

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL COACHES  
AND STRESS

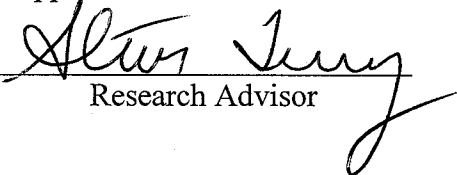
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ABSTRACT

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High School Football Coaches and Stress

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Education

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The purpose of this study was to identify the three most common areas of stress in Western Wisconsin head football coaches. An additional purpose was to determine which areas had the most intense levels of high or extreme stress. Coaches (n=24) completed a modified Coaching Issues Survey (CIS) originally developed by Dr. Betty Kelley. Results indicate that coaches view the pressure to win as the greatest source of stress. In addition, coaches reported that 75% (n=18) of this stress was either in the high or extreme range.

The review of literature presents previous investigations on the level of burnout among amateur coaches. The causes that can lead to occupational burnout are also discussed. A Stress model, and its application for coaches, defines the three stages of stress. Many different factors of stress along with techniques for stress reduction are listed.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

He is called 'coach'. It is a difficult job, and there is no clear way to succeed in it.

He is out in the open being judged publicly almost every day or night for six, seven, or eight months a year by those who may or may not be qualified to judge him. And every defeat is recorded constantly in print or on the air and periodically totaled up.

The coach has no place to hide. He cannot just let the job go for a while and assume no one will notice as most of us can. He cannot satisfy everyone. Seldom can he even satisfy himself. If he wins once, he must win the next time, too.

They plot victories, suffer defeats, endure criticism from within and without. They neglect their families, travel endlessly, and live alone in a spotlight surrounded by others. Theirs may be the worst profession - unreasonably demanding and insecure and full of unrelenting pressures. Why do they do it? Having seen them hired and hailed as geniuses at gaudy party-like press conferences and having seen them fired with pat phrases such as fool or incompetent, I have wondered about them. Having seen them in exuberant in victory and depressed by defeat, I have sympathized with them. Having seen some broken by the job and others die from it, one is moved to admire them and to hope that someday the world will learn to understand them" (Libby 1985, cited in Martin, 1993, p. 1).

This quote illustrates the difficulties and pressures that coaches feel every day. Stress occurs when the demands of the job exceed one's ability to cope with it. Coaching has been characterized as a volatile profession involving many pressures (Pastore & Judd, 1992). It is

clear that stress and coaching go hand and hand. There are numerous examples of coaches leaving the profession due to overwhelming stress demands of the job. Professional coaches who have left their positions, many at the top of their profession, include Jimmy Johnson, Dick Vermeil, Mike Ditka, Bill Parcells, and Joe Gibbs. Although some of these coaches are now back in the profession, each needed time away to deal with the accumulated stresses of the job. They usually come in the form of physical, psychological or mental stress.

Stress is a strain or discomfort when the demands of the stress outweigh response capabilities of the individual. The coach is not the only one who feels the pressure. Family, friends, colleagues, and players feel the pressures as well. Within the field of education, teaching and coaching have been identified as high stress related occupations (Capel, Sisley, & Desertrain, 1987). Recent studies indicate that teachers are affected more by burnout than any other public service profession (Schamer & Jackson, 1996). The stresses involved in coaching come from a number of sources. These stresses can either be internally or externally placed upon the coach. Some of the sources of stress include role conflict, pressure to win, parents, community, time and job demands, inadequate salary, and lack of administrative support. Stress and coaching cannot be separated, but with coping skills, it can be managed.

One of the negative aspects of coaching and other service professions is occupational burnout. Burnout is a consequence of chronic and unmanaged stress. Symptoms of burnout include physical exhaustion, attitudinal change, and emotional detachment (Dorsett, 1982). Burnout rates of teachers and teacher/coaches vary depending on the study. Some studies describe burnout levels as moderate while others categorize burnout as relatively small when compared to other service professions. Once occupational burnout has been reached, it usually signifies the end of the career for that individual.



