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A STUDY OF ATHLETIC COACHING
AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL
USING THE COMPETING VALUES FRAMEWORK

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**A STUDY OF ATHLETIC COACHING AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL
USING THE COMPETING VALUES FRAMEWORK**

By

Michael James Prelesnik

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF ATHLETIC COACHING AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL USING THE COMPETING VALUES FRAMEWORK

By

Michael James Prelesnik

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe how middle school athletic coaches balanced the challenges of coaching as they strived to follow the established standards for coaches, adhered to middle school principles, and tried to field a competitive team. Qualitative research techniques were used as the activities of middle school girls' basketball coaches were observed. The source of data for this study was observations of practices as well as games and a post-observation interview with the coaches. Case studies were then written which revealed elements of coaching techniques, the coaches' own philosophies as they related to middle school principles, and strategies that the coaches utilized when they experienced a conflict in enacting their own standards and principles. Additionally, many of the established coaching standards of middle school coaching were revealed as the actions of these middle school coaches were documented. Next, coaching descriptions and information about a variety of actions were written in detail to support and provide examples during discussion of five major themes related to elements of coaching where challenges may occur. In addition, a cross-case analysis was used to compare the coaches' activities with relationship to the five major coaching themes as well as the established coaching standards. Research findings were further examined with reference to the competing values framework as the findings from the study were analyzed within the parameters of this framework. It was discovered that coaches with cognitive complexity were more successful coaches as they could move

more easily through the various quadrants of the competing values framework. A rubric that middle school administrators can use to evaluate middle school coaches was also written. Final conclusions, implications, and further recommendations for additional research related to middle school coaching philosophy are proposed.

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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Introduction and Background

Extracurricular activities are an important component of any middle school educational program. Students have the opportunity to participate in a variety of after school activities including interscholastic athletics in the seventh and eighth grades. These students often gain positive rewards from their involvement in sports as they have the opportunity to learn about the sport as well as the importance of teamwork and character development while they are taught by a positive role model; a coach who cares about them and wants them to have a successful and enjoyable experience as a member of the team. Coaches in middle school athletic programs are faced with a variety of challenges as they work with youth at this age level because there are different traits and values that the coaches may choose to emphasize. These challenges include balancing playing time while fielding a competitive team, working with the busy schedules of middle school students, relying on varying degrees of institutional support, and deciding whether or not to have a strong connection to the high school program. They need to be supportive motivators of the participants, but also teach the fundamental skills of the sport. They may be compassionate in their coaching, yet also firm as they work with this age group of students. Additionally, coaches sometimes have to handle conflicts or problems between the players as they ultimately strive to teach the concept of being a team. Typically, these coaches also have a fundamental understanding of the emotional and social needs of the middle school adolescent. At an eighth grade basketball game,

Lori, the coach, is observed as she talks to her players and coaches them throughout a game.

“Good job! Grab it,” she exclaims as the players go after a defensive rebound. “Pressure, box out,” she says while they continue to attempt to get possession of the ball. She adds, “Be strong with the ball.” As the team gets possession and takes the ball up the court she tells them, “Wait, wait, okay now pass it.” While one of the players is shooting, she yells to the others, “Be strong, rebound, rebound.” The team then falls back on defense as she tells them, “Good job. Good job. Get another turnover.” The team is working hard and giving a good effort, and she exclaims, “Good hustle! Way to move the ball ladies.”

This brief glimpse of a few minutes during an eighth grade basketball game demonstrates many of the coaching characteristics and values that coaches at this level may have as part of their own coaching philosophy. Middle school coaches are positive motivators, they emphasize the fundamentals and basics of the game, they teach players to work together, and they must be continually communicating with the players. Lori mentioned what she strives to emphasize as a middle school coach.

I stress character a lot. In terms of no matter what happens on the court, showing class, and showing good character. I teach responsibility. Teamwork is also a big emphasis. Kids at this age are focused on themselves, their own playing time, and how they look to people in the stands. You have to instill teamwork so that they know what it means to play as a team.

Lori’s discussion illustrates many of the goals of her coaching. She is attempting to teach character development, sportsmanship, and teamwork skills. However, this can be quite a challenging task to balance such a variety of priorities. Coaches such as Lori are often faced with difficult choices when they have conflicts in their own coaching beliefs and philosophies at the middle school level. The middle school years are a unique time of social and emotional development in the K-12 educational career of the typical student.

Middle schools began as the formation of the junior high school in the early 1900’s. This provided a specific school for 7th and 8th graders, and it removed them from

the typical K-8 elementary school. In the 1960's these junior high schools evolved into middle schools for students entering the period in their lives known as "early adolescence." These schools were for students in the sixth through eighth grades that were between the ages of 10 and 14. The schools utilized teaming, and specialized guidance and support systems to assist students during this time of dramatic social and physical changes in their lives. Extracurricular activities and athletics are a large component of the middle school philosophy as well. These programs give students an opportunity to be involved in activities outside of the regular school day. Middle school athletic programs can have a dramatic impact on a young person's life. Athletic activities with a clear focus on the needs of young adolescents can have a positive influence on this age group of students. Successful athletic programs will organize competition around equal opportunities in games, fundamental skill development, and social networking. With the guidance of an effective coach, middle school adolescents can be tremendously impacted by the middle school athletic program as they will gain personal development skills, learn about teamwork, and develop skills and learn information related to a specific sport.

Middle school coaches play a large role in the lives of their student athletes. The actions of a coach will affect the experience of the youth playing the sport. The coach's behavior influences participant's enjoyment of the activity as well as their self-esteem. Additionally, the coach influences the athletes' perceived success, effort, and preference for optimally challenging activities (Black and Weiss, 1992). The support and feedback that coaches give young people will directly affect a young person's level of motivation and self-perceptions in the sport. As coaches utilize more frequent praise, informational

feedback, and encouragement; this is positively related to the student's perceived competence and success, enjoyment, effort, and preference for optimally challenging activities (Harter, 1981). Although coaches strive to encourage all of their players to work hard and learn the sport, they also have a desire to field a competitive team. They want to win, as winning can be a motivator for the team. However, they have to balance their priorities. If coaches overemphasize winning at all costs, keep statistics, and yell at players, then this competition can be harmful. On the contrary, if the coaches believe in playing fairly, equal opportunities for all team members and skill development then the benefits of a competition can outweigh any anxiety created by losing a game. In general, most middle school students do not find athletic competitions to be stressful. With the support of a coach they can handle competition just as they would prepare for a band concert or musical playing competition (Scanlan and Passer, 1978).

The middle school years are a time of great importance to the education of a young person's life. It is vital that the middle athletic program fit the needs of this age group of students. Ultimately, individual schools and coaches will decide what they believe are the most important components of an athletic program to meet the needs of middle adolescents. By considering the desirable skill sets of coaches and the middle school philosophy, the middle school athletic program can flourish and have a positive impact on students. Schools strive to hire coaches who have a basic understanding of middle school philosophy (Lirgg, 1995). Additionally, coaches must have many traits which include being a good communicator, a teacher, motivator, and listener. However, the definition of what is effective in middle school coaching varies greatly, and this can be a difficult framework to define. The Michigan High School Athletic Association

(2005) established standards that all middle school coaches should consider in their coaching. These standards are helpful in defining the actions, values, and goals that an effective coach should strive for while teaching middle school students. The standards were developed to give coaches and school administrators guidelines for the expectations in coaching at this level. Many of the standards are related to communication as coaches should strive to have good working relationships with players, parents, and administrators. Coaches also will develop unprejudiced relationships with all players so that team selections are fair. Coaches will have a good knowledge base about the sport being coached. Additionally, they may attend workshops or other training seminars to learn about the sport that they are coaching. Coaches also are role models for their student athletes. They should demonstrate appropriate behavior at practices, when talking with other coaches and officials at competitions, and during other team activities. As the role model of the team, coaches should also dress professionally, and not display inappropriate conduct in front of the players. Finally, the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) encourages coaches to attend MHSAA rule update meetings and other MHSAA sponsored activities to be continually informed about the sport and the MHSAA's expectations of middle school coaches.

The MHSAA developed these standards so that the middle level coaches in any school can have consistent benchmarks for what they should be striving for in their own goals as a coach of middle level adolescents. Coaches who meet these standards, are more likely to be termed as "effective" than coaches who do not follow an established set of standards. This study examined how coaches handled coaching situations as they educated young people about the fundamentals of a sport and taught them the meaning of

being part of a middle school athletic team. The study investigated the qualities and characteristics coaches have, and how they coach and educate middle school age students in a busy and challenging environment.

Statement of the Problem

Middle school athletic coaches are faced with a variety of challenges. There are an established set of standards that they should follow. They must be aware of the middle school philosophy and the emotional needs of this special age group of students. Most coaches want to be competitive and win while still balancing the coaching standards and middle school philosophy including playing all students in games. It is challenging for middle school administrators to know what criteria should be valued when hiring and evaluating middle school coaches. However, this is critical because administrators hire and evaluate athletic coaches. Should coaches follow all of the MHSAA standards? Do they emphasize being competitive or should they follow the middle school philosophy which emphasizes equal opportunities for all students? These are questions that any middle school administrator will consider as they coordinate and supervise an athletic program at the middle level. The goal of this study was to examine how middle school girls' basketball coaches balanced the challenges of coaching as they strived to follow established coaching standards, adhered to middle school principles, and also tried to field a competitive team. This study provides middle school administrators with findings that can guide them in the hiring and evaluation of coaches. Additionally, the study will aide coaches in developing their own coaching philosophy as well as include findings that can provide resources that can assist coaches in effectively teaching middle school students about a specific sport or athletic activity.

A dilemma and challenge for all middle school coaches is the high level of expectations placed upon them. For example, they want to win. However, they also need to have an understanding of young adolescents and the middle school philosophy. Additionally, there are a variety of standards that school administrators expect them to adhere to each day as they coach their young athletes. In this study, middle school basketball coaches were observed to see how they went about the daily routine of coaching while having to think about all of these challenges that they are faced with each day. Certainly tensions and conflicts resulted in their own beliefs as they carried out their coaching duties.

In this study of middle school athletic coaches, the research participants were observed with a variety of coaching philosophies utilizing numerous activities to accomplish the task of coaching young adolescents. Along the way, I saw coaches grappling with a sense of conflict resulting from competing demands. Coaches may be believers in the middle school philosophy and equal opportunities for students, but they may have these beliefs challenged in a situation where a game becomes particularly competitive. At times as a coach weighed in the middle school philosophy, coaching standards expected of them, and a sense of competitiveness—challenges arose. It was inevitable in these situations that conflicts or tensions in their own beliefs could not be avoided. It reached a point where individuals had to make decisions based on what was most important to them. For example, does a coach play all students equal amounts of time in a game, and sacrifice some of the team's competitiveness for that contest? These are dilemmas that were seen in this study of middle school athletic coaches. What was of

interest to me was to see how coaches handled these difficult tensions and conflicts that arose in their coaching belief system.

Significance of the Study

In Michigan, thousands of middle school youth are involved with seventh and eighth grade interscholastic athletic programs. School administrators are continually challenged with hiring coaches who they feel will be the best fit for their school's athletic program. Administrators are also responsible for supporting the coaches and athletic program on a day-to-day basis. This study of middle school coaches was designed to provide information for current and future middle school coaches and administrators, and to assist the coaches in being more successful as they work with middle school youth to develop the team concept, help them gain skills in the sport, and provide an enjoyable experience for the players. Additionally, the study will propose a theoretical perspective on the competing values that coaches are faced with each day while coaching middle school students. The research findings will ultimately provide both practical information as well as the theoretical framework that coaches and administrators will find useful for helping middle school coaches improve in their coaching responsibilities.

Purposes

The purpose of this study was to examine how middle school girls' basketball coaches balanced the challenges of coaching as they strived to follow established coaching standards, adhered to middle school principles, and also tried to field a competitive team. The findings of this study provide a resource for coaches and school administrators in the process of hiring, training, and evaluating middle school athletic coaches. The researcher is hopeful that these findings can be shared with colleagues to

assist middle school coaches in being even more effective in carrying out their responsibilities with middle level adolescents. The findings of the study which outline the qualities, characteristics, actions, and values of coaches have a strong application to both the hiring procedures and evaluation procedures for middle school athletic coaches. This information can be utilized to improve existing middle school athletic programs and to assist middle school coaches in being more effective.

Competing Values Framework

In this study, girls' basketball coaches were faced with a variety of challenges and competing demands. Coaches had to develop their own philosophy related to playing time for each student. They had to decide if they should play each athlete equal minutes in games, or should they have a policy to at least make an effort to get every player some time in games, but not necessarily equal playing time. Coaches were faced with challenges of the busy schedules of middle school students as the players could not always attend every practice or game due to conflicting activities. Coaches had to either be understanding of these conflicts or they may have a strict policy with expectations that the students come to all practices and games. Institutional support also presented challenges to the coaches; some programs had two coaches for each grade, while others had only one. How was this challenge tackled when only one coach was hired by a school to work with two different basketball teams? Coaches also were faced with the challenge of deciding what the focus of the team should be for the season. Should they have a strong connection to the high school program, and do they run similar plays and drills as the upper levels of the program to prepare the students for the high school? Do they coach as they would like at the middle school level with less concern about future

years of basketball in the school district? Finally, when developing their own coaching philosophy, what are the priorities? Should the coaches ensure that the students are having an enjoyable experience? Should they emphasize learning the fundamentals, or should there be an effort to teach more advanced offensive plays? How do coaches teach students what it means to be a member of a team, and how is responsibility and character taught to the players?

We can turn to the competing values framework as structure to guide coaches as they are challenged by all of these various coaching demands. The competing values framework examines criteria in organizations that appear to be related to organizational effectiveness. This framework developed by Robert Quinn, a professor of organizational behavior and human resource management, has also been applied to the variety of managerial roles required for personal effectiveness in complex environments (Vilkinas and Cartan, 2001). Since being developed, the framework has helped researchers determine what makes organizations effective in a number of research settings in education, communication, organizational culture, management of diversity, gender in management, and management information systems (Vilkinas and Cartan, 2001). The title of the framework derives from the fact that the characteristics highlighted in the four quadrants seem to have conflicting messages (Quinn, 1988) (Figure 1). The vertical axis ranges from flexibility to control, and the horizontal axis ranges from an internal focus within the organization to an external focus outside of the organization. Four models in organization theory are represented. They are 1) the human relations model in the upper-left quadrant stresses cohesion and morale as well as human resource development; 2) The open systems model in the upper-right quadrant is related to flexibility and readiness

as well as growth, resource acquisition, and external support; 3) the rational goal model in the lower-right quadrant stresses planning, goal setting, productivity, and efficiency; and 4) the internal process model in the lower-left quadrant stresses coordination and communication as well as stability and control. The model posits that organizations need to pay attention to all of these organizational values in some way in order to be effective. The values represented by each of the quadrants, however, might not receive equal attention or universal attention. There might be environmental pressures, for example, that demand a focus on one or the other of the quadrants at any given time. For instance, if a team is suffering from low morale and teammates are quarreling with each other

Figure 1. The Competing Values Framework

<u>Human Relations Model</u>	<u>Open Systems Model</u>
-Value of Human Resources	-Adaptability
-Training	-Growth
-Cohesion	-External Support
Internal	External
Focus	Focus
-Coordination	-Planning
-Communication	-Goal Setting
-Stability and Control	-Effectiveness (Winning)
<u>Internal Process Model</u>	<u>Rational Goal Model</u>
	Control

rather than working together, the coach might have to pay particular attention to the human relations values so as to promote more collaboration and participation.

This framework presents conflicting messages. Organizations may want stability and control under the internal process model, but they also want to consider planning and goal setting to reach maximization of output with the rational goal model. Organizations may want control with centralized integration but also may strive to be more flexible with decentralization. The competing values framework does not suggest that these oppositions cannot mutually exist within a system or organization (Quinn, 1988). In reality, these criteria and assumptions are oppositions in our minds, as we think of these as being different from each other. But leaders who can find a way to reconcile these opposites will be more effective than those who can concentrate only on one quadrant at a time. Quinn refers to this ability as “cognitive complexity” and argues that such complexity is necessary to meet the demands of operating in a complex world. Effective managers, or coaches in this case, will pay attention to these conflicting values all of the time. They have the ability for complex thinking, and they find ways to act that reduce the tensions between opposite values. This enables organizations to not only exist, but also to flourish. Although leaders will have natural preferences for discrete roles within the organization, one of the fundamental premises of the competing values framework is that leaders have balance and flexibility within the organization (Cartan and Vilkinas, 2006). Leaders pay attention to human relations concerns at the same time that they focus on productivity and maintaining a competitive position. Effective leaders will be able to move throughout the quadrants of the model, and this will provide benefits to the organization. Managers and leaders may also play the role of the “integrator” within the

organization. The integrator role provides guidance to the manager or coach as he or she goes through the process of selecting the appropriate role in the competing values framework (Vilkinas and Cartan, 2001). The integrator is a critical observer and reflective learner. According to Vilkinas and Cartan (2001), this role requires the manager to observe and interpret the changing environment on a continual basis, and as they learn and adapt to this environment they will be able to adopt the most appropriate roles in the competing values framework. Similarly, a coach would then integrate his or her coaching behaviors and actions to meet the variety of important goals that they strive to achieve in their middle school coaching.

Research Questions

From a consideration of the responsibilities that coaches are faced with each day, an overarching research question emerged that guided this dissertation study: “How do middle school coaches reconcile the tensions that result from their efforts to support middle school principles even as they field competitive teams?”

Sub questions include:

1. In what ways do highly regarded middle school coaches support middle school principles in working with athletes and their families?
2. To what extent is adherence to the MHSAA coaching standards evident in the participants’ coaching practices?
3. To what extent do participants sense or experience conflict in enacting these standards and principles, particularly in competitive environments?
4. When they experience conflict, how do participants reconcile them?

The findings of this study will aide in determining answers to these questions related to the actions of middle school coaches.

Limitations/Assumptions

This study of middle school coaches included case studies of seven girls' basketball coaches. The study was limited to the sport of girls' basketball. The research was also intentionally limited to middle school coaches in Michigan, and coaching standards for the state of Michigan were purposely used as a framework for the study. With this study, it may have been difficult for coaches to fully express their actions to the researcher. Sometimes the participants had difficulty putting into words what was happening on the basketball court. Also, the selection of candidates was conducted using a purposeful selection based on recommendations of middle school administrators. Although this was an appropriate method of participant selection, some administrators did not respond to requests to nominate coaches for this study. If these administrators had participated, this could have increased the pool of possible research participants. In the study, administrators were asked to nominate coaches who they highly regarded or felt were good coaches. Thus, the seven participants were considered to be highly regarded coaches by their school administrators. This could leave another sample of coaches who are not as good as others. There also could be other middle school coaching issues that were not observed because they were not issues for the coaches in the study. With this small number of research participants, the results of this study needed to be carefully summarized for this group of coaches. It is difficult to generalize the findings to include all middle school coaches as a broader quantitative study of a larger sample may be able to accomplish. However, it was the goal of this study to produce trustworthy findings that can be helpful to other middle school coaches and administrators.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to provide background information about this study related to middle school philosophy, the characteristics of young adolescents, and middle school coaches. Additionally, this chapter outlined the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the limitations of the research. Chapter two will review further many of the findings in the literature related to middle school philosophy and middle school coaching techniques.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The 1989 report by the Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development summarized the importance of the middle school experience for children: “Middle school grades—junior high, intermediate, and middle schools—are potentially society’s most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift, and help every young person thrive during early adolescence. The early adolescent years are crucial in determining the future success or failure of millions of American youth” (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). The report asserts that successful schools will hire teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents. The report also advocates that schools should work to improve academic performance through health and fitness. Extracurricular activities contribute to the successful growth of young adolescents, and athletic activities in particular often have positive benefits for the students involved in them.

Middle school students who are involved with athletic programs, and who are taught by a coach knowledgeable about young adolescent behavior, experience many academic and social benefits. Also, interscholastic sports are desirable as a way to recognize young people for excellence. Student involvement in extracurricular activities such as athletics has been linked by researchers to indicators of positive development such as interpersonal competence, improved self-concept, better academic achievement, increased school engagement, and improved educational aspirations (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Elder & Conger, 2000). Students involved with athletics and other activities report

feeling more challenge and enjoyment in organized activities outside of the regular school day than they do in classrooms, where they are often bored. (Larson, 2000). Additionally, students involved in athletics for many seasons and many years have a higher level of scholarship than students who only participate in sports for a few seasons, only one year, or not at all (Buhrmann, 1972; Stegman & Stephens, 2000). Participation in athletics might also reduce the likelihood of students dropping out of school (McNeal, 1995) Involvement in athletics is one of the most positive activities in a young adolescent's life (Kirshnit, et al., 1989).

Participation in interscholastic sports certainly seems to enhance the academic performance of students. It is often difficult to determine why athletes seem to perform better academically than nonathletes. However, participation in athletics does help students build discipline, set goals, organize time, and develop self-confidence (Stephens & Schaben, 2002). Student athletes who can transfer these skills to their academic careers find success and reach higher achievement in the classroom. Also, these effects of athletic participation reach beyond the walls of the school and enter the social world of the students.

Participation in nonacademic activities such as athletics can also increase a student's social ties. This increase in social capital can be advantageous to students' educational pursuits. Social capital is generally recognized as the ability to accrue benefits through membership in social networks (Portes, 1998). Research based on analyses of NELS:88 data, a nationally representative longitudinal study sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics, investigated the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement. According to Broh

(2002), students who participate in interscholastic sports have a stronger sense of control over their lives and a value system that is concordant with the American educational system. She concluded that participation in extracurricular activities can forge a link between parents and the schools as well as parents and the coaches, which is equally important. The role of the parents and family in a student's athletics can affect their success in the sport as well as students' performance inside of the classroom.

Indeed, social networks forged through athletics can enhance students' achievement in multiple ways including development of relationships that enhance learning experiences, the dissemination of resources, and attachment to the school (Broh, 2002). Students involved in athletics are more likely to communicate with their teachers outside of class than are non-athletes. The more students talk to their teachers, the more opportunities they have to gain information that could be used to improve their test scores or grades in the class. These interactions may also encourage behavior that conforms to school expectations and norms, which help students succeed in school. Additionally, these student-teacher relationships create social bonds that motivate students to perform better for teachers with whom they have personal relationships.

Given these potential positive outcomes of extracurricular programming such as athletics, school leaders must evaluate the need for appropriate programs in the school and must also be attentive to finding appropriate coaches with an understanding of young adolescents and middle school philosophies. This can be a tremendous challenge to find the coaches who are the right fit for the athletic program within a particular school. Principals or athletic administrators aim to hire coaches who they hold in high regard as professionals with specific personal characteristics that fit the philosophy of the school

(Lirgg, 1995). For instance, administrators in one school might prefer coaches with winning records. Other administrators will seek out individuals who believe in giving students equal opportunities and equal playing time in games and practices. Coaches who are efficient with the use of practice time and who also understand the role of parents in the athletic program can also be desirable individuals to lead a middle school athletic team. A coach with a combination of these traits may also be the right fit for a specific school. Despite what characteristics the administrator desires in athletic coaches, careful consideration must be taken to hire the best person to meet the needs of the students at each particular school.

Middle School Coaches

Characteristics and Skills of Coaches

One of the important keys to a successful middle level athletic program is that school administrators hire coaches who have a fundamental understanding of the middle school young adolescent. Coaches who are hired from outside the school or from other levels, such as the high school, may lack this vital understanding (Lirgg, 1995). My review of the literature has led me to make the conclusion that with a successful middle school athletic program, the coaches as well as the administrators, students, and parents will understand the middle school philosophy and how it impacts competition at the middle school level. Individuality is respected and, therefore middle school students of all abilities have the opportunity to participate. In fact, my research findings may provide further information about why it is important for middle level students to have equal opportunities, and if coaches really do provide these opportunities for team members. Middle level experts also assert that successful coaches organize games so that every

member of the team plays at least a minimum amount of time (Riemcke, 1988).

Additionally, Riemcke states that if coaches and schools can make multiple sports available to middle level students, both team and individual, this gives all students in the school greater opportunities in athletics and more opportunities to be successful. These statements outlined in this paragraph seem logical, but additional research could help to support these claims.

Coaches can have a large impact on middle school adolescents. Coaches who value equal opportunities for student athletes and who display more encouragement, positive reinforcement, and instruction with less criticism have players who enjoy sports more and have higher levels of self-esteem (Smith et al., 1983). This conclusion comes from earlier research investigating and measuring coaching behaviors and determining the relationship of these behaviors to the psychological development of young athletes. During research of youth swimmers and their relationship to perceived coaching behaviors, it was found that coaches' behaviors not only influence sport enjoyment and self-esteem, but also influence the athletes' perceived success, effort, and preference for optimally challenging activities (Black & Weiss, 1992). A young athlete's self-perceptions and motivation are significantly related to the quantity and quality of coaching feedback that they receive for performance successes and errors. Coaches' use of more frequent praise, informational feedback, and encouragement are positively related to perceived competence and success, enjoyment, effort, and preference for optimally challenging activities (Harter, 1981).

Coaches can have an influence on young athletes in yet other ways. Snyder (1972) found that players' decisions to attend college are positively related to their

coaches giving them advice in regards to college plans. The type of advice and feedback that coaches give athletes also influences the student's perceptions of ability (Chambers, 1991). For instance, Horn (1985) found that athletes who achieved the same performance level perceived their ability as low when coaching feedback signaled pity, and high when coaching feedback was either neutral or angry. Horn also found that feedback can facilitate children's motivation, but only when such feedback is administered in a non-controlling, performance-contingent, and specific manner, which provides the child with positive information concerning his or her competence (Horn, 1985).

Another characteristic of an effective middle level coach is having a person who will emphasize to the students the positive benefits of the sport or activity. Doing this helps students to boost their self-esteem and increase their interest in athletics. An effective coach will have the young adolescents' psychological well being in mind as a priority whenever developing coaching strategies for middle school athletic programs. Additionally, effective coaches of middle school students should not place too much emphasis on winning, and they should not have unrealistically high expectations of the students. They also are aware of the physical and psychological readiness of each participant (Vaughan, 1984). Coaches help young adolescents set goals, which reflect the individual interests and abilities of each student. Furthermore, a coach's primary role is to help athletes realize their potential, and coaches are able to accomplish this by continually motivating their young athletes (Hansen et al., 2003). When motivating students, an effective coach might follow the motivation guidelines of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (1995) which include: react positively to mistakes and give encouragement; know the social and emotional reasons why the

players are competing; use goal setting strategies and arousal techniques; and use a variety of positive instructional methods such as encouragement and constructive criticism. Coaches who follow these guidelines will more effectively instruct and coach young people and allow the students to enjoy the sport while improving in their athletic skill development as well.

The Middle School Philosophy

The History of the Middle School

One of the most helpful strategies for middle school coaches is for them to have a better understanding of the middle school philosophy and its development. This will enable them to establish a personal philosophy of coaching that shows awareness of potential challenges they might encounter in various coaching activities. Having this extra knowledge could be pivotal to a coach's success in the middle school athletic program as well as to the coach's prioritizing what is most important to him or her as a middle school coach.

The origin of the American junior high school dates back to 1910. During this time period, schools for grades K-8 were becoming overcrowded with large numbers of immigrant children. Students were also held back for failure, and older children were not receiving the education they needed in these schools that were designed more for the younger children than the older ones. Many of the older children then left school to become laborers in factories during the industrial revolution (Beane, 2001). Welfare advocates such as G. Stanley Hall argued that these children should not be entering the factory workforce because at 7th and 8th grade, these adolescents were not mature adolescents; nor were they children. Hall's concerns also followed earlier findings of the

Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies led by Harvard president Charles W. Eliot in 1893 (Gruhn & Douglas, 1971). This group had recommended that secondary education should begin two years earlier, which would result in six years of elementary education, and six years of secondary education. Finally in 1913, the Committee on Economy of Time in Education made reference to a separate junior division of secondary education. This met the needs of school officials as it removed the seventh and eighth grades from the elementary schools, relieving overcrowding, and it allowed educational experts to reconsider the kind of education that should be provided in those two grades.

When reviewing history, one can study the formation of the junior high school in two interconnected ways. First, as many of today's educational leaders would like to think of it, the formation of the junior high school can be thought of as an *educational reform* forming from the ideas of professional educators such as Hall and Eliot. However, the other strategy to understanding the beginning of the junior high school is to examine the development of the schools as a *social intervention* whose beginnings were more related to the lives of immigrant families, the education of their children, and the use of child labor during the industrial revolution. In reality, the creation of junior high schools was more of a solution to a set of social problems in this country rather than an educational reform (Beane, 2001). This was no accident. The junior high school was designed as a combination of the need for college preparation for students and social efficiency with the design of an institution dedicated to the developmental interests of young adolescents. The junior high school remained unchanged for decades, until the transition into middle schools.

The Middle School Philosophy

Junior high schools began to evolve into middle schools during the 1960's. At this time new data documented a decline in the average age of puberty. This new information centered an age window of 10 to 14 as "early adolescence" rather than the 12-15 year period, which had previously been associated with this period of time in a child's life (Tanner, 1962). As a result, administrators began to think that grades five or six through eighth were the appropriate ones to include in a school for young adolescents. Middle school reform advocates also felt that these young adolescents were not "mature" enough to succeed with the anonymity and isolation that could result from the departmentalized secondary school model of the junior high school. Thus, middle schools were developed with teaming among teachers and classrooms with small clusters of students in order to meet the special needs of this age group. Additionally, because this age level was not yet considered mature adolescents, the schools would emphasize affective guidance and counseling services to help students during this time of dramatic changes in social and physical development.

During the late 1980's, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) presented its findings of a task force on the education of young adolescents. This group made numerous recommendations to improve the middle school including: small communities within the larger school, a core academic program for all learners, success experience for all students, empowerment of teachers and administrators to make decisions, families reengaged in the education of young adolescents, and reconnected schools and communities. These six recommendations are in addition to two others, which include that middle schools hire teachers who are expert at teaching young

adolescents and that improved academic performance be fostered through health and fitness. In an additional publication by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*, two conclusions were made (Jackson & Davis, 2000). First, the report stated that developmentally appropriate educational experiences were being implemented effectively by thousands of middle schools across the country. Second, the report concluded that evidence indicated that such programs, implemented effectively, produced the positive outcomes that educators and parents desired. George and Alexander (2003) recently defined the term *middle school* as a school planned and operated as a separate school to provide a developmentally appropriate educational experience for students usually enrolled in grades 6-8 or 5-8 and 10-14 years of age, building on elementary and leading toward high school. The middle school concept has worked appropriately when administrators and boards of education effectively implement it, and utilize it as they develop schools for young adolescents. The middle school philosophy is also a pivotal component of middle school extracurricular and athletic programming.

The Middle School Philosophy and Athletics

The middle school philosophy is represented within extracurricular activities as well. These activities are important to young adolescents because middle school physical education cannot provide all of the young people's recommended physical activity (McKenzie et al., 1995). Results of a recent study show that middle schools offered extracurricular activity programs an average of 3.1 times per week, each lasting approximately 75.4 minutes (Powers et al., 2002). Of great importance for middle school administrators, is that they structure extracurricular programming such as athletics

with a clear focus on the needs of the young adolescent during this time of great emotional and physical change for each student. Middle school leaders have to decide what type of athletic program to institute in the school. Some researchers believe that competition at any age level is exclusionary, too competitive, unhealthy, and should be avoided (Kohn, 1986 and Weller, 1999). However, simply due to normal relationships among people, other researchers realize that children are generally competitive and begin organizing into competitive groups at a very early age (Lirgg, 1995).

The opinion of many sport psychologists is that competition can be good or bad—depending on the social context in which it is taking place (Scanlan and Passer, 1978). If coaches overemphasize winning, compile statistics, or yell at players during halftime, than competition can be harmful. On the contrary, if middle school athletic competition is organized around fair play, equal opportunity, and skill development; than the benefits of competition in athletics can outweigh any anxiety created by losing a game. In fact, Scanlan and Passer (1978) argue that most children do not find athletic competition highly stressful, and that athletic competitions have been found to produce no more anxiety than physical education classes, academic tests, or band competitions (Simon and Martens, 1979). Schools with an athletic program interwoven with the middle school philosophy will be more successful than middle school athletic programs that disregard the middle school philosophy.

Once a middle school has made the decision to have athletics, school leaders have to make a choice as to whether the school should offer an intramural athletic program, an interscholastic athletic program, or both opportunities for students. This is a decision for some school officials that is highly debated. With the first type of program, intramurals,

students only compete within their own school. The program is structured, supervised, and students are allowed near equal participation. Intramural athletics are also closely tied to the school's physical education program; however, the coaching that takes place is minimal (Lirgg, 1995). The interscholastic athletic program, on the contrary, is for the elite athlete. Tryouts may be held, students could be cut from teams, and winning may be emphasized. Additionally, Lirgg (1995) states that coaches are more knowledgeable about the sport, they work with the student athletes to increase their skills, and there is competition between school districts. Regardless if a school implements an intramural or interscholastic athletic program, or both, in a school setting based on the foundations of the middle school philosophy, the basic fundamentals of the middle level research and middle school philosophy are components that are interwoven into the athletic program.

The effective leaders of a middle school with an extracurricular athletic program will take into consideration both the emotional and physical needs of young adolescents. In looking at the emotional needs of students, one of the most important needs of this age group is within the social area: the need for friends. Friends represent an important act of choice for young adolescents because they have little control over most other areas of their lives (Milgram, 1992). The peer group for most young adolescents is made up of same-sex friends. As a result, athletic programs that can allow for both co-ed and same-sex activities are mostly likely to be successful in meeting the social needs of the young adolescent. Peer pressure is another aspect of the emotional component of a young adolescents' life. Schools that utilize the middle school philosophy will plan activities to formally and informally address peer pressure (Campbell, 1991). Intramural activities where everyone participates and can be a member of the team help to eliminate peer

pressure (Lirgg, 1995). Also, discussions led by coaches about the differences in areas such as personality, race, gender, and ability will help to eliminate some of the typical problems that could result from middle school athletics such as elitism, racism, or sexism among the students. Emotionally, these students are in a fragile state. They lack experience to put things into perspective, and events are often blown out of proportion (Campbell, 1991). Coaches who understand these emotional needs can help the students to better cope with daily events without devaluing the student's feelings. Middle level students desire open communication with adults to help them deal with their feelings and to help them develop a positive self-concept. Because they often are easily discouraged and lose self-confidence rather easily, they need adults such as coaches who are interested and genuinely care about them (Irvin, 1992).

Along with the emotional needs of middle school students, coaches must also take into consideration the physical characteristics and changes of this age level child. This is a time period of intense physical change. Although boys and girls have similar biological characteristics before puberty, once girls reach puberty at age 10 or 11 and boys at age 12 or 13, they are distinctly different (Keogh and Sugden, 1985). Changes in muscle mass, height, weight, and secondary sexual characteristics happen quickly at this age level, and it is distinctly different for boys and for girls. Puberty can have a large impact on athletes as some students are taller than others, have more muscle mass, or are simply more athletic than later maturers. Because of this, cutting middle schools students is strongly discouraged as it is highly unfair to the late maturers (Payne and Issacs, 1991). These researchers also recommend that students receive education about their body changes during this time period, and they be given the opportunity to discuss their concerns with a

caring adult such as their coach or teacher. My review of the literature has led me to conclude that, as difficult as it is for middle school leaders and coaches, an understanding of the middle school philosophy and the emotional and physical needs of this age group will contribute to a more successful athletic program with additional positive outcomes and benefits for the students involved. This understanding will result in better relationships between coaches, students, and parents as well, and this will be helpful to coaches as they balance all of the tensions they face on a regular basis.

Selection and Evaluation of Coaches

The middle school is a pivotal component of the educational career of a young person's life. The middle school athletic program has certain characteristics and features to meet the needs of young adolescents. Of greatest importance is a school's employment of a coach who has an understanding of this age group and who enjoys working with middle school students. Coaches are also faced with a variety of challenges as they set out to accomplish their goals to teach these students and help them develop skills and characteristics that they very well could retain for the rest of their lives.

A coach may have certain characteristics including being a motivator, enjoying working with middle school age students, helping students with goal setting, and providing instruction to students about the sport. Additionally, they may carry out actions such as communicating, providing feedback, modeling, praising, instructing, and many others. A middle school coach will also have an understanding of the middle school philosophy as well as information about the role of the parents and family in the life of a young adolescent.

Once middle school administrators establish their priorities for characteristics of a middle school coach, they search out individuals that they think will fit their school's program. An important component of the program is not only to hire the best individuals for these positions, but also to continually work with these coaches and evaluate their performance. Often, middle school athletic coaches are evaluated at the end of each season. This enables the administrator to examine their coaching characteristics and to identify areas of improvement. The evaluation process can be rewarding and beneficial for the coach, administrator, and the athletic program. Coaches also attend workshops and training sessions to improve their coaching abilities in both technical skills related to the sport and interpersonal skills related to working with young adolescents. An effective coaching evaluation process only strengthens and improves the middle school athletic program.

This study investigated qualities and characteristics coaches have and how they coach and educate middle school age students in a busy and challenging environment. The goal of the study was to examine how middle school girls' basketball coaches balanced the challenges of coaching as they strived to follow established coaching standards, adhered to middle school principles, and also tried to field a competitive team. The findings will have strong application to both hiring procedures and evaluation procedures for middle school athletic coaches.

Clearly, the term "effective" in relation to middle school coaches is ambiguous in that it can be specified in any number of ways. This research was based on the assumption that successful coaches balance the competing demands introduced by interscholastic competition, equity concerns related to players, facilities use and

scheduling, parent involvement and other contingencies outlined in the preceding section. Because effectiveness and success are abstract and unspecified terms, it is useful to introduce a more concrete framework for thinking about the dispositions and behaviors of middle school coaches. For this purpose, I turn to an established set of standards.

The Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) published an athletic code for coaches, which contains twelve standards that should be practiced by all middle school and high school athletic coaches in Michigan (MHSAA, 2005). These standards include:

1. Develop an understanding of the role of interscholastic athletics and communicate it to players, parents, and the public.
2. Develop an up-to-date knowledge of the rules, strategies, precautions, and skills of the sport and communicate them to players and parents.
3. Develop, communicate, and model policies for athletes' conduct and language in the locker room, at practice, during travel, during competition, and at other appropriate times.
4. Develop fair, unprejudiced relationships with all squad members.
5. Allow athletes to prove themselves anew each season and do not base team selections on previous seasons or out-of-season activities.
6. Allow athletes time to develop skills and interests in other athletic and non-athletic activities provided by the school and community groups.
7. Give the highest degree of attention to athletes' physical well being.
8. Teach players, by precept and example, respect for school authorities and contest officials, providing support for them in cases of adverse decisions and refraining from critical comments in public or to the media.
9. Teach players strict adherence to game rules and contest regulations.
10. Present privately, through proper school authorities, evidence of rule violations by opponents; and counteract rumors and unproven allegations of questionable practices by opponents.

11. Attend required meetings, keep abreast of MHSAA policies regarding the sport, and be familiar with MHSAA eligibility and contest regulations.
12. Present a clean and professional image in terms of personal appearance, and provide a positive role model in terms of personal habits, language, and conduct. Use of tobacco within sight of players and spectators and use of alcohol any time before a contest on the day of the contest is not acceptable.

These standards for athletic coaches set a state-level benchmark for the expectations of middle school coaches. These establish a basis so that coaches can know what their responsibilities and duties are as a coach of young adolescents.

Summary

Middle school youth across the country are involved in extracurricular athletic activities including athletics. The success of a young person's involvement in such activities hinges on the quality of the instructor—their coach—in the activity. It is helpful for coaches to have an understanding of middle school youth, middle school philosophy, as well as the established set of standards for athletic coaches. With this knowledge base, coaches are more likely to be effective in their coaching activities with middle school youth. Coaches now have to prepare to face challenges in their own coaching value system and philosophy as they coach middle school students.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how middle school girls' basketball coaches balanced the challenges of coaching as they strived to follow established coaching standards, adhered to middle school principles, and also tried to field a competitive team. In this chapter, the methods for this research study will be outlined. This will include the research design, data sources, sampling techniques, instrumentation, data collection strategies, data analysis procedures, and a discussion of trustworthiness.

Research Design

As the researcher sought to study middle school athletic coaching, seven middle school coaches were studied and profiled. The researcher sought to provide detailed descriptions and images of the activities of these individuals. Creswell's (1994) description of a qualitative study fits this research inquiry. A qualitative research study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. Qualitative research allows for the collection and analysis of extensive narrative data in order to gain insights into a situation of interest that is not possible using other types of research (Gay, 1996). In this study, a multiple site case study approach was utilized with the experiences of multiple middle school coaches being examined. A case study is an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1998). In this type of research

there is a bounded system that is bounded by time and place and the cases themselves being studied such as a program, an event, an activity, or individuals. A qualitative research study also allows the researcher to study meaning such as how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world, and qualitative research involves fieldwork in which the researcher physically goes to the people, setting, or institution to observe or record behavior in its natural setting (Merriam, 1998). Thus, in light of the observational research in the field that will be conducted in this study, the researcher utilized case study research strategies.

Data Sources

The source of data for this qualitative study was observations and a post-observation interview with middle school basketball coaches. Women's basketball was selected as the middle school sport for this study. This enabled the researcher to keep the sport constant. The researcher used a multiple site case study to report the findings in a descriptive format. Previous research studies of coaching or the role of knowledge in teaching utilized both interviews and observational research. The number of teachers or coaches studied varied between four and ten (Housner and Griffey, 1985; Schempp, et al., 1998; Graham et al., 1993; Walkwitz and Lee, 1992; Borko and Livingston, 1989; and Benham, 2002). This research study consisted of case study research of seven coaches from seven different middle schools in the mid-Michigan area. After gaining approval from the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), seven adult coaches were observed in the field at a minimum of one practice and one game as well as interviewed following the observations. These research strategies provided data for use in writing detailed descriptions of the coaches' activities.

The researcher contacted administrators at a variety of mid-Michigan area middle schools to find coaches for this study. Of the seven coaches studied, an effort was made to have coaches who varied by 1) gender, 2) race-ethnicity, 3) school location (urban/rural/SES), 4) school size, and 5) included both faculty and non-faculty coaches.

Sampling Techniques

The researcher was particular in the selection of participants for the research study. The selection of the middle school basketball coaches was of the utmost importance. With the assistance of middle school athletic directors and/or principals, the researcher sought to identify potential participants for this study who the administrators highly regarded as coaches who were successful and upheld middle school principles, who valued established coaching standards, and who were competitive. The study was restricted to the state of Michigan and included current middle school coaches.

The researcher reviewed the pool of highly regarded coaches suggested by middle school administrators for this study. This sampling relied heavily on the recommendations made by these middle school athletic directors and principals. After screening the recommended candidate profiles for meeting the criteria of this study, coaches were contacted by telephone and/or letters to ask for their assistance with this research study. The researcher sought to establish a preliminary pool of a minimum of eight to ten coaches for the study based on purposeful sampling techniques. A telephone or on-site interview was held to determine which coaches would be the best candidates to fulfill the criteria of this study. This allowed the researcher to select coaches who would provide the most information and eliminate candidates who were unwilling to share in great detail about their coaching techniques or who may have been reluctant to participate

in this study. After the conclusion of the preliminary interviews, the researcher selected seven middle school coaches who seem most likely to provide beneficial information for the research study.

Instrumentation

During the research study, data was collected by direct observation of coaching activities as well as by post-observation interviews with the middle school coaches. Observation of the coaches took place at minimally one practice and one game. All observations followed established protocol. Coaches were asked specific, predetermined questions about their background and coaching beliefs as well as other open-ended questions based on the findings from the observational research. If interviews took more than an hour and in cases where the coach did not have time for a complete interview, a second interview session was scheduled.

Observational Protocol:

The researcher used two strategies to make observations in the field. First, of the twelve standards that coaches should follow, any behaviors related to these standards were noted. Additionally, any observations related to middle school philosophy and being competitive was also documented. Second, the researcher utilized the Arizona State University Observation Instrument (ASUOI) (Lacy & Darst, 1984) to assist the researcher in logging the frequency of a variety of coaching activities.

Behavior Categories and Definitions of the ASUOI:

The frequency of a behavior in each of these categories was logged and noted so that the researcher could have an accurate log of the coaches' activities or behaviors during each observation time period.

1. Preinstruction	Initial information given to player(s) preceding the desired action to be executed.
2. Concurrent Instruction	Cues or reminders given during the actual execution of the skill or play.
3. Post-Instruction	Correction, re-explanation, or instructional feedback given after the execution of a skill or play.
4. Questioning	Any question to player(s) concerning strategies, techniques, assignments, etc. associated with the sport.
5. Physical Appearance	Physically moving the player's body to the proper position or through the correct range of motion of a skill.
6. Positive Modeling	A demonstration of correct performance of a skill or playing technique.
7. Negative Modeling	A demonstration of incorrect performance of a skill or playing technique.
8. Hustle	Verbal statements intended to intensify the efforts of the player(s).
9. Praise	Verbal or nonverbal compliments, statements, or signs of acceptance.
10. Scold	Verbal or nonverbal behaviors of displeasure.
11. Management	Verbal statements related to organizational details or practice sessions not referring to strategies or fundamentals.

The researcher expected that the observation settings – practices and games – would introduce some variety in the findings. That is, coaches demonstrated different dispositions and behaviors in the different observation conditions. In that case, the follow up interview provided an occasion to question the coach about the differences.

In addition to follow-up of observed situations, as above, the interviews also included specific questions and follow-up probing questions that were asked of all coaches:

Background Questions:

- 1) How did you become a middle school coach?
 - Were you ever a volunteer who assisted a coach?
 - Did you attend coaching clinics or classes?
 - Did you feel prepared initially to be a coach?
- 2) Why do you coach middle school students?
- 3) How long have you been coaching middle school students?
- 4) Did you play a sport yourself in middle school or high school?

Coaching Philosophy

- 1) What is your coaching philosophy?
- 2) How did you develop your coaching philosophy?
- 3) What do you especially have to pay attention to when coaching middle school young adolescents?
 - What specific characteristics of young adolescents affect your coaching style?
 - What do you think is different between coaching elementary children, or high school students as compared to middle school adolescents?
 - Do you or did you have a coaching role model/mentor?

Coaching Standards

- 1) Now I would like to give you a few scenarios. Please think about what you would do if you were the coach.

Scenario 1: At the beginning of the season, you would like the student athletes and parents to understand the role of the sport in their life as compared to family, school studies, and other aspects of their life. How would you relay this message to students and their parents?

Scenario 2: You witness questionable behavior by another coach in the school. What would you do?

Scenario 3: You notice after practice that student athletes are not treating each other with respect in the locker room. What would you say to them?

Scenario 4: Student athletes approach you, and they have conflicts in their schedule with a school activity and an athletic practice. What would you say to them?

Scenario 5: A parent is upset after a game about something that took place during the contest. What strategies do you use to deal with this parent?

- 2) From our discussion, I can tell that you have developed your own coaching beliefs. Generally speaking, what is your strategy for dealing with conflicts in your coaching beliefs?

Data Collection Strategies

The data collection strategies included 1) the observation in the field of coaches as they were teaching students during practices and games, 2) post-observation interviews, and 3) field note writing. The data collected through the fieldwork provided detailed information about the activities of the middle school coaches. Additionally, the interviews provided background information and additional insight into the coaching strategies observed by the researcher. Interviews also allowed the researcher to follow-up on the coach's interpretations of activities or behaviors from observations in the field and probe deeper into their coaching value system.

The observations of coaching activities included fieldwork of at least two hours during each visit. These occurred at games and practices. The researcher was present from start to finish of each practice session or game. The researcher also was able to sit near the coach during games so that the coach's discussion with players during the game could be heard and noted. The researcher took observational field notes following the established observational protocol outlined previously of what occurred during coaching

sessions with particular emphasis on observing coaches' behaviors and speculation about what they revealed about their coaching strategies and beliefs related to the published coaching standards. Interviews with coaches after the fieldwork included specific questions as well as open-ended questions and questions that expanded on the observations of the researcher. Interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the research participant for future review and transcription.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis organized and summarized the research into a useable format to make conclusions based on the research findings. The Arizona State University Observation Instrument (ASUOI) was used for a 30 minute time period during the practice observation of each coach. This use of the ASUOI gave the researcher a general idea as to the type of activities the coaches used during practice. For example, did a coach utilize more praise, hustle, or scolding comments to the players during a practice? Then this information was an additional resource during the writing of the case studies. Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher to ease the dissemination of information as well as the development of the case studies. During data analysis, research findings were first grouped into categories related to the twelve standards of athletic coaches, general middle school philosophy, and actions that are competitive in nature. Grouping the large amount of qualitative data into these value categories assisted in identifying the findings of this research study.

Once the research findings were categorized by coaching values, the researcher sought to determine how the coach was successful at balancing these various tensions related to the middle school philosophy, coaching standards, and competitiveness.

Coaches also were specifically asked in follow-up interviews how they felt about these coaching standards, which of them they felt were most relevant, and how they would expect the standards to affect their coaching on a regular basis as well as questions about their coaching beliefs in regards to the middle school philosophy and being competitive (winning).

The researcher also utilized a data matrix to assist in organizing the observations related to major themes and categories of the observation. This helped the researcher to navigate through the large amount of qualitative data that was collected (Table 1).

Table 1. Data Matrix

Coach	Middle School Principles	MHSAA Standards	Other Activities	Institutional role	Playing time	Students
Scott	Wants players to have fun	Positive, motivates	Supportive of other activities	Support, two coaches	Everyone plays equally	2 teams, 21 players
Lori	Character development	Positive feedback, role model	Has policies for other activities	Support, two gyms, two coaches	Everyone plays, not equally	2 teams, 20 players
Dave	Develops fundamentals	Sense of humor, enjoyment	No policy for other activities	Some support, only one coach	Everyone plays, not equally	2 teams, 17 players
Jennifer	Teamwork Fun	Role model, motivator	Basketball should be priority	Limited, only one coach	Everyone plays, not equally	2 teams, 16 players
Tom	Fundamentals	Role model, positive	Basketball is the priority	Limited, one coach, gym time issues	Everyone plays, not equally	2 teams, 22 players
Ed	Coaches for players enjoyment	Motivates, role model	Basketball is the priority	Good support, one coach	Everyone plays equally	2 teams, 20 players
Sam	Teamwork, teaches advanced plays	Motivator, role model	Supportive of other activities	Good support two coaches	Everyone plays, not equally	2 teams, 24 players

The outcome of this research study grouped emerging and common themes about the coaching activities of these highly regarded coaches. This enabled the researcher to determine what actions these coaches took to balance all of the tensions they must handle on a regular basis. Additionally, the results of this study will be made available to help other coaches in the future

Trustworthiness and Transferability

The goal of this research study was to provide accurate interpretations of coaching activities related to coaching standards from fieldwork, interviews, and observations. It was important for this study to address trustworthiness, which is the accuracy of the information and whether it matches reality (Merriam, 1988). Several strategies were implemented to lend trustworthiness to the study. To be impartial and unbiased, formal interview guides were used during post observation interviews. Also, structured methods of taking field notes were utilized. Systematic analysis was imperative to accurately present findings for this select group of seven girls' basketball coaches. The author acknowledges that there might be other issues that were not identified. Some ideas, perhaps, could be found in another study, with a different sample of coaches such as first year coaches or coaches who were struggling. However, the author contends that the findings in this research study deal with universal issues in middle school athletics and will be helpful information to assist other coaches and administrators. Whether readers of the study will find the results important in their own contexts is for them to decide. The intention of the researcher was to report the data as accurately as possible, and in as much detail as possible, so that readers can fairly decide on the transferability to their own schools.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine what actions middle school athletic coaches took and what they emphasized in their coaching as they strived to follow the established standards for coaches, follow their beliefs related to the middle school philosophy, and to field a competitive team. In order to create a useful summary of the

research findings, descriptive case studies were written. It was the goal of the researcher to use established qualitative research strategies to report accurate findings. This enabled the researcher to produce an end document that is useful and helpful to current middle school coaches, principals, and athletic directors who are directly involved with middle school athletic programs.

Chapter 4

CASE STUDIES AND EMERGENT THEMES

Introduction

Case studies are presented in this chapter that describe the activities of middle school girls' basketball coaches. The coaches' names and the school names used in the case studies are pseudonyms. These case studies show elements of coaching techniques, the coaches' own coaching philosophies as they relate to middle school principles, and strategies that the coaches utilize when they experience a conflict in enacting their own standards and principles. Additionally, many of the established coaching standards of middle school coaches are revealed as the actions of these middle school coaches were documented. Each of the case studies offers evidence of various qualities and characteristics that a coach of middle school adolescents should uphold to educate this age group of students in a busy and challenging environment. The case studies in this chapter are written in two components. First, brief descriptions of the coaching activities of all seven participants are presented. Then, in the second part of the chapter, coaching descriptions and information about a variety of their activities are written in detail to support and provide examples during discussion of five major themes related to elements of coaching where tensions may occur.

Description of the Coaches

The research participants coached either seventh or eighth grade girls' basketball at middle schools located in Michigan. Coaches who were teachers in the school as well as non-faculty coaches were utilized for the study. Coaches were observed during after school practices as well as during games in the late afternoon and evening throughout the

girls' basketball season. Interviews were conducted after the practice and game observations.

The procedure and criteria used for selecting the middle school coaches were described in Chapter 3. Table 1 (below) provides a brief summary of the description of the coaches. All coaches are identified by pseudonyms.

Table 2. Description of Coaches

Coach	Grade	Years Coaching	School Location	School Size (#/Students)	Faculty/Non-Faculty
Scott	7	14	Rural/Suburban	449	Faculty
Lori	8	5	Suburban	662	Faculty
Dave	8	8	Rural/Suburban	523	Non Faculty
Jennifer	7	3	Rural	508	Faculty
Tom	8	5	Urban/Private	278	Non Faculty
Ed	8	6 / 8 overall	Suburban	478	Faculty
Sam	7	4 / 20 overall	Urban	1045	Non Faculty

The Coaches

Scott

Scott is the seventh grade girls' basketball coach at Pine Junior High School. Pine Junior High School is in a growing, rural school district that has become more suburban over the last few years. The school has 449 students in the 7th and 8th grades. Scott has been coaching at Pine for 14 years and teaching physical education in the district for 17 years. After teaching at the elementary school for the last 16 years, this school year he began teaching at the junior high school where he coaches. Like most schools in this geographical area, the seventh grade basketball program has two teams to allow for more students to participate in the sport. These are called "A" and "B" teams. Scott and an assistant coach work together to coach both teams of girls. Twenty-one seventh grade girls play on one of the two teams.

Scott is a former basketball player himself, and he actively participates in practices. On a recent afternoon he runs a practice with a focus on fundamentals. Scott uses drills to teach the young athletes basketball skills that he will expect to see in the games. "Okay, outlet drill now," he tells the players. On each of the two courts the players are defensively rebounding the basketball and then moving back quickly down the court. "Freeze!" yells Scott as he stands directly in the middle of the gym between both courts. "You all have to be watching. When you rebound look up and yell 'outlet'". Scott hustles back and forth between the two groups. On a few occasions he rebounds the ball himself and goes down the court with some of the players to complete the drill. During another drill, Scott has the players work on their physical conditioning. The girls line up and move their feet following his lead. This drill is known as the "machine gun,"

and they continue to move their feet rapidly while remaining in place as they follow Scott's movements. As the coach turns one direction or the other, the girls do as well. The drill continues, and Scott compares their effort to a game situation to make the drill more fun. "Okay, it's the end of the first quarter, we're down by 6." A little bit later in the drill he says, "It's the half—down by 3," and then, "Now it's after the third, and we're down by one. Oh the game is over, we're tied!" He then exclaims, "Keep going, it's overtime!" Scott later explained what he likes to accomplish at practice.

The kids play for fun at this level. I want to make it fun for them. Sometimes I look at their faces after a game, and I want to see that they had fun. If they haven't had fun, I don't care if we won by 20 or lost by 20, if they didn't have fun; it's not worth it to me. We do a lot of fun things in practice, but we'll work really hard too. We have to field a competitive team because this is the feeder program to our upper level. I think the girls have fun on the team.

Scott continues practice with an emphasis now on the offense. He stresses the importance of good passing to the girls. As the players are working on offensive plays he stops them, "Freeze! When you're out with the ball, drive in, get the defensive player to come out, and then the inside will be open." The drill continues. Scott watches intently, "Nice shot." He stops the drill again. "Blue team, we don't need to score in two passes. Don't force it! Be a little more patient and pound the ball inside." He now is intently watching this group of players while the assistant coach is on the other court working with the second group of players. He counts the passes to emphasize to the girls the importance of passing during an offensive play, "one pass, two passes, three, four, five, six, work that D, work that D." The shot is made and he says to the players, "Nice job!" Scott's emphasis is on the fundamentals at this practice.

As the practice time comes to a close, Scott says loudly to the girls running drills, “Bring it down, time flies when you’re having fun!” The team circles around their coach, “Let’s think about what you are doing. Make the defense work. Outside shots are okay, but let’s not settle for them. Let’s try to get the ball to our taller girls inside for an easy shot.” Scott ends the practice with some running drills up and down the court. But rather than just running the girls have an opportunity to shoot free throws to determine how much they will run. The girls eagerly volunteer one at a time to shoot free throws until one of them makes a basket to end the practice. The practice concludes as the players and coaches gather around at the center of the gym and yell “one, two, three—team!”

During a recent A team basketball game, Scott coaches with an emphasis on the fundamentals. He coaches the players on defensive strategies, rebounding, and making good passes. As the game is progressing, he tells the players on the floor, “Let’s see some good passes now, let’s see some good passes.” When the team is on defense, he says, “Move your feet, move your feet.” He provides encouragement to a player on defense, “Stay with her, go get her.” As he often does, he then turns to the players not in the game who are seated next to him on the bench and tells them, “Girls, you have to play good defense.” With Pine leading 15 to 6, they head to his classroom for a half-time talk. He stresses the fundamentals on defense and offense to the players. “What do they have, six points? Four of those points came off put-backs where we didn’t get a rebound, and on the other basket the girl went right around and made a shot. That won’t happen again. You have to work twice as hard on the defensive end as you do on the offensive end. Twice as hard. That comes from right there—pride. Right in your heart. That’s where you play defense, with your feet, your head, and your heart. Not with your hands and

reaching every time. I know it is tempting to reach and go for the steal. How many of you got a foul because you were going for the ball?" he asks the players. "Alright. You can't play defense with your hands. Now if they leave it right there for you, then yes we're going to take it. But we're not going to foul them or plow right into people. That's not the way you play defense." Scott also speaks to them about how they are doing on offense. "Offensively, be patient. Work the ball around. Let's not settle for long bombs. Now, if you were open a couple of times, wide open—that's a good shot! If you're forcing it up there, that's probably not a good shot. The good thing that can come of it though is we can get rebounds, and that is what we did on a few occasions. Get yourself in position, use your feet, use that backboard, and work hard."

During the fourth quarter of the game, Scott calls a timeout to set up a play. Pine has the ball, and using the whiteboard he explains to the players what to do when inbounding the ball. The game resumes, and on the inbound, the players did not run the play. He explained his thoughts on this and coaching at the middle school level.

That happens all of the time. It makes me upset. You'd think it would be really easy to carry over what they just learned in the timeout to the game. But then I think back to when I was in 7th grade. When you're on the court playing, it is completely different sometimes. We have worked on those plays for a long time. It was a set play, and the player sent the play in too early to almost the third option.

The game comes to a close, and the Pine Junior High School A team wins. After shaking hands with the other team, the players go to the locker room with Scott to listen to his post-game comments. He tells them, "The effort was there. They were physical, but we did a good job." Next, he says to the girls, "Raise your hand if you made a mistake." Most girls then raise their hand. He then says, "We all make mistakes. But you have to learn from them. What did we do the last time up the court? We had 5 or 6 passes and

then we were able to make an easy lay-up.” Finally, Scott asks the players, “Did you have fun?” The girls answer loudly, “Yea!” He tells them, “Basketball is about having fun and learning about the game and life. Work hard, and study hard too.” The team then yells in unison, “One, two, three cougar pride!” The players leave the locker room, and will need to be ready the next day for another practice and a second set of games later in the week.

Lori

Lori is the eighth grade basketball coach at Eagle Middle School. Lori is also a seventh grade math teacher at the school, a suburban middle school of 662 students in the sixth through eighth grades. The eighth grade basketball program has two teams; however, Lori is only responsible for coaching the A team. Another teacher at the school coaches the B team. Twenty girls tried out for the two teams, and ten girls were put on each team. The team this year is quite social and outgoing, and they seem eager to play basketball. Lori also previously coached softball at the high school for a few years before becoming the eighth grade girls’ basketball coach for the past five years.

During an early season practice, Lori instructs the players to circle up and stretch. Lori has a friendly demeanor with the girls. They are comfortable joking with the coach. A student joked with her about her shoes she was wearing in practice (which she borrowed from another coach because she had forgotten her own gym shoes). Lori instructs the team members on a variety of drills such as how to shoot a lay-up, transitioning down the court, and rebounding. Next the team practices free throw shooting. Lori asks the students, “What do you think is a reasonable percentage of free throws we can shoot? 70? 60? 50?” The girls agree that they can reach 60 percent today.

“You know what; let’s go with 50% for this week.” The girls break into small groups and shoot free throws around the gym. Lori runs between the groups and writes down how many shots are made on her clipboard. When everyone finishes shooting, she tabulates the results. “You were at 42%,” she announces. “We’ll keep working on it.” Before a drink break, the team has a number of agilities. They run down the court and back switching their feet as they run. Then they shuffle down the court. “Keep your knees bent,” she yells as they are moving down the court. Finally, the players do a drill known as the “back pedal drill” where they go down the court and back running backwards. After a brief water break, the players practice shooting, and then move into working on man-to-man defense. As practice ends she tells the players, “Good job. Okay at the end of each practice we will end in the middle of the court.” She then talks to the team, and tells them, “Good first practice. Look over your packets. Everyone on three,” she says. “One, two, three, team!” the group yells in unison with their hands together in the middle of the circle. Lori talks about the strategies she uses to coach at this level.

One of the things I teach is the basic skills. We’ll run some plays that they brought from junior pro, but I work on the basics. These are simple pick and rolls, boxing out, and ball handling—the basics. Then when they get to high school they can just work on the strategy of the game, because they will already know the basics from playing in eighth grade.

During a game, Lori is a positive mentor for the student athletes. She yells encouragement to the player as the game progresses. As a player rebounds she says, “Good job, grab it.” On offense, the team is passing the ball well. Lori gives them encouragement, “Good hustle! Way to move the ball ladies.” As some of the Eagle players wrestle for a loose ball, Lori exclaims, “Good job, Good job!” Eagle leads at half-

time. Lori then speaks to the players at half-time, “We have another whole half to go. We have to come out strong. Don’t let them back in. Stay pumped and stay in control of this game.” As part of her half-time discussion, she offers her input on where the team needs to improve their defensive intensity, “You guys are giving them easy shots. But you know what, they are making shots too. Get a hand in her face. On the outside, get a hand in her face. Don’t necessarily try to block or foul the other player, but get a hand in her face. If you get a hand in her face, they won’t all drop.” After addressing some offensive plays, she ends the half-time discussion, “Do not let off. Don’t let them back in this game. Okay? Let’s go out there and stay pumped up. Let’s go!”

Throughout the second half, the Eagle players seem to respond to their coach’s half-time talk. At one point, an Eagle player makes a tremendous dive for a loose ball and slides out of bounds. Lori exclaims, “Good hustle Jen!” In the second half as the team improves their intensity, they also continue to call their own plays offensively. Lori allows this group of girls to call one of four plays themselves as they come up the court—usually the point guard calls the play. Although as the coach she doesn’t select the play, she actively watches and instructs the players as they run through the play. “Post up, post up. Switch. Switch. Good job. Way to hustle!” As the game ends, Eagle wins by a sizeable margin. A close contest in the first half—the team played harder in the second half and gained control of the game. After shaking hands with the other team, they head into the locker room to talk to Lori. “Good team effort. Good hustle. Look what happened. Last year we beat this team by one point. This year we won by much more. Everybody contributed. It was a team effort. Good hustle out there tonight. Jen...diving, that was great! Vicky, way to go out there. Even the little things tonight created more

shots. That was so much better. You were pumped up before the game, and it showed on the court. You need to take this with us from tonight. Any questions? Good job tonight.”

Dave

Dave is the eighth grade girls’ basketball coach at Townsend Middle School, a rural/suburban school with approximately 500 students in the sixth through eighth grades. Seventeen girls are on one of the two eighth grade teams. This fall is Dave’s eighth season coaching girls’ basketball at Townsend Middle School. Dave does not teach at the school. He works in the human resources department at a nearby university. When he graduated from college, Dave returned to his hometown, and he volunteered to coach middle school basketball. After landing the university job he left his hometown, and eventually he found that he missed coaching. He decided he wanted to coach middle school athletes once again. He looked in the local newspaper, and applied for open coaching positions at a few local middle schools. He was hired at Townsend. He explains why he decided to work at the middle school level.

I chose to coach at the middle school level. The place I started coaching was middle school. It seems like to me that most of the high school coaching positions are for staff members at the school. I like the practice schedule at the middle school, and I enjoy this age level.

A few minutes before 6:00 PM on a mid-September evening, seventeen eighth grade girls wait in the hallway outside the gym at Townsend Middle School. Once the seventh grade team is done practicing, the eighth graders are ready to start their own practice that concludes at 8:00 P.M. The girls are chatty and seem excited to get the practice started. As the seventh graders exit the gym, the eighth grade girls enter and

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begin running. Shortly thereafter, Dave arrives to the gym and posts a paper on a small bulletin board by the doors. The paper lists the practice schedule for the evening, and a quote is typed at the bottom, "True success is overcoming the fear of being unsuccessful." Dave puts up a quote each day at practice. Sometimes he reads the quote and emphasizes it with the players, and other days he just allows them to read it and think about it on their own. Today, he doesn't say anything about the quote, but most players walk up to the bulletin board and read the quote by the end of the evening. Some girls repeat the quote to one another. The practice begins with warm-ups and then Dave gives the players some brief comments at center court before they begin organized activities.

Practice this evening at Townsend moves quickly into drills. Dave instructs the players to line up on one end of the court and the girls practice an outlet play they would use after a defensive rebound. Dave yells encouragement during the drill, "Let's go, let's go. You've got to control the ball ladies. Go, go!" He wants them to work on quick, solid passes that are on target. "Come on ladies, no soft passes," he tells them. Dave watches the drill for quite a few minutes, and then he yells, "Outlet" and joins the drill in progress himself with two other players. After a few more minutes, he blows his whistle to begin a new drill. He runs the players through a number of rebounding drills. He has to stop the drill and explain how to do the drill a second time to the players. He then has the players line up near the gym wall and shoot the ball at the wall, rebound the ball, and shoot again. He offers them support throughout the shooting, "That's it, put it back up. There you go. Good." During the "hustle drill" he has the team line up in two lines. He then rolls the ball and a player from each line tries to get the ball and then make a lay-up. Each player has a chance to run through the drill a few times. Dave is pleased with the

effort the players exhibited in the drill. He tells them, “You did great on that. Now we’ll move to free throws.”

Dave emphasizes free throw shooting in his practices. Each player joins two other players to shoot 30 free throws at one of the six baskets in the gym. Over the next several minutes the players shoot the first 10 free throws, five at a time, and then rotate in their group. Then they switch after each two shots for the next ten free throws, and rotate after every attempt for the last 10 free throws. Dave watches the players from the center of the gym. Each group of girls eagerly reports the number of shots made, and Dave records them. Over the next few minutes, the players shoot baskets in their small groups. Dave announces, “The first group to make 10 shots, run to the middle of the gym.” He then instructs the girls to run this game with a different type of shot at the basket, closer to the basket than the free throw line. “The first group to make five shots, run to the middle.” This is a fun way to work on shooting, and the girls try hard and run to the middle to be the winning group. After a short break to get a drink, Dave has the players number off to select sides for a full court scrimmage. The last 30 minutes of the practice is devoted to a scrimmage. Dave coaches the teams from the front row of bleachers in the gym. “Run Carolina,” he says. He then has them run it again. He keeps running the play a number of times so that every player has experience running this particular offensive play. He yells encouragement from the bleachers, “Let’s go!” he says while clapping, “Make sure you are running a play, not just running around.” He tells them to run the play again. The girls continue the scrimmage and with five minutes left in the practice, he has them gather at center court. “We’re improving—that’s the good news. I like what I’m seeing. We just need to play with consistency. I want to see consistency

with what we do. Does anyone have any questions? Let's go." To end the practice, all of the team members and Dave say in unison, "one-two-three Hornets!"

As a coach at the middle school level, Dave focuses on the fundamentals. His discussions with the A team at a recent game demonstrate this emphasis. With just a few minutes before the game, he calls the team members over to where he is near the bench. Dave stresses fundamentals of the game as he talks to the players. "Work on boxing out tonight. On offense, look for the cutters. Move your feet on defense, remember we're playing man-to-man defense. Get the rebounds, look for the open man, and make good passes. Any questions?" The team and Dave then say in unison, "Take good shots and use the backboard." The game starts with Townsend on defense. Dave shouts, "Move your feet white, move your feet. Watch the middle." As the team gets a defensive rebound, Dave calls a play for the offense to run, "Green, green." The game remains close at half-time, with Townsend in a slight lead. The game was quickly paced with both teams racing up and down the court, but not necessarily getting good opportunities at the basket. At the break, Dave speaks to the girls. "First of all, we have to stay under control. Okay? The fast break is great, but if we don't get a shot right off, then pull it back and run the offense. Keep using the backboard. When we're using the backboard, they go in. We didn't run the offense the entire second quarter. We have to keep things under control. Keep things under control on both sides of the court. I want you to be aggressive, but there is a fine line between being aggressive and keeping things under control. Box out, play strong, and be aggressive." Dave later talks about his emphasis in coaching middle school girls' basketball:

I stress fundamentals. We only learn a few plays. We have three baseline out-of-bounds plays, one side line play, and four offensive plays. In my coaching, I like to do a few things well.

Throughout the second half Dave continues to coach, stressing fundamentals. He says, "Use the backboard," and then later, "Keep it up! Move your feet." At the end of the third quarter he talks to the team. "Don't let up! Keep moving your feet on defense. Attack the basket on offense. Finish the game. On three, finish." The team says, "One, two, three, finish." The girls are laughing. "What?" asks Dave. A player answers, "We thought you said spinach." They laugh and then go out on the floor for the final quarter. Throughout the rest of the game, the team continued to play well hustling for loose balls on defense, moving, and using the backboard on shots. The game ends with Townsend winning by 22 points. After the game, Dave enters the locker room where many players are eating. "How come I didn't get a snack?" he asks. The girls laugh. He tells the team, "You played well. Just like the B team, you did everything that I asked. You moved your feet on defense. You boxed out. You ran the offense well with the cuts. I'm proud of you. Have a good weekend." Dave then heads out of the locker room and now will get ready for another week of games and practices.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a third year seventh grade coach at West Middle School. Jennifer teaches math at the high school, and upon being hired in the school district, she was also given the opportunity to coach at the middle school. Jennifer is a graduate of the West Public Schools, and her hiring as a middle school coach was based on her reputation as a former player and student teacher in the school district. The high school athletic director

had recommended her to the middle school administration as a potential coaching candidate, and she was hired when there soon was an opening at the middle school as the seventh grade girls' basketball coach. West is a middle school with just over 500 students who comprise two grades—seventh and eighth grade. Jennifer is the lone coach working with the two seventh grade teams.

At an early season practice session, sixteen seventh graders are practicing for an upcoming game. One of the first activities for the team is agility drills. The players are running back and forth on the basketball court. Although the two teams now have a total of 16 players, the first few weeks of school, there were only 11 players on both teams. Jennifer recruited and searched for additional players so that the school could field two teams. Just getting the bodies out for the team has been a tremendous challenge for Jennifer this year. Some of these players who joined the team late have never played before and need to work on their basic basketball skills. Jennifer said that this year there was a problem with a low turn out of players at tryouts as students were busy with other activities which resulted in more new players to the game.

The practice moves quickly along with various drills and activities. Next, the team is practicing free throws. The players are in groups of three at each basket around the gym shooting. Jennifer quickly runs between the groups offering suggestions and advice to the shooters. She arrives to a group that has students who just recently joined the team. She demonstrates where to place their feet and how to go up and down on their toes as they go through the motion of shooting the ball. At one point she literally stands behind one of the players and moves the student's body as the player shoots the free throw. Once the free throws are completed, she asks the team, "Are we done?" The girls

answer, “Yea,” as students are still bouncing the balls. “Hold the balls ladies!” she yells, and then she begins to explain the next activity—agility drills. The team runs, except for the two girls who made the most free throws. They are rewarded by not having to participate in the agility drills.

While the players are running, the parent of an eighth grade student enters the gym and sits down in the bleachers. He was looking for his eighth grade daughter, and he thought she was in this gym. In reality the eighth grade team was in the nearby gym of the intermediate school. Jennifer recognizes the parent and approaches him. She asks, “Can I help you?” He then explains he is looking for his daughter. “You’re Amanda’s Dad, right?” He replies, “Yes.” She then enters into a conversation with him about Amanda. Jennifer knew she had been struggling this year in the first weeks of practice to adjust to the eighth grade coach and learn her role on the team. “I’m Jennifer. I coached your daughter last year. I hope I’m not overstepping my bounds here, but I heard she is having trouble this year. She is a tremendous athlete—she rocks on the court. Tell her Coach T. says play the game—coaching philosophies are different from year to year, but she does well on the court. She just needs to just play the game and not worry about coaching differences.” The father responded that yes she had quit the team at one point, but had just rejoined this week. He said that the eighth grade coach and Amanda had a conflict with each other initially, but they got it worked out. He thanks Jennifer for her time and left the gym. Jennifer later reflects on her interaction with the parent:

That eighth grader is a tremendous athlete. I had her as a seventh grader, so I already had some prior knowledge about her family life. It is not the greatest. When she played as a seventh grader, it was her first time ever playing on a team of any sort, she always wanted to quit when things got hard last year. I was trying to talk to her Dad go get him to work with his daughter rather than yell at her as he did last year.

The eighth grade player did rejoin the team and had a successful eighth grade season. Jennifer's conversation with the parent early in the season was something she felt as a coach at the school, she needed to have in order to help with the situation. This is just one of the many responsibilities that Jennifer feels she has to fulfill as a coach at West Middle School.

Next during the practice, Jennifer reviews offensive plays with the students. She sends six players from the A team to one end of the court, and she works with 10 players from the B team on the other end of the court. Before the girls split up on the court, she says, "My concern is when I send girls to the other end of the court they are not working as hard. You are goofing around. If you are doing that, we are just going to run. Everyone needs to work hard whether I'm with you or not." She then works with the players from the B team, demonstrating plays and helping the girls run through offensive plays that they can use in the upcoming game. Meanwhile, the A team is working independently on the other end. After a brief break for drinks, Jennifer has the two groups of girls switch ends. She begins to work with the A team and abruptly stops. "I have five bosses of girls who like to tell each other what to do. I can't coach this way—come on ladies." This group of players is the more talented athletes that have tried out for the team. But sometimes it appears they can be bossy or rude to one another. After a few more minutes, Jennifer instructs some of the girls to do 10 push-ups on the spot as a consequence for their actions on the practice court. Jennifer later explains the situation.

The A team girls dropped for push ups because I had warned them about bossing each other around. They have a tendency to tell each other what they are doing wrong and not focus on where they need to go themselves during plays. I only had the girls on offense do push ups because defense was working really well and communicating together. In that particular case, on offense my post player was

telling the point guard what to do and which play to run, which was not the play I had told the point guard to run. It's very hard with the A team because these girls have played for so long and on so many different AAU, Junior Pro, and other teams that they are not used to playing with each other and trusting each other yet. This is something I'm working on though.

During the last drill of the practice, Jennifer shoots the ball from various positions on the court and the players line up, and each takes a turn rebounding the ball and moving it down the court. Jennifer is not only rebounding, but she also is involved with the play and often joins in moving the ball down the court after the rebound. She continually offers instruction as the girls are carrying out the drill. As the practice ends, she tells the girls it is time to go select their uniforms. This is one of the last practices before the first game of the season, and they need to go down to the storage room and get their uniforms. After the practice, Jennifer talks about the structure of the team and what she hopes the students learn as a member of the team.

I coach the A team to be competitive, but the B team is for the experience, having fun, and skill development. We do split up during the practice, but many of the drills we do as one team. What I want to teach these girls is what seventh grade basketball is all about. I want them to learn what it means to have a uniform and to play for your school.

A halftime break in the locker room at an A game which West is winning, demonstrates Jennifer's coaching style. There is a lot of excitement in the room. Jennifer is clapping—the players are clapping and yelling. The girls are excited. Although Jennifer is pleased with how the team is playing in the game, she stresses where they need to continue to improve which is on defense. "Push them hard. We're in man-to-man (defense). We're much better in man-to-man. Get faster and get back. You have to get back." She then uses the whiteboard to show the players how to get back on defense after a basket or missed shot on the offensive end of the court. "Girls in the back

court, you have to spring down the court. You have to get back. You're making me nervous. I don't like to be nervous. So just get back. You're doing well, but they're going to come back in the second half and be aggressive. We can't give up." Jennifer then shows the girls on the whiteboard where on the floor they should position themselves to box out on a rebound. The girls respond to her discussion, and are listening, even laughing a few times as the coach interjects a slight amount of humor. Jennifer talks about hustling and working hard and sends the team back to the gym. Jennifer's half-time talk with this team demonstrates some of her own coaching beliefs. She wants her players to be competitive, thus she discussed strategies they could use to improve their defense. On the other hand, she also wants them to have fun.

When working with middle school athletes, Jennifer knows she must be attentive to their learning styles. Although Jennifer teaches at the high school, she has a good relationship and connection with her middle school team members. She strives to keep them focused, because sometimes if they are not playing they may not pay attention or they may become bored. One of Jennifer's biggest challenges this season is working with the various needs of young adolescents.

When the A team girls are frustrated, it's hard. They feel like when they get frustrated, it is all them, by themselves. With the B team players, if they get frustrated they get scared—they would rather be on the bench and cheer. That's good because that's part of West basketball too. We continue to work on the girls who have skill—getting them to learn to trust each other and not become frustrated.

Jennifer's coaching philosophy demonstrates a desire for the players to learn about the game, to learn about what it means to play a school sport, and to have fun. She enjoys the challenges she is faced with coaching middle school students, and strives to make a

difference in these players' lives and she wants to teach these young women to have pride in their uniform and to have pride in playing basketball for West Middle School.

Tom

Tom Smith is the eighth grade girls' basketball coach at Deer Valley parochial school. Deer Valley Middle School is a private school of 278 seventh and eighth grade students in an urban city. Tom, who graduated from Deer Valley High School, works in private industry and is a non-faculty basketball coach. He has coached at the middle school level for five years. Although the school administration typically hires a coach for the A team and a coach for the B team; this season, Tom coaches both teams because the district could not find anyone interested in coaching the B team. Although he is allowed by the school to have 12 girls on each team, this fall only 22 students tried out for the eighth grade team. There are 10 girls on the A team and 12 girls on the B team. Although he doesn't mind coaching both teams, it is a longer time commitment, and a difference at Deer Valley versus the public schools in the area is the pay Tom receives. He earns about \$800 for each team he coaches, whereas some of his friends in the public school system earn \$2600 each season for coaching one middle school team.

Tom is coaching during a practice with just the A team players on a Sunday afternoon. Tom is relaxed at the practice—he rarely blows his whistle. The girls begin practice by going up and down the full court making lay ups. Tom remarks after a few minutes, "We haven't missed one lay up today." He then says jokingly, "How come we missed them all in the last game?" After warming up with lay ups, the players move into various shooting drills as well as free throw practice. Each player shoots 10 free throws.

During the free throws he provides instructions for a few of the girls. He shoots the ball to model the proper stance for shooting a free throw.

After practicing free throws, the team works on offensive plays that they will use in games. There are a few tall players on the team, and one of the fundamental plays involves passing the ball to these players who are near the basket. “Our goal is to get the ball to her (referring to the center),” he instructs. “Don’t be afraid to shoot either. We looked scared in the game the other night.” Deer Valley has only played one game this season, but the school they played was a good, competitive team. Both the gold (B) and green (A) teams lost. Tom is using this practice to improve on the mistakes made in the game. He also is coaching to provide the girls with confidence. He tells his players the team they just faced is the best team they will see all season, and he is honest with them where they need to improve including taking shots at the basket, passing, and free throw shooting. After working on offensive plays, they go back to practicing more free throw shooting. He explains to the players, “We were one for six in the game. We need to shoot more free throws. Ten free throws with a partner—let’s go.” He then observes the players shooting, and walks between the girls. Next, he leads the team in practicing jumps shots, and then they go back to even more free throws. “Free throws—five each in groups of two. How many you miss in your groups is how many times you are running.” For each missed free throw out of ten attempts in their groups, the players will run the length of the basketball court. Tom walks back to the player he had assisted earlier in the practice. “Good that’s better,” he tells her. “You’re bending your knees.” After finishing the free throws, the players run the length of the gym for several minutes. Some groups have to run more than others depending on how many free throws they missed.

The last activity of the practice is a three on two drill where the players rotate on defense and offense. This enables them to practice both sides of the ball. Tom is providing instruction throughout the mini-scrimmages. “Good. Up strong. Square up,” he says. As the practice ends the team practices shooting for a few minutes and then Tom tells them to bring it in. He ends each practice in a circle with the team. He always ends practice by talking to the team, “That was the best team we will see this season. Don’t be afraid. Be ready to play. Everyone that was here today is going to play a lot. You are the starters because you were here. Let’s go Raiders.” Tom will allow five of these players who were at practice to start in the game.

In a recent B team game, Tom is an animated coach. He starts by sitting, but is quickly up watching the action on the floor. Deer Valley is on defense. He says, “Who do you have? Who’s right here? Good. Good. Help out!” The gold team rebounds a missed shot by the opposition, and Tom sits down and says to himself, “Good.”

Although there is a lot of action up and down the court, there is very little scoring. During a break in the first half, he tells the players, “We’ve got to go to the basket. Calm down out there. Set your picks and get up the court. It’s four to nothing. Remember man-to-man defense.” A few times throughout the game, he yells instructions to players on the floor, and then talks in more detail to the players on the bench. During a low scoring first half, Tom uses the half-time to review some basics of the game. “Okay, we’re making this game too hard for ourselves. Simple pick and roll. Wait for your pick. We’re playing man-to-man defense. Give them a little space. We don’t need to be right up on them. Get back. I have to tell you this every game. Give them a little space. If we don’t, we’re in front of them, but right on top of them, and they dribble around us. We

have to help a little better. Help defense. Does everybody got it? Okay.” Tom also encourages them to play tougher on offense, “Go to the basket. When you get it underneath, get a rebound, and go right back up with it. Warm-up out there, and everybody be ready to play, okay? Here we go.” Throughout the second half of the game, Tom continues to coach animatedly. When a Deer Valley player is inbound, he is talking to the player on the floor, “Do it right. Wait for it. Help out (the ball is inbound). Good! Way to take it to the basket (they score off the inbound play).” He then comments to the players on the bench, “This is a pretty simple game when you listen.” The girls nod in agreement. As the game ends, Deer Valley wins by 9 points. Tom is pleased with their effort in the second half, which he felt was lackluster in the early part of the game. He has the girls shake hands with the opposing team, he circles them for quick congratulations by telling them, “Good win,” and he sends the team to the locker room.

Ed

Ed is a computer teacher and eighth grade girls’ basketball coach at Maplewood Middle School. He has been teaching at Maplewood for over eight years and this season is his sixth year as the eighth grade girls’ basketball coach. He also coaches boys’ basketball during the winter sports season. Maplewood is one of two middle schools within a large, suburban school district. Ed played basketball when he was in middle and high school, and as a result he is familiar with the game from his own experiences. After becoming a teacher at Maplewood, he saw a posting for a boys’ basketball coach. He began his coaching career with the boys’ team, and he added the responsibility of

coaching the girls' team two seasons later. Ed felt initially prepared to be a coach when he first started coaching. Additionally, he has learned more technical information about the game from keeping in contact with the varsity coach at the high school. He feels there is a good connection between the middle school and high school basketball programs. He has his own playing experience as well as working at basketball camps in the district to assist him in being a more proficient coach. He is the sole coach responsible for coaching both the A and B eighth grade teams at the school.

At a practice, Ed directs an activity where the players line up with three students in each of three rows. All nine students are bouncing a basketball. It is the goal of an additional player, who is playing the position of a guard, to dribble through the three lines of defense. He explains to the players that the guards need to learn to attack, and not be passive. As each guard is attempting to dribble through the defense, he closely watches. "Look to attack. Don't get stuck, go in and out then," he instructs. He rotates all of the players in the drill through the positions as a guard attacking and a defensive player on one of the three lines. He continues the activity until all players have been in the guard position and have successfully gotten through the defense. For the last drill of the practice, he has the team practice a press break. In yesterday's game, as the teams were being pressured by the defense, they did not successfully get the ball over half-court. They practice many different options to break the press by the opposing defense. Ed summarizes how he coaches when working with middle school students.

Things have to be repeated over and over when coaching middle school students. I repeat instructions. You also have to have patience when working with this age group with their short attention spans. I also coach so that they have fun.

As a team building activity, for the last twenty minutes of practice, Ed takes the players to the art room at the school. The players begin working on two banners for a teammate who had ACL surgery during the week, and has been out of school. The banners will be hung in the gym on the following Monday for her to see when she returns to school. Ed gives the players some basic instructions, and then lets their creativity take over. As the practice time ends, he tells the players, "Give me five. Listen up, Monday we can finish these up. See you then!"

The following Tuesday, the two Maplewood Middle School eighth grade teams are playing games against the other middle school in the district in the opposing school's gym. To the players, this is big rivalry game as the two middle schools are within walking distance and a part of the same community. Many of the players from each school know each other. The coaches and administrators at each school down play the rivalry, and they remind the players at both schools that in one year they will be teammates at the high school. The game has a larger than normal crowd as compared to a typical afternoon middle school basketball game. Student spectators have their faces painted in school colors, and the gym, is a loud, exciting atmosphere. As the B team is warming up, Ed helps a player tape her fingers. At the end of the warm-up, Ed gathers the players near the center of the court. He tells them, "Tonight, play your hardest! Any questions? This is the same as our other games, except we have more fans. Be sure to set your picks. Make sure you rotate. Panthers on three!" The team then yells in unison, "One-two-three panthers!"

Ed directs all of his attention to the court throughout the game. He calls plays each time Maplewood has the ball on offense. On defense, he also provides instruction.

He tells the players on defense, “Drop back, drop back.” But, the players do not respond. Within the first few minutes of the game, he calls a time out. He huddles the players around him on the bench, and kneels down on one knee. Using a small whiteboard he explains the defense he is expecting in the game. “When I say drop back, here is what I mean.” Using a marker on the whiteboard, he shows them how to play the defensive scheme. Ed continues to stress defense throughout the first half. The players still seem to struggle to find their positions on the floor when transitioning from offense to defense. One particular player is having trouble, and Ed subs her out of the game. He takes a moment on the bench to explain her position on defense in the middle of the court. She seems to understand and takes a seat on the bench. On the next several offensive plays, Ed calls the play. “Triangle,” he says. He calls this play multiple times, each time resulting in a missed basket. He calls timeout. Again on one knee, he says to the players, “When you’re running triangle offense, here is what you need to do. You are up here, match up,” he says as he illustrates the play on the whiteboard with a marker. “Know you have, Panthers on three!” The offense begins to play better in the second quarter. At one point Ed calls a different play, “Line, line, line,” he repeats. The play results in a wide open player who scores an uncontested lay-up. Phil explains this play.

Line is a play that we run on offense to get the ball to that particular student who scored. She is a basic (special education) student. She is new to basketball, and this play works for her to be able to be involved in the offense.

Maplewood leads by over ten points as the game nears half-time. The coach of the other team, who Ed knows, calls him to the scorers table. He asks Ed to let off on his defensive intensity. Ed answers, “Call timeout and I will.” The other coach quickly calls a timeout, and during the timeout, Ed explains to the girls to adjust the defense and let off on the

pressure. However, these players are not well-experienced with basketball, and don't quite let off like the other coach would like. He calls Ed over again, and they have a lengthy conversation at mid-court while the game is continuing. Ed tells the players, "Drop a step, drop a step," to encourage them to let off on the intensity of their defense. The first half ends with Maplewood leading by a score of 22 to 5. Ed instructs the girls to go to the visiting locker room.

Ed appreciates the effort the players have shown in the game. At halftime he tells them, "Alright, good intensity there. You're going after stuff hard. That's good. We're getting people in there who aren't always involved." He goes on to use the white board to re-explain the triangle and line offensive plays. After answering a few questions he tells them, "Don't let them have easy baskets. Play help defense. Play hard with help defense. Be sure not to stick to your player, play help defense." Ed believes as a coach of students at this age level it is good to repeat instructions. He often repeats plays and instructions to the team in both games and practices. During the second half, Maplewood continues to score and they often run the plays known as line and triangle. On defense, Ed actively coaches, "Move your feet! Move your feet!" he instructs a player. A few minutes later he says to everyone on the floor, "Arms up D!" Although they are leading by a wide margin, Ed continues to instruct and call timeouts a few times to further explain offensive plays in more detail during the game. The game ends with the Maplewood B team winning 32-11. After the game in the locker room he tells the team, "Hey that was a great effort. You continued to give a good effort, and you played hard. I liked that we could make adjustments. Everyone contributed. Good team effort! Panthers on three!" As Ed walks out of the locker room, there are just a few minutes left

before the A game. The next group of players is already warming up in preparation for the final game of the evening.

Sam

Sam Jones coaches the seventh grade A team at Central Middle School. At Central, Sam coaches in a large dome fit to be a community college athletic facility. Central is a large, urban middle school with 1045 students in the seventh and eighth grades. Sam coaches the seventh grade A team, and another adult coaches the B squad. Although Sam coaches at Central, he is not a teacher or staff member at the school. He works for a private business in the area. Central Middle School is a former high school in the Central School district. Sam, a veteran coach for the past 20 years and former player at the middle school, high school, and college levels enthusiastically coaches in practice and games.

On a mid-October afternoon, Sam leads a typical basketball practice. After a three on two drill where students practice on both offense and defense, the players run agility drills in groups against one another up and down the court. Sam yells at the players to encourage them to run their hardest. “Come on Lisa, you can do better than that,” he says. “Good job, good job, hustle back,” he yells to another group. As the last group starts running he enthusiastically yells, “Come on now—let’s go. Come on turn it up!” Next Sam instructs the players on a defensive drill. He has the girls pair up. He demonstrates an offensive play with a basketball, and he has another player defend him. “Is she playing defense right?” he asks the team. “No she is not, that’s right. What is wrong with her?” he asks. “She needs to be lower and down more towards the floor,” he

answers. In the pairs, the girls practice defending each other. Sam walks among the six groups and offers instruction. “Ann, you have to get lower, and you have to be more flexible. You have got to be loose—you can’t be stiff,” he tells her. Then interjecting some humor he says, “It’s like when you are dancing, you’ve got to be low and you’ve got to be loose.” The players laugh, and then continue practicing the drill.

Next he has the girls shuffle their feet as they move up and down the court. He has one player lead the other 11 players as they follow each other at an arms-length apart up and down the court following the out of bounds lines. As the girls run the drill, he offers encouragement. “Get down some. Come on finish up,” he says. He then blows his whistle and has them run more shuffling drills. “Keep it going. Good job girls, good job,” he yells as they slide up and down the basketball court. Once everyone has completed the drill he explains why they are doing this drill in practice. “The reason for so much sliding today is that we’re going to play man-to-man defense tomorrow in the game. This will be different than the zone defense. You will have to worry about finding your man. When you were in a 2-3 zone defense, you just had to worry about finding your spot on the floor. It’s going to be harder tomorrow because you will have to think about where your girl is. But we will try it. Are there any questions about what I just said?” Sam often physically gets involved in the practice. For the next activity, he pairs up with each player, one at a time, and Sam and the player run up the court and back passing the ball. The player then shoots a lay-up attempt on each end of the court. The ball never touches the floor. Sam makes a positive comment to each player as they end the drill such as “Good job” or “Finish it.” Sam strives in practice to make positive comments to each player throughout the afternoon.

Later in the practice, Coach Jones splits the players into red and blue teams. They are practicing game situations in a mini-scrimmage format. He begins by discussing the defense. “This is giving us problems. When the ball is in the wing (he demonstrates dribbling the ball on the side of the court), you just can’t stand here. What you guys are doing is standing here. Then you’re here, and then they get the easy lay up.” He then says, “If the ball is over here, then you have got to slide over (as he has the ball, the defensive players slide over). Good job,” he tells them. After situating the defense, he begins to work on the offense. “I want to see five passes before a shot!” he exclaims. He watches the players run the offensive plays. “Let me see you girls run it. Okay—good.” He continues to observe the teams as they run offensive plays. “Five passes, five passes,” he reminds them. “Good job, good job. Finish it.” Then he starts calling some specific plays. He takes a minute to explain the next play he will be calling. “Do you know what Iowa is?” A player answers. “That’s right. It slows the game down, and helps us work the clock down. See if we can run it for 30 seconds. Go.” He watches as they pass the ball. “You’re too close together. You’ve got to have more spacing. That’s right. Good job.” Sam teaches his players a lot of specific plays and skills in practice during the season.

Towards the end of the practice, Sam instructs the team to shoot free throws. He tells the girls that these practices are not enough time. They also need to work at home to get better. After everyone has shot their free throws, he asks, “Who wants to shoot free throws?” Many of the girls on the team raise their hands to volunteer. How many shots are made out of three by the player Sam selects will determine how many times the team has to run the length of the court to end the practice. The player makes the first—

everyone cheers loudly. The dome echoes with noise. Then she misses the next two shots, and the team has to run up and down the court twice. No one seems to mind, as the one shot that was made reduces their agilities from three lengths of the court to two. Finally, to end the practice, Sam instructs the players to circle up at the edge of the court. He tells them, “Good job everybody. Good practice. We’re going to keep the same routine. Go home tomorrow and come back before the game. The team tomorrow is tough. Good practice ladies!” The players begin to leave the dome, and Sam is already thinking about tomorrow’s game.

Sam looks forward to coaching in games. During a recent game, the contest begins with Central winning the opening tip. Sam yells the first offensive play, “Sentra, Sentra, Sentra,” but the team does not score. As the players fall back on defense he tells them, “Hands up. Two-three zone, two-three! Good defense!” One player in particular takes several three point shots attempts in the first few minutes of the game. Sam calls a timeout. As the girls huddle around him at the bench he tells them, “What is with the three point shots? Run the offense. That’s what we have done all season. Run the offense. One-two-three Bulldogs!” As the ball is inbounded, he again calls the offensive play, “Sentra—run the offense.” The team runs the play and successfully scores. Sentra is the name of a play that the A team runs often in the game. Sam later explains how this play originated:

One of my coaching role models was my high school basketball coach, Ben Sentra (pseudonym). Still today I use Coach Sentra’s philosophies in every game. Even though they are high school philosophies, I find that they work at this level as well. As a matter of fact, the offense we ran in high school—a swing offense—I call this play Sentra, to honor him. It is a great offense. We have two guards and then a swing person, and it works very well.

Sam continues to call the Sentra play quite often in the first half as well as a few other offensive plays. The player who shot several three point attempts early in the game, takes more three-point shots in the second quarter. Sam subs her out of the game and has her sit next to him on the bench. "I don't mind you taking three's if you are open, but what is the three-point thing? Run the offense. You need to go to the basket and cut through. Okay?" The player nods that she understands. A few minutes later he puts her back in the game. In the next few offensive series, Central scores. The one particular player is no longer taking three-point shots as Sam had instructed. The other team soon calls a timeout. Sam huddles the team around him at the bench. "Good job ladies." To the one player who had been taking all of the three point shots he says, "You had a wide open lay-up. Good work. You just have to be patient." The first half ends with Central leading by a score of 15 to 6.

Sam feels that the team can play better and has improvements to make in the second half. In the locker room he asks the players, "Is this the best team we've played all year?" "Yes," the players answer. "That's why we have to play. We have to play our game. We want to be on top of our game, or we are going to lose. What I am talking about is don't get out of what you guys have been doing all season. Don't play differently. Keep doing what you have been doing all year. The second half begins, and the game is competitive and intense. Sam continues to give instructions and directions to the players in the game. On defense, he tells the players, "Hands up, Hands up," and later says, "Good job, good job. Nice rebound." Often during the second half he calls the Sentra offensive play. One player drives to the basket and misses the shot. "That's alright," he says as he claps with approval for the effort the player shows in the play. The

game ends with Central winning by 10 points, this was the closest game they have played in all season. The players huddle and say in unison, “Good game!” to the other team before they shake hands. A game worker from the other school comes up to the girls and coaches and tells them, “You are a nice group of girls. You all represented your school well.” Sam thanks her for her compliment and instructs the players to head to the bus. The team will stop for dinner at the way home and get back to the school late. He decides that they will not practice on Friday afternoon. Sam later talks about his philosophy as a middle school basketball coach.

I want the players working hard and listening. The winning and losing doesn’t matter. But, I’ve found out that the girls listen and if you reinforce it everyday, I win my share of games, just by using that philosophy. I really believe that a coach has to be a nurturing person at this level. You can’t be an in-your-face kind of coach, always expressing anger. You have to be a nurturing person. I think you have to be a nurturing person at every level you coach to get the kids to respond. If you’re always screaming and hollering, and not hugging and holding, talking in a good manner, you’re not going to get much from them.

Emergent Themes

Each day, middle school basketball coaches are faced with a variety of challenges related to their coaching of young adolescents. As a result, the coaches develop their own unique characteristics as they strive to coach basketball to middle school girls. At the middle school level, the coaches attempt to play all students while fielding a competitive team. They work with middle school adolescents who often have difficulties with their peers, family, and their busy schedules. The coaches also must tackle these challenges with sometimes limited institutional support. Additionally, many of the coaches observed did not have a good communication pipeline to the high school basketball program, which could be another source of support. Each coach takes on this

task of coaching middle school girls' basketball, and attempts to be the most successful coach that he or she can be for their respective schools. The coaches all measure their level of coaching effectiveness differently, and this ideal level of effectiveness will vary depending on their own coaching beliefs and coaching philosophies.

The discussion that follows will outline some of the challenges that are faced by middle school girls' basketball coaches. First, the coaches' efforts to play all students while remaining competitive in each game will be discussed. Then, the challenge related to the busy lifestyles of today's middle school adolescent will be noted and how these busy schedules can conflict with basketball. Next, institutional support for the coaches and resources provided by the school will be noted followed by a discussion of the connection between middle school and high school basketball coaches. Finally, coaching effectiveness will be reviewed as seen through the eyes of each individual coach.

Playing Time and Competitiveness

One of the biggest challenges for all middle school coaches is balancing the competitive nature of the game with the coach's own coaching beliefs. Coaches want to be competitive in each game, but they also believe in the fundamentals and making sure that all students play nearly equal amounts of time in the game. Experts argue that successful middle school coaches organize games so that every member of the team plays at least a minimum amount of time (Riemcke, 1988). At Pine, Scott plays all of his team members in each game. He utilizes strategies as a coach so that he is always thinking ahead in a game, especially if the outcome may be close, and doing the best he can to balance opportunities and playing time for all of the players.

It's tough, because I am competitive. But what I'll try to do is sense if a game is going to come down to whoever has the ball at the end. What I'll do then is try to sit these particular girls so that I have those five girls at the end of the game. But it doesn't always work that way. There have been times when we've lost a game before because I didn't sub. I told the girls it is just a game, that scoreboard means nothing. You can feel good about yourselves that you tried your hardest. But, I'm not perfect by a long shot.

During the observed game, both the A and B team won by a large margin. This made it easy for Scott to play everyone equally in the games. In other games later in the season that were close, Scott is sure to plan and play everyone early in the game.

Lori, the coach the eighth grade coach at Eagle Middle School also makes it a priority to balance playing time. In the games, all of the players have numerous minutes of playing time. It is Lori's coaching philosophy to make sure that all of the athletes play in each game, although not necessarily equal minutes in each game.

I do play all the kids in every game unless they forget their uniform, or there is a discipline situation. But I haven't had that this year. This year has been fine with 10 girls. Sometimes with 12 players, there is a drop off in terms of skills, and you weave them in when you can. I try to make sure everyone gets plenty of minutes in every game. It is easier when you are winning by a lot. The last two games, perhaps I had kids in a little longer who needed to be fresh. At the B team level, everyone plays equally. At the A team level, we make an effort to get every player in each game. But I really try to get them in several minutes each half, or even time in each quarter. There would be very few girls who have not played at least a portion of a quarter in each game. They all get a good amount of playing time.

One of the greatest challenges that Lori faces as a middle school basketball coach is insuring that all the team members' play, and yet still being competitive in each game. She feels that to keep the program strong, they have to win as well as make sure everyone plays. She shares how she handles it when she does have a conflict in her own coaching beliefs such as a game situation when she would like to remain competitive, but also be sure all athletes play in the game.

I would try to make sure that I don't violate anything that I've given to the kids up front about what our philosophy is in terms of playing time and winning. Our goal is to have fun and learn a lot, and winning is a byproduct of it. And at the same time, if it came down to it—the first game of the season went into overtime, and we were outmatched height wise. I had five girls in who played the second half of the 4th quarter, and all of overtime without any subs. Because I set up the fact that we don't all play equally, and I'm not going to rotate you as groups. They've been in a system where they have rotated five players for five players, and they have rotated as groups. I don't rotate as groups. So I tell them that upfront. So as long as I don't violate my word or go back on my word, with something I've said prior to that. We do play to win more so than a B team because that is what keeps kids involved in our program too (winning). If they think at the end of the game, I'm just going to put kids in to get them equal playing time—that turns off kids as well. Hopefully at one point or another, everybody has a chance to be in a game at that time and make a difference. I think they all felt really good about tonight for the most part. The kids who played, I think they all felt good about the role they played in the win. But I also stress, we win as a team, we lose as a team.

After losing the previous two games, the team won the game on the night observed. Lori had been quite intense the past few games, and she made a conscious effort to be more relaxed as a coach. It is her hope that this more relaxed atmosphere helped her team members to play better in the game. In the game, the girls seem to enjoy themselves, and everyone played. This resulted in a victory for the team.

Dave, the eighth grade coach at Townsend Middle School has a simple coaching philosophy. He wants to work on the fundamentals, and give all of the players opportunities while they have fun playing basketball as well. Dave talks about dealing with situations where he wants to be competitive as a team, but also offer equal opportunities for all players.

They all play. I don't guarantee equal playing time, but everyone plays in the games. To avoid situations where players are not getting in a close game at the end, I always try to get everyone in before the fourth quarter. So everyone plays, and if it is close at the end of the game, I'll play the starters. If it isn't close, than everyone will get to play in the fourth quarter.

Dave developed his coaching philosophy by modeling it after coaches in his hometown. He played basketball in middle school and high school, and he stresses the same fundamentals that those coaches stressed when he was a player and later a volunteer coach. It has worked well for him at Townsend Middle School.

During a recent seventh grade basketball game at Central Middle School, at half time Sam is talking to his players. A player tells the coach during the half-time that she has not been in the game during the entire first half. He tells her that he will get her in the game during the second half. Sam's goal is to have all of the team members play in each game. However, because this was a close game, this particular player did not play in the first half. He did not yet meet his own guideline in this game to play each team member.

The players all play in the games. They don't get equal playing time, but they all play. I believe at this level, that everyone can play, and you can still be competitive and win some games. I don't believe in each player playing a certain amount of specific minutes in a game because that is not always realistic. It might work in elementary school, but in middle school we are starting to prepare the girls for high school. But I haven't had too much of a problem getting all of the girls in games.

During the second half, Sam was sure to have this student in the game. Although it was a close game, Central won and all of the players had time in the game.

Tom, the eighth grade coach at Deer Valley Middle School, wants all players to play a role on the court in each game. They may not play equal playing time, but everyone will have an opportunity to play in each game.

I get everyone in the games early. In the last game, two girls didn't play at the end in the A game. But they are getting into the game and getting time to play. We want to win too. The girls want to win. That's what I can do.

Tom's strategy to play everyone early in the game supports the claim by Riemcke (1988) that successful coaches organize games so that every team member plays a minimum amount of time. By making sure everyone has adequate playing time early in the game, this allows Tom to play certain students who may be more advanced in their skills near the end of the game. This would be helpful, for example, if the score of the contest was close near the end of the game. Tom also rewards players for their effort in practice. On a recent Sunday afternoon, only six of the ten members of the A team were at practice. The other players were at a community based league soccer game. These players chose a soccer game over basketball practice. At the end of the practice he tells the players, "Everyone that was here today is going to play a lot on Tuesday. You are the starters because you were here. Let's go Raiders!" Later in the game that week Tom did start the players who were at the practice, and eventually he put everyone else into the game. Although Tom penalized the students who were not at practice by not allowing them to play at the beginning of the game, as the game progressed, everyone played. Coaching middle school students who have busy schedules as well as fielding a competitive team and playing all students in games is a continual challenge for basketball coaches. The students' conflicts with other activities is another element of coaching that affects many middle school basketball programs and can also contribute to a coaches' ability to play all students equally in games.

Conflicts in the Schedules of Middle School Students

Oftentimes it is difficult for middle school students to focus their full attention on basketball with the competing demands on their time. Team members are busy with other sports and activities which may cause a conflict with a basketball practice or game.

Schools and coaches who make multiple sports and activities available to middle level students can benefit the students by giving them more opportunities in athletics and more opportunities to be successful (Riemcke, 1988). At many times throughout the season, coaches will have situations where students have a conflict with a basketball activity. Scott, the seventh grade coach at Pine Middle School is flexible when a player was a little late to a recent game.

Well, just like what happened with the girl's soccer practice after the game, she had to leave right away. They have all these other activities going on. You have to be a little bit flexible. You can't say they have to be at every practice, and you can't hold it against them if they're not at every (basketball) practice. You just can't hold it against them if they're not. Like tonight one of my girls was a little late getting here. She doesn't have a driver's license. She went home; it's not always their fault. You have to be flexible. Also at this age and the high school too, we pound home the academics and getting your grades before you play. If you don't have the grades, you don't get to play. That's probably the biggest difference. You can't scream at them and yell at them because of their emotional maturity. There are some kids you can push a little harder than others, but their maturity is not that of an older kid, so you have to be a little more of a...not a father figure I guess, but someone who will take them under your wing and try to be more patient with them. You definitely have to show much more patience with kids at this level. At the high school if a kid messes up you see a coach pull them out, and they sit the bench the rest of the game—we can't do that here.

Scott understands that students have busy schedules, and allows for some flexibility when conflicts arise.

Lori, the eighth grade coach at Eagle Middle School understands that students are busy. She feels that family priorities and school come first. However, she recently had a student miss a practice for a soccer game. The player did not start the next basketball game. Because she missed practice, she did not start in the game. Lori feels that a school activity should take precedence over practice, but an out of school activity such as soccer does not have priority. She is preparing the girls for high school, and she feels when they get to high school they couldn't play soccer. High school coaches would not tolerate

students missing excessive basketball practices. They would have to make a choice. This creates an interesting coaching situation for Lori. She must decide whether to sacrifice playing time now to better prepare the girls for the future as a member of the high school team, or she can organize the team as eighth graders so that everyone plays regardless of missed practices for other activities. By choosing to not start the player who missed practice for soccer, she has designed her coaching strategies to sacrifice some playing time as eighth graders to better prepare the girls for the future in high school.

At West Middle School, during the first week of basketball tryouts, there were only 11 players for both teams. Jennifer recruited and searched for additional players so that the school could field two teams. Just getting the bodies out for the team has been a tremendous challenge for Jennifer this year. Some of these players who joined the team late have never played before and need to work on their basic basketball skills. Jennifer talks about the problem she faced this year with a low turn out of players and the new team members to the game.

When I played ball this is all that there was. Now there are so many choices for these girls. There is so much they can do. Most years, everyone wants to be on the A team. This year I have nine girls who want to be on the B team. I coach the A team to be competitive, but the B team is for the experience, fun, and skill development.

During an A team game, there were only seven players dressed to play. A player went home ill, and two others will not start the game for disciplinary reasons. One of the players had missed a recent practice, and the other was late to a practice. Jennifer believes in tough consequences for actions such as players not being responsible to arrive

to practice on time. If players are late to games or practices, they sit out or don't start a game. Jennifer discusses her policy for students who miss practices or games:

If a player misses basketball for a school activity like band, and they get credit, that comes first. If it is something like going to their sister's varsity game, which has happened this year, and they miss a practice then they do not start. If they miss a game then they sit out the next game too. One missed practice also means they won't start the next game. If they miss two practices that week, they don't play in a game at all. Sometimes players on the A team early in the season would come late to practice or leave early. On one occasion when three starters all sat out for part of a game, they had almost perfect attendance after that.

Jennifer had some parent complaints about this policy when the players sat the bench for being late to a practice. However, she stayed firm with her policy, was supported by the school's administration, and the players did not start the next game after missing part of a practice. After this happened a few times, the more talented players on the A team, who had the tendency to miss part of a practice ended their antics and the remainder of the season went smoothly.

With Jennifer's coaching philosophy, there is a distinction between not starting and sitting out of a game. Not starting means that they do not play in the early stages of the game, but eventually they will play. This is typically a meaningful consequence to the best players on the team who begin the game and are considered "the starters." Sitting out is when a player does not play in an entire game. This can be a strong consequence to all players because typically the player will still attend the game and sit on the bench to support their teammates. But, this also sends a strong message to the student as sitting close to the action on the court—but not playing—certainly can be difficult. Jennifer does not start players who are late or miss a practice. However, if a player misses a game or misses more than one practice, they have to sit out an entire

game. The goal of this strategy is that the players will learn from their first experience, and not miss practices or games in the future.

At Deer Valley, Tom has penalties for students who miss basketball for other non-school related activities. He adheres to a policy that he developed.

If it is school related like band, that's okay to miss practice. If it is a school activity, they can do that. My problem is soccer. We tell parents they have three strikes. The first time they miss a practice is my discretion. The second time it happens they miss a game, the third time—they are off the team.

His policy allows the students and parents to understand his expectations. Although, it is difficult when students have conflicts, they know that their coach expects them at the basketball practice or game.

With middle school coaches, a distinction must be made between activities that are acceptable and those that are not for missing a basketball practice or game. There is a hierarchy that coaches typically follow. Students are not penalized for missing basketball practice for activities that are related to the school. This may include band or choir concerts, a required meeting with a teacher, or a drama play. Typically activities that are not related to school will result in a coach such as Tom assessing a penalty which could include sitting out part of a game. In this study, these non-school events mainly consisted of community based soccer programs. But they also could include other non-school sports, dance classes, or other activities. In most cases, coaches expect students to give them advance notice if they cannot attend a practice or game. When the student informs the coach of the conflict rather than simply missing the activity without an excuse, this can also affect the severity of the penalty enacted by the coach. Although school activities are “privileged” over non-school events, each situation is dealt with on a case by case basis.

During the first quarter of a Maplewood game, Ed did not play a student. She missed the previous Friday's practice for a commitment to a community soccer team. However, she did not tell the coach about this conflict until noon on that day. Ed has a policy for players who miss practice.

If students miss a practice for a school activity that is okay. However, if they miss basketball for another activity or something like shopping there are consequences. The first time it happens is a warning. The second time they sit out for part of a game. The third time we will look at removing them from the team. They don't miss practice very much. I remember one time I had a player who planned to miss practice to go shopping with her older sister. A few days before, she asked what the punishment would be for doing this. I explained it would be a warning. She was at the practice.

One strategy Ed uses to communicate his team rules with parents and players is to meet with the parents at the beginning of the season. This helps the parents to understand his coaching beliefs and philosophy. During this game, the team has not scored very many points. However, Ed is confident none of the parents will be mad over the game because they know the team is trying their hardest. Ed seems confident with his relationship with the parents of the team members. The pre-season meeting helps to strengthen his relationship with the players and their parents.

At Central Middle School, Sam is flexible when it comes to conflicts in the schedules of the players, and they have to miss a game or practice for another activity. His beliefs support those of Riemcke (1988) who asserts that it is beneficial and gives more opportunities for students to be successful if they have multiple sports and activities made available to them.

I'm flexible. I have four soccer players. I encourage the girls to do everything that they can. If you like basketball or soccer, and if you can handle it, go ahead and do it. As long as you're out there doing something, that's the main goal. I encourage it. If they can swing it, we'll work it out. It hasn't been that big of a problem. I talked to another school, where they can only do one activity, and the

coach only had six girls on their B team for basketball. It makes it tough. I can be flexible.

As long as the players can handle multiple activities, Sam is supportive of their other activities. However, the situation Sam mentions at another school can be a problem for some coaches. If a middle school coach adheres to a firm policy that students can only participate in one activity, often students may not elect to play basketball, particularly the less talented basketball players who may comprise a B team. This results in fewer players on the team. This is another example of a conflict in values that middle school coaches may have to face as they are working with middle level adolescents. They have to decide if they should have such a stringent policy which could limit the number of participants, or if they can be more flexible with other student activities, they may have more players on the team. This is another dilemma that coaches deal with as they carry out their responsibilities coaching middle school students.

It is difficult for coaches when conflicts arise for players with other activities that interfere with basketball practice or games. It is important for each coach to develop guidelines for these situations, and relay them to the team members and their parents at the beginning of the season. This communication will help in building a successful basketball program. As coaches strive to develop a strong program, they also must rely on institutional support for their team.

Institutional Support and Resources for the Program

A successful middle school athletic program needs the support of the school district and administration. This support is in the form of equipment and supplies, facilities, and providing the coaches with the resources that they need to be successful.

Even the number of coaches hired by a school illustrates institutional support of the basketball program. Throughout the research study, institutional support of the middle school girls' basketball teams was noted.

At Deer Valley parochial school, Tom often holds his eighth grade practices on Sunday afternoons. Facility usage time is a challenge at the school. Community bingo is held in the gym twice each week, on Mondays and Thursday as a fundraiser to raise money for the private school. Because of this, practices cannot be conducted on Mondays and the home games on Thursdays have to be moved to another day of the week. Thus, practices are held on Sundays. This is not ideal because on Monday—the day before a game—there is no practice. But this is the schedule that Tom has to follow, and he does the best that he can to prepare the team with the gym time that is made available to him by the school's administration. Typically, Tom coaches each team separately, with 90 minutes to practice with the green team and the following 90 minutes for practice for the gold team. At Deer Valley, the school refers to the A team as the green team and the B team as the gold team. This naming of the teams with the school colors is an effort to take away the notion of the A team being more elite or better than the B team. Also, because Tom is the lone coach, he leads practices with both of the teams.

Eagle Middle School has two gymnasiums. This allows Lori to practice with her eighth grade team while the seventh grade practices in the second gym. Sometimes right after school Lori coaches the eighth grade A team in one gym while the other eighth grade coach works with the B team in the second gym. The structure of the school with two coaches as well as two gymnasiums allows Lori to schedule practices at ideal times

right after school. This makes it more convenient for players and their families, and also allows practice to end before 5:00 P.M., which is helpful to students and families that have other activities. During one game, Lori was observing during the B game. She noticed some defensive strategies that the other team was using. During halftime of the B game, she led the team to the auxiliary gym. They were able to review some offensive plays and how the players should rotate when running the play. This was helpful for Lori's coaching to have this opportunity and this gym to go over plays again, just before the game. Most schools would not have such a convenient set-up.

At Central Middle School, Sam leads a seventh grade practice in a large dome fit to be a community college athletic facility. Central Middle School is a former high school in the Central School District. The athletic facilities were recently renovated which resulted in the large dome with rubberized flooring providing state of the art athletic facilities and basketball courts for the students of the middle school. There are numerous courts in the dome. This also allows the seventh grade B team coach to simultaneously coach the other team behind a partial curtain. The support of the school with these facilities is helpful to Sam as he tries to build a strong program.

At Maplewood Middle School, Ed is excited about the new uniforms for the team. Last spring, the school ordered new uniforms for both the boys and girls teams. These uniforms were custom made in the school's colors. Ed said they cost over \$7,000. He feels this helps him improve the basketball program as the players have more pride in the uniforms that they are wearing. They feel good about being a member of the team. Ed is fortunate his school was able to purchase these uniforms, because other schools likely would not have the financial resources for this type of support.

One final example of institutional support for middle school coaches is related to the number of coaches employed by each school to coach the girls' basketball teams. Schools that employ two coaches for each grade level are providing additional support to the program and the coaches. With two coaches, some schools have one coach for the A team and one coach for the B team such as Sam at Central Middle School or Lori at Eagle Middle School. Other schools use the two coaches as a head coach and an assistant coach for both the A and B teams such as Scott's coaching situation at Pine Junior High School. When two coaches are available, this allows for better supervision of the players, a smaller coach-to-player ratio, and additional opportunities for one-on-one instruction. At schools like Deer Valley, West, Townsend, and Maplewood, with just one coach for both the A and B teams for each grade, it can create a more difficult coaching situation. If schools are able to provide two coaches, it seems to be an advantage to the basketball program.

The institutional support provided to these coaches affects the success of their basketball programs. With more support and less obstacles, this gives the students opportunities to be more successful. When fewer resources are provided by the school, this makes coaching the team more challenging. Another factor that affects the programs is the middle school coaches' connection to the high school programs.

Middle School Coaches' Connection to High School Programs

Middle school basketball programs often have a connection to the high school athletic program. Coaches at both levels may communicate and run the same plays at both levels, for example. High school coaches working to build a strong basketball

program often utilize a strong connection between the middle school and high school teams. The teams may run the same type of defense, offensive plays, and drills in practice. The coaches then feel this will result in a better transition from middle school basketball to the high school as the players will already be familiar with the plays and team philosophies related to the game. These strategies seem to be an advantage to those schools that have this type of connection as the players contribute to a high school team. However, some might argue this is too intense for the middle school level, and that in fact it may work against the middle school philosophy in sports which stresses a positive experience and granting all athletes playing time. Thus, at some schools in this study, there is little or no connection between the two programs. Both circumstances are noted from field observations.

At Eagle Middle School, the high school and middle school programs are well connected. On an early fall day, ten eighth grade girls gather in Lori's classroom after school. Before the team heads to the school's gym for the first practice since tryouts determined who is on which team, they meet in her classroom to talk about the season and her expectations for the students as players on the team. Lori gives the team members a packet about the basketball program at both Eagle Middle School and the high school. The packet is mixed with program goals, quotes, and technical information about inbound, defensive strategies, and offensive plays. Lori reads through the packet with the students reviewing offensive plays, transition assignments, defensive positions, and base line out of bounds plays. "A lot of this is based on the high school program," she tells the students. She then reviews with the players what they can expect from her as their coach. "I'll come with a plan ready to go. We'll move along. There will be a

reason for doing things. There is a reason that we may spend 10 minutes today on something and 30 minutes on it tomorrow. We won't do meaningless running. We will build conditioning right into what we do unless it is a consequence for talking or goofing around. If there is something new you need to know about, tell me." She then adds, "I think we'll have a fun season. We'll win a lot of games, and we'll learn new skills."

After some questions and further discussion the meeting concludes, and she instructs the players to meet in the gym. Lori also mentioned that the previous day, the high school varsity coach held a meeting with eighth grade players. He spoke to them about his goals for the program at the high school, and motivated them to play hard as eighth graders as they prepare for the high school level. He feels this will allow for a better transition from eighth grade to high school basketball next year. This contributes to building a stronger district wide basketball program. Lori outlines the advantages she sees to having good communication between high school and middle school coaches:

Doing this promotes continuity within the program. We are provided with a binder full of plays, drills, and philosophical ideas regarding both offensive and defensive priorities. Also, I think it helps give middle school sports and coaches a little more credibility when they understand that much of what we do is encouraged by the high school coaches. This communication also gives the high school coaches a much better sense of the girls before they ever get to high school. They can see the big picture of the program's strengths and weaknesses as the girls move through high school. Finally, the collaboration between coaches has provided me with ideas, direction, and a sense of importance. The high school coaches make us feel like what we do is very important to the overall program.

As Ed coaches middle school basketball at Maplewood, he feels a good connection to the high school program. He has learned technical information about the game from keeping in contact with the varsity coach at the high school. He has also worked at basketball camps within the district which have helped to prepare him as a

coach. This connection to the high school also allows him to learn what types of defenses they are using at the high school and what offensive plays they are coaching. Then, Ed can coach his players using similar strategies. This will help as the players transition from the middle school to the high school basketball team next year.

Other coaches do not feel there is a good connection between the middle school and high school programs. At Deer Valley, Tom does not talk to the varsity coaches. At Townsend, Dave does not talk to high school coaches either. These coaches run more of their own offensive and defensive plays which are not related to the high school basketball program. This could potentially make it a more difficult transition to the high school for the players in the future, particularly because both of these teams are eighth grade. Tom is interested in working more closely with the high school coaches, but the coaches there are not currently interested in the middle school program. This is something he would like to improve as he continues coaching at Deer Valley.

The relationship between the middle school and high school basketball programs and coaches has an affect on the middle school programs. Good communication between the coaches can result in a better transition from middle school to high school. As the younger players become familiar with plays and strategies used at the upper levels, this can contribute to a smoother transition as the player moves through the program. However, this rigor of high school coaching philosophies could be too intense for the middle school level. Although this communication could contribute to the success of a middle school basketball coach and the program, it may also be contrary to the middle school coaching philosophy. Besides connectivity to the high school, other factors also contribute to a coach's belief that he or she is coaching effectively.

How Coaches Measure Their Own Effectiveness

All coaches have a different measure of effectiveness as they work with middle school young adolescents. Scott feels he is effective if his seventh grade players are having fun and they are learning the basics of the game.

At this level of basketball, I try to teach as many fundamentals as possible. Win or lose—that doesn't matter. I am a competitive person by nature, but we can get over that. I want them to learn fundamentals and have fun too. You have to juggle both sides of it.

The way Scott speaks to his players at the close of a practice demonstrates his emphasis on the fundamentals. "Let's think about what you are doing," he tells them. "Make the defense work. Outside shots are okay, but let's not settle for them. Let's try to get the ball to the taller girls inside for an easy shot."

Lori also strives to teach the athletes on the team the basic skills of the game. She emphasizes running basic plays and working to improve strategies such as simple pick and rolls, boxing out, and ball handing. She is a positive role model for the girls, and she continually encourages them. She also measures her effectiveness as a coach by how she brings the team together throughout the season. She emphasizes teamwork, and she wants her players to know what it feels like to be part of a team and to contribute to a team effort. Lori shares what her areas of emphasis are as she coaches eighth grade girls.

I stress character a lot. In terms of no matter what happens on the court, showing class, and showing good character. In fact my starting line up now is not what I had starting at the beginning of the season because you can tell that to the girls, but until it really affects the girls like starting, sometimes they don't change it. Early in the season I had a few girls who didn't work very hard and goofed around a lot, and would react to referees' calls on the court, and react to fans. I also teach responsibility, if they don't have a part of their uniform, they don't play; they don't get to borrow from another player. Teamwork is a big emphasis. Kids at this age are focused on themselves, their own playing time, and how they look to the people in the stands. You have to instill teamwork so they know what it means to play as a team.

At Townsend, Dave measure effectiveness by coaching the players to do “a few things well.” He emphasizes the fundamentals, and he has developed his own coaching routine and strategies over the last eight years. At times, he may appear intense as he coaches, but his sense of humor comes through after observing him over a period of time. Dave ensures that everyone plays in each game, although all students may not get equal playing time. He seems to have developed a philosophy that is effective as the players are learning about the game, and laughing and enjoying the experience at the same time as well.

As West Middle School’s seventh grade coach, Jennifer feels she is an effective coach as she teaches the girls about the game and how to be a member of a team. Although she wants to win and be competitive, she also wants the players to have a positive experience as a member of the team.

It’s hard. That is probably the hardest part. Even though I try to tell the girls that winning doesn’t matter, you always want them to win or play well. It is seventh grade basketball, and it is very hard. You could have a lot of knowledge about something, but it sometimes goes in one ear and out the other a lot of times when they are out there. Most of all, I like to see the girls working hard and enjoying the game. If the girls are miserable, than I am doing something wrong.

Jennifer’s utmost goal is for the players to learn about the game and enjoy themselves.

I want the players to have fun, to learn, and to feel how it is to be in a team sport. I also want to evaluate them to see what they came in with and what they learned. Did they become more of an athlete? Basically, that I’ve introduced them to what it means to be a team and be at school at the same time.

Jennifer’s coaching philosophy demonstrates a desire for the players to learn about the game, to learn what it means to play a school sport, and to have fun. She enjoys the challenges she is faced with coaching middle school students, and she strives to make a

difference in these players' lives. If she can accomplish these goals, than she feels she is an effective middle school basketball coach.

As a coach at Deer Valley, Tom has certain standards he expects of his players. When thinking about the role of athletics in a student's life, Tom has particular priorities that he relays to the players. The first priorities are school and family, and next is the game of basketball. Tom also wants the players to have fun. He talks about his priorities as a coach:

School is number one. I get progress reports. I check how they are doing in school. Family is next. That is why we don't practice a lot. Which I should, but...it is all about them. It is all about having fun. These are kids, you know. It's about them.

By establishing the role of the sport in the life of the player, he meets the first MHSAA coaching standard which is to develop an understanding of the role of interscholastic athletics and communicate it to players, parents, and the public (MHSAA, 2005). It is important for the athletes to understand the role of basketball in relation to family and school. Earlier in the season, Tom had a problem with two players not treating each other with respect. As the coach, he expects all of the team members to get along. In this situation, he sat both players down and determined what the problem was. He also talked to them individually, and worked the problem out. He will not tolerate this type of behavior from teammates. Finally, with regards to playing time, Tom wants all players to play a role on the court in each game. They may not play equal playing time, but everyone will have an opportunity to play in each game.

One of Tom's strengths as a coach is providing feedback to his players about their skill level, effort at practice, and performance during games. Similar to a study by Black and Weiss (1992) in which the coaching behaviors of youth swimming coaches were

studied, Tom also demonstrates that a coach's behavior can influence the enjoyment of a sport by the players as well as their self-esteem. Furthermore, Tom's positive feedback also influences the player's effort and perceived success. This feedback helps the students to learn about the game and be more successful.

Over the last eight years coaching at Maplewood Middle School, Ed has developed his own coaching philosophy and measure of effectiveness. He coaches so that all players have experience playing in games, and he wants them to have fun as a member of the team as well.

I don't coach to win or lose. But you want to win—if you can. All kids will play in games. I coach with equal playing time to equate with their practice time. It's about life lessons. The one girl missed practice on Friday, and she didn't play in the first quarter. That was a huge deal for her. It was symbolic of her responsibility to the team to not start when she missed practice for soccer. It's about life lessons. I play a lot of man-to-man defense. If we played zone, we'd win more. But I sacrifice winning by doing things the right way. We do learn zone, but don't use it too often. However, we did it last week, and we held a team scoreless for more than a quarter.

Ed's coaching strategies are based on a middle school philosophy. He believes in positive feedback, having a plan to play all students in games, and providing motivation and instruction to the players on the team. As a middle school coach, Ed utilizes his own playing experience and communications with the high school coaches to direct his coaching strategies at this level. He doesn't have the time to attend coaching seminars or classes. He expects the players to have basketball as the priority in their activities. He enjoys coaching and feels he is making an impact on the young people that he is working with each day. By establishing procedures so that all team members play and contribute, this helps to build a stronger team, which results in a positive experience for these eighth

grade basketball players. Additionally, his positive support and feedback during practices and games help strengthen the skills of the team members.

While coaching at Central Middle School, Sam emphasizes skill development and a work ethic. He measures his effectiveness by measuring the skills the players develop as the season progresses.

At every practice I try to put a program in so they can develop. When I first got the girls this fall, most of them didn't know what foot to go off of when shooting. I try to establish that. Then I try to establish the right hand. I explain to them that they can look at me as a teacher—that's what I really am. If they want to learn, they need to listen to get better. I give them assignments. In the first three weeks of the season, everyone had to make a right handed lay-up. Now, everybody's doing it. If they don't—I have them run sprints, baseline to baseline. Everyone runs. That kind of builds team spirit as well. It's worked for me. Now all of the girls are shooting with both hands.

Sam also organizes his practices to mirror his expectations for the games. Drills they run in practice and become learn become the warm ups drills for the games. He explains this strategy:

When we do the lay-up drill in practice that is really preparation for the games. I tell the girls when you go out on the court, that's the stage, and you're the performers. When you go out there, you want to look your best. When you go out there in your warm-ups, you can make a statement before the game even starts. You're out there, you're performing, and you're setting the tone for the game. I do the same thing at every practice. We do our stretching, we do our two laps, we do our lay-up drill, our shooting drill, and three-girl weave at every practice. That's our routine to start warm-ups. By the middle of the season, these girls have it down.

Even though the Central Middle School seventh grade A team finished the season with a 12-0 record, Sam doesn't measure his effectiveness by wins and losses. Although he is proud of their team accomplishments, he is even more proud of the improvement the players made in their individual and teamwork skills as the season progressed.

Summary

As the seven coaches work with young adolescents, a variety of coaching strategies and philosophies were revealed. Each coach had different coaching tactics to field a competitive team yet play all students in the games. They also had a variety of strategies to handle situations that arose when students had conflicts in their schedule with other activities that interfered with basketball. In addition, differences in institutional support and the connection between the middle school and high school programs were revealed. Ultimately, each coach developed their own coaching strategies that defined their effectiveness as a middle school basketball coach. This finding, along with others will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Chapter 5

AGGREGATE FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how middle school girls' basketball coaches balanced the challenges of coaching as they strived to follow established coaching standards, adhered to middle school principles, and also tried to field a competitive team. This information will also be interpreted through a cross-case analysis. The case study method was helpful to provide a detailed description of the activities of the middle school coaches. In this chapter, the similarities and differences among the coaches in relationship to the five themes presented in chapter 4 will be discussed. Additionally, a cross-case analysis will be used to compare the coaches' activities with relationship to the established coaching standards.

In the final part of this chapter, these research findings are further examined with reference to the competing values framework. Findings from this research study are analyzed within the parameters of this framework. Final conclusions, implications, and further recommendations for additional research related to middle school coaching philosophy are proposed.

Elements of Middle School Coaching

Playing Time and Competitiveness

A challenge to one's own middle school coaching beliefs is the balance between playing time for team members and fielding a competitive team. Successful middle school coaches organize games so that every member of the team plays at least a

minimum amount of time (Riemcke, 1988). At the middle school level, all participants should be given time to compete in game situations. Coaches who value equal opportunities for participants have players who enjoy sports more and have higher self-esteem (Smith et al., 1983). Typically, sports in the elementary grades have an emphasis on equal playing time and learning basic skills of the game. As students reach high school, a larger emphasis is placed on winning. This leaves seventh and eighth grade middle school coaches in the transition period between focusing on equal playing time and emphasizing competitiveness at all costs. Most coaches in this study attempted to reach a middle ground by playing all students using specific strategies so that they could maintain a competitive team. Some coaches argued that if they did not at least attempt to be competitive, losing would be harmful to the team in terms of maintaining participation levels and creating an environment where the players could have an enjoyable experience as a member of the team.

The case study of Scott provided in-depth information about the challenge of balancing playing time and coaching the team to be competitive. As the coach, Scott wanted the players to develop fundamentals, have nearly equal playing time in games, and enjoy the experience of being a part of the team.

At this level of basketball I try to teach as many fundamentals as possible. Win or lose—that doesn't matter. I am a competitive person by nature, but we can get over that. I want them to learn fundamentals and have fun too. You have to juggle both sides of it.

It was difficult for Scott to balance his own coaching philosophy of teaching the fundamentals of basketball and playing every athlete nearly equal playing time in games with fielding a competitive team. However, he was able to accomplish this by planning ahead in games. He played everyone in the first quarter of the game. He also adjusted

his line up in more competitive games, so that the particular players that he wanted on the court in the closing minutes of the game were out there at that time.

What I do sometimes, and what I did in the last game, is the team that I had on the floor at the end of the game—I prepared my line up so a couple of those girls sat a little longer when they normally would have gone into the game. That way I can have this particular group on the floor at the end of the game. They all still played the same amount of minutes, but I thought I had my best five on the floor at the end of the game.

This planning ahead allowed Scott to coach so that each player received nearly equal playing time, but it also allowed the team to be competitive at the end of the games as well.

The case study of Ed also demonstrated a coaching philosophy that emphasized near equal participation in games.

I don't coach to win or lose. But you want to win—if you can. All kids will play in games. I coach with equal playing time to equate with their practice time. It's about life lessons.

Ed did play all students nearly equally in games, however it was contingent upon their participation in practice. If all players were at practice, they all played in games equally. However, if a student missed practice, she had less playing time in the next game.

The coaches all emphasized playing time for each team member in games. However, unlike Scott and Ed who balanced playing time near equally, other coaches did not make this promise. Many of the other coaches placed an emphasis on each player having time in every game, but not necessarily equal playing time. Coaching philosophies related to playing time also differed with some coaches depending if the game situation was with the A team or B team. At Eagle, Lori utilized similar strategies that were used by Scott to balance playing time with the B team. However, with the A team, players were not guaranteed equal playing time in the games. With the A team

members, she made sure that each student had several minutes of playing time in each half of the game. Similarly, Jennifer coached the A team to be competitive and the B team for skill development and the experience. Jennifer balanced playing time near equally for the B team players, but not necessarily for the A team members. Tom, Dave, and Sam also played students in each game, but not equally. Each of these three coaches played everyone early in the game, and then if necessary they could control which specific players they wanted on the floor towards the end of the game, particularly if it was a close contest. Sam mentioned that all of his team members had playing time in games, although not necessarily equal amounts of time. But, he felt that with everyone playing in games, including the less skilled players, with planning and organization, the team could still be competitive and win games.

Playing time was an important area of emphasis in each coach's philosophy. Although the strategies varied, all of the coaches played students at least a certain minimum amount of time in games. The coaches developed methods so that they had a system for doing this while the team remained competitive. Overall, the middle school adolescents were playing in games, learning fundamentals, and having an enjoyable experience. However, students who missed excessive practices for other activities did see this affect their game playing time.

Conflicts in the Schedules of Middle School Students

One factor that could affect game playing time for the team members is their involvement in other activities outside of school which interfered with basketball. Middle School adolescents are busy young people as they are involved with school activities, family commitments, and outside activities such as community sports, music

lessons, and other events. It is difficult at times for coaches to have all team members at every practice and game. Generally, it is positive to give middle school students ample opportunities for extracurricular involvement. In fact, schools and coaches who make multiple sports and activities available to middle level students can benefit by giving them more opportunities in athletics and more opportunities to be successful (Riemcke, 1988). Parents just need to be cautious as to not overburden children with too many extracurricular activities. Students who rush from afternoon school sponsored sports to other activities such as yearbook staff meetings or other community based athletic teams can be stretched to their limit and experience burnout (Martinson, 1997). These activities can be incredibly time consuming and too many extracurricular activities will not allow time for homework or family commitments. Martinson (1997) asserts that educational responsibilities and student enjoyment should be the first priorities when examining a student's extracurricular involvement. Parents and coaches should strive to avoid student burnout as it involves psychological, emotional, and many times physical withdrawal from an activity such as a sports team that was originally perceived as enjoyable (Smith, 1986). Ultimately, parents and students should decide together which extracurricular activities are most appropriate for the student. However, in the research study, when students did have conflicts arise between basketball and other activities, some of the coaches handled this dilemma differently than others.

The nature of the conflicting activity affected how the coach handled each situation. All coaches shared the same philosophy related to school activities. Students were not penalized for missing a basketball activity if the conflict was school related such as a choir concert or a meeting with a teacher to complete homework. Also, family

conflicts were typically viewed as acceptable absences by the coaches. All coaches expected the student to notify them of the absence from the practice or game in advance. However, the coaches' policies related to non-school activities varied.

The case study of Scott at Pine Middle School was an example of a coach who was understanding of conflicting activities in a team member's life. On occasion, players had been late to games or had to leave a practice or a game early for another activity. Scott realized they had a variety of activities going on in their lives, and he felt that he could not hold it against them. As a result, he did not enact penalties for students who missed a basketball game for another activity. Similarly, Sam was also understanding of conflicts, and he encouraged his players to be involved with multiple activities. As long as players were capable of being a part of numerous activities and kept their grades up, he didn't mind if the players had multiple activities during the basketball season. Scott and Sam were similar in that they did not enforce penalties for students missing practice or games for other non-school sponsored activities.

Each of the coaches had a policy related to missed practices or games. They also usually had a penalty for a first, second, and third offense. Similarly, Lori and Jennifer had policies that if a player missed a practice, they did not start the next game. This meant that they would not play in the early part of the game, and then eventually the coach would put them in the game, but it could be late in the first quarter, into the second quarter, or even in the second half of the game. Both coaches would have a player sit out of an entire game if they missed a practice for a second time. At Deer Valley, for the first missed practice, it was the coach's discretion with regards to the penalty. Tom may have given a verbal warning or not started a player in the next game. However, if a player

missed practice for a second time, he also would not play the athlete in an entire game. Ed gave players a warning the first time the team member missed a practice, and then they sat out part of a game if it happened again. However, both Ed and Tom had a policy that they could remove players from the team if they had a third episode of a missed basketball game or practice. These were the strictest penalties for missing a practice or game of any of the coaches. It was their belief that the players should make a commitment to being a member of the team. Ed and Tom emphasized a focus on one sport—basketball. They did not want to have to compete for a player's time or attention with other, outside activities. At Townsend, Dave did not have specific penalties in place, but when conflicts arose, he reminded players that basketball should have been the priority during the season. Generally, coaches who had policies related to missing games applied them to both their A and B teams. There was no variation within the same school, their rule related to missed practices and games applied to all players. Although there were some general similarities, each coach had a set of rules for these situations that was based on their own opinion.

It is challenging when players miss a practice or game. Each coach had to develop his or her own policies related to this to encourage students to not miss additional basketball activities. The busy lives of middle school students presented a coaching challenge. A few coaches such as Scott and Sam were supportive of other activities and did not enact strict penalties. However, all coaches wanted their players at practices and games. As the coaches were further examined, another difference among them was the institutional support provided to each of them by their school.

Institutional Support and Resources for the Program

The school and administration are expected to provide support and resources to the athletic program in order for it to be successful. General support in terms of the school providing typical supplies and equipment were fairly equal at each of the seven schools. However, greater difference arose in the physical facilities provided to the coaches for the basketball practices and games. Additionally, facility usage time varied at one particular middle school, and support in terms of the school district providing two coaches versus one for each grade level varied by school.

Facilities themselves that were available to the coaches varied in the research study. Lori coached at Eagle Middle School where two gymnasiums were available for practices. This allowed most practices to be held at convenient times after school. During one home game in particular, Lori was able to use the second gymnasium with the A team for a few last minute offensive practice items during the half-time of the B game. At Central, Sam's team was provided with a large dome which had four full size basketball courts. This allowed multiple teams to practice after school. In addition, the facilities were state of the art, and the students had a sense of pride playing in their dome. These two coaches had facilities that were better than the typical middle school in the study. The schools where Scott, Dave, Jennifer, Ed, and Tom coached had only one gym. Tom had another challenge of institutional support that he was challenged by each week.

At Deer Valley parochial school, facility usage time was a concern. Unlike any of the other six coaches, Tom had to hold practices on each Sunday. This was because the gymnasium was used for bingo as a school fundraiser on Mondays and Thursdays. Additionally, at Deer Valley the games on Thursdays were moved to Wednesdays. This

schedule was a disadvantage for Tom because he was not able to have a practice the day before a game. He had a practice on Sunday, and then there were no practices until Friday after the games on Tuesday and Wednesday. The other schools were able to have practice on Monday, a game on Tuesday, and then a practice on Wednesday. This was very beneficial because the coaches could work on a skill or plays that may have not been working well in the Tuesday game before the next game on Thursday. However, at Deer Valley, Tom had to follow the schedule that was made available to him, and he did the best that he could with the practice times he was allotted.

Another challenge to some of the coaches was the number of coaches provided by the school for the basketball program. Scott, Lori, and Sam all were part of a two coach staff for their respective grade level. Scott used the second coach as an assistant and he coached both the A and B teams. Lori and Sam were only responsible for coaching the A teams, and the other coach was responsible for coaching the B teams. An additional coach allowed for extra supervision at practice, more individualized attention, and it lowered the player-to-coach ratio. Two adults was also an advantage to supervise the students during games, bus trips, and other related activities. Dave, Tom, Jennifer, and Ed were the sole coaches for both the A and B teams for their respective grades. This often brought forward challenges in terms of running multiple drills at practice simultaneously and supervising the students at all times throughout the season. Most of these coaches conducted practice activities with the large group. Tom scheduled A and B team practices separately, but for him this created a much larger time commitment to practices. However, this was a sacrifice he was willing to make in order to have practices

with a lower player-to-coach ration. The number of coaches hired by the school district had an effect on the activities that the coach could conduct at both practices and games.

Financial resources of the school districts also affected the coaches. Ed was excited to have new uniforms for his team. Other teams wore uniforms that were not new, and there was a noticeable difference in the uniforms of Maplewood and some of the other schools. Also, at Central, a recent bond issue allowed for the renovation of the dome facilities. These financial resources affected the programs, and even though coaches at the other schools tried to let limitations affect students as little as possible, at times it was unavoidable. For example, during games coaches would sometimes compete against schools that had better facilities or newer uniforms, and they realized that these other schools had advantages provided by the financial resources of their school district.

Each of the schools in this study provided a different level of support to the respective basketball programs. Eagle and West had larger facilities. Some schools provided two coaches for each grade level, while other schools only had one coach. Financial resources at some schools such as Maplewood allowed the students to have new uniforms. Although all of these institutional resources may vary by school, each coach continued doing the best possible job that he or she could with the resources made available. This was one challenge that coaches could not control. They had to make the best of coaching with the resources provided to them by their school. Another factor that was different for each of these coaches was their connection to the high school basketball coaches and programs.

Middle School Coaches' Connection to the High School Basketball Programs

This study revealed that most of the middle school coaches had some type of connection to the high school basketball programs. This allowed the middle school coaches to teach the middle school students the same offensive and defensive plays used at the high school level. Although these relationships were not required, it seemed both the high school and middle school coaches embraced the idea. Middle school coaches could talk to the high school coaches and learn offensive and defensive plays, coaching strategies, and other information about the sport. In at least one case, middle school coaches attended in-service meetings about the sport with high school coaches. Additionally, the high school coaches were available at all times as a resource for many of the middle school coaches in the study. In terms of building a complete basketball program in the district, this connection between the two levels can strengthen the overall program. The main advantage is that it provides the high school level with players who have already been exposed to the program's philosophy and strategies for two years at the middle school level. At the middle school, these coaches can be a great resource for the middle school coaches. The middle school players can also learn plays at the seventh and eighth grade level and carry them into high school. They do not need to learn new plays.

Some of the coaches had a very strong connection to the high school. Lori and Ed had good relationships with the high school coaches. They talked to the coaches often, and Lori's team was even visited by the high school varsity coach at a practice. He spoke to the players about the high school philosophy and offensive and defensive plays. Lori felt that this relationship with the high school was a great benefit to her. She was provided with plays, resources, and philosophical ideas related to coaching. She also felt

that this connection gave her a sense of more importance. Other coaches including Scott, Dave, Jennifer, and Sam had a lower level of connection to the high school coaches. Scott knew the coaches at the high school and would call them on occasion. He communicated with them early in the season, and he utilized some of the same plays in his coaching. He was aware that the middle school is the feeder program to the high school. Similarly, Dave and Jennifer may connect with the high school coaches a few times throughout the season. Sam also talked to the high school coaches. Sam was challenged with keeping students in the Central School District. Often players left the district between middle school and high school. He sometimes talked to the coaches at the high school to discuss this concern and develop strategies to keep students from leaving the school district before entering high school. In terms of specific plays and coaching strategies, Sam had many plays of his own for the team, and he did not rely on the high school coaches for these.

At Deer Valley, Tom mentioned that there was not a good connection between the middle school and high school basketball programs. He would like to see this improve. Recently, a new coach was hired at the high school, and he hopes this will improve the connection between the two programs. The high school girls' basketball program is currently struggling in terms of wins and losses, and it is not as strong as neighboring districts. Tom is hopeful that improved connections can help strengthen the programs at both schools.

The level of connectivity between the high school coaches and middle school coaches varied in this study. Generally, most coaches had some communication with the upper level coaches. These coaches could provide the middle school coaches with

resources and ideas to improve their coaching. This connection can be an advantage for both levels, improving the overall girls' basketball program.

How Coaches Measure Their Own Effectiveness

The school administration's hiring of an effective coach is crucial to the success of middle school athletic programs. Coaches have a large impact on middle school young adolescents. Coaches' behaviors also not only influence the enjoyment of the sport by the participants, but these behaviors can also influence participants' perceived success, effort, and preference for optimally challenging activities (Black and Weiss, 1992). The coach plays a crucial role in the development of a young athlete. According to Vaughan (1984), an effective coach will also have the young adolescents' well being in mind as a priority whenever developing coaching strategies for middle school athletic programs. Coaches should make it a priority to help young adolescents set goals, which they will help the students accomplish by continually motivating the young athletes (Hansen et al., 2003). Each of the coaches in this study had a different measure of effectiveness. However, some similarities existed between the coaches in the study with reference to how each coach perceived his or her own success. These areas included teaching the fundamentals and basic strategies of basketball, coaching to have fun, and being a positive motivator and modeling responsibility as well as good character for the young ladies on the team.

The most common measure of effectiveness among all of the coaches was their desire to coach their players in learning the fundamentals of basketball and to see improvement in the athletes' skills throughout the season. If they could teach the basics of the game at this level, and see progress throughout the season, many of the coaches felt

that they were coaching effectively. Tom was one coach who emphasized the fundamentals in his coaching.

I like to make something easy. Fundamentals are important, like the lay-ups. Basic pick and rolls is what I try to do (on offense). The easiest thing is to get the ball and go, that way you don't have to set up an offense. Then we can go, and we don't have to set up anything. We beat their defense down. I tell them all of the time. I just try to make it easy. We don't have too many plays.

Tom's emphasis on the fundamentals was observed in his practices. The team worked on inbounding the basketball, free throw shooting, lay-ups, and transitions from defense to offense. During a shooting drill his comment to the players illustrates his emphasis on the fundamentals, "Get the ball, square up, and shoot. Get your own rebound and square up and shoot the ball right." Other coaches in the study stressed the fundamentals and the basics of the game as well.

The case study of Scott was another example of a coach who measured his effectiveness by gauging if throughout the season the players learned the fundamentals that he taught them. As a seventh grade basketball coach, Scott strived to coach the fundamentals of the game including rebounding, understanding the outlet after a defensive rebound, passing, and free throw shooting. During a practice, Scott watched the team on offense. He counted the passes to emphasize to the players the importance of passing during an offensive play. He said, "One pass, two passes, three, four, five, six." He did not want them shooting the ball until they made at least six passes. Scott stated that he emphasized to the students the importance of learning the fundamentals of the game of basketball. Teaching the fundamentals was a priority for Scott as the seventh grade basketball coach. One strategy that Scott used to teach the fundamentals in game situations was that he would often talk to the players on the bench first before talking to

players in the game when he needed to give coaching advice to the players. Scott shared why he coached in the manner.

When coaching, a priority has to be coaching the kids on the bench. It's hard to coach the kids while they are in the game. It's too hard to coach the kids in the game, but I do try, probably too much. My goal is that we work in practice on all of these things, and then they go into the game and react and play. I do turn around and coach the girls on the bench so that maybe it will carry over, and they will remember it when they get into the game. Hopefully by the end of the season they will remember a few things.

This coaching strategy was effective for Scott to coach the basic fundamentals to the players. Scott utilized this strategy of talking to the players on the bench in order to place an emphasis on teaching. He took advantage of all "teachable" moments by talking to the players on the bench, as the players in the game could not always hear him or focus on what he was saying. Scott also at times talked to the players on the other team who were sitting behind the team. For example, at the beginning of the B game, he explained to the A players seated behind him to watch what types of plays they were running and whether or not they pressed, as more than likely this was the same type of play that they would see in the A game. Similarly, Lori turned to the A team during the B game, and also instructed them to watch the game and determine what type of defense the other team was play. Dave is an example of a coach who did not have the opportunity to speak to the A team during the B game, as the A team was seated across the gymnasium in the bleachers. However, Dave did coach with an emphasis on the fundamentals. He taught a limited number of out-of-bounds plays and offensive plays. Dave's motto was to "Coach a few things well."

Lori also coached with an emphasis on the basic skills needed in the game of basketball. During practices she stressed the importance of basic agilities and drills that

taught the players how to move down the court in a shuffling motion. "Keep your knees bent," she said as they practiced the drill. Later they worked on lay-ups and rebounding. As they were practicing, she told the players, "Good job, keep working on it." Although throughout the season, the team learned a few offensive and defensive plays, Lori focused primarily on the basic skills which included pick and rolls on offense, boxing out, and ball handling. Lori, unlike some of the other coaches, distributed a packet to the players early in the season which outlined basic inbounding plays, defensive strategies, and a few offensive plays. She reviewed the packet with the players, and they ran through the plays and strategies at practices. Lori coached with a strong emphasis on basic skills. She felt that she needed to emphasize the basics of the game in middle school. Then they will already know the fundamentals as they enter high school, and there they can focus on learning the strategies of the game.

As the lone coach at West, Jennifer coached the A and B teams slightly differently. She coached the A team to be competitive, and the B team to work on the basics of the game and skill development. During a B game, just before the second half, the team was warming up on the court. Jennifer was right on the court working with the team. She threw the ball to the backboard and the girls were in two lines to fight for the rebound. In the second half of the game, Jennifer spoke to the players on the court about boxing out. Boxing out was one of the basketball skills she wanted her players to learn during season. Jennifer later explained that she coached the girls about the basic fundamentals of basketball including boxing out. She wanted to be sure that they learned how to box out as the season progressed. But this could be a challenge. Jennifer said at the end of the season why this was difficult.

Only a few of the team members significantly improved in boxing out at the end of the season. It is a hard skill for some of the girls to do because girls at this age don't like to be that physical.

In the later part of the game on offense, a West player was holding the ball tentatively. Jennifer yelled, "Shoot." She wanted the players to be aggressive and have the confidence to shoot the ball whenever they have the opportunity. As the games ended, West lost by four points. In the locker room, Jennifer talked with the team and made a connection to basketball fundamentals. "The game started and we weren't aggressive. But you guys fought back. But then you got tired. In the end, tell me the number one thing that cost us the game." A player said, "We didn't box out." Jennifer answered, "That's it. We didn't play at the end—we decided to watch them play. We need to work on being more aggressive and getting the rebounds. We're going to need more practice, and we do need to work on boxing out. But we have something to work on, right? You were much more aggressive in the end. Be proud of your hard work. Be proud of your bruises, your marks, and your chin. Bring it in—one, two, three, hounds!"

Jennifer's coaching strategies demonstrated an emphasis on coaching more aggressively than many of the other coaches. This resulted in Jennifer having a more offensive minded coaching philosophy along with her emphasis on the fundamental skills of the game. Jennifer utilized the press on defense which is not common in middle school basketball. She also continually encouraged the players to be aggressive while rebounding and to not be afraid to shoot the ball on offense. Sam was another coach who ran a number of plays with an emphasis on the offense. He taught them an extensive number of more advanced plays that were effective and wore down the other team. On the contrary, a coach such as Scott focused more on the general fundamentals and did not

have such elaborate offensive minded coaching philosophies as some of the other coaches.

The case studies of Ed and Sam also demonstrated coaching the fundamentals of the game. However, these coaches also emphasized development of more advanced offensive plays to use in the games. Practices contained work on basic fundamentals such as dribbling, shooting, and passing. However, they also taught the athletes offensive strategies using picks, transition plays between offense and defense as well as other more advanced offensive plays. During the halftime of games, Ed used the whiteboard to emphasize and review specific offensive plays. During the games, Ed called the plays while the point guards were dribbling up the floor with the ball. When players came out of the game, he took time to go over plays with them at the bench using a small whiteboard. Sam also taught the players on his team a number of advanced plays to utilize during games. Sam relied heavily on a swing offense that he taught the players based on an offense developed by his high school coach. Sam played basketball himself through college, and he utilized many of the skills that he learned playing at those levels with his coaching of the seventh grade team at Central. Sam coached the girls plays that were advanced and most other seventh grade teams would not be running in games. Sam explained why he coached at this level, even with skeptics of his strategy.

You know, some people say that I coach up higher than the girls are capable of learning. I kind of think that young people can learn whatever you teach them as long as you have a good way of teaching them. I can only teach the way that I used to play. I know pro sets, some college sets, and some high school sets. If I have a group of girls who I think is capable, like this group here, then I teach them advanced skills.

Sam utilized practices for work on the basic fundamentals of basketball, but he also spent time coaching advanced skills to the players. This focus on both fundamentals and

advance skills worked well for the team. The players improved their individual skills, and the team also experienced success.

Many of the coaches in this study stated that they determined their coaching effectiveness depending on if the middle school students had a fun and enjoyable experience playing on the basketball team. Although the coaches were teaching the players the fundamentals of the game, some offensive plays, defensive strategies, and other technical information about basketball, all of the coaches wanted the players to enjoy being a part of the team. Many stated they would be doing something wrong if the students were not having a positive experience and having fun being a part of the team. Involvement in athletics is one of the most positive activities in a middle school young adolescent's life (Kirshnit, et al., 1989).

One of the keys to the students enjoying the experience playing a sport is that the school administration employs coaches who like to work with middle school students and have an understanding of young adolescents. In fact, an important component of a middle school level athletic program being successful is the school hiring coaches who have a fundamental understanding of the middle school young adolescent (Lirgg, 1995). Scott, the coach at Pine Junior High School, was an example of a coach who had a fundamental understanding of young adolescents, and he also thoroughly coached the game as he made it a priority for students to have fun at practice and games. He wanted students to enjoy all aspects of being a part of the team. Scott made drills in practice fun by interjecting humor. At the end of a practice which ends with running drills, to make it more fun, rather than just running the girls had an opportunity to shoot free throws to

determine how much they will run to end practice. Scott stated that he wanted the players to have fun. He mentioned this emphasis:

Sometimes I look at their faces after a game. If they haven't had fun, I don't care if we won by 20 points, or lost by 20, if they didn't have fun; it's not worth it to me. We work hard, but I want the girls to have fun as a member of this team, and I think they do.

The case study of Lori also demonstrated a coach measuring effectiveness by whether or not the students were having fun while participating in the sport. During a practice, Lori joked with the students about her shoes. She had a friendly demeanor with the players. She had forgotten her own shoes and borrowed from another coach. A student joked with her about the shoes that she was wearing in practice that day. Lori provided a comfortable atmosphere for the players; they were having fun at practice, and working hard as well on drills and other activities to prepare for an upcoming game. During a game, Lori's friendly and relaxed demeanor was apparent. She was wearing a large ring the night of the game. The girls noticed the ring and laughed. She was pleased during the B game that the A team players cheered loudly for their teammates. Just before the A game during the pre-game talk in the locker room, she acknowledged her appreciation for their positive attitudes and she also motivated them to play hard. She told the players, "You know what; I love to see you guys being excited and cheering for the B team. You sounded awesome back there. It makes a big difference." As the team gathered in a close circle for a final cheer, the players looked at the ring again and laughed. One student asked if it was real. "The ring is to bring us good luck," Lori answered. "It's costume jewelry ladies, trust me, but it's going to bring us good luck tonight." Lori mentioned that the previous two games she was quite intense in her coaching, and they lost both games. On this evening, she intentionally was more relaxed,

hopeful that the more relaxed atmosphere would result in the students playing better in the game. They did win the game that evening, and Lori attributed this to her emphasis on making the game an enjoyable experience for the players.

Other coaches also emphasized fun in their coaching actions. At a Friday afternoon practice, Ed instructed the players to play a game in which players all had a basketball and were dribbling. The goal of the game was to knock the ball away from the other players, and to be the last player dribbling. Ed also had a basketball and was participating and attempting to knock the ball away from the other players. Ed's participation contributed to this drill being fun for the players. In another practice activity, Ed divided the players into two teams. They all had a ball and tried to steal the ball away from other players on the opposing team. If a player's ball was stolen, she had to switch teams. After the activity Ed asked them, "Why did we just do that drill?" One player answered, "So we play as a team?" "Yes, that is right," he said. "We need to play as a team, and we need our guards to attack. That is something we didn't do in yesterday's game." Ed later explained that this practice was slightly different than a typical pre-game practice. It was more relaxed and geared toward fun activities that the player could still benefit from to improve their skills as they participated in them. Sam also realized the importance of the players enjoying their experience as a member of the basketball team. During a practice, Sam paired up with each player, and then Sam and the player would run up the court and back passing the ball back and forth. The ball never touched the floor. The players seemed to enjoy Sam participating in the drill. Sam also planned other activities throughout the season to make the team experience fun for the players. He organized a bowling party on a Saturday afternoon. Additionally, on

the Monday following the last game of the season, Sam planned a banquet for the players and their families. Sam saw value in students having fun while participating on the team. Dave also at times would joke around and have fun with the players. After a game that Townsend won, Dave entered the locker room and told the team, “Nice job ladies. Nice job.” A player responded, “Nice job coach,” and everyone laughed. This is just one example of jokes and an emphasis on fun that were intermixed throughout Dave’s coaching. He valued the players laughing and enjoying the experience on the team while learning as well.

A final measure of coaching effectiveness was the coaches’ effort to be a role model for the players, modeling responsibility, being a positive motivator, and teaching them about character. Coaches indeed have a large impact on middle school young adolescents. Coaches who display encouragement, positive reinforcement, and instruction with less criticism have players who enjoy sports more and have higher levels of self-esteem (Smith et al., 1983). The type of advice and feedback that coaches give athletes also influences the student’s perceptions of ability (Chambers, 1991). Coaches measured their effectiveness if they could see a noticeable improvement or development of character in the students between the time the season started in August until it ended in late October.

The case study of Lori demonstrated character development. She stressed teamwork, and showing good character. She taught the players about working together to reach a common goal. She worked throughout the season to change the players’ emphasis from a focus on themselves to a focus on the team as a whole. Lori’s coaching techniques were positive and supportive. Throughout games she would yell positive

reinforcement such as “nice shot” or “good job,” which motivated the players to continue to work hard. Lori’s actions impacted her team members. Coaches such as Lori, who value equal opportunities for students and who display more encouragement, positive reinforcement, and instruction with less criticism have players who enjoy the sport more and have higher levels of self-esteem (Smith et al., 1983). Lori’s emphasis on character development was a positive attribute which made her a role model for the players on the team. As a coach, she had a positive influence on the lives of the team members.

Jennifer also was a positive role model for the players. She strived to teach the players about teamwork, and she wanted to players to learn about what it means to have pride playing in a team uniform and playing for your school. She provided positive feedback and motivation during practices and games. Ed also instilled the value of teamwork, and he provided his team members with positive reinforcement and motivation throughout games and practices. At a practice, as a team building activity for the last twenty minutes of the afternoon, Ed took the players from the gym to the art room at the school to create banners for a teammate; this demonstrated his emphasis on teamwork. The players worked on banners for a teammate who had surgery during the week, and who had been out of school. The banners were hung in the gym the next week when the player returned to school. Ed gave them some basic instructions, but he let the players decide how to create the banners. This was an activity he planned to teach the players about teamwork, and caring for other members of the team.

Each coach measured their effectiveness with an emphasis on key components in their coaching. Throughout the research study, specific actions of the coaches became apparent which they utilized to measure their effectiveness. Coaches strived to teach the

players the basic skills and fundamentals of basketball. It was also a priority that the students had fun and enjoyed their experiences with the sport. Finally, the coaches were positive role models for the players and taught them teamwork skills and the importance of character. As coaches measured their own effectiveness, these are some of the attributes that they thought about throughout the season. We also can examine the coaching behaviors from the study in a discussion related to the established coaching standards.

Coaching Standards

The Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) established an athletic code for coaches. This code contains twelve coaching standards that this organization recommends should be followed by middle school coaches in Michigan (MHSAA, 2005). We can now examine the twelve coaching standards, and which of these became apparent in the research study, and which standards were observed to a lesser degree throughout the duration of the observations. Adherence to the MHSAA coaching standards was evident in many of the participants' coaching practices.

Two of the coaching standards were related to communication with players and parents. The first standard states that that coach will develop an understanding of the role of interscholastic athletics and communicate it to players, parents, and the public. The other standard related to communication states that coaches will develop an up-to-date knowledge of the rules, strategies, precautions, and skills of the sport and communicate them to players and parents. The case study of Scott provided a coaching philosophy that aligned with these two standards. Even though he had never formally reviewed the

MHSAA coaching standards, Scott's coaching actions demonstrated these two standards. In an effort to effectively communicate the role of basketball in a student's life, Scott held a parent meeting on the second day of practice. He discussed all aspects of the team from the practice schedule to academic eligibility. He also talked to parents and students about his procedures and rules as the coach of the team. In addition, throughout the season, Scott communicated about the skills needed for basketball and the rules of the game by talking to the players on a regular basis at practice. Scott strived to have effective communication with both the team members and their parents. Lori is another coach whose coaching actions aligned well with these two standards. Lori gave a handout to parents early in the season which stated her team rules and procedures. She stressed to the parents that family commitments come first, before basketball. She discussed that she would check students' academic eligibility on a regular basis. Additionally she reviewed her policy if students missed practice. Lori also demonstrated meeting this standard by handing out the packets of plays and information about basketball at the team meeting early in the season. She was diligent in her communication with players about the rules, strategies, and skills of the game. Tom and Ed also met these standards. As previously mentioned, Tom made it clear to his players early in the season the role of basketball in their lives as compared to family, academics, and outside activities. Ed also met with students and parents at the beginning of the season to communicate the role of basketball as an interscholastic sport in the lives of the members of the team. He taught the students the rules and skills of basketball, and appropriately communicated them to players and parents.

Two coaching standards related to positive modeling were also observed. These standards state: Coaches will develop, communicate, and model policies for athlete's conduct and language in the locker room, at practice, during travel, during competition, and at other appropriate times; and coaches will present a clean and professional image in terms of personal appearance, and provide a positive role model in terms of personal habits, language, and conduct (MHSAA, 2005). Jennifer and Ed were examples of coaches that were positive role models for their players. They modeled appropriate behavior, and they led activities that related to being a positive model. Scott and Lori also modeled behavior for the students. In fact, Lori placed a large emphasis on being a role model for the players, and helping them develop character as a member of the team. Scott in his general behavior exhibited appropriate behavior, good sportsmanship, and he developed a positive working relationship with the assistant coach. These standards were well noticed in the coaches as they carried out their duties and responsibilities.

Two of the MHSSA (2005) coaching standards were related to relationships with players. They stated that: coaches develop fair, unprejudiced relationships with all squad members; and coaches allow athletes to prove themselves anew each season and do not base team selections on previous seasons or out-of-season activities. Scott worked diligently to develop positive relationship with all players. In fact, he also encouraged the students to develop fair and unprejudiced relationships with each other. If Scott noticed a problem between two teammates, he stepped in to help with the problem. Scott worked with players to resolve any issues.

I'd rather they players talk to each other (if they have a problem). But, sometimes, they won't. They will talk to their friends, and that can create even more problems. If I have two girls who aren't getting along, I'll bring them right together. I give them each one minute, I tell them not to be mean to each other,

and then we talk about it together. But they are all pretty good at hiding it from me. It doesn't happen too often, but it does happen. I do what I can to solve the problem.

Dave also developed fair relationships with each player on the team. As a non-faculty coach, he did not know these girls prior to the season. This enabled him to fairly place students on either the A or B team without regard to performance the previous year. In this situation, this was an advantage for Dave. He rated each player early in the season without regard to previous basketball experience. This seemed to be an advantage of being a non-faculty coach which allowed for a fair assessment of the players' skills at the beginning of the season. Dave also mentioned that he strived to have the players develop positive relationships with each other. If he noticed a conflict between players, he handled the situation immediately.

If there is a conflict, I would pull the girls aside. I would sit them down, and get a solution in place. Girls can be critical of their teammates. I teach them to be real teammates, and I teach them the team concept. We have to walk that line as to how we're going to help each other. But I would definitely address any problems with those players individually.

Sam's coaching philosophy adhered to these coaching standards as well. He had fair relationships with all players and a fair selection process. One strategy at Central the coaches used to balance the A and B teams was they didn't put the best 12 players all on the A team. They put the best six or seven players on the A team, the next six or seven on the B team, and the rest of the players were evenly balanced. This balanced of the skill level of the players allowed the coaches to more evenly play the girls in each game.

Another coaching standard observed was: coaches will give the highest degree of concern and attention to the athlete's physical well being. All coaches were concerned about the players' well being. Coaches were concerned for players and always aware of

their well being during practices and games. They were given drink breaks as necessary. Coaches were observed helping tape fingers and tend to injured players. Specifically, Jennifer was concerned for the players' emotional well being. During a game, the West players were beginning to become frustrated about the game. At one point one particular player was called for her fourth foul of the game. When Jennifer subbed her out of the game, she exited the game and was crying. "You can't come off like that," Jennifer told her. She later talked about what happened in the game.

This season frustration, crying, and pouting was a big goal for the A team members to get over. That player thought it was not her fault when she would be called with a foul. She would cry because she had to come out of the game. It took awhile, but eventually they learned to control most of their frustrations. I noticed in one of our last games of the season that none of the A team players fouled out, and they were very supportive of one another on the bench.

Middle school coaches need to be aware of the physical and psychological readiness of each team member (Vaughan, 1984). By addressing the emotional responses of the A team players to a foul, Jennifer was assisting them to develop their psychological well-being and emotional maturity in game situations. As Jennifer noted, this was one area the team worked on to improve throughout the season, which they did by the last few games of the year as team members supported one another when someone fouled out rather than becoming upset.

Other standards related to teaching respect for school authorities and officials, as well as teaching players strict adherence to game rules and contest regulations were observed. Lori at one point in the season penalized some players for reacting to the crowd and overreacting to officials calls. She talked to them about appropriate behavior in games. All of the coaches taught the players the rules of the game. Coaches such as Scott continually talked about the rules throughout the games by directing comments to

the players on the bench. If he noticed something on the floor, he explained to the players what he saw and how they could improve. Other coaches worked game rules and contest regulation discussions into team meetings and practices. Lori and Dave gave out handouts which outlined not only team plays but also basic game rules. A lack of instruction about these standards was not observed. Players were respectful of officials, and players were observed to have knowledge of the game.

Another standard observed was that coaches will allow athletes time to develop skills and interest in other athletic and non-athletic activities provided by school and community groups. Scott and Sam were supportive of players' involvement in activities unrelated to basketball. Other coaches such as Lori, Jennifer, Tom, and Ed had policies related to missed practices and games because of other activities. Students were penalized to varying degrees for each occasion that they missed a basketball activity. Although Tom did not have a specific policy, he often reminded players that basketball should be the priority in their lives outside of school. This standard was observed with the most conflicting results. Some coaches approved of outside activities, while others did not. Ultimately, each coach has to develop the policy that is most appropriate for their school and will be supported by the school administration. Additionally, it was a benefit to coaches who communicated their policy to parents early in the season. This allowed players and their parents to understand the coach's individual policy related to this issue.

Two final coaching standards were observed less frequently in this research study. The first of these standards was that coaches will present privately, through proper school authorities, evidence of rule violations by opponents; and counteract rumors and

unproven allegations of questionable practices by opponents. Rule violations by other teams or questionable practices were not observed. When asked what they would do if they encountered this situation, coaches were unsure. Scott commented that he was not sure how he would handle such a situation. He had never encountered this before. Generally, from my observations, it appeared that intentional rule violations by teams occur less frequently at the middle school level than the high school level. The other standard that was not observed was that coaches attend required meetings, keep abreast of MHSAA policies regarding the sport, and be familiar with MHSAA eligibility and contest regulations. Although all of the coaches were aware of policies and rules related to the sport as well as eligibility requirements related to academics and school enrollments, none of the coaches attended MHSAA meetings related to basketball. From discussions with middle school coaches, in most districts, high school coaches attended these meetings. Additionally, difficulty missing school or work to attend these meetings and a lack of funding prevented middle school coaches from attending these MHSAA basketball meetings. In the schools observed, high school coaches attended the meetings, and relayed the information to the middle school coaches. Also, school athletic directors would provide rules updates and other information that they received from the MHSAA to the coaches to keep them informed of any rules changes or other information that they needed to know.

The MHSAA published coaching standards for middle school coaches. These standards were observed, and many of them were a part of the coaches' philosophies as they worked with middle school adolescents coaching basketball. Interestingly, although coaches adhered to several of these standards, many of the coaches had never read

through them or attended an MHSAA coaching workshop. Additional training for the coaches related to the standards would be helpful to them in the future.

Competing Values Framework

Introduction

The competing values framework can specifically be adapted to managerial/leadership roles. Quinn (1988) used this model to explain the four models of the competing values framework at the managerial level (Figure 2). The rational goal model emphasizes in people the need for high achievement through directive leadership as well as goal and task orientated leadership. With the human relations model, the manager's concern is relationships with people, and the manager's power is based on these relationships. With the internal process model, decision making is hierarchical and power is based on the influence of information. Leaders are conservative and cautious. Finally, in the open systems model, the leadership style is inventive and includes risk. In this model, there is a high need for growth, development and stimulation. These four models seem distinct and different. It is hard to imagine a leader being involved with different quadrants of the framework. However, the competing values framework presents ways to see managerial leadership in new ways, where it is possible for leaders to engage in behaviors at two opposite points in the framework.

Figure 2. The Competing Values Framework of Leadership Roles

<u>Human Relations Model</u> -Mentor Role -Group Facilitator Role -Supportive Style Longer Time Horizons	Flexibility <u>Open Systems Model</u> -Innovator Role -Broker Role -Risk Taking Style External Focus
Internal Focus -Monitor Role -Coordinator Role -Conservative, Cautious Style <u>Internal Process Model</u>	Shorter Time Horizons -Producer Role -Director Role -Goal Orientated Control <u>Rational Goal Model</u>

Competing Values Framework and Middle School Coaching

The competing values framework can be utilized to examine middle school coaches as they are faced with multiple challenges while they are coaching middle school adolescents. There are four quadrants of organizational structure as represented in the competing values model for middle school basketball coaches (Figure 3). Just as the theory suggests a manager can engage in multiple behaviors in more than one quadrant, a

Figure 3. The Competing Values Framework and Middle School Coaching

<p><u>Human Relations Model</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Coaches promote a positive experience for the players with basketball -Coaches develop relationships -The team concept is emphasized -Understanding of other commitments -Makes sure playing time is equal <p>Longer Time Horizons</p>	<p><u>Open Systems Model</u></p> <p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Uses resources -Solicits parent support -Risk taking style -Teaches advanced skills -Players call plays on the court <p>External Focus</p>
<p>Internal Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Coordinator role -Conservative, Cautious style -Connection to high school -Teaches fundamentals of the game <p><u>Internal Process Model</u></p>	<p>Shorter Time Horizons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Competitive/would like to win -Sets goals for the team -Coach calls plays from the bench -Best players in close games <p>Control</p> <p><u>Rational Goal Model</u></p>

coach may also demonstrate different behaviors found in various components within the framework. A coach may even move from one quadrant to another as they are carrying out their coaching responsibilities during games and/or practices. Coaches also can select the integrator role, which allows them to observe the current environment, and select the best coaching strategies, or the most important quadrant of the competing values framework, to best meet the needs of the middle school basketball players at that moment.

Scott was an example of a coach who occasionally moved into different quadrants, but was primarily remained in one quadrant—the human relations model. Scott had many of the characteristics of a coach in this quadrant. He was understanding of other activities that may conflict with basketball, and he was diligent to have equal playing time for all students in games. He emphasized team development, and he wanted the players to enjoy their experience on the team. Although he was competitive and he wanted to win, he kept in mind his focus on the human relations quadrant as he emphasized values such as equal playing time and skill development. However, because he built a strong program, winning came as a natural byproduct of his coaching philosophy. His coaching values certainly were based on the human relations quadrant of the competing values framework.

Middle school coaches are challenged by competing demands as they carry out their coaching responsibilities. It is common for coaches to have beliefs and values that fall under more than one quadrant in the competing values framework. For example, a coach's emphasis on teamwork and character development with an internal focus on the needs of the team will be in the human relations quadrant of the model. However, that same coach may be task driven, goal orientated, and highly structured which is in the rational goal model quadrant of the competing values model. A coach who may value a conservative style of play with an emphasis on fundamental skills of the sport as well as valuing a strong connection to the high school program will fall in the internal process model. A coach who emphasizes more advanced skills and teaching complicated offensive plays would fall under the open systems model. If they are coaching in a close game, coaches may not play everyone equal minutes in the game. They want to make the

most of the available resources by playing the best players near the end of the game. The coach will now be in the rational goal model of the framework. As each middle school coach develops his or her own coaching philosophy, they will likely fall primarily into one or two specific quadrants. However, as they are coaching during practices and games, it is common for coaches to move from one quadrant to another. These opposite beliefs can exist in a system, and oftentimes they do as coaches are faced with multiple challenges and difficult situations while they are coaching. The competing values model demonstrates that these conflicting coaching behaviors can exist simultaneously and the coach can still be effective in teaching and coaching middle school athletes about the sport. Similarly, coaches who can play the role of the “integrator” can often be termed effective coaches. These coaches can observe their own coaching and be a reflective learner. I saw evidence of the integrator role as coaches such as Sam and Lori reflected upon their coaching behaviors and discovered ways they could improve in their instruction at practices or games. For example, both of these coaches reflected on a practice drill and developed a better way to teach it in the future.

Coaches who can balance all of these competing values will make better coaches. In fact, their cognitive complexity, or ability to reconcile opposites within an organization, can be considered an indicator of coaching effectiveness. An effective manager, or effective coach will have the ability to integrate seemingly opposite approaches to management and many roles will become blended (Quinn, et al., 2003). Effective coaches realize the importance of various goals in the different quadrants; thus, they are able to integrate their coaching strategies in a way that emphasizes multiple goals from different quadrants of the competing values framework. For example, as a

coach plays the role of a facilitator in the human relations model, once every member of the team understands the other players' role, team members are more willing and able to act outside of their own role. A coach playing the director role in the rational goal mode may find that this increases his or her flexibility and he or she moves to the upper half of the competing values framework which included the open systems model and human relations model. Sam is an example of a coach who was faced with a paradox as he tried to integrate a variety of roles as the seventh grade coach at Central Middle School. Sam fit into the human relations model. He developed strong relationships with the players, he cared about them, he was understanding of other commitments, and he emphasized the team concept. Sam was also at times in the rational goal model quadrant of the competing values framework. Sam was competitive, he wanted to win, and he had high expectations for the team. He would play the better players in close games. Sam also was in the open systems model as he coached advanced defensive and offensive plays and was more of a risk taker as he tackled difficult offensive plays for the seventh grade. Additionally, at times he selected the integrator role as he observed the environment, learned from his experiences, and was able to select the best role of the competing values framework for the current situation. Sam was faced with a paradox, as he had to battle all of these competitive tensions. However, he was able to effectively balance and integrate these different roles. This leads me to conclude that what Sam has accomplished is an example of how an effective coach carries out his or her duties. Sam was an effective middle school basketball coach as he balanced these various tensions in the competing values framework. When reaching this conclusion about effective coaches, one may theorize that there is an overarching value that helps effective coaches in balancing these

tensions. I would propose that this higher value is coaching with an emphasis on the team members playing for enjoyment of the game. It seemed as Sam moved from one quadrant to another, he did not lose focus on his emphasis on players enjoying the experience playing middle school girls' basketball. A coach such as Sam, who can balance the various tensions and conflicts in his own coaching value system, demonstrated that he can be termed an effective middle school basketball coach.

Another coach who handled the paradox of different roles in their coaching responsibilities was Lori at Eagle Middle School. Lori greatly emphasized many of the qualities of a coach in the human relations model. She made it a priority to teach the players about character. She stressed the team concept, and she taught the players throughout the season to focus less on themselves, and more on teamwork. Lori wanted the players to know what it means to play for a team. She also taught the players responsibility. Lori's philosophy included getting all players in games, but she admits in a close game, some players may be in the game more than others. This is an example of a shift towards the rational goal model. In this model, as a coach Lori is competitive and she would like to win. In a close game, she may call plays from the bench. Early in the season, she stressed goals for the team, and she handed out an organized packet of plays while she outlined the season's goals. Although Lori fluctuated between the human relations model and rational goal model, similarly to Sam, her emphasis on enjoyment of the game was always present. Whether it was at a practice, a pre-game huddle, or exuberant coaching during a game, she seemed to also interject a moment of fun or humor into her coaching. As Lori developed her coaching values, she was an effective middle school coach. She balanced the competing tensions, and she seemed to never lose

focus of her coaching philosophy, and her goal for the students to enjoy their experience as a member of the team.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

This research study provided a great deal of descriptive data about the actions and behaviors of middle school girl's basketball coaches. The coaches utilized knowledge about the middle school philosophy to guide their coaching. They had to take into account the unique emotional needs of middle adolescent players. At this level, coaches had to develop their own coaching philosophy for working with middle school youth. They also had to decide if they should emphasize winning, equal opportunities for all players, or a combination of these priorities. Furthermore, the emotional needs of middle school students had to be considered throughout the season at practices and games. Coaches also designed the goals for their program. They had to determine whether or not they were striving to improve players' skills now at the current time as seventh or eighth graders, or were they attempting to contribute to building a stronger district wide program by having a closer connection to the high school coaches? They also had to consider any potential sacrifices for the current team in deciding to emphasize a closer connection to the high school. These were challenges that each individual coach had to handle as they developed their own coaching philosophy.

The author enjoyed planning, organizing, and carrying out the research study. It was interesting to conduct cross analyses of the seven coaches in the study. Differences in coaching strategies and philosophies became apparent. In the study, it was expected to be determined that faculty members made better coaches than non-faculty coaches.

However, the study revealed that effective coaches were composed of both school faculty and non-staff members. There was not a noticeable difference in the activities of these two groups of coaches. The author was pleased to discover a sample of coaches who were effective and successful as they coached middle school girls' basketball. If the study were to be repeated, it would be interesting to examine these seven coaches for multiple years. The findings from each year could then be compared to see if they carry out their coaching responsibilities in the same manner each season. One might expect to find improvement in their coaching as they coached over multiple seasons. Another study could investigate where these coaches learned their coaching behaviors. Did they learn from their own coaches while they were in middle school and high school, college level coaching classes, and/or from current coaching colleagues? It would also be intriguing to seek out inexperienced coaches, or new coaches, to compare their coaching activities to the highly regarded coaches in the current study.

Recommendations can be made about middle school coaches. During the research it was discovered that most middle school coaches were not aware of the established coaching standards which were published by the Michigan High School Athletic Association. School districts could be of great assistance to their coaches if administrators provided coaches with the MHSAA coaches' manual and a copy of the established coaching standards which outlines expectations for coaching. Each individual school likely also had their own expectations for coaches, but the MHSAA standards are consistent for all schools in Michigan. Most coaches did not attend the MHSAA updates and rules meeting held throughout the state before the sports season began. It is recommended that schools send middle school coaches to these meetings.

Coaches can learn valuable information about the sport, information about rules changes for the upcoming season, and have an opportunity to discuss coaching with MHSAA officials. Finally, schools may consider enrolling their middle school coaches in the Coaches Advancement Program (CAP) sponsored by the MHSAA. This is a 36 hour training program that is divided into six segments. CAP provides coaches with additional training about techniques and skills that can be used to coach middle school adolescents on topics which include: effective instruction, sports medicine and first aid, effective communication, managing time, teaching technical skills as well as strength and conditioning, healthy living, controlling emotions in pressure situations, resolving conflicts in athletics, and other current issues in educational athletics (MHSAA, 2006).

This research contributed information which can assist in the hiring and evaluation processes of coaches at the middle school level. During the hiring process, school administrators should seek candidates who have an understanding of the middle school philosophy. Candidates need a basic understanding of the specific sport, and particularly have a focus on being able to teach middle level adolescents the fundamental and basic skills of the game. Coaching candidates should also express a desire to make the experience of playing a sport enjoyable for members of the team. Finally, ideal coaching candidates will emphasize character development, teamwork, and will be a positive role model for the athletes. If school administrators seek out these basic attributes in coaching candidates, they will be more likely to find a potential coach to work with the middle school students in their school. During coaching evaluations, the key attributes of middle school coaches could be used in a rubric (Figure 4) to evaluate coaches. Items to be considered in a middle school coach's evaluation could include:

connection to middle school philosophy and relationships with middle school students; emphasis on teamwork in their coaching; demonstrating positive role modeling for the athletes; having an emphasis on making the sport activities enjoyable for the participants; and effective communication skills with the players and their parents. These suggestions could assist in the hiring and evaluation procedures used for middle school coaches. This will lead to hiring and retaining the best qualified individuals for coaching assignments at the school.

Figure 4. Middle School Coaching Evaluation Rubric

<u>Coach's Name:</u>	<u>Performance Standards</u> 1. Exceeds Expectations 2. Meets Expectations 3. Meets Requirements But Needs Improvement 4. Does Not Meet Requirements
<u>RATING:</u>	<u>COACHING VALUES & TRAITS</u>
	1. Connection to middle school philosophy and relationship building. -Considers the emotional and physical need of players -Allows team members to prove themselves anew at the beginning of the season
	2. Emphasis on teamwork and rapport with players. -Works to have a good rapport with the players -Develops a plan to emphasize the team concept -Designs practices and other activities to develop team building
	3. Professional conduct/role modeling. -Models conduct for players at practices, games, in the locker room, and during travel -Teaches by example respect for officials and other coaches -Presents a professional image/represents school well
	4. Emphasis on enjoyment of the sport by players. -Plays all students in games -Athletes are enjoying the experience on the team -Not an overemphasis on winning
	5. Effective communication with players, parents, and staff. -Communicates appropriately with players -Conducts a parent meeting early in the season

	6. Emphasis on fundamentals of the sport. -Teaches fundamentals and basics of the sport -Helps players develop their own performance goals
	7. Adheres to MHSAA and school rules, regulations, and standards. -Has received and read the MHSAA standards -Follows the MHSAA coaching standards -Attends MHSAA update meetings when possible.
	8. Knowledge of the sport and contest rules. -Teaches adherence to game rules and regulations -Has experience with the sport -Attends coaching workshops to gain knowledge about the sport
	9. Outstanding accomplishments during the season.
	10. Areas of suggested improvement/other comments.

Middle School Coaching Research

Future research related to middle school coaching could provide additional information to supplement the findings found in this study. Research could be conducted in a different sport to determine if the research findings of girls' basketball coaches are applicable to other middle school sports. Also, it may be useful to conduct research with coaches over the course of multiple sport seasons to determine if their actions are consistent with different players over the course of many years. Another potential future study is related to the connection between middle school and high school athletic programs. This study could investigate the contributions a middle school program makes to the high school program. Also, further study of middle school coaching from the perspective of the school administrator may provide additional information about middle school coaching and what makes a coach successful at this level. Other studies could examine how coaches came to their behavior model, as many were unaware of the published coaching standards. It is hoped that the findings of this research study contributed to the knowledge base about middle school coaching as well as provided other researchers and school administrators with useful information about middle school coaches, and that this study will be a catalyst to further research by other colleagues in the area of middle school athletic coaching.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Coaches' Informed Consent Form

APPENDIX A

Coaches' Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in this doctoral research study by Mike Prelesnik, who is examining the coaching activities of middle school athletic coaches. The dissertation study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the PhD at Michigan State University. The investigator will collect qualitative data from observations of a minimum of one practice and one game, as well as from participant's responses to interview questions. Each observation will take approximately two hours and the interview will take one hour. If there is a compelling reason, additional practices or games may be observed if you agree. I request that the interviews be tape recorded in order to supplement the investigator's field notes. Observations will not be recorded in any manner.

All information obtained from this research will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for coaches and schools in the dissertation and any subsequent publications. The privacy of all participants will be protected to the fullest extent allowable by law. Participants are under no obligation to the investigator and may terminate involvement in the study at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions, or discontinue your participation at any time without penalty.

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. Participants will not benefit from this study. However, their participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of middle school athletic coaching and will help administrators and coaches understand and gain more knowledge about how coaches balance the challenges as they strive to follow the established standards for coaches, adhere to middle school principles, and try to field a competitive team. Research will not begin until the appropriate permission has been granted by the school's administration.

If participants have questions about the study they may contact the researcher, Mike Prelesnik, or the chair of his dissertation committee, Dr. Susan Printy. Contact information is below:

Dr. Susan Printy, Dissertation Chair
407 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824
(517) 355-4508
sprinty@msu.edu

If you have concerns about your rights as a research participant you should feel free to contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) directly. Contact information is below:

Dr. Peter Vasilenko, Chair
Human Research Protection Program
202 Olds Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824-1047
Phone: (517) 355-2180 Fax: (517) 432-4503
email: irb@msu.edu

I hereby consent to participate in this study. I permit the tape recording of interview sessions.

Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Initials to verify
consent for tape recording of the interview

APPENDIX B

Administrator's Permission Form

APPENDIX B

Administrator's Permission Form

You are being asked to give permission for Mike Prelesnik to conduct a study at your school. The study examines the coaching activities of middle school athletic coaches. The dissertation study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the PhD at Michigan State University. The investigator will collect qualitative data from observations of a minimum of one practice and one game, as well as from participant's responses to interview questions. Each observation will take approximately two hours and the interview will take one hour. If there is a compelling reason, additional practices or games may be observed. The interviews will be tape recorded in order to supplement the investigator's field notes. Observations will not be recorded in any manner.

All information obtained from this research will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for coaches and schools in the dissertation and any subsequent publications. The privacy of all participants will be protected to the fullest extent allowable by law. Participants are under no obligation to the investigator and may terminate involvement in the study at any time. The coaches' participation in this study is voluntary. They may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions, or discontinue their participation at any time without penalty.

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. Participants will not benefit from this study. However, their participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of middle school athletic coaching and will help administrators and coaches understand and gain more knowledge about how coaches balance the challenges as they strive to follow the established standards for coaches, adhere to middle school principles, and try to field a competitive team. Coaching observations and interviews with coaches will not begin until permission has been granted by the school administration.

If participants or school administrators have questions about the study they may contact the researcher, Mike Prelesnik, or the chair of his dissertation committee, Dr. Susan Printy. Contact information is below:

Dr. Susan Printy, Dissertation Chair
407 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824
(517) 355-4508
sprinty@msu.edu

If there are concerns about the rights of research participants, you should feel free to contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) directly. Contact information is below:

Dr. Peter Vasilenko, Chair
Human Research Protection Program
202 Olds Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824-1047
Phone: (517) 355-2180 Fax: (517) 432-4503
email: irb@msu.edu

I hereby give my permission for Mike Prelesnik to conduct this study with coach(es) at

School Name

School Administrator

Date

APPENDIX C

Letter of Invitation to Coaches

APPENDIX C

Letter of Invitation to Coaches

Dear Middle School Coach,

I am a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University in the Department of K-12 Educational Administration. As partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in K-12 Educational Administration, I am working on my dissertation study. This study will be a qualitative study of coaching activities of middle school athletic coaches.

Middle school athletic coaches have a variety of challenges they are faced each day. They strive to field competitive teams, they follow guidelines of coaching standards published by the MHSAA, and they must have an understanding of the middle school adolescent and the middle school philosophy. This research study will examine the activities of coaches as they strive to develop a competitive team and how they handle the variety of coaching expectations in order to determine if their activities support middle school principles and show evidence of adhering to MHSAA coaching standards. Any conflicts in their own coaching beliefs and how they are reconciled will also be noted.

You have been recommended by your school's administration as a potential participant for this research study. The participants for this study are to be current middle school girls' basketball coaches of any level of coaching experience.

I will observe the participants at a minimum of one practice and one game. Additionally, I will conduct one interview with you to ask follow up questions related to the observations from the practice(s) and game(s).

A coach's participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and all information about the participants and their schools will remain confidential. Names of participants and schools will not be identified in this study without written permission. You would be under no obligation to the investigator of the study, and you could end your participation in the study at any time.

Thank you for your consideration. I will be contacting you in the near future to discuss this study in more detail and to determine if you would be interested in participating.

Sincerely,

Mike Prelesnik
Doctoral Candidate
Michigan State University
Department of K-12 Educational Administration

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