you would be interested in allowing me to conduct a 20-30 minute interview of you some time this week over the phone if you have the time.

Thank you,
Brad Loomis ’17

Chris O’Donnell <codonnel@loyolahs.edu>  Nov 6 (10 days ago)
to me

Brad,

Give me a couple of times over this week that work well for you and I will see if I can make it work with my schedule.

Either way, I will make this work.

I hope all is well at Indiana.

Bradley Loomis <boloomis@umail.iu.edu>  Nov 6 (10 days ago)
to Chris

Mr. O’Donnell,

Thank you so much for helping me out. The following times work best for me: Wednesday at 1 pm PT or any time after that Thursday at 12 pm PT or any time after that

Thanks again,
Brad Loomis

Chris O’Donnell  Nov 6 (10 days ago)
to me

Thursday anytime after 12 PM works for me.

Why don’t you try me in my office first at 213-381-4121 extension 1518.

If that does not work, please try me on my cell phone at 213-247-3335.

Sent from my iPhone

Bradley Loomis <boloomis@umail.iu.edu>  Nov 7 (9 days ago)
to Chris

Mr. O’Donnell,

Thank you so much... will do.

Brad Loomis

Appendix
What was your first job? What was your first job that incorporated sports or was in the sports industry?

Have you ever had a job that you did not enjoy? Did that job in the long run benefit you in any sort of way?

Which job would you say benefited you the most and why?

What type of skills are needed for being a high school athletic director? What kind of education is needed?

What managerial skills in particular are necessary for being successful in your position?

Describe your duties as an athletic director. In what ways do you...
  - Plan
  - Staff
  - Organize
  - Direct
  - Control and Evaluate

If you had to put it to words... what are Loyola athletics’ mission and values?

What positions do you oversee? Just head coaches or all the coaches... training staff too

If you were in my position and interested in working in the sports industry... what advice would you give me?
Dear Mr. O’Donnell,

Thank you for being so generous with your time by allowing me to interview you over the phone during the weekday. I felt the interview went well and I got a lot out of it and learned a lot from it. My perspective of possibly working in the sport industry has definitely shifted for the better.

Thanks again,
Brad Loomis ’17

Go Cubs!