

REFRAMING COACHING SUCCESS: MENTORSHIP AND ETHICS IN THE ERA OF  
INCREASED COMPETITION AND EXPLOITATION OF HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **REFRAMING COACHING SUCCESS: MENTORSHIP AND ETHICS IN THE ERA OF INCREASED COMPETITION AND EXPLOITATION OF HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES**

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The research inquiry asked the question, what methods do athletic coaches employ to improve academic performance and skills of their high school student athletes? The research method chosen for this investigation, influenced by the teachings of Dewey and Freire, is constructivist grounded theory. This research method used intensive interviews with 17 former high school athletes ranging in age from 19 to 68. The responses from these interviews uncovered three main coaching concerns: eligibility based on maintaining minimal grade point average; improving academic performance through peer tutoring; and mentoring for life skills and success. Based on my co-construction of meaning with the participants that considered data from transcripts, my memo writing, my own experiences as a coach and student athlete, and relevant theoretical literature a grounded theory emerged: Reframing Coaching Success. This grounded theory accounts for the process through which athletic coaches extend their definition of coaching success beyond assuring athletic achievement to ensuring that each student-athlete has support for academic and life success. Further research is needed regarding how high school athletic coaches are prepared to transcend a focus on sporting success to a wider view of academic success for students. This study supported the concept that athletic coaches have the potential to play an important role in a student athlete's life and is an opportunity that needs to be taken and maximized. This investigation has the potential to

shift the focus in high school athletics from one that rewards elite athletes and championship winning coaches, to one that focuses on improving the academic skills of student athletes. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (<https://aura.antioch.edu>) and OhioLINK ETD Center (<https://etd.ohiolink.edu>).

*Keywords:* athletic coaching, mentoring, student athlete, extracurricular sports, constructivist grounded theory

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to all the coaches who helped teach me the life lessons I needed to be a successful person and educator with a goal of paying it forward to subsequent generations of student athletes. A special dedication goes to Kevin O'Neil, my basketball coach at Sinclair Community College, who would not let me give up on a college education and the career that would follow. This dissertation would not be possible without the support of my family, particularly my wife Andrea, whose love and belief in me has never wavered.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iv
Dedication .....	vi
Acknowledgements .....	vii
List of Tables.....	xi
List of Figures.....	xii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Personal Relationship to the Study .....	1
Research Question .....	4
Purpose.....	4
Researcher Assumptions .....	5
Definitions of Key Terms .....	6
Key Terms: Subject Matter .....	6
Key Terms: Methodology .....	6
Chapter Summary .....	7
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
Athletics and Their Effect on Academics .....	8
The Coach's Influence on Student Athletes.....	12
Leadership to Initiate Change .....	14
Real Life Examples .....	17
Chapter Summary .....	25
CHAPTER III: METHOD .....	27
An Overview of the Grounded Theory Method.....	27
Rationale .....	29

viii



Recruiting Participants .....	30
Collecting Data .....	31
Analyzing Data .....	32
Ethical Considerations .....	33
Role of the Researcher .....	33
Timeline .....	34
Chapter Summary .....	34
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....	35
The Motivation of the Minimum Grade Point Average.....	36
Tutoring.....	41
Mentoring.....	43
Theory: Reframing Coaching Success.....	46
Reframing Coaching Success .....	46
Reframing Coaching Success: Example of the Process.....	48
Chapter Summary .....	49
CHAPTER V: post-interviews literature review .....	51
GPA Requirements .....	51
Peer Tutoring .....	52
Mentoring.....	55
Chapter Summary .....	57
CHAPTER VI: Discussion .....	58
Summary of Study .....	58
Implications.....	59

Proposed Professional Development .....	62
Limitations .....	66
Future Research .....	66
Social Justice Implications.....	67
Reflection.....	68
References .....	70
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	77
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM .....	78
APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION.....	80
APPENDIX D: DISSERTATION THOUGHT DIAGRAM.....	82
APPENDIX E: INITIAL CODING .....	83
APPENDIX F: MEMO .....	87

## List of Tables

Table 1 Participants.....	36
Table 2 Eligibility Experience .....	38
Table 3 Perceived Pressure .....	39
Table 4 Type of Intervention .....	42
Table 5 Coach’s Role.....	45
Table 6 Tutoring Benefits .....	54

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Reframing Coaching Success .....	47
Figure 2 Dissertation Thought Diagram From Interview Data.....	82

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

In this introductory chapter, I share my personal relationship to the topic of high school athletic coaching, experiences that led me to recognize an endemic problem in the profession. The research question, purpose, and definition of key terms are also stated.

### **Personal Relationship to the Study**

Something is wrong. I entered the profession of teaching and coaching 39 years ago to “pay it forward.” To be a difference maker, a mentor, a leader, and a positive role model for all I work with, but especially for those who are struggling to find their voice and potential in their turbulent, and in many cases, oppressed lives. I know, from personal experience, how a teacher, a coach, a sport, can be “the thing” that links passion to learning, and learning to the pursuit of an education and career. I feel that most in my profession have lost this focus or never had it at all. An example of this comes from, in 2019, a radio news report on KROQ-FM 106.7 about a local California high school basketball team. This news report focused on a basketball team from a \$30,000 dollar a year private high school, jet setting the country playing five games, in five states. I remember thinking, this is a high school. Have we have lost our minds? Do we really think this is good for high school sports? I feel, as coaches, we have lost our way. Recognition, championships, winning, and career advancement have warped our values and altered our purpose. It is time, especially in light of the pandemic, to pause and reflect on practice, to examine core values, and have them reflected in our actions as coaches. High school athletic coaches are positioned not only to develop athletes, but to teach student athletes many of the skills necessary to develop successful lives and become impactful leaders.

I cannot expect to influence other coaches without first looking at my practice. I must begin my reflection with how my experience affects my core values, how I learn, and how I

teach. “The belief that a genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (Dewey & Kappa Delta Pi, 1998, p. 8), is true about my educational experience. Until beginning this doctoral program at Antioch University, with few exceptions, I was expected to be a compliant student who receives, memorizes, and repeats information given by the teacher. As high school and college basketball player, I was told to follow directions without hesitation and without complaint. “This is the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits” (Freire, 2000, p. 72).

Looking back at my undergraduate experience at Wilmington College, I now realize that Wilmington gave me contradictory messages. Wilmington College has a philosophy and vision that states it will “challenge students to live the historic Quaker testimonies of integrity, service, peace and social justice, stewardship and respect for all persons and to practice them in their communities and workplaces” (Wilmington College, 2019). As an institution, Wilmington encouraged me to question and challenge authority, peacefully demonstrate, and to engage in dialogue to enact change. The contradiction occurred inside its classrooms where the university expected me to receive, store, and spit back information without challenging the authority of the professor or university. These experiences only served to perpetuate the banking concept, but the seeds of integrity, service, peace, social justice, stewardship, and respect for all persons were planted.

A small handful of my teachers and coaches were the only exceptions to my experiences of the banking concept. They painted a different picture and inspired a more personal, service-based approach with students. I learned, from how important it was to me, the value of mentoring and making personal connections with students. These teachers and coaches

understood, in their own ways, that a student's life situation or environment was part of their learning experience. Their practice fit Dewey's explanation of environment, as "whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had" (Dewey & Kappa Delta Pi, 1998, p. 17). Their attention to my environment and personal needs it created has made a lasting impact on my life.

I will be forever grateful for the interventions, guidance, and help these teachers and coaches provided. One coach stands apart. Kevin O'Neil, my college basketball coach, saved me from myself and is the sole reason I completed my undergraduate degree. Even though academically, I met the entrance requirements of most colleges, I needed to rely on a basketball scholarship. I did not qualify for financial aid and, due to the cost of treating my father's serious health condition, there was nothing left for my college expenses. This led me to accept the only full basketball scholarship, which was offered by Coach Kevin O'Neil at Sinclair Community College. When I tried to quit school due to a family crisis, he calmly sat me down, showed how getting my degree was more of a benefit to me and my family than quitting school and working a minimum wage job. Even though I was not the star of the team, but a bench player, he found a way for me to be able to stay in school. Coach O'Neil was able to find me a part time job on campus and books to borrow. Coach O'Neil came from the streets of New York City which taught him the uplifting power of an education and conversely, the pitfalls and traps waiting for the undereducated and those lacking training in any type of skill. He cared deeply about his players and had a personal mission to ensure that we all earned our bachelor's degrees. As my two years of community college ended, Coach O'Neil made a handful of calls to head coaches at several four-year colleges to convince one of them that I was worthy of a scholarship. He believed in me when I did not. He wanted the best for my life and knew a college education

would be the platform. I have experienced the difference one person can make and as a young man, I vowed that I would be a difference maker.

My dissertation inquiry evolved from my growing concern, from decades of coaching and teaching, that high school student athletes are used to further the agenda of others. In a 2019 survey completed by the National Federation of the State High School Association, only 3.1% of all male high school basketball players continue playing in college, at any level (National College Athletic Association [NCAA], 2020). I have always been concerned about the educational experience, progress, and future of the marginalized athletes I have had the honor to coach. I am especially concerned for the educational and career future of the 97% of my athletes who will never play college athletics. This dissertation has the potential for creating a change in focus in high school athletics from one that rewards elite athletes and championship winning coaches, to one that focuses on improving academic skills of student athletes. What is wrong and needs to change, is that my experience with Coach O'Neil is unique, and that most student athletes never receive the kind of advocacy and care that have sustained me for the past 40 years.

### **Research Question**

My personal and professional experiences as a student, player, and coach, along with my passion to be a change agent in the lives of young people, inspired the development of my proposed dissertation topic. The research inquiry asks the following question: What methods do athletic coaches employ to improve academic performance and skills of their high school student athletes?

### **Purpose**

After considering various approaches to my research and discussions with Antioch faculty, I decided to limit the scope of my dissertation. Originally, I entertained the idea of



including the creation of a coaching manual containing suggestions of methods/practice ideas. This manual would contain the methods uncovered in the data obtained, coded, and sorted from the constructivist grounded theory interviews. This manual would become the main text used in a coaching course and coaching seminars I would create. I recognized that taking on the creation of this manual and courses would add considerable length and complexity to the completion of a dissertation. Listening to the counsel of my Antioch colleagues and professors, I recognized that creating and disseminating the manual and lessons would be a post-doctoral project. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to discover the methods athletic coaches use to increase academic performance for high school student athletes from the perspective of former high school athletes.

My dissertation is a practical application of what I have taken away from this doctoral program. It applies learned knowledge of social justice, a passion to make a difference for as many high school athletes as possible. Applying transformative leadership practices, I used Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory as my research method to gather data, and to keep in line with my beliefs and to value the experiences of former high school athletes. The resulting data reveal, from the viewpoint of former high school athletes, methods that coaches employ to improve the academic performance of their athletes. My hope is that implementing these methods widely will bring the focus of coaching back to the student athlete's future and away from the greed and controversy currently surrounding athletics.

### **Researcher Assumptions**

I am aware of assumptions I am bringing to the inquiry, specifically the role of coaches in academic success. I initiated this study based not on research that shows that coaches have a strong influence of their student athletes (Coffino, 2018; Gould et al., 2007), but on a personal belief that high school athletic coaches have the influence to impact their athletes' academic

success. More importantly, I believe they have an obligation to their athletes to use this influence for the betterment of the athletes, especially those who are disadvantaged or marginalized.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

This section defines key terms. First, I define terms related broadly to the subject matter. Second, I define terms related to the research method.

#### **Key Terms: Subject Matter**

*Extracurricular sports:* High school sports organized in teams to compete against teams from other high schools.

*Mentor:* “Person engaged in a unique relationship with a mentee who provides guiding, caring, nurturing, counselling, and advising” (Jones et al., 2009, p. 277).

*Role model:* An individual whose crucial feature is having someone else emulate some aspect of their behavior. This can be both good and bad behaviors (Crosbie, 2012).

*Student athlete:* High school student participating in extracurricular sports.

*Transformational leadership:* Leaders create connections with followers that positively affects ethical climate, decision making and moral action (Northouse, 2019).

#### **Key Terms: Methodology**

*Constructivism:* The belief that learners build meaningful learning from the interactions of their own experiences (Charmaz, 2014). As related to methodology, constructivism consists of a systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data, the interviews with the participants themselves. Thus, researchers construct a theory ‘grounded’ in their data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1).

*Constructivist grounded theory:* A research method used to develop new theories from data gathered from participants (Charmaz, 2014).

*Intensive interviewing:* Qualitative interviewing that relies on open ended questions (Charmaz, 2014).

*Coding:* Codes are constructed, by the researcher, to define and label what researchers see as significant in the data (Charmaz, 2014).

*Memo-writing:* Used to keep track of a researcher's thoughts on data, codes, ideas, and questions (Charmaz, 2014).

*Theoretical sampling:* Seeking information or data to refine categories in the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2014).

*Saturation:* The point in data analysis where no new properties, or ideas, emerge from new data (Charmaz, 2014).

*Sorting:* A way to theoretically compare and link categories (Charmaz, 2014).

### **Chapter Summary**

In this introductory chapter, I shared my personal relationship to the topic, as both a high school and collegiate student-athlete and a high school athletic coach. The chapter also presented my purpose statement and research question: What methods do coaches use to improve the academic performance of their high school athletes? The chapter also set forth my assumptions and definitions of key terms. The next chapter is a review of the literature relevant to my topic.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this initial literature review is to explore accepted ideas about the connection of participation in sports and academic achievement through documentation in research. Further, I reviewed research on the role of a coach in influencing their athletes in various ways. This literature review also connects leadership styles that work well to initiate change and provides examples of coaches who exhibit these leadership styles as role models, mentors, and leaders of change.

This initial literature review is part of the process of constructivist grounded theory and served as the basis for my dissertation inquiry, to discover what methods coaches use to increase academic performance in high school athletes. The grounded theory process seeks to discover a theory that is meaningful to the participants by using their experiences and input. Once the data were gathered from interviews with former high school athletes, analyzed and conceptually categorized, and the emergent theory sparked additional exploration of research, which is integrated into the post-analysis literature review in Chapter V.

### **Athletics and Their Effect on Academics**

Before uncovering the methods coaches use to impact the academic performance of their athletes, it is important to look at research that supports athletics connections to academic performance. The scholarly and professional literature reflects a long-standing acceptance that high school athletics have an impact on academic performance. The National Federation of State High School Associations reported in 2008, that over seven million interscholastic athletes in the United States had a “higher grade-point average, lower dropout rate, better daily attendance, and fewer discipline problems than non-athletes” (Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011, p. 125). Other researchers have come to a similar conclusion. Fox et al. (2010) conducted a study that examined

the relationships between sport team participation and academic outcomes and found a positive correlation for both girls and boys between participation and grade point average.

This correlation between athletics and academic performance has been recognized by high schools and colleges. School districts throughout this country set academic requirements that are connected to athletic eligibility to ensure that their athletes are meeting academic graduation requirements. As early as 1986, a bill, authored and introduced by Sen. Joseph B. Montoya, to the California State Legislature required all students in grades 7-12 to maintain a 2.0 grade point average to be eligible to participate in extracurricular activities (Hiserman, 1985). The intent for measures such as this is to capitalize on an athlete's desire to participate in extracurricular activities as motivation to attend school and perform in the classroom.

The National College Athletic Association (NCAA), the governing body for college athletics, has its own academic requirements regarding an athletic eligibility. Athletes enrolling in a Division I school must have at least a 2.3 grade-point average in the 16 NCAA approved core courses (Hosic, 2020). During their college athletic career, a student athlete must be enrolled in a full-time baccalaureate degree program, be enrolled in at least 12 semester or quarter hours, successfully complete at least 24 semester or 36 quarter hours per year, and complete at least 60% of the course requirements in their specific degree program by the beginning of their fourth year (NCAA, 2021). These requirements represent the NCAA's intent to make sure that college student athletes maintain a grade point average coupled with course completion that leads to earning a college degree.

There has been considerable interest in how participation in high school athletics affects academic performance of marginalized students. Studies have shown that participation in high school athletics has improved academic performance for African American high school students

and for low-income minority students in Los Angeles (Cho & Lee, 2021; Dudovitz et al., 2017; Yeung, 2015). Similarly, Efrat, in a 2011 study on the relationship between low-income and minority children's physical activity and academic outcomes reported "that regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity, a positive relationship exists between physical activity and academic-related outcomes" (Efrat, 2011, p. 2).

This leads to research that explores not only athletics but participation in any type of extracurricular activity regardless of social or economic status. Research that looked at the effect of student participation in school-based extracurricular activities showed that those who participated in extracurricular activities showed higher academic performance (Fox et al., 2010; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). A Texas study of 7-12<sup>th</sup> grade male and female, ethnically diverse students showed that athletes scored significantly better on all standardized tests compared to non-athletes (Eldridge, 2014).

The connection between athletics and academic performance is also evident in both middle school and early childhood. Studies, conducted throughout the world, have shown a relationship between physical activity and higher academic performance exists as early as primary school (Kantomaa et al., 2016; van der Niet et al., 2014; Van Dusen et al., 2011). This association has also been documented in research conducted, by numerous authors, on team sport participation and academics with middle school students (Fox et al., 2010; Shu-Shih et al., 2019; Syväoja, 2018). Overwhelmingly, as most assumed, athletic participation has a positive relationship in supporting and improving academic performance from childhood through high school. In future studies, more research needs the focus on the specific connections between athletic participation and academic performance. Once determined, the academic benefits of sports participation can be maximized by organizations and coaches.

Academic performance is not the only positive school related outcome reported from participation in athletics. There are benefits that indirectly increase academic performance. Research conducted by Dudovitz et al. (2017), among others, revealed that being involved in athletics promoted better behavioral self-concepts and lower drug use for low-income minority students (Dudovitz et al., 2017; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Chen and Harklau (2017) reported that participation in sports improved time management skills and school engagement. Research also connected participation in athletics to decreased dropout rates, increased concentration, and higher attendance rates (Ballester et al., 2015; Chen & Harklau, 2017; Eldridge, 2014; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011). Improved time management skills and school engagement, increased concentration, higher attendance rates coupled with a lower dropout rate are all necessary components that give a student the optimum opportunity to succeed academically.

Research conducted by multiple authors over several decades has overwhelmingly shown that participation in high school athletics has a positive effect, either directly or indirectly, on academic performance. Concentration and time management skills are clearly connected with successful students and adults. Lowering drug use, improving school engagement, and increasing attendance are benefits of sport participation that lower dropout rates and give a student athlete the opportunity for success. It is also important to explore how the influence an athletic coach has influences their student athletes. Having research supporting the relationship between athletic participation and increased academic performance, it is important then to explore research that discusses the role of a coach in increasing academic success.

### **The Coach's Influence on Student Athletes**

Before exploring what athletic coaches do to help their student athletes succeed academically, it is important to establish the coach's role and importance in influencing their student athletes. First and arguably foremost, coaches are role models. Being a role model is not something a coach can choose. Student athletes notice every detail of a coach's behavior and this behavior lays the foundation for teaching life skills, values, proper behavior, respect, and team building (Coffino, 2018; Gould et al., 2007). All coaches must decide on the importance of their own behavioral choices and how they affect those they lead.

A coach can choose to serve as a mentor to one or more student athletes. The difference between being a mentor and a role model is that a role model is an individual whose life example is looked up to and imitated by others, whereas a mentor is a trusted individual who personally guides someone. As a mentor, a coach establishes a deeper relationship with their student athlete(s) which allows a transfer of knowledge and skills, not taught, or learned in a classroom, which apply throughout a lifetime (Coffino, 2018; Gould et al., 2007).

When coaches help athletes prioritize their academic work, learn interpersonal and social skills, and develop and display their physical abilities to their potential, these athletes are more likely to keep winning in perspective and prepare themselves to become productive members of society. (Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011, p. 128)

Coaches can also impact the emotional health of their athletes. Research has shown that coaching student athletes can have a positive effect on developing self-determined motivation, emotional learning, their development of initiative and reflection, which all affect an athlete's confidence in the ability to exert control over their own motivation, behavior, and social environment (Amorose et al., 2016, Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003, Hansen, Larson, &



Dworkin, 2003, McMullen et al., 2020). Furthermore, especially when working with female student athletes, coaches have shown to be able to create an environment that reinforces a positive body image (Smith & Ogle, 2006).

How a coach interacts with their student athletes can influence their development of interpersonal/social skills. Research has reported that coaches can influence and teach their student athletes' skills which include acquiring new peer relationships, developing group social skills such as taking responsibility, working together as a team, and developing valuable connections to adults (Chan et al., 2012; Dworkin et al., 2003; Hann et al., 2003; Holt et al., 2011). In addition to supporting previously mentioned research results, work completed by Hansen et al., (2003) showed that a coach can also teach student athletes how to manage and control their social environment.

Student athletes, working under the direction of coaches in team sports, have shown to have improvement in their psychosocial health. Research has reported that team sport participation improved self-esteem and fewer depressive symptoms greater than improvements attributable to participation in individual physical activity (Eime et al., 2013). These benefits occur in interactive environments created by coaches who employ autonomy supportive behavior (Felton & Jowett, 2013; Fraina et al., 2020). In a study conducted by Davis et al. (2019), coaches reported using multiple strategies to reduce negative outcomes, which included teaching self-awareness, regulation strategies, training diaries, and ongoing communication to promote positive adaptation to stress.

To help ensure the reported benefits of participating in athletics, a coach needs to set a positive instructional climate. How a coach chooses to frame feedback, their verbal immediacy in heightened situations, and their team management/control strategies have a direct impact on an

athlete's perception of their athletic experience (Turman, 2003, 2007, 2008). Turman (2003) indicated through his research with wrestlers, that when a coach creates strong bonds of trust with and among team members, that there are times, particularly later in the competitive season, that the athletes prefer and respond best to negative coaching control methods. Therefore, the link to any benefit and perception of a positive athletic experience is directly tied to the influence of a coach.

An athletic coach's influence on their athletes is well documented by research and reinforced by countless testimonials by former and current athletes. Being an athletic coach comes with great responsibility. A coach who is a positive role model and mentor can support an athlete academically and their successful development as an individual and member of a community. The number of student athletes a coach can mentor varies from coach to coach and is limited. The specific goal of my inquiry is to focus on the methods coaches use to influence academic achievement for their entire team. Using intensive interviews embedded in a grounded theory approach, the athletes interviewed will have the opportunity to reveal the most effective coaching techniques that support academic growth, as well as identify practices that are not as effective.

### **Leadership to Initiate Change**

The role of a coach to initiate change in the lives of those they lead requires a belief system and a leadership style and approach. The following paragraphs describe my connection to beliefs of Dewey and Freire, and the concept of authentic leadership.

The teachings of John Dewey have had a direct impact on how I teach, coach, and how I approach my dissertation. A student's life situation or environment is part of their learning experience (Dewey & Kappa Delta Pi, 1998). When working with a group of student athletes it is

crucial to understand how their life experiences affects their learning, to “survey the capacities and needs” of these student athletes and “provide the experiences that satisfy these needs and develop these capacities” (Dewey, 1997, p. 25). By Paying attention to their environment and personal needs, I believe I can make a lasting impact on their lives. These teachings and philosophy are at the core of how I approached my dissertation topic and research method.

This doctoral program gave me my first exposure to the writings of Freire. For the first time I realized that I was raised and educated to be part of the problem. I was trained by the educational system, both as a student and teacher, to work as part of the banking concept of education. “The banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits” (Freire, 2000, p. 72). As a student, I was the “container to be filled” by the teachers (Freire, 2014, p. 70). As a teacher I was trained, by my universities, to fill my students with knowledge that was then withdrawn with assignments and tests. I believed that I was partaking in a noble endeavor. I believed I was preparing students for equal access for a successful future. What I have learned is that I was and always have been a part of a “system which achieves neither true knowledge nor true culture” (Freire, 2014, p. 78). I now know that I need to be practicing “liberating education, which consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information” (Freire, 2014, p. 77). These concepts are woven into my change initiative. Before I can lead high school student athletes, I must learn from them. “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire, 2000, p. 72). When I experienced success, it followed concepts of Dewey and Freire. It had to do with connecting with students to learn their experiences in their environment when developing learning plans. I experienced the most success when I checked my ego, carefully

listened, got out of the way, and made the space for students/players to insert their own voice and ideas in reaching goals. Embracing the teachings of Dewey and Freire coupled with my own experiences have led me to explore leadership styles and focus on one that fits both my beliefs and the needs of my dissertation methodology.

Of the leadership styles researched and discussed, I was most drawn to transformational leadership. Transformational leadership encourages leaders to create connections with followers that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Northouse, 2019). Specifically, I am interested in how transformational leadership positively affects ethical climate, decision making and moral action (Northouse, 2019). My inspiration to enter this doctoral program, to create change, was the greed, career advancement, and the focus of winning at all costs exhibited by coaches and institutions. These unethical and sometimes immoral actions are overshadowing student athlete development of academic skills and life lessons. Also lost has been the importance of a coach as a role model and mentor in their student athletes' lives. A transformational leader keeps the improvement and wellbeing of all central. My change initiative comes from my ongoing quest to be a transformational leader who inspires and leads others, students, and colleagues alike, to become transformational leaders.

Authenticity in leaders is a necessary component to lead change. There are important traits associated with authentic leaders. According to Authentic Leadership (2021), they are as follows:

Positive psychological capacities; ethics; moral perspective; values; relational transparency; positive social interactions; self-regulation; consistency; and positive behavior modeling. By demonstrating these, and through guiding organizations with a sense of purpose, leaders are able to evoke authenticity (p. 2).

The authentic leader has characteristics of heart and compassion, purpose and passion, values reflected in behaviors, connectedness in relationships, and consistent self-discipline (Northouse, 2019). To be truly authentic is to contribute as much as one possibly can while helping others do the same (Authentic Leadership, 2021). “To be really authentic is not to reach the highest rung on the administrative ladder but to contribute as much as we possibly can by being the people we really are, and to help others do the same” (Gunderman & Maas, 2014, p. 2). Contributions that lead to differences in lives are not measured by how many people are being reached but by the amount of the change in the person (Gunderman & Maas, 2014). Authentic, transformational leadership makes the necessary connections coaches need to foster an environment where their student athletes have the best opportunity for personal growth and future successes.

### **Real Life Examples**

This next section looks at the careers of two of the most outstanding leaders, John Wooden and Mike Krzyzewski, in the history of college basketball. These examples show how success for student athletes is defined, consistently supported, and maintained over decades. I will be summarizing and quoting from biographic, historical, and academic sources throughout this section while looking at sustained excellence over long careers and how they built champion teams on a solid foundation based on their consistently applied moral beliefs.

I have read books on and taken graduate courses in leadership, but I find myself returning to the writings on leadership by the legendary UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden. Coach Wooden’s teams recorded 10 national championships in 12 years, including 7 in a row, an 88-game winning streak, a 38 game winning streak in national tournament play, 12 Final Four appearances in 14 years, and 4 perfect seasons (Wooden & Jamison, 2007, p. x). What stands out

is that Coach Wooden was a man of character. He thoughtfully identified a set of core values and incorporated them into his leadership principles, the Pyramid of Success, which he painstakingly developed over a 15-year period (Wooden & Jamison, 2005), and lived them daily, never wavering.

Looking at examples of how Coach Wooden acted in accordance with his values helps me evaluate the effectiveness of his practice. In 1947, when as head coach of the men's basketball team at Indiana State, his team was invited to play, by the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball, in a national tournament in Kansas. Coach Wooden turned down the invitation after learning that the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball would not allow his only Black player to participate. This was before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball, and before Red Auerbach and the Boston Celtics of the National Basketball Association drafted the first Black basketball player (Wooden & Jamison, 2005).

Keep in mind that Coach Wooden made this choice, coaching in the state of Indiana, which at the time, was a stronghold of the Klu Klux Klan. He held fast to a core value, a belief that a team is a family, and that either all are welcome, or the team does not go. The next year, his Indiana State team was invited to play in this same national tournament. Once again, he refused the invitation due to their no Black player policy. As a result, the tournament directors changed their policy and Coach Wooden took his team, including its black player, to participate in the tournament. Coach Wooden was a living example of how he led. His core beliefs and habitude developed trust and created an environment where success was defined by Coach Wooden as "peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best of which you are capable" (Wooden & Jamison, 2005, p. 3). This early

example clearly demonstrates how standing up for one's beliefs have consequences that prove, in the long-term, to benefit the team and in this case, society.

Another example, important for replicating success, is how Coach Wooden's set of core values laid the foundation for a basketball program that drew the best to work and to play for him. When NBA Hall of Famer, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, was completing high school, every major college in the country pursued him. These schools lavished praise and promises to both Kareem and his parents. Coach Wooden's approach was different. He only agreed to talk to Kareem and his parents after Coach Wooden was contacted by Kareem's high school coach. He used this same approach in all recruitments. Coach Wooden only talked to those that showed interest in UCLA. He believed that the university and his basketball program would draw student-athletes based upon their values. Kareem and his parents chose UCLA based upon evidence of these values. Kareem, while viewing *The Ed Sullivan Show* with his parents, saw evidence of equality at UCLA. Ed Sullivan went out of his way to introduce Rafer Johnson, a UCLA basketball player and future Olympic gold medalist in the decathlon. Rafer's introduction included his athletic credits and concluded by saying he was in New York representing the entire UCLA student body as its class president. This provided visible evidence of what UCLA stood for, a university whose predominately white students elected a Black student to represent them (Wooden & Jamison, 2005, p. 68).

Kareem received letters of credible testimonials from former UCLA students, written on their own initiative, which supported the ideals and standards of both the school and coach Wooden. Included in these letters were ones from Dr. Ralph Bunche, a Black recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, Jackie Robinson, the first black player in Major League Baseball, and Willie Naulls, an All-American at UCLA and member of the New York Knicks, who all praised UCLA

and Coach Wooden for their beliefs in racial equality (Wooden & Jamison, 2005, pp. 67–68).

This example reinforced the idea that good values attract good people and good people will maintain a consistently successful program.

What I recalled from John Wooden’s leadership approach triggered me to revisit his writings and remember ideas and principles he talked about when I attended a coaching conference where he was the headline speaker. This helped me see that my profession needs change. I believe that too many in my profession value winning more than anything else. There may be exceptions, but many have lost sight of the ideals, which are the basis for working with student athletes. We must all remember that our athletes are students first and we are responsible to help them achieve their optimal futures through sport, and to ensure this happens, we all need to follow a strict code of ethics. We are, at the least, role models, and have a valuable opportunity to serve as mentors.

The second example of a coach who exemplifies being both a role model and mentor is college basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski, more commonly known as Coach K. Over the course of 46 seasons, Coach K holds an NCAA record of 1170 wins along with five national championships (Buchanan, 2022). He is also known for his ability to develop leaders on the court as well as leaders in all aspects of business and life. He is the executive-in-residence for the Fuqua/Coach K Center on Leadership and Ethics at Duke University and is famous for his lessons in leadership (Buchanan, 2022).

The literature on Coach K’s influence contains examples of personal connections to his lessons in leadership. Given that I am using grounded theory to understand the experience of the student athletes I interview, it is relevant to document two of these experiences. The first example comes from Jim Tobin, founder and president of influencer marketing firm Carusele,



which is used by large consumer brands to create influencer content to drive/improve business results (Tobin, n.d.). As a board member of the Emily K Center, a college preparedness nonprofit the Coach K founded and is the chairperson of, Jim had the opportunity to work with and watch Coach K work with basketball staff and fellow board members. The following are six lessons Jim Tobin learned from Coach K's wisdom and applies to his business:

1. Run your "team" on standards, rather than rules, which are set by team members each year. The overarching theme is that striving for excellence is expected.
  2. Instead of attacking a meeting agenda, making decisions, and moving on to the next item, take a step back and motivate and remind the group of what all are trying to achieve.
  3. A team/organization only operates at an elevated level if all its members play their role. A leader must have the knowledge of and show interest and respect to all roles especially to those outside of the limelight.
  4. Long before remarkable success has been accomplished, a leader must have the courage to accept the leadership role, and truthfully share their vision.
  5. In any organization or team, no one person can do it all. Leaders need to give each person a chance to do what they do best.
  6. Coach K's lessons on leadership are not just about sports, they apply to life as well.
- (Tobin, 2021)

Jim Tobin's experience and lessons learned come as an adult, not an athlete. He emphasizes learning leadership and skills that apply to all aspects of his life. This reinforces literature outlined earlier in this paper, that a coach, acting as a role model and/or a mentor has a great deal of influence on student athletes and in this case, a person who a coach works with.

The next example examines the lessons learned by one of Coach K's former athletes. Ryan Caldbeck is the founder of CircleUp, a software technology company, and was a walk-on member of Coach K's 2001 national championship team (Caldbeck, 2022, p. 1). Even though Ryan was one of the least used players on Coach K's team, he states that "I owe a lot to Coach K, including countless leadership and life insights" (Caldbeck, 2022). Here are lessons Ryan learned that serve him in life and as a tech founder:

1. Names can be a powerful motivator and demonstrate respect.
2. Everyone has something that will motivate them to be better. Great leaders take the time to identify and figure out how to motivate based on what drives each individual.
3. Visualizing success is a powerful tool and practice.
4. A leader empowers his assistants and staff to make decisions within their areas of responsibility and to have a real impact on the entire organization.
5. Great leaders inspire others to do thankless jobs and authentically appreciate their work.
6. Consistently managing fundamental details breeds reliability and trust.
7. Discovering and following one's passion is crucial for success.
8. Talent is important but means nothing without hard work.
9. Your faithful friends call when you fail.
10. Loyalty matters.
11. Communication is critical in all directions within an organization.
12. Great organizations and people that sustain excellence worry about and move on to the next moment.
13. The language you use and how you frame things sets a tone and a mindset.

14. Those with knowledge and talent must speak up. They cannot worry about public perception but only about what is right for the team/organization.
15. Work with a sense of urgency.
16. The mark of a great journey ends in tears regardless of outcome. It shows that one/the group has put all of themselves into the journey.
17. A leader must understand how to get talented people to sacrifice to build something together.
18. A leader must be in touch with their emotions so they can respond rather than just react.
19. A leader will need to pivot, due to changes (like COVID) along the journey to reach the organizations goal.
20. Leaders must pay attention to body language. It gives valuable information about people and where their thoughts really are.
21. All members of a group or organization need to look each other in the eyes. It is a great show of respect, openness, and honesty.
22. Nothing great is accomplished without hard work.
23. A leader must keep their message fresh by employing creative methods of delivery.  
Included are using different assistants and even group members to deliver the message. Even changing meeting locations can keep the message fresh.
24. Leaders need to hold themselves and their group members accountable.
25. Leaders must require excellence from every position in their group and organization.

26. Effective leaders and organizations demonstrate discipline. Organizations do this by have principles and standards of behavior, not rules. These standards are set by the group and revisited regularly.
27. Great leaders love courage. The kind that can step up to take on a challenge, call a colleague out when they are not doing what is expected, and the courage to raise a hand to take charge. (Caldbeck, 2022)

Ryan Caldbeck, as a member of one of Coach K's teams, has shown the influence a coach can have on a player, and a player's future. Coach K's consistency as a role model and mentor had such an impact on Ryan, that he implemented the lessons he learned, as the founder of his software technology company, CircleUp.

Even with all the valuable leadership lessons Coach K has taught, and the various importance placed on those lessons by those who have embraced them, Coach K has singled out the importance of communication. That "effective teamwork begins and ends with communication" (Buchanan, 2022, p. 1) and that communication will benefit any group functioning as a team. According to Coach K, there are four major benefits gained from communication. First, communication allows leaders and teammates to connect, and connecting is important in building trust and performing as a team. Secondly, communication is needed by an organization/team to create shared understanding and alignment. Thirdly, communication helps expectation management and role clarification that are needed by the organization/team before leaders can hold others accountable. And lastly, effective communication is motivating (Buchanan, 2022).

Coach K is known for producing teams with amazing teamwork, leadership, and communication, which he believes is a critical skill. Coach K said about communication, “it doesn’t occur naturally, and it has to be practiced” (Buchanan, 2022, p. 2).

Kevin Costner, in his 1989 movie, *Field of Dreams*, follows a voice that keeps telling him, “If you build it, they will come.” Both John Wooden and Mike Krzyzewski built their basketball programs on sound foundations of moral beliefs, ethics, being role models, and mentors who were transformative authentic leaders. Players and their parents were drawn to Wooden’s and Krzyzewski’s programs. Championships were the byproduct resulting from the life lessons they taught through basketball.

There is collaborating research that supports that playing athletics in high school increases academic performance and that coaches have a great deal of influence over their student athletes. There is a pattern of leadership style, transformative authentic leadership, which emerges in the coaching of John Wooden and Mike Krzyzewski. What did not come forth in the literature I researched, was the methods coaches used to directly increase the academic performance of their student athletes. Using grounded theory, I will interview former high school student athletes to see if these methods emerge.

### **Chapter Summary**

This initial literature review addressed the following topics: Athletics and their effect on academics, the coach’s influence on student athletes, leadership to initiate change, and real-life examples of leadership that, over a career, initiated change. These topics were researched to show their foundational support to the research question, in this dissertation, which asks what coaching methods, as reported by former high school athletes, were used by their coaches to

support academic success. In Chapter III I will explain the constructivist grounded theory method and how it was employed in this study.

### **CHAPTER III: METHOD**

In this chapter I will discuss this dissertation's research method. I will detail the rationale of the method chosen, give a brief history of the method, how participants were recruited, how data was collected, how data was analyzed, ethical considerations, the role of the researchers, and the timeline of the research.

#### **An Overview of the Grounded Theory Method**

There is no better way to describe the purpose of grounded theory but with a quote. "Grounded methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves. Thus, researchers construct a theory 'grounded' in their data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1).

Grounded theory has been employed by social researchers for over 45 years. Glaser and Strauss (1967, as cited in Bryant & Charmaz, 2019) argued that quantitative and many qualitative approaches produced "reasoning that necessarily leads to the position that data should fit the theory, in contrast to our position that the theory should fit the data" (p. 206). Qualitative researchers who arrive at a conclusion based on method designs that test pre-existing theories risk running into problems such as overlooking aspects of the social life and data that are outside the scope of the specific theory which they are using as an analytical lens (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). Glaser and Strauss (1967) stressed that this practice only serves to verify existing theories and that this type of research not only dominated the field of social research of the 1960s but inhibited the use of new methods and discovery and construction of new theories (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

In founding the new method, sociologists Glaser and Strauss noted at least three reasons why grounded theory is necessary:

1. The literature does not provide enough theories to cover all aspects or areas of the social life.
2. Due to their lack of grounding in data, extant theories seldom fit or work, nor are relevant or sufficiently understandable to use in research which aspires to be sensitive to the empirical field and its participants. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)
3. Our reality is dynamic, continuously shaped by diverse, subjective lived experiences and innovations. (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019, p. 208)

Since 1967, grounded theory has evolved in different versions, and the three most widespread versions today are *Glaserian* or *Classic* GTM (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2005), *Straussian* GTM (Corbin, 2015; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), and *constructivist* GTM (Bryant, 2002; Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz, 2000, 2014; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

One point of divergence among the approaches is how to treat the review of literature. Glaserian grounded theory has continued to argue that the literature should not be reviewed prior to data collection. The main rationale for postponing the literature review in Glaserian grounded theory is that the theory “must be discovered within the data, rather than being imposed on it from pre-existing literature” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019, p. 209). Straussian grounded theory states that

we all bring to the inquiry a considerable background in professional and disciplinary literature and have a rich background of information that can be used more actively in grounded research as long as the researcher does not allow it to block creativity and obstruct discovery. (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019, p. 210)



In practice, this means that the researcher, even during the exploring of an initial literature review, will return to the literature both during and at the end of the analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

Constructivist grounded theory argues that neither data nor theories are discovered but are constructed by the researchers through their interactions with the participants and the field of study. Researchers co-construct data with participants and this reveals an emerging theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz, 2014). This theory is developed by the interactions between the researcher, the environment, the participants, and the literature (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). With constructivist grounded theory, the initial literature review is different from the final version of the literature review. The final literature review must be written in light of what is revealed during the data collection and analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

The constructivist grounded theory literature review process works in phases. It begins with an initial literature review to establish why the researcher should explore the research question. The second phase consists of intensive interviews and an ongoing literature review that is informed by the data collected from the interviews. The last phase is the final literature review compares the constructed theory to established theoretical ideas. This final literature review will locate the study across disciplines (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

### **Rationale**

I came into this doctoral program with a passion to change the focus and methods high school coaches use to support their athletes, for which their main reason for going to school is to be involved in a sport. From personal experience I know how important a coach can be in the life and future of their athletes. I also know that those of us who coach tend to be strong leaders with even stronger opinions. Knowing this, and through course work, research, and discussions with

my Antioch professors, I chose to use grounded theory as my research method. I chose this research method after looking at various quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches. I decided that the grounded theory method would allow me to focus on the student athlete experience, while decentering my assumptions about coaching as well as setting aside the voices of the coaches themselves who are immersed in their practices. I chose constructivist grounded theory after a conversation with my dissertation chair. This conversation revealed that I have a strong bias and passion for coaching high school athletes. This bias could interfere with and direct my research to preexisting theories and to paint the picture I wanted. Using Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory allowed me the flexibility necessary to obtain data generated by the experiences of the athletes, the very people I wish to empower. At the same time, constructivism recognizes that I am part of the meaning-making process, and that my experiences will be relevant to my analysis. Charmaz's (2014) book, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, served as my handbook for designing interview questions, focused coding of data, memo-writing, sorting, and reaching the saturation point, and writing up the results.

### **Recruiting Participants**

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that relies primarily on intensive interviews. To help alleviate pressure a high school athlete may feel when answering questions about the influence of their coach, I recruited former high school athletes who are out of high school. I chose to interview individuals across a range of ages and genders to see how different generations of athletes believed their coaches impacted their academic and life skills through specific coaching methods and actions. There may be methods that were used by coaches throughout the decades that prove useful as well as new emerging methods. The total number of participants interviewed numbered 17. I used my coaching contacts, developed over 39 years of

coaching in two different states, along with my contacts as an athletic director to recruit participants. This also includes a Los Angeles Unified School District level contact who has provided me with private information on the state of coaching in LAUSD and the need to teach athletic coaches skills in raising academic performance and life skill acquisition.

I also am fortunate to know professional athletes who are excited about my inquiry and provided valuable assistance. These former professional athletes tell stories of the lack of knowledge/education many professional athletes have due to being “taken care of.” Many of these same athletes have been handed grades in high school and college to keep them eligible. These same former professional athletes are also concerned with the trend of leaving college early to enter professional sports without acquiring the education and life skills to manage their temporary lucrative career and those who will try to take advantage of their naivety. They are also concerned about those college athletes who, even with the tutoring provided in college, are unable to make the grades for eligibility due to the lack of skills learned in high school and lack the ability to make the roster of a professional team. Using these contacts, I conducted and recorded interviews using Zoom. These interviews are stored on an encrypted external hard drive which is stored in a locked file cabinet.

### **Collecting Data**

I collected data by developing and following a question guide (see Appendix A) I used while conducting qualitative intensive interviews. These interviews are flexible, allowing me to use my years of experience as a teacher, former high school, and college player, and as a coach to follow-up with questions that expanded or dug deeper into an answer, or a participant’s experience. As topics were revealed by the data, I conducted follow-up interviews when necessary. The number of participants I interviewed to reach a saturation point was 17. Once

this saturation point was reached, the point where no added information was gained from more interviews, the interview process ended (Charmaz, 2014).

### **Analyzing Data**

The data gathered during interviews underwent a coding process which occurs in two main phases: an initial phase recording each thought or idea followed by a focused phase that identifies the most frequently used or significant initial codes to organize the data (Charmaz, 2014).

This process occurred in a series of steps, the first is memo-writing. This is the “pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162). The memos represent the researcher’s ideas about the codes that they have constructed. These memos promote further analysis of the data and the codes to promote thinking and discovering ideas about them (Charmaz, 2014). Memos are spontaneous and are written by the researcher, using informal language and for personal use. Charmaz (2014) recommends keeping a methodological journal to keep track of progress and decisions and to help prompt ideas for memos as well as giving information for writing methods and data sections in research papers, articles, and in my case, in a dissertation. What is important, according to Charmaz (2014), is to “do what works for you, but aim to make your memos increasingly analytic” (p. 165).

Further analysis of the data involved theoretical sampling. This involves refining the categories to develop their properties until no new properties emerge, which Charmaz (2014) refers to as reaching the saturation point. Specifically, the saturation point has been reached when “gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 213).

The next step of data analysis is sorting. This involved comparing and integrating the memos. Charmaz (2014) recommends that one sorts their memos by hand to be able to see them and reorganize them as one sees fit. Once the researcher has a sorting that looks promising, Charmaz (2014) suggests that the emergent concepts should be diagramed (Appendix D) to identify connections between them. While sorting, one should continue to compare categories, looking for clearer relationships between categories, which will help form an “outline of what you cover and how you cover it” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 218).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical collection of data is governed by the Institutional Review Board. I conducted interviews with former high school student athletes who are at least 18 years of age. Personal information, including name and any contact details, will be kept private in accordance with the parameters set out by Institutional Review Board. Participants signed a waiver that explains how the data will be used by the researcher and how their privacy will be protected. No data will be used by the researcher without signed permission. Participants had the right to end their participation and the inclusion of their data at any point during the research process. The participants received no compensation for their participation. The conduct of this study caused no physical or emotional harm to the participants. The goal was to improve the experience of future student athletes which include improved support for academic performance.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As with all research methods, the bias of the researcher must be taken into consideration and measures taken to limit its influence on the study and the interpretation of the data. Grounded theory acknowledges the researcher’s bias and minimizes its effect by the inclusion and foregrounding of participant perspectives. To do this, I co-constructed and discovered

theories with my participants using flexible qualitative interviewing (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). My key role involved intensive interviews to draw out experiences and ideas that could be conceptualized and form the basis of an emergent theory.

### **Timeline**

The interviews were conducted between August 27 through November 5, 2022, with at least two initial interviews per week. Data analysis was concurrent with data collection, as I wrote memos, coded data, engaged in theoretical sampling, and sorted concepts until I reached the saturation point. From November 5–December 31 the data analysis was completed, and a draft of results chapter was written.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explained the rationale for my selection of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) as my research method and explained the procedures I employed. The resulting data revealed, from the viewpoint of former high school athletes, the methods coaches employ to improve the academic performance of their athletes. Those results are presented in Chapter IV.

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

The results presented in this chapter resulted from the collection and analysis of semi-structured interviews with 17 participants. The goal coming into the grounded theory interview process was to interview at least eight participants, a male and a female from each decade, from the ages of 20 to 69. Interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview guide with each interview lasted between 35 and 50 minutes. Interviews began with a brief description of the purpose of the interview and the rationale of my dissertation topic. Interviews were added until no new themes emerged. Upon the completion of the interviews, a total of 17 individuals participated in this intensive process. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 68. Ten participants were female and seven were male. The racial self-identification consisted of four Latina, five Black, seven White, and one participant that identified as Black/Latino. Two of the 17 participants identified as being gay. The participants' socio-economic self-identification, while in high school, are as follows: Seven participants identified as being socially economically disadvantaged, three participants identified as lower middle class, and seven participants identified as middle class. The diversity of the participants in age, ethnicity, sexual identity, and social economic background allowed for the possibility of a wide range of responses to the interview questions and gives credibility to common responses and themes.

**Table 1***Participants*

Participant Number	Ages	Gender	Sexual Identification	Race Identification	Occupation	Economic Status in High School
1	19	Female	Heterosexual	Latina	Student	Disadvantaged
2	21	Female	Heterosexual	Latina	Student	Disadvantaged
3	29	Male	Heterosexual	Latino	Teacher	Low Middle
4	34	Female	Heterosexual	Black	Runs non-profit	Disadvantaged
5	35	Male	Heterosexual	Black	Investment Banker	Middle Class
6	39	Female	Gay	Latina	Founder of non-profit	Disadvantaged
7	40	Female	Heterosexual	White	Teacher, AD, Title I	Middle Class
8	40	Male	Heterosexual	Black/Latino	Finance Banking	Low Middle
9	45	Male	Heterosexual	White	Teacher	Disadvantaged
10	52	Male	Heterosexual	White	Writer	Middle Class
11	52	Male	Heterosexual	Black	Self employed	Disadvantaged
12	54	Female	Heterosexual	White	Assistant Principal	Middle Class
13	59	Female	Gay	White	Retired Teacher	Middle Class
14	60	Male	Heterosexual	Black	Author NFL Player	Disadvantaged
15	63	Female	Heterosexual	Black	Teacher/Coach Professional Dancer	Middle Class
16	67	Female	Heterosexual	White	Retired Teacher	Low Middle
17	68	Female	Heterosexual	White	Coach Retired Teacher	Middle Class

Using semi-structured interviews, the focus of the interactions was to have the participants identify what, if any, methods, or techniques their high school coaches used to improve academic performance and how they experienced those strategies as high school students. All interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom, which includes video, audio, and transcripts. Coding of data from these interviews and memo-writing identified three overarching categories: The power of the minimum grade point average, peer tutoring, and coach mentoring.

### **The Motivation of the Minimum Grade Point Average**

One of the core categories that presented itself throughout the interview process was the influence and the understanding that to participate in interscholastic high school sports, a student athlete is required to maintain a minimum grade point average (GPA). All participants expressed



that they were very aware of this rule, that their coaches emphasized its importance, and all participants were all subjected to regular grade checks. This ranged from daily checks as reported by participant 7, with biweekly grade checks being the most frequent method described by participants. Failure to meet the GPA requirement meant that they would not be able to play, and the participants were also aware that this meant that they would have to sit out, bring their grades up, as they waited for the next eligibility window to open. This window usually meant they would sit out at least half a grading period. If a player was ineligible at the beginning of a season, they would miss about half the season. If ineligibility occurred during the eligibility window in the middle of a season, a player would be ineligible for the remainder of the year.

The data from the interviews revealed the level of struggle the participants experienced. Participants 4, 6, 7, 10, 13, 12, 15, 16, and 17 all stated in their interviews that they did not struggle academically. Commonly reported by these participants was that they were self-motivated and being aware of the GPA requirements was enough to add to the motivation to do well in high school. These same participants described having a sense of pride in doing well in school as well as having the desire to help others. Participant 17 describes herself as “one of the ones who helped tutor my struggling teammates.”

Even armed with this knowledge of grade point requirements, several of the study participants struggled with grades and were ineligible for periods of times during their high school athletic career. As illustrated in Table 2, Participant 14, a former professional athlete, was academically ineligible during his high school career. “I was academically ineligible for basketball my junior year and I graduated from high school with a 1.5 GPA. Because of this, my only college option was to attend community college.” He further described how knowing the eligibility requirements, “didn’t keep me from becoming ineligible.” Participant 5 explained that

even though he was aware of the academic requirements to play sports, “from 4th grade until Senior year, I was ineligible at various times during high school.” Participant 2, a capable student, reported that “I was ineligible parts of both my 9th and 10th grade years. I struggled with problems at home and was not motivated to turn in work.” Participants 1, 3, 8, 9, 11, were never academically ineligible, but all shared that they struggled to be and stay eligible.

Participant 9 explained, “I graduated from high school with a 2.1 GPA. I struggled more with a lack of direction and motivation rather than from grasping concepts.” Participant 1 explained that “my main academic struggle was due to math. I struggled with math all four years.” Participant 3 had difficulty early in his high school career. During his interview he explained, “in my 9th grade and Sophomore years, I only had a GPA of 2.2, and was barely eligible for soccer.”

Participant 8 came close to being ineligible several times during his high school career but, as he put it, “it was due to having too much fun and not enough focus on schoolwork.” Participant 11 reported having difficulty with maintaining academic eligibility all through high school. He stated that this was due “more out of boredom and lack of connection to the courses I was taking.” Table 2 gives a visual representation of the participant’s eligibility experience.

**Table 2**

*Eligibility Experience*

<b>Eligibility</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Experienced Ineligibility	2, 5, 14
Struggled to Maintain Eligibility	1, 3, 8, 9, 11
No Academic Eligibility Issues	4, 6, 7, 10, 13, 12, 15, 16, and 17

Several of my interview participants reported feeling pressure, from various sources, to maintain a GPA that allowed participation in athletics. Table 3, along with the following descriptions, summarize the type of grade pressure participants experienced as student athletes. Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 17 all reported experiencing pressure from teammates and coaches to maintain athletic eligibility. All Participants reported that their coaches showed interest in their GPA in relationship to being eligible to play. Participants 1, 3, 6, 7, described an additional peer pressure to excel in the classroom and take Advanced Placement courses. Participants 5 and 8 discussed feeling a responsibility to teammates, family, and the entire school to maintain academic eligibility. “When a player is a ‘star,’ there is pressure not to let others down.” Participants 11 and 17 felt the most pressure to maintain their grades from home. Conversely, participants 10, 14, and 16 reported that at their schools, getting good grades was ‘not cool’ and participant 10 explained that exceeding in school was not popular, instead he remarked, “the pressure was to do just enough to get by.”

**Table 3**

*Perceived Pressure*

Perceived Pressure	Participants
Maintain GPA for Eligibility	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 17
Take Advanced Placement Courses	1, 3, 6, and 7
Responsibility to the Entire School	5 and 8
From Their Family	11 and 17
Pressure From Peers to Do Poorly	10, 14, and 16

All the participants in this study reported that it was made very clear to them that they needed a 2.0 GPA to be academically eligible, regardless of where they attended high school, for participation in high school sports. Ten out of 17 participants reported feeling pressure from teammates, coaches, parents, classmates, and/or the community to maintain academic eligibility. Even with having a clear understanding of the requirements for eligibility and pressure to maintain eligibility, many of the participants I interviewed were either ineligible at times during their high school career or had a great deal of difficulty staying eligible.

The responses, by coaches, to the 2.0 GPA eligibility requirement varied. All the coaches checked their athletes' grades. They all check grades at the beginning of the season, and when required by their governing body for athletics. There are those coaches who stop with that. If a player is ineligible, then they just cannot play. Other coaches check grades early on to identify who may be struggling and if something can be done to improve their grades. Participants 1, 3, and 14 reported that their coaches made personal regular inquiries with them, to check academic progress. Participant 1 explained that, "My coach asked me every time he saw me how I was doing in my Math class and if there was anything he could do to help me." Participant 3, from his coach's connections as a teacher, had his grades monitored by each of his teachers. Participant 3 said, "My coach would meet with me weekly and went over the reports he received from all my teachers." Participant 14, explained that his coach was "old school." He stated, "He would check my grades, and If I had anything less than a 'C,' he made me run to exhaustion." Coaches who check grades are the norm. These grade checks have spurred many coaches to be involved in setting up tutoring for struggling student athletes, which is discussed in the next section.

## **Tutoring**

A second category that emerged from participant interviews was tutoring to improve academic performance. Eight out of 17 participants reported that their coach set up ongoing tutoring to support academic performance. For some athletes, their coach required their attendance while other athletes would attend as needed. Participant 3, whose coach was a teacher, arranged faculty tutoring when he was struggling. He explained that “coach monitored grades and had an open understanding and dialogue with the entire teaching staff. When I or any player struggled academically, the coach would set up academic tutoring/interventions with staff to support learning.” Participants 1, 4, 6, 7, and 8 indicated that not only did their coaches directly intervene by organizing regular peer tutoring for athletes who were struggling, but also for those athletes who just needed a little help on an assignment. Typically, the peer tutors were fellow teammates or athletes with two of the participants in this study acting as tutors for their teams. Participants 7 and 17 both reported that they frequently acted as tutors. “Coach would have players tutor each other before practice and I was one of the tutors.”

The participants also identified other ways coaches intervened to obtain academic help for their athletes as summarized in Table 4. Participant 4 described her coach assigning athletes to attend her school’s tutoring center when their grades and eligibility were in jeopardy. A similar but slightly different approach was shared by participant 7. During her interview she remarked, “coach set up study hall for those having grade issues. She also had us take extra academic classes in the off season.”

**Table 4***Type of Intervention*

Type of Intervention	Identified by Participants
Peer Tutoring to Raise Grades for Eligibility	1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 13, 17
Peer Tutoring for Additional Help	1, 4, 6, 7, 8
Tutoring by Teachers	3, 8
Study Hall	5, 7, 8, 11, 13,
Tutoring Center	4
Student Athletes Who Acted as Tutors	7, 17

With peer tutoring being identified by the participants as an important intervention initiated by their coaches, I did a quick check on the interview data to see if any participant mentioned their coach's rationale or belief in choosing peer tutoring for their players. I found that there was no mention of rationale in any of my interview data. I did see that 14 out of the 17 participants stated that their coach was a teacher. Being that peer tutoring/collaboration is commonly used in classrooms in schools across the globe, I would expect athletic coaches who are teachers to be aware of peer tutoring. Of the nine participants who reported peer tutoring for their athletic team, seven had teachers as coaches.

Tutoring, more specifically, peer tutoring emerged from participant interviews, as a method coaches use to improve their athlete's academic performance. The participants in this study describe several ways that their coach used peer tutoring to help their athletes improve their academic performance and increase their GPA. Whether it was an assigned study hall, before practice or lunch time peer tutoring, or connecting athletes with teachers, the goal was to improve academic performance to maintain eligibility.

### **Mentoring**

The third category that came from the participant interviews was coach mentoring. The participants in this study talked about the important role their coach played, in their life, as a mentor. Table 5 summarizes the descriptions of how coaches influenced their athletes. Twelve out of 17 participants specifically mentioned their coach as being their mentor. Of these 12 participants who stated that their coach was a mentor, five reported that their coach had a major influence on their lives. Participant 3 describes the influence his coach had as a mentor and how he helped him see the importance of committing to becoming the best version of himself, to be responsible, committed, and to follow through on his word. He described “having many, many, conversations that pushed the big picture, the long-term picture in my head. Like, where are you going to be 10 years from now? I know that soccer is a big part of your life, but it’s not going to be there forever.” Participant 13 explained that her coach was “authentically interested in me as person and cared about me. This made a big impact on me.”. Even though participants 16 and 17 did not mention their coaches as being their mentors, they both expressed that their coach greatly influenced their lives. Participant 16 told me that her coach “helped keep me focused and motivated me to have more fun and to be more social.” Participant 17 reflected on her coach’s influence, even though there was no mentor/mentee relationship, on feeling connected to something and how this impacted her career by stating, “My coach showed me how sports have the ability to build a culture and let kids know that they can almost do anything they want to and I took this approach to my teaching and coaching.” This seems to speak to how being a role model, something all coaches are, can influence a student athlete even if not as a mentor.

In addition to being mentors and life influencers, participants 8, 9, and 11 describe their coaches as “life changing.” Participant 8, during his interview, details how this change occurred by stating:

My coaches changed the course of my life. They showed me that they cared about me, expected hard work, discipline, and focus. They showed me how the skills I learned as an athlete transferred over to help me be successful in any field of endeavor. They taught me how to break down a goal into components, and in a plan to get there, which is how to conduct anything.

Participant 9 describes his coaches as “mentors that changed the course of my life. I respected my coaches and how they pushed me to have discipline, which I lacked. They saw something in me and never gave up on me.” A dramatic example of how a coach mentor can change a life comes from participant 11 who told me that “my coach helped me keep on the right path, kept feeding me all this wisdom, and information, and it has never stopped since then.”

Several of the participants reported that they still stay in contact with their coach. Participants 1, 3, and 4 reported talking with, or seeing their coaches on a periodic basis. Participant 15 remained connected to her coach until her coach passed away at a young age. Given that seven of the participants in this study are over the age of 50, there is a high probability that many of them have experienced the death of their mentor, no longer having that contact, but still carry the memories and the lessons learned from their mentor. I know that this is true in my life, and it has influenced who I am and my passion to mentor student athletes, and to mentor other coaches.

Two of the study participants, both very self-motivated, indicated that their coach was not a main influence in their lives. Participant 7 stated that “My father was a teacher and coach and



there was that expectation. It was kind of like an unsaid thing I felt like from him being a teacher, that I would go to college.” Participant 12 reported that “being involved in cross country and track led me to be aware of how it led to a healthy lifestyle and healthy habits that I have incorporated into my life. Participating in sports and continuing in activity makes me feel good about myself.” Not only can athletic coaches be effective mentors who contribute to mentee’s life success, there are also coaches who have a negative effect on their athletes. Participant 10 is one of those casualties. “My soccer coach set an example for how not to be a coach. I took this lesson and made sure I did things in my life, including coaching, the right way.” Fortunately, participant 10 recognized the lacking in his coach and was able to make something valuable come from a terrible situation. A summation of how a coach influenced the participants of this study is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Coach’s Role*

Coach’s Role	Participants
Mentor	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15
Major Influence	1, 3, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
Life Changing	8, 9, 11
Still Stay in Contact	1, 3, 4
No effect	7, 12
Negative Experience	10

A coach, as a mentor, has the potential to guide their athletes in their decision-making skills, acquire life skills, and develop habits that can improve their academic success all with the goal of helping mentees to have the potential of achieving a goal of being a productive member of their community.

### **Theory: Reframing Coaching Success**

The preceding discussion set forth the qualitative findings from my interviews with student athletes. In this section, I posit an emergent grounded theory based on my co-construction of meaning with the participants that considered data from transcripts, my memo writing, my own experiences as a coach and student athlete, and relevant theoretical literature.

#### **Reframing Coaching Success**

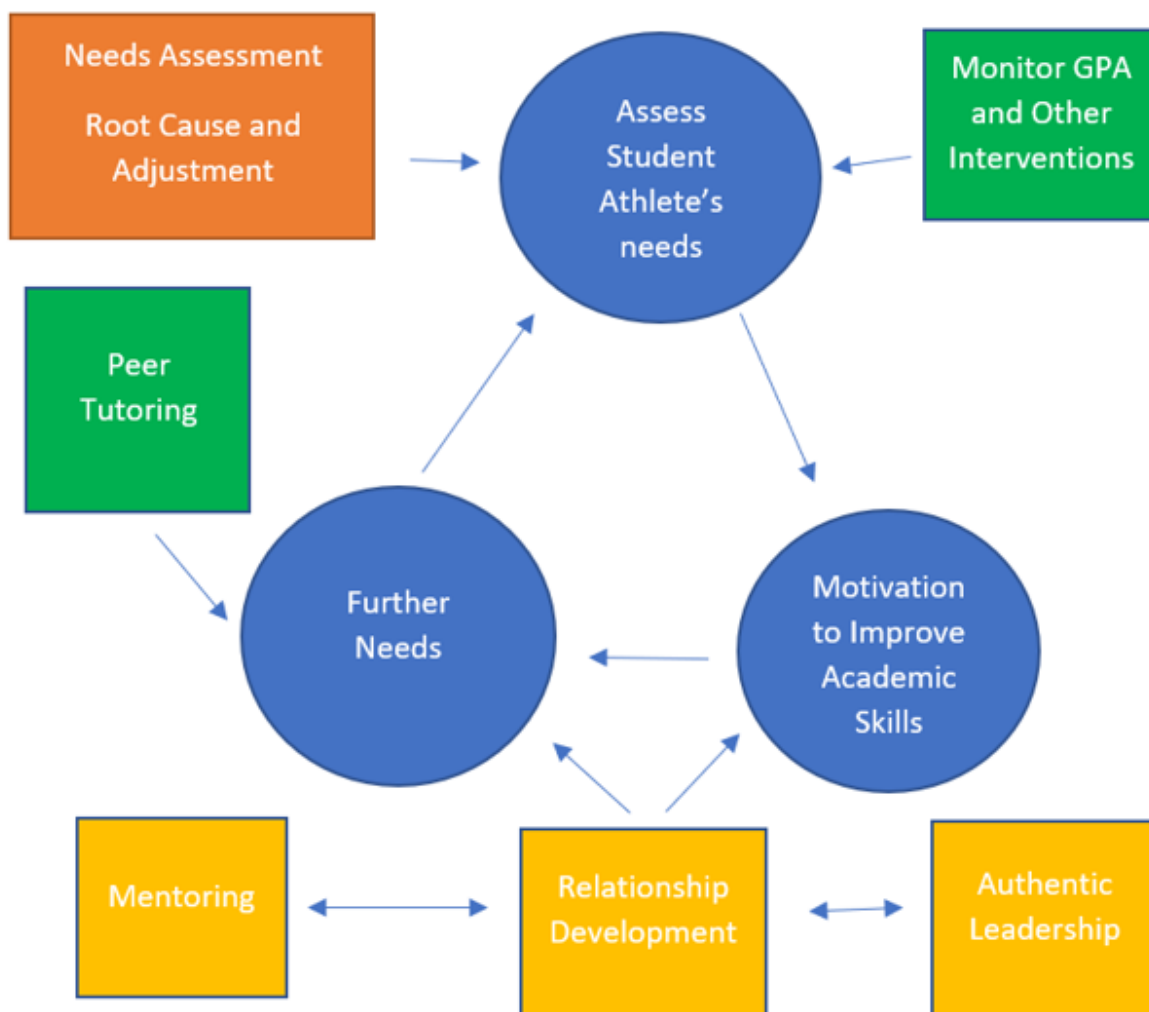
The name of my emergent theory is Reframing Coaching Success: Mentorship and Ethics in the Era of Increased Competition and Exploitation of High School Athletes. From the intensive interviews with my study participants, along with my personal experience as a coach and student athlete I co-constructed a theory that identifies the methods high school athletic coaches use to identify their student athletes' needs and develop the relationships necessary to initiate effective interventions to improve skills needed to improve academic performance. The data that revealed this theory was based on a simple query question to which all participants responded, "What methods or techniques did your coach use to improve academic performance?" From this question and related questions that made up the interview guide, three categories, GPA, peer tutoring, and mentoring emerged. I coupled these categories with my belief that there needs to be a change in the emphasis of coaching from one that focuses on winning and career advancement to one that gages success by developing student athletes into productive adults who contribute to the betterment of their communities, therefore reframing coaching success. Academic performance is the focus due to its ties to both athletic eligibility and future educational opportunities and their potential impact on careers.

This theory identifies a process that is cyclical in nature, demanding constant evaluation of practice with modifications to ensure continuous student athlete improvement in academic

performance. Figure 1 shows this cycle of improvement and includes the components/methods the study's participants identified that their coaches used to increase academic performance. The circular movement visually demonstrates how all these components are interconnected.

**Figure 1**

*Reframing Coaching Success*



### ***Reframing Coaching Success: Example of the Process***

I will explain the process with a practical example.

#### **Stage One: Assess Needs.**

At some point during an initial grade check, a coach discovers that a player is very close to being ineligible. A closer look at his grades reveals that he is struggling in both Math and English. Furthermore, he is frequently tardy and leaves early periodically, all unexcused. His coach sets up tutoring for both Math and English and puts the player on a daily grade and attendance check which are turned into the coach at the end of the day, every Friday. The coach, a teacher at the school, sets up a weekly lunch time meeting with the player. At these meetings, the coach engages with authentic conversations to build trust and create a mentor/mentee relationship.

#### **Stage Two: Motivate to Improve Academic Skills.**

During the initial weekly meetings, conversations will focus on identifying what a player likes and dislikes about school, what he wants to get out of his education. The coach will explore, during these meetings, how academics, work ethic, and attendance contribute to future success. Weekly discussions will also include hurdles to overcome, what additional supports are needed, with all done in a caring and supportive fashion. At this point, the initial supports to improve academics (Math and English tutoring, weekly grade and attendance checks, weekly meetings) and life skills are in place. Many of the participants in my study, including participants 1, 3, 8, 9, and 11 reported similar interventions that proved to be life changing.

#### **Stage Three: Re-assess for Further Needs.**

This step in the cycle blends back into Stage 1. An ongoing evaluation of data from weekly grade and attendance checks and adding a deeper understanding of the student athlete

through weekly meetings will reveal further needs and/or adjustments to the current interventions. Included in this evaluation will be a root cause analysis for both successful interventions, and those which are not working. Changes and adjustments will come from this analysis and changes and strategies will be implemented. There is no timetable for the length of this cycle. Ideally, needs and changes can be identified weekly, but some of the emotional changes will be slower to come, and will be based on the level of trust developed during mentoring. Even when a student athlete begins excelling as a student and a person, this cycle continues as their mentor/mentee relationship deepens. For example, participant 3, at 29 years of age, remains in contact with his coach and still seeks his council.

A dimension that cuts across this whole process is authentic leadership. This process is an authentic approach to invest time and effort into ensuring a student athlete has best opportunity to have a successful life as a person and leader of their community. The ultimate goal of this process is to produce leaders who ‘pay it forward’ to their families and communities. This goal of ‘paying it forward’ has support in literature. To be truly authentic is to contribute as much as one possibly can while helping others do the same (Authentic Leadership, 2021). For a coach to be really authentic is not to reach the highest rung on the coaching ladder but to contribute as much as they possibly can by being the person they really are, and to help others do the same (Gunderman & Mass, 2014).

### **Chapter Summary**

The goal of this grounded theory study was for the student athlete participants to reveal, through intensive interviews, the methods and practices their coaches used to improve academic performance. Coding of the interviews and memo-writing about the concepts led me to identify three major categories: the influence of minimum 2.0 GPA requirement, the use of peer tutoring

as an intervention to improve academic performance, and a coach mentoring a player, giving advice and life lessons that lead to better habits including better academic performance. There is also evidence, from the interviews that these strategies were used in combination with each other and in some cases used separately. The chapter also set forth an emergent theory, Reframing Coaching Success, which explains a process by which high school coaches positively influence their student athletes' academic performance. In Chapter V, I will discuss a second literature review based on the interview responses and data analysis.

## **CHAPTER V: POST-INTERVIEWS LITERATURE REVIEW**

As discussed in the methods chapter, constructivist grounded theory calls for an initial literature review to sensitize oneself to concepts in the field, followed by another literature review once the data are analyzed. This chapter discusses that additional literature.

### **GPA Requirements**

No matter which decade of life they were in or state a participant in this study originated from, they all reported needing a 2.0 GPA to participate in high school athletics. Further research on grade point average led to a national governing body for high school athletics called the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS). This national organization is keenly interested in making sure all high school athletes are academically eligible for not only high school sports, which includes their support of a 2.0 GPA minimum for high school athletes, but to actively promote the academic standards necessary to accept National College Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I scholarships. COVID-19 has changed the requirements for admission to college. In the past, athletes applying to colleges were required to submit their grade point average (GPA) and SAT or ACT scores. These athletes were admitted on a sliding scale, meaning that the higher the GPA the lower the needed SAT/ACT score with the converse being true, the lower the GPA the higher the SAT/ACT scores required for admission. For example, a student athlete with a GPA of 3.0 would need to have at least a SAT score of 720, whereas a student athlete with a 2.0 GPA would need a SAT score of 1100 (NCAA, as cited in NCSA College Recruiting, 2022-23). An important difference between high school athletic GPA calculation and the GPA calculations computed by the NCAA is that the NCAA only uses the grades from core subjects whereas high school athletic eligibility is calculated from all subjects taken during an eligibility period.

Due to COVID-19, SAT and ACT scores requirements are no longer required for any student. According to an NCAA PowerPoint shared on a NFHS website by the NCAA Eligibility Center, the current NCAA requirements, as of 2022-23, to participate in Division I athletics is comprised of three levels. An athlete with a 3.0 GPA in core subjects can be accepted as an Early Academic Qualifier, an athlete with a 2.3 GPA is considered an Academic Qualifier, and an athlete with a 2.0 GPA would be accepted as an Academic Redshirt, meaning that they would be held out of competition their first year and complete all academic requirements (NFHS 2023). These athletic scholarship acceptance requirements do emphasize that even though a GPA of 2.0 qualifies a high school athlete to participate in their sport, it should be the goal of all athletes and students to aspire to maintain as high of GPA as possible to better their chances to be accepted into colleges, universities, and training programs. These changes in college requirements and lack of alignment of GPA requirements for participation in high school athletics to participation in athletics in college at the NCAA Division I level are discussed in Chapter VI.

### **Peer Tutoring**

The participants I interviewed used the word “tutoring” to describe the academic help being given by one person to another. Research on the meaning and the application of the word tutoring was necessary to establish if what the participants engaged in matched with the research findings. There is a long history and evidence of peer tutoring. “Peer learning goes back as far as the period of Aristotle” (Ali et al., 2015, p. 2). According to research, peer tutoring involves two or more students working together to make sure what they are learning is clear and it typically involves one student providing help and feedback to another (Ali et al., 2015; Bowman-Perrott et al. 2013; Darrow et al., 2005; Houston & Lazenbatt, 1999).



For there to be any benefits to come from tutoring, there needs to be an objective for any peer tutoring session. Solving problems, learning skills, and improving performance are many times a goal or goals for a peer tutoring session (Algozzine et al., 2009; Marr et al., 2011; Merrill & Gilbert, 2008). Many student athletes have a cognitive obstacle keeping them from completing a task or solving a problem. A peer tutor can provide insight to how they solved the same problem in a way that a teacher is unable to. Another benefit or characteristic of peer tutoring is a deepening of understanding of the material being worked on (Darrow et al., 2005; Vallarino et al., 2022). This deepening of understanding is not limited to the student being tutored. The tutor learns by teaching (Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006). It takes deep thought about a topic to teach another about it and “no one learns more than a teacher, so a logical notion is to make the student the teacher” (Darrow et al., 2005, p. 1). As well as a shared deepening of knowledge, both the tutor and the tutee become more responsible as they commit to the tutoring process (Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006). Peer tutoring, therefore, benefits all who participate.

Peer tutoring can also be used to build upon ideas (Matuk & Linn 2018; Tasker, & Herrenkohl, 2016). This can happen when a tutor scaffolds knowledge/ideas the tutee possesses, to help them come to a new understanding. It also can happen when a student being tutored combines their ideas with those of the tutor to improve understanding or create a new understanding for both the tutee and the tutor.

Literature shows that peer tutoring is effectively used across the curriculum. “It is an accepted strategy to promote learning and academic achievement across the curriculum” (Darrow et al., 2005, p. 1). This fact is important regarding peer tutoring for athletic teams due to all the subjects taught in high school. Research has shown that peer tutoring can improve oral fluency (Algozzine et al., 2009; Marr et al., 2011). That peer tutoring is successfully used in

science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) classrooms (Houston & Lazenbatt, 1999; Matuk & Linn, 2018; Tasker & Herrenkohl, 2016), and Darrow et al. (2005) described an effective use of peer tutoring in a general music class.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the daily lives of individuals, families, businesses, and schools. It changed the way students learned and were taught. Mandatory school closings forced students and teachers to participate with Zoom classes and use online learning platforms and products. This also meant that peer tutoring had to be conducted online. Research by Vallarino et al. (2022) has shown peer tutoring to be effective even when used in online courses.

Benefits of peer tutoring are various and apply to both the tutor and tutee. Bowman-Perrott et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analytic review of single-case research and concluded that peer tutoring results in moderate to large academic benefits. Many times, the benefits experienced by the tutor are an afterthought or not considered. Some of the benefits of peer tutoring for both tutee and tutor are as follows in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Tutoring Benefits*

Benefits for Tutee	Benefits for Tutor
Learn how to work as a team	Learn how to work as a team
Enhances students' engagement, communication, and independence skills	Builds confidence
Promotes critical thinking and problem-solving based learning	Fosters leadership qualities
Increases the understanding of course content	Deepens understanding of content
Builds self-reliance and confidence	Satisfaction for helping fellow students

Knowing the benefits of peer tutoring, for both the tutor and tutee, can help facilitate matching tutor to tutee thus increasing the probability of success and learning for all involved.

The participants I interviewed identified that their coaches organized peer tutoring among their players to help their teammates improve their academic performance. According to several research studies, peer tutoring can provide benefits to the whole team, benefits that any coach would welcome, including improving teamwork, fostering leadership qualities (Marashi, 2021), social development (Houston & Lazenbatt, 1999), and the need to help and support each other's learning (Darrow, Gibbs, & Wedel, 2005). Implications of peer tutoring are addressed in Chapter VI.

### **Mentoring**

Being a mentor means being a “person engaged in a unique relationship with a mentee who provides guiding, caring, nurturing, counseling, and advising” (Jones et al., 2009, p. 277). Being a mentor is a choice and can extend well beyond the high school years of the mentee. A mentor establishes a deeper relationship with their student athlete(s) which allows a transfer of knowledge and skills, not taught, or learned in a classroom, which apply throughout a lifetime (Coffino, 2018; Gould et al., 2007). The skills and advice being taught and given can help a student athlete negotiate social interactions, develop values, maximize their physical abilities, improve life skills, and prioritize their academic work (Coffino, 2018; Gould et al., 2007; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011). Many times, mentoring will reflect learning not usually associated with classroom instruction.

In addition to teaching life skills, values, social skills, and physical skills, a coach mentor can have an impact on the emotional health of their athletes. These emotional health benefits include the development of emotional learning, developing self-determined motivation, and the

development of reflection and initiative which leads to an ability to have control over their own social environment, behavior, and motivation (Amorose et al., 2016; Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003; McMullen et al., 2020). Research has reported that mentor coaches can influence and teach their student athletes' skills which include acquiring new peer relationships, developing group social skills such as taking responsibility, working together as a team, and developing valuable connections to adults (Chan et al., 2012; Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003; Holt et al., 2011). For female athletes, a coach mentor can help a mentee with body image by creating a team environment that reinforces a positive body image (Smith & Ogle, 2006).

Being an athletic coach comes with great responsibility. A coach who is a positive mentor can support an athlete academically, improve emotional health, and promote successful development as an individual and member of a community. An effective coach mentor is authentic with their approach and leadership style. It takes real commitment to being a mentor. It cannot be 'faked' or turned on and off as if a light switch. As stated in the initial literature review, the authentic leader has characteristics of heart and compassion, purpose and passion, values reflected in behaviors, creates connectedness in relationships, and exhibit consistent self-discipline (Northouse, 2019). Authentic, transformational leadership makes the necessary connections needed to foster an environment where their student athletes have the best opportunity for personal growth and future successes. These are the qualities that effective mentors possess. It takes both a willing student athlete, one who recognizes genuine authenticity in a coach, and a committed coach to make the connection necessary for a successful mentor, mentee relationship. There have been documented examples of well know athletic coaches with decades of recognition for their abilities as an authentic leader and mentor. Reading about coaches such as John Wooden, Mike Krzyzewski, and Dean Smith will reveal how their role as

leader and mentor improve the lives of student athletes, adults they worked with, improved the teams and athletic programs they led, and developed lifelong connections and relationships.

Implications of a coaches' role as a mentor is discussed in Chapter VI.

### **Chapter Summary**

Further research on the key concepts revealed through participant interviews revealed additional support for the importance of those categories and new information. Research on the 2.0 grade point requirement for high school athletic participation revealed that the NCAA no longer requires that students take the SAT or ACT and bases athletic eligibility on a core subject GPA with different levels of eligibility including an athlete being considered an athletic redshirt with a GPA from 2.0 to 2.29. Research on peer tutoring supported its effectiveness across all subjects and included the use of virtual peer tutoring. Also emphasized was that peer tutoring has benefits for both the tutee and the tutor. This second literature review revealed that being an athletic coach mentor comes with great responsibility. A coach who is a positive mentor can support an athlete academically, improve emotional health, and promote successful development as an individual and member of a community and that it takes serious commitment to being a mentor.

## **CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION**

This chapter provides a summary of my study and the implications it raises for coaching practice and the preparation of coaches. The chapter also offers suggestions for future research, a statement of limitations, the social justice significance of the study, and my personal reflections.

### **Summary of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the potential for creating a change in focus in high school athletics from one that rewards elite athletes and championship winning coaches, to one that focuses on improving the academic skills of student athletes to support their optimal future opportunities. The research inquiry asked the question, what methods do athletic coaches employ to improve academic performance and skills of their high school student athletes?

My work was informed by the theoretical perspectives of Dewey and Freire, as well as research on authentic leadership and the literature on high school athletic coaching. Because I wanted to transcend my personal biases through open consideration of other perspectives, while also co-constructing meaning with participants, I selected constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) as my research method.

Using a semi-structured question interview guide, I spoke with a diverse group 17 former high school athletes to uncover their perspectives on how their coaches attended to their non-athletic success. The responses from these interviews uncovered three main coaching concerns: eligibility based on maintaining minimal grade point average; improving academic performance through peer tutoring; and mentoring for life skills and success. Through theoretical analysis, these central issues led to a tentative grounded theory Reframing Coaching success. This theory explains how high school athletic coaches positively influence their student athletes' academic performance. It as a process that involves a repeating cycle of evaluation,

interventions, and mentoring that lead to improved academic success and acquisition of valuable life skills.

### **Implications**

In this section I present the practical implications of my study for the profession of high school athletic coaching.

All participants interviewed identified the influence and pressure to obtain and maintain a minimal 2.0 GPA to participate and maintain eligibility for athletic competition. All felt some level of pressure to perform academically, whether the sources were from oneself, their coach, teammates, parents, peers, or from their community. Those students who did well academically still felt pressure to improve their GPA and participate in AP courses to better their chances to enroll in colleges and universities of their choice. Those who struggled felt pressure from peers, fellow players, themselves, and their coaches to meet eligibility standards. Regardless of this pressure, many of the participants still were ineligible at some point during their high school athletic careers and needed further intervention to raise their academic performance.

The pressure felt to maintain a 2.0 GPA for high school participation is both real and motivating. There is a question as to whether it is an adequate requirement given that the NCAA requires a student athlete with a 2.0 GPA to be a redshirt freshman. For high school athletic coaches, it is more important to evaluate how they contribute to this GPA pressure and how they can work to relieve this stress. There needs to be a balance of GPA pressure and methods of support. Student athletes' need some pressure to motivate them to produce academically, but coaches need to monitor their athletes' stress levels and have procedures/programs in place for student athletes who show signs of excessive stress levels.

Even with the pressure of maintaining a minimal GPA, many of the participants struggled to stay eligible. This reality led to the emergence of interventions to improve grades. The participants identified tutoring, almost exclusively peer tutoring as the method their coaches used once academic issues were uncovered. In most cases, peer tutoring involved a member of an athletic team to act as a tutor for one or more of their teammates. The athletes relied on the strengths of its members to help those in need. Tutoring session usually took place before practice or during lunch. There were also a few reports of students being referred to teachers for tutoring or tutoring during study hall sessions.

Peer tutoring, from the data obtained from the participant interviews, has been identified as a method most coaches choose as an intervention to improve their athlete's grades. It follows that how tutoring is implemented will have an impact on its effectiveness. From this study, it is unclear if the tutors received any training in tutoring methods or if the coaches had any prior knowledge of tutoring methods. It can be assumed that, for those coaches who are also teachers, they have been exposed to peer tutoring or have used it as a teaching strategy in their classrooms. These findings suggest that training programs need to be implemented for both tutors and coaches to ensure that the maximum benefit can come from peer tutoring sessions. To ensure that all student athletes maximize their academic potential, it makes sense to incorporate peer tutoring sessions throughout the school year and should not be only implemented after there is an academic issue with impending academic ineligibility. Since a literature review has shown that peer tutoring benefits both the tutee and the tutor, ongoing tutoring sessions can help all student athletes improve their academic performance.

The third category uncovered during the interview process led to the identification of coach mentoring as an important intervention in developing life skills, decision making skills,



habits, and values, all which help promote academic skills. Coach mentoring involved a coach and student athlete creating a safe and trusting relationship where a coach is available to answer questions, give advice, give guidance, and support the student athlete with their life decisions.

Research literature and statements from participant interviews reveal the significant impact a mentor can have on the life of a mentee. Many of the participants reported having a strong relationship with their mentor coach that continued after their high school playing days were over. The participants who reported having their coach as a mentor express that, in many cases, it was life changing or that it had a great impact on their life choices.

Even though coach mentoring is a powerful influence on the life of a student athlete, there are limitations on how far-reaching coach mentoring can be. First, a coach cannot possibly have enough time to mentor every player on their team. Secondly, both the coach and the player must mutually participate as mentor and mentee. Without this dual commitment, there will not be any mentoring taking place. Both limitations mean that many players, who need intervention will be left out and need other support.

The interviews with the 17 participants revealed three main categories associated with the improvement of academic performance which include the influence of a 2.0 GPA to be eligible for athletic participation, peer tutoring to bring up grades or maintain eligibility, and coach mentoring to guide student athletes to develop the life skills necessary for future success. The overarching theme of this study is the role and involvement of the coach. None of the strategies revealed work without a coach being committed to the student athlete. This includes the implementation of policies and expectations connected to each theory and authentic follow-up with the student athlete. Without the commitment and leadership of the coach, no consistent results will occur. The theory, Reframing Coaching Success, with its cycles of evaluation,

interventions, and mentoring gives the framework that leads to the best possible futures for high school student athletes. In the next section I outline my evolving professional development ideas that can help coaches to attend to the academic needs for their student athletes.

### **Proposed Professional Development**

This section contains an example of a three-module training course designed to use the results and implications of this dissertation to lead coaches to develop and walk away from these modules with plans that they developed for use with their student athletes. These modules address the three themes of improving academic performance that came out of the participant interviews which were based on the question, “What coaching methods/techniques did your coach use to improve academic performance?” This main query also drove the creation of the interview guide.

## Reframing Coaching Success

### Coaching Professional Development

#### Module I: Managing Eligibility

#### **Objectives**

- Coaches will be introduced to the rational of Reframing Coaching Success
- Coaches will review athletic eligibility requirements and discuss practical methods to monitor their athletes' grades
- Coaches will discuss the impact of the pressure they put on their athletes to maintain eligibility and will devise methods to incorporate into their monitoring practice that are supportive and encouraging
- Coaches will choose their method to monitor athletes' grades and create a letter for athletes and parents explaining this method along with forms needed for their method

#### **Guiding Questions**

- How do we, as coaches, define success as coaches and how does this support our athletes' futures?
- How can we, as coaches, monitor the academic progress of our student athletes in a nurturing and supportive way?

#### **Time**

#### **Topic/Activity**

5 minutes	Welcome
15 minutes	Introduction/rational of Reframing Coaching Success and the day's objectives
10 minutes	High School GPA requirements vs NCAA GPA requirements
15 minutes	How do you monitor players' GPA? Groups of 4- Discuss/list methods to monitor GPA. Share responses with whole group for a master list
5 minutes	Groups of 4- How do you convince players to meet GPA requirements? Share with whole group
5 minutes	Groups of 4- How can you convince players to meet GPA requirements? Share with whole group
5 minutes	Groups of 4- Which of these methods are both nurturing and supportive? Share with whole group
25 minutes	Each coach will choose a method to monitor athletes' grades, create a letter for athletes and parents explaining this method along with forms needed for their method
5 minutes	Wrap-up

## Reframing Coaching Success

### Coaching Professional Development

#### Module II: Grade Intervention- Peer Tutoring

#### **Objectives**

- Coaches will discuss the concept of peer tutoring and will identify steps necessary to implement and monitor peer tutoring
- Coaches will develop a peer tutoring plan that has been created specifically for their student athletes, school, and available resources

#### **Guiding Questions**

- How will coaches use a peer tutoring plan to improve academic performance and academic skill acquisition?

#### **Time**

#### **Topic/Activity**

5 minutes	Welcome
15 minutes	Module I review and the day's objectives
10 minutes	Discussion of peer tutoring- With a table partner, discuss the meaning of peer tutoring. Share with the whole group.
15 minutes	How can peer tutoring benefit student athletes? - Discuss this question in groups of 4. Share responses with the whole group.
15 minutes	Ways to implement peer tutoring- Groups of 4. Discuss and list ways to implement peer tutoring. Share with the whole group and put on a master list
25 minutes	Each coach will create a peer tutoring schedule that is customized to their student athletes' needs and school's resources
5 minutes	Wrap-up

## Reframing Coaching Success

### Coaching Professional Development

#### Module III: Coach Mentoring

#### **Objectives**

- Coaches will discuss the concept and goals of coach mentoring and will identify the principles necessary to mentor student athletes effectively including authentic leadership skills
- Coaches will develop guidelines for successful coach mentoring
- Coaches will select guidelines and develop a mentoring plan that works for them on a personal level

#### **Guiding Questions**

- How does mentoring a student athlete support them as a person and their academic growth?
- How does a coaches leadership style contribute to effective mentoring?
- What are procedures and steps necessary to be an effective mentor?

#### **Time**

#### **Topic/Activity**

5 minutes	Welcome
5 minutes	Module II review and the day's objectives
20 minutes	With elbow partner, discuss what it means to be an effective mentor. Share with the whole group making a master list. In groups of 4, discuss the connection of leadership style to being an effective mentor. Share with the whole group.
10 minutes	In groups of 4, discuss the meaning of authentic leadership and how it is connected to being an effective mentor.
15 minutes	In groups of 4, develop principles and guidelines for being an effective mentor. Share with the whole group making a master list <sup>64</sup>
20 minutes	Coaches will choose principles that personally speak as being critical to being an effective mentor and create a guiding document for their personal use
15 minutes	Review, resources, next steps, professional development evaluation

In developing this professional development framework, I relied on participant data that supported my theory of Reframing Coaching Success as well as literature on peer tutoring and leadership (Ali et al., 2015; Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Darrow et al., 2005; Houston & Lazenbatt, 1999; Gunderman & Maas, 2014; Northouse, 2019).

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. Due to the sample size of 17 participants, the study's findings cannot be generalized, which was not the goal of this research, but can be transferable to other settings. My own biases based on my positionality has a potential impact on the outcomes of the study. Finally, given that some of my participants have been out of high school for so long, memories of those events might not be accurate or complete.

### **Future Research**

I believe research needs to be done or repeated on the effectiveness of a 2.0 GPA as a minimal GPA for high school athletic participation. Can we even guarantee, with any certainty, that an "A" from one school is equal to an "A" from another school, let alone from one algebra class to another in the same school? I would like to see studies that identify the best methods to help student athletes prepare for college admission. There are examples of athletes who graduate from high school, have a high enough GPA, but cannot place into the college freshman English or Math courses.

I believe there is a need to discover whether training for peer tutors has an impact on the level of effectiveness of the tutoring. It would be helpful for a high school athletic program to know this to determine how much time to invest in training peer tutors and how to implement peer tutoring, which is an important tool for coaches who care about their athletes' academic success.

The relationship between a coach and a player can be a life changing and lifelong. I would like to see research studies that explore the most effective mentoring skills for athletic coaches who must balance concerns for both athletic and academic success. I suggest a grounded theory study with high school athletic coaches as participants to get their perspective and practical experiences with the skills they find effective as a mentor. With this research, coaching courses can be designed to include these mentoring skills.

Another study I suggest would involve research that does a comparative study between coaches who are teachers and those who are not to see what differences there are in their approach to education, specifically their knowledge and application of academic interventions for their student athletes.

Other studies I see as valuable would be a study that compares experiences with coaches and academics based on different socioeconomic statuses and a study that looks at parents' involvement supporting academic performance at public schools versus charter schools and private schools

### **Social Justice Implications**

I work for the Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest in the United States, where we have a large percentage (80%) of our students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. These students need every intervention and support possible to help close the academic gap. A high school athletic coach is working extended hours per day with students who, in many cases, participate in a sport that serves as the primary motivation for attending academic classes. Helping their student athletes become academically successful increases their socioeconomically disadvantaged athletes' chance of achieving economic success. The life skills, values, and support provided by a coach mentor has the potential for laying the foundation for

these athletes to become leaders who are contributing to the improvement of their families and community. It is not enough for a socioeconomically disadvantaged athlete to experience individual life success. It really does “Take a Village” to generate change. There is a great need for these successful individuals to become leaders of change for their communities.

### **Reflection**

Since I began this dissertation, events in college athletics have caused me to have even more concern for the future of high school student athletes. With the Supreme Court’s decision in *NCAA v. Alston* (2021), college athletes are entitled to earn compensation for their name, image, and likeness (NIL). This Supreme Court decision has changed the recruitment of high school athletes to include brokering deals on the level of compensation a recruited athlete may receive for their NIL and has raised the level of education and awareness a high school athlete needs to have to negotiate this business decision. Most are unable to make informed choices and decisions without legal guidance, and some are not old enough to sign legally binding contracts. My greatest worry for these talented athletes is the number of adults who are willing to take advantage of these athletes for their own financial/career benefit.

Regardless of whether a high school athlete moves on to college athletics, it is critical that a high school athletic coach uses the valuable time spent with their athletes as an opportunity to prepare them for their optimal future. As coaches we not only have an opportunity, but a great responsibility to help the student athletes with whom we spend these countless hours. This dissertation revealed, from the perspective of former high school student athletes, methods and practices an athletic coach can implement to improve the academic performance of their student athletes and reinforced the important role an athletic coach has in a student athlete’s life. This dissertation study is just the beginning. I believe that with more research, collaboration with high



school athletes, and input from successful adults, more interventions and supports will be uncovered that will benefit and support the acquisition of skills high school student athletes need to be productive adult members of society.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### *Interview Questions Guide*

Interviews were semi structured to allow for flexibility to explore emerging themes. Each interview lasted between 35 and 50 minutes. Each interview began with a brief description of the purpose of the interview and the rationale of my dissertation topic

1. Name and age and socioeconomic background
2. Where did you go to high school?
3. What sports did you play and for how long?
4. Was your coach a teacher?
5. Did you ever struggle academically?
6. Did you attend college? Where? What levels? Where do you work and what do you do?
7. Who encouraged you to work on your academics? How did they do this? Were there interventions?
8. Did your coach use any methods or tactics that encouraged you to improve your academic skills?
9. Did your coach ever incorporate an academic lesson into the practice plan?
10. Was there any social/peer pressure to do well academically?
11. Were you encouraged to go to college?
12. Did you know what you wanted to do with your college education? When did you decide your major and have you applied it to your current career?
13. Are there any tips, insights, or anything else we haven't touched upon that you would like to share?

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

### *Consent Form*

#### Coaching Athletes for High School Academic Success

**Project Investigator:** Thomas Auten **Dissertation Chair:** Dr. Michael A. Raffanti

1. I understand that this study is of a research nature. It may offer no direct benefit to me.
2. Participation in this study is voluntary. I may refuse to enter it or may withdraw at any time without creating any harmful consequences to myself. I, as a participant, will not receive compensation. I also understand that the investigator may drop me at any time from the study.
3. The purpose of this study is to discover methods high school athletic coaches use to improve the academic performance and/or skills of their student athletes.
4. As a participant in the study, I will be asked to take part in the following procedures: Initial and possible follow-up interviews. Participants in the study will take an hour of my time and will take place during recorded Zoom interviews.
5. The risks, discomforts and inconveniences of the above procedures are minimal and could possibly cause the recall of a bad experience.
6. The possible benefits of the procedure might be knowing that the participant contributed data that helped future high school student athletes benefit from coaching methods that improved their academic skills and success, increased their college options, and increased their potential for a productive life.
7. Personal identifiers will be removed and the de-identified information may be used for future research without additional consent.
8. Information about the study was discussed with me by Thomas Auten. If I have further questions, I can call him at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

9. Though the purpose of this study is primarily to fulfill my requirement to complete a formal research project as a dissertation at Antioch University, I also intend to include the data and results of the study in future scholarly publications and presentations. Our confidentiality agreement, as articulated above, will be effective in all cases of data sharing" If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Thomas Auten at xxx-xxx-xxxx or via email at xxx. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Chair ( ) or local Provost ( title, and office phone number).

Signed:\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

### *Letter of Introduction*

Date

Dear <Name>,

I am writing you to ask for your assistance with a research study I am conducting as part of my doctoral dissertation for Antioch University. I am seeking feedback from former high school student athletes with the intent to discover coaching methods that improved academic skills and performance.

The importance of this study is highlighted by research completed by the National College Athletic Association (NCAA) and reported in the 2020 Estimated Probability of Competing in College Athletics. This study breaks down, by sport, the percentage of high school athletes who participate in college interscholastic athletics at any level. The majority of NCAA sports show that only approximately 5% of high school athletes will participate in college interscholastic sports and even a smaller percentage will play professionally for any amount of time. This means that our high school athletes need our focus to be on their academic careers, not only their athletic careers. This study, through interviews with former high school athletes will help identify and make available the most effective coaching methods used to improve academic success.

Taking part in research is always optional and there will be no compensation for participation. I am looking for people who want to take part in this research study and who are:

1. Former high school athletes between the ages of 18 and 70

2. Athletic Directors and coaches who can help recruit participants either directly or by providing contact information of other athletic directors or coaches who would be interested in helping.

What I am asking you is your help in the following ways:

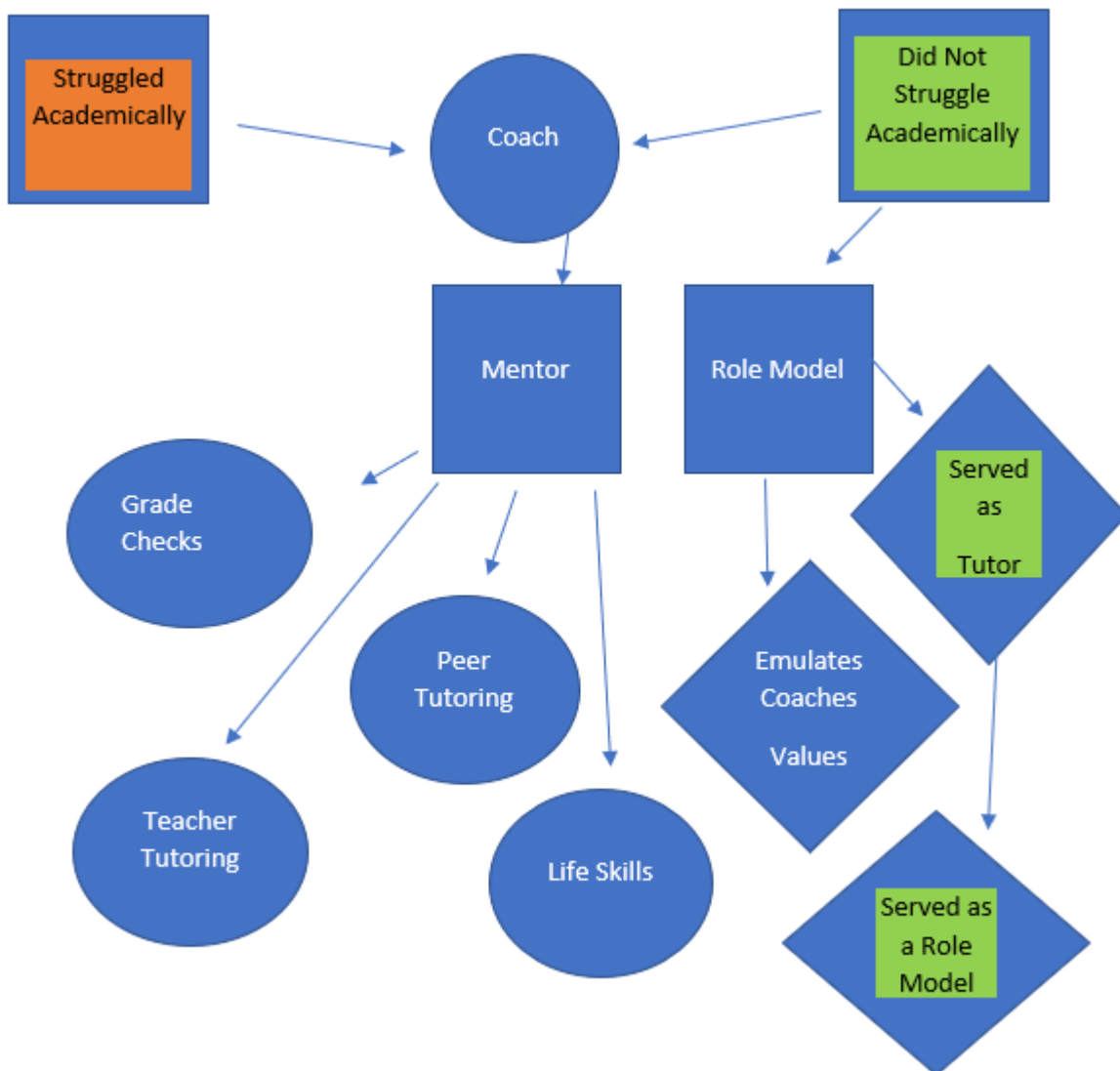
1. Participate by volunteering to be interviewed
2. Provide me with contacts of former student athletes
3. Participate and provide contacts

Please let me know, by responding to this email, if you are willing to help. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Thomas Auten

Doctoral Candidate, Antioch University

**APPENDIX D: DISSERTATION THOUGHT DIAGRAM****Figure 2***Dissertation Thought Diagram From Interview Data*

## APPENDIX E: INITIAL CODING

### *Initial Coding*

Code	Narrative Data to be coded
	<p>Researcher-How would you describe your Socioeconomic status in High - School?</p> <p>Participant- We were lower middle class. The community and school served a range of economic groups. I grew up on the outskirts of Paso Robles, CA in a house on an acre and a half. My dad is a landscaper and my mom worked in a silicone factory. Paso has numerous Latino communities. I don't believe I went to a Title I school and the high school I went to Beleives was close to 50-50 white/Latino.</p>
	<p>Researcher- Where did you attend High School?</p> <p>Participant- I attended Paso Robles High School all four years</p>
	<p>Researcher- What sports did you play in high school?</p> <p>Participant- I played soccer all four years in high school.</p>
	<p>Researcher- Was your coach a teacher?</p> <p>Participant- My soccer coach was a math teacher, and our JV coach was also a physical education teacher. My soccer coach's wife was also the agriculture teacher at the school.</p>
GS	<p>Researcher- Did you ever have academic issues in high school?</p>

	Participant- I struggle in my 9 <sup>th</sup> and 10 <sup>th</sup> grade years. I was barely eligible for soccer with GPA of 2.2.
	<p>Researcher- Did you go to college? What was your major? When did you decide on your major?</p> <p>Participant- Went Cal State Northridge. I Began as a business major but switched to Kinesiology early on. I wanted to be involved in sports and coaching. I earned a degree in Kinesiology and a teaching credential in Physical Education.</p>
-	<p>Researcher- Describe your career?</p> <p>Participant- I'm currently a physical education teacher for LAUSD and a club soccer coach and director in Santa Monica.</p>
MY	<p>Researcher- Who encouraged you to work on your academics. How?</p> <p>Participant- I was encouraged by parents to go to college. They didn't want me to rely on my body for a career. They wanted me to be able to use my mind instead. My soccer coached mentored me to think about my future and how education would benefit and expand my options.</p>
CMG TT MY	<p>Researcher- Did your coach use any methods or tactics to improve your academic skills?</p> <p>Participant- My coach monitored grades and had an open understanding and dialogue with the entire teaching staff. When a player struggled academically, my coach would set up academic tutoring and interventions with the staff to support learning. My coach mentored athletes and encouraged strong work habits, taking responsibility for one's actions, and planning for their futures.</p>



TT	<p>Researcher- Did your coach ever incorporate an academic lesson into a practice plan?</p> <p>Participant- Yes, he was a math teacher and from time to time would incorporate math into practice. Angles and geometric shapes are a good fit with soccer, and he took full advantage of this.</p>
GPP	<p>Researcher- Do you recall any social or peer pressure to do well academically?</p> <p>Participant- Yes, there was indirect pressure from older teammates who were trying to do well enough to get into AP courses. It made feel pressure to push myself to get good enough grades to take advanced courses, Also, the was pressure from teammates to stay academically eligible.</p>
MY	<p>Researcher- Were you encouraged to go to college? Who encouraged you?</p> <p>Participant- I was encouraged to go to college by parents and family to have an opportunity for options for a career so to avoid only using my body for work. My coach mentored me to go to college and have options for a career,</p>
MY	<p>Researcher- Did you know what you wanted to do with your college education and have applied it to your career?</p> <p>Participant- I went to CSUN as a business major but switched to kinesiology and graduated with both a kinesiology degree a physical education credential. I chose this route to be involved with sports and coaching. My experience with being mentored by my coach played a major role in wanting to be a coach and pay it forward.</p>
MI	<p>Researcher- Was your coach influential in your life? How?</p>

MY	Participant- My coach has been a major influence in my life. I'm till close to my coach and his family. I remember having many, many, conversations that pushed the big picture, the long-term picture in my head. Like, where are you going to be 10 years from now? He would remind me that "I know that soccer is a big part of your life, but it's not going to be there forever."
MI	Researcher- Any other insights or tips you would like to share?
MY	Participant- I can't underestimate the importance of the role my coach played in my life, my academic performance, and my career

## **APPENDIX F: MEMO**

### **REFRAMING COACHING SUCCESS**

#### **Memo**

##### **Data observations**

Early in the participant interview process, consistent themes have emerged. With a general inquiry question, What methods or techniques did your coach use to improve academic performance guiding an Interview guide, themes present themselves into three main categories which revolve around the methods athletic coaches use to improve academic performance. These themes are the influence of grade point average eligibility requirements (GPA), tutoring, and coach mentoring. There are subgroups to each theme. Codes can be attached to each major them and their subgroups and will be used for initial coding of narrative data. The codes constructed are as follows:

##### **GPA**

GI = Ineligible at some point during high school  
 GS = Never ineligible, but struggled to be eligible  
 GN = No problems with eligibility  
 GPP= Peer pressure to be eligible  
 GPE= Pressure to excel  
 GPN= Peer pressure to do poorly  
 GN- No academic pressure

##### **Tutoring/Interventions**

CMG- Coached monitored grades  
 PT = Needed and assigned peer tutoring

PTN = Did not need interventions

S = Assigned study hall

TT = tutored by a teacher

TC = Assigned to a tutor center

PTT- Student athlete served as a tutor.

### **Mentoring**

MY = Coach was mentor

MN = Coach not a mentor

MI = Coach had a major impact on student athlete life

MLC = Coach had a life changing impact on student athlete

MNEG = Coach had a negative impact on student athlete