It is important to study coaching and stress because if the stressors are not handled adequately, coaches will not survive within the profession. Scharmer et al. (1996) stated that teachers are affected by burnout. It has been shown that teacher/coaches do not stay in the educational system as long as they once did (Kelley & Gill, 1993). Two other studies found that although coaches are leaving earlier, the level of teachers remaining in the profession has been relatively constant (Kelley, 1994; Wishnietsky & Felder, 1989).

The problem of losing teacher/coaches is a serious one since our society places such a high level of importance on athletics. Many school districts now require that new employees coach as well as teach making it important to address the issues related to the dual role. Many qualified teachers will leave the profession because of the dual roles as a teacher and a coach. For our educational system to function at its highest level we need to be able to recruit and retain the best teachers available. Ignoring the issues related to the teacher/coach would contradict the purpose of education.

Being a coach can be a rewarding, yet stressful experience. Along with the pride a coach feels when helping a player grow personally, physically, and mentally, comes many challenges that lead to stress. Addressing stress related issues is important if teachers continue to be involved with supervising extracurricular activities. This study will provide us with an understanding of the sources related to occupational stress in current head football coaches in Western Wisconsin. If teacher/coaches are not adequately prepared for these stressors then school districts could lose quality teachers. The research in this study will focus on the areas of stress in coach's lives.

There have been many studies completed on the effects of burnout and the rate of burnout among coaches. If this study proves that there are areas of overwhelming stress, then changes in

coaching certification programs should be made. Adjustments made in sport psychology classes would be able to address the problems that coaches may face. Current head coaches need to communicate with assistants who have an aspiration of someday becoming a head coach. They need to transfer their knowledge of the causes of stress and the strength of each stressor. Although classroom instruction and mentoring will never duplicate real life experiences, potential head coaches would at least be made aware of the major occupational stressors prior to becoming a head coach.

A review of the literature shows that coaching is a stressful occupation with stressors coming with a number of different sources. Studies have also shown that burnout is a problem among teacher/coaches at all levels.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The objective of this research is to identify the three leading causes of stress issues in current high school football coaches in Western Wisconsin. Obtaining this information will allow educational systems to improve their curriculums to help future coaches deal with occupational related stressors. Survey research methods will be used in this study to determine what issues high school football coaches perceive as areas of elevated stress. Subjects for this study will include head high school varsity football coaches in Western Wisconsin. The conferences used include Dunn-St. Croix, Middle Border, Large Cloverbelt, Small Cloverbelt, and Heart O' North. The Coaching Issues Survey (CIS), originally developed by Dr. Betty Kelley, was modified by the researcher to collect the data for this study (Kelley et al., 1993). The five questions that were removed from Dr. Kelley's original Coaching Issues Survey were those pertaining to the recruitment of players. The current survey consisted of twenty-five

questions using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5, with one being no stress and five being extreme stress.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to determine the level of stress in various areas in current high school head football coaches in Western Wisconsin as measured by a modified Coaching Issues Survey (CIS) (Appendix A).

1. To determine the three most common stress areas as identified by current high school football coaches.
2. To determine if high school coaches experience any areas of high or extreme stress.

### *Definition of Terms*

Coaching Burnout: Result of constant emotional pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods in relation with an athletic coach's occupational duties.

Coach: A man or woman whose duty is to instruct participants on techniques and methods in athletics

Teacher-coaches: Those people who have dual roles as a teacher and coach.

Role Conflict: Conflict arising when trying to meet the demands and expectations of two responsibilities simultaneously.

### *Limitations of the study*

1. Survey return rate
2. Honest response by coaches
3. Accurate representation of Wisconsin football coaches

### *Methodology*

A review of the literature will be important in exploring previous research on factors contributing to coaching stress and burnout. The study will examine the stressors associated with coaching that can lead to burnout.

A twenty- five question survey was emailed to forty head varsity football coaches in Western Wisconsin asking them to respond using a five-point scale on various coaching issues. No personal information was collected from the subjects. The emailed responses were sent to the Webmaster at the University of Wisconsin-Stout and then forwarded onto the researcher. Tabulated results from the survey will be compiled to identify the three most common areas of stress and the areas with the highest levels of high and extreme stress.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature reviewed in this chapter is composed of four sections. The first section will address Hans Seyle's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) on stress and how it can be applied to coaching. The next section will focus on the occupational stressors related to coaching and their effects. Following the identification of stressors will be a section on burnout. This section will define burnout, identify characteristics of individuals who may be susceptible to burnout, and describe how burnout is measured. The final section will focus on the current literature related to coaching and burnout.

#### Stress Addressed & General Adaptation Syndrome

Stress is something that we all must deal with daily in every aspect of our lives. Stress is needed to survive. The word stress usually conjures up negative thoughts in most people's mind, but not all stress is bad. Positive stress is categorized as eustress, which stimulates individual growth and development. Each person can describe how stress affects himself, but developing a concrete definition is difficult. Stress can be described as a physiological or psychological response to external events (Wishnietsky et al., 1989). Stress is a real reaction to a concrete or abstract cause, but regardless, stress is real and necessary for survival.

Hans Seyle developed a three-stage stress syndrome model known as the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) that can be applied to coaches. The first stage is the alarm reaction stage. This is where the body tries to fight against an outside influence with the resistance being lowered. For example, a new head coach begins to have trouble sleeping at night. The second stage is the resistance stage. During this stage, the body acts to restore balance by adapting to continued exposure to the stressor, and resistance actually rises to above normal levels. In this

case, the head coach continues not sleeping well at night, but has increased energy levels during the day due to the adjustments his body has made. The exhaustion stage is the third and final stage. It is here where the body loses the battle to resist the effects of the stress even though it has adjusted to it. If the stress remains great and balance is not restored then coach will begin to feel worn out, and unable to cope with the demands of the job. The resulting damage from the combination of stress can vary from mild to severe illness or even death depending the duration of the stressor (Ruder, 1991).

### Occupational Stressors

Coaching has been described as a stressful occupation. Many studies have indicated that coaching has a high amount of stress (Martin, Kelley, & Dias, 1999). The stresses related to teacher/coaches come from a number of different sources. These sources include self-imposed and external pressures to win along with time demands. Lack of support from the administration and role conflicts contribute to elevated stress levels. Theobald's (1991) investigation of high school boy's basketball coaches in Minnesota revealed that the stresses of coaching come from various sources. The coaches identified their sources of stress as game coaching, interpersonal relation with athletes, interpersonal relation with parents and fans, time restraints, and self-imposed pressure. Two other studies on coaches reported that parents were the most stressful aspect of their job (Wegge, 2002 & Wu, 1991). Wegge (2002), in her study of Wisconsin high school girl's basketball coaches, reported that 42.6% of respondents indicated that parents were the most stressful part of coaching.

One aspect of the job that has been identified as contributor to stress is having dual roles of a teacher and a coach. A study conducted on coaches in the state of Washington investigated role stress, as result of role conflict and overload. Teacher/coaches experienced more stress from

their coaching roles than their teaching roles. Excessive time and energy demands were listed as the greatest sources contributing to role stress (Wu, 1991). Wu also concluded that gender was not a factor in contributing to role stress. The expanded duties of a dual role professional can compound the effects of stress.

### Burnout

Defining burnout is difficult, but most people agree that it is a psychological, emotional, and physical syndrome of chronic everyday stress. Others believe burnout is a loss of enthusiasm, energy, idealism, perspective and purpose (Wegge, 2002). “The basic concept underlying burnout focuses on an imbalance between resources and demands causing an immediate, short term emotional response to this imbalance characterized by feