A Look Into The Life Of An Athletics Administrator

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It is all too common for those whose duties generally take place “behind-the-scenes” to go without receiving the proper recognition that they deserve. For athletic directors, this is very much the case. However, over the course of my interview, I discovered that athletic directors do not depend on hearing “Way to go,” “Atta boy,” or any other congratulatory expression for fulfillment. Instead, their fulfillment levels correspond more so with how successfully their athletic events unfold in front of their eyes. As for the interview conducted for the sake of my research assignment, it revolved around the words of the athletic director of Bedford North Lawrence High School, Jeff Callahan. Mr. Callahan resides in Bedford, Indiana, approximately 30 miles south of the Indiana University campus. There, he serves as not only the athletic director, but also the head baseball coach. Interviewing Mr. Callahan was an easy decision for me to arrive at, as he was my baseball coach from the time I first stepped on a baseball diamond at the age of six until the time I walked off the field as a player for my final time last year. On top of that, I spent seemingly my entire childhood around Mr. Callahan and his family since I grew up attending school and playing summer baseball with his son, Brandt. Coach Callahan holds the all-time and seasonal hits records at Bedford North Lawrence for the baseball program, and he proceeded to play a couple of years of Division 1 college baseball at Vanderbilt University. However, because he was not granted his desired playing time at Vanderbilt, he opted to focus solely on his academics and conclude his baseball career. After graduating and meeting his future wife, he moved to the Atlanta area (her hometown) in Georgia to start in on his career path. Then, after spending a year teaching social studies in the South, he and his wife moved up North to Bedford, which is where he and his family have inhabited ever since.
Logistics

The interview that this assignment is centered around took place at Mr. Callahan’s residence and lasted about forty minutes. We agreed to conduct the interview there via text messaging (I already possessed his phone number due to our personal relationship), as he lives roughly one minute away from my home. Also, he had spent his entire day tending to the athletic events that had transpired at the high school on the day of the interview and wished to be resting at his home over the course of the interview, so I agreed in order to accommodate him as much as possible.

Education

Mr. Callahan graduated from Bedford North Lawrence High School in 1987. After that, he proceeded to double major and earn his Bachelor’s degrees in secondary education and human resources at Vanderbilt University.

Duties

The duties of a high school athletic director are comprised of, but not limited to, schedule-building, supervision of all school-sanctioned athletic events, ensuring of athletic clubs being IHSAA compliant, recording of the financials of the athletic department, and communication with officials and various means of transportation for athletic events. Schedule-building and communication with officials and various means of communication would fall under planning, as each respective duty must take place before said athletic event is possible. Supervision of all school-sanctioned events would fall under controlling and evaluating, as one would partake in such supervision to evaluate the success of a given event and control the measures necessary to ensure maximum success of said event. The ensuring of athletic clubs being IHSAA compliant would fall under organizing, as the athletic director must organize
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his/her paperwork and files to ensure that his/her programs are compliant with IHSAA regulations. Lastly, the recording of the financials of the athletic department would also fall under controlling and evaluating, as one must evaluate the annual expenditures and take the steps necessary to ensure his/her program remains within its budget.

**Necessary Skills**

According to Coach Callahan, the most essential of skills for a sport management professional to possess are communication skills, time-management skills, organizational skills, and technological skills. In addition, Mr. Callahan suggested that communication skills are the most vital of them all. This is because a sport management professional, specifically an athletic director, is in constant communication with not only fellow athletic directors, but also the coaches of each respective sport program run under his/her domain, officials, and even players. However, he was clear in expressing that each set of skills is still crucial in one’s achievement of maximum efficiency and success in running his/her athletic program. For instance, an athletic director must possess competent time-management to not suffer too severe of setbacks when said director encounters any bit of unpredictable adversity, such as game/event postponements due to inclement weather conditions or meetings with principals, superintendents, or other administrators. Also, athletic directors must possess strong organizational skills so that they do not become overwhelmed with their wide range of daily duties, including the management and storage of physicals, concussion papers, and other handbook papers. Lastly, AD’s must also exemplify keen technological capabilities, especially nowadays with the ever-changing purposes of technology in sport, to maximize efficiency in communication with those around them.
Challenges

Athletic directors are generally exposed to a wide array of challenges, but none more so than the constant adversity they encounter on a daily basis. For instance, many of the challenges that an A.D encounters are out of his/her control, such as the previously-stated inclement weather and unexpected meetings with fellow administrators that demand said athletic director’s attention. On top of that, another challenge that athletic directors are faced with is a hefty time-commitment, as they must not only roam the perimeters of their sport complexes throughout the week, but the weekend as well. Also, A.D’s must deal with just about any and all parental complaints regarding their children’s experience(s) in sport, which can occasionally be just as daunting as the rest of the challenges.

Takeaways

One very key takeaway I received from the interview conducted with Coach Callahan is that one cannot communicate with other persons associated with the field of sport management enough. Mr. Callahan was very thorough in expressing his belief that only positives can come about when one is very interactive with established individuals in the field. Though I was already semi-aware of the impact of networking going into the interview, being reassured of the potential positives that could derive from it by such a tenured individual certainly proved to be quite significant in terms of my understanding of why and how it is so important. Also, he was very sure to reinforce the idea of an aspiring sport professional to “be a sponge,” meaning that one hoping to make it in the field of sport management should do all in his/her ability to absorb any knowledge passed on to him/her from a professional in the field.

Another crucial takeaway I amassed from the interview is that an aspiring sport management professional must be willing to make sacrifices in order to achieve his/her dream
career. Whether it be income or family time towards the beginning of one’s career, Mr. Callahan was sure to explain that being willing to sacrifice such luxuries can prove to be quite a divider when it comes down to a future employer choosing whom he/she wishes to hire. This helped me a great deal because it will be instrumental in my ability to separate myself from the rest of the competitive crowd entering the field of sport management.

The final pivotal takeaway I garnered from the interview is to just try to amass as much experience in the field as I possibly can, whether it be via volunteer work around my local community, involvement in student organizations, or participation in internships. Coach Callahan was very clear in stating that not only will I get a better grasp on which specific career I would like to advance into in doing so, but I would also build a multitude of connections along
Questions for Student’s Choice Assignment Interview

1. What was your first job/internship in the sport management field? Did you have to do a job you didn’t enjoy to get to where you are today?
2. What type of skills/education would you say are needed for the position of high school athletic director?
3. Are there any managerial skills necessary to successfully hold your position? If so, would you care to elaborate on which skills are necessary?
4. What are some of the biggest challenges you face in your day-to-day life? What have you learned from mistakes that have been made on the job?
5. How has technology affected your position in the sport management field?
6. Would you care to identify the duties of the position of high school athletic director?
7. What positions do you oversee? Is it important to have performed the duties of your position(s) in order to lead these individuals? Why or why not?
8. What steps would you encourage an undergraduate studying in sport management to take to advance his/her career and secure a job/internship?
9. What, if any, advice would you give to someone deciding to start a career in sports management?
10. Heading into your undergraduate career, was a career as a high school athletic director your dream job? If not, what factors ultimately led you to decide on becoming a high school athletic director? Are there any tips you would give to a sport management undergraduate student that is open to a variety of jobs in the sport management field?

Topics to address for Student’s Choice Assignment Paper

1. For interview question #3: (Refer to Table 5.1 in your text) and describe which duties fall under planning, staffing, organizing, directing, or controlling and evaluating. You should cite the book when discussing these aspects.
2. What lessons were you surprised to learn from Coach Callahan over the course of the interview?
3. How has this interview/experience helped you make decisions about your next step towards your career?
B - be coachable
N - no one outwits us
L - locked in and focused

S - so what next pitch?
T - two hundred feet
A - attitude is everything
R - respect the game

Pooches gracias!

Dear Coach Cal,

Thank you for sitting down with me and participating in my interview. Not only did it help me with my assignment off-hand but it also provided me with a sense of direction with regard to my pursuit of a career in the field of sport management. On top of that, it was refreshing to receive an insider’s perspective of what a potential future career for me would entail. Once again, thank you very much.

Sincerely,
Jackson Bartlett
Hey Coach Cal, hope the team is prepping just fine for the Vincennes tourney. I plan to come to town quite a bit and watch you guys this year. I was wondering if there's any chance you'd partake in a quick, roughly 10-12 question interview (can be over the phone or in person) for me at any point in the upcoming week? It would be for a paper I have to write for my "Intro to Sport Management" course, so I thought who better to write about than my lifelong coach and high school AD. The interview would revolve around the life of a high school AD, so the questions wouldn't be anything too strenuous for you. Also, I could give you a preview of the list of questions afterward.
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Jackson,
I would be glad to help you out. We can do the interview over the phone or in person, whatever is best for you. Send me the questions and we can get started.

Awesome, sounds great. I will begin working on the questions pronto. Thank you a ton.

No problem. As always, glad to help out. Feel free to contact me for any of your needs during your classes.

Thanks Coach Cal, I appreciate it. I'll likely make the trip home this weekend to watch the Red v Blue game.
Fri, Mar 23, 7:43 PM

Hey Coach Cal, just letting you know I attempted to email you a list of my questions via the BNL online directory. However, I have altered one question since then so if you'd prefer me to text you the list of questions or send you a PDF, I will do that.

Either way.

Sat, Mar 24, 2:28 PM

I think I sent you a link to all of the questions I have written out for the interview. Let me know if there were any technical issues and I'll try to send them to you again. Thank you.
Hey Coach Cal, sorry to disturb you. I'm sure you won't get this message until you wake up, but I wanted to ask now and get it out of the way... is there any chance an interview anytime between roughly 5 PM Thursday-Sunday could work for you? Thank you in advance.

Jackson,
Yes, we can make that work. I will check out questions today and get back with you.

Sounds good. Thank you.
Hey Coach Cal, did you get a chance to skim over those questions by chance?

Yes. I looked over them. Do you want to talk sometime Saturday?

That would work for me. Just however much time you would need to prepare any and all answers that you'd need. I hope none are too demanding. Is there any chance you would be ok with me audio recording the interview for the sake of me being able to fully listen and comprehend what you are saying and transcribe later?

Yes. That is fine. I will be at bnl from 7-2 tomorrow and home..
being able to fully listen and comprehend what you are saying and transcribe later?

Yes. That is fine. I will be at BNLL from 7-2 tomorrow and home around 3. Just let me know. I am talking to Mac tomorrow about the frosh baseball job.

I heard that from my parents. He seemed genuinely excited - his only concern is work scheduling I think. Told him he may have to let me get some cuts in. As for the interview, I can accommodate your schedule, so whatever works best for you is good for me.

Let's plan 3 at my house.

See you then.
Callahan, Jeff. “Jeff Callahan.” Personal interview. 31 Mar. 2018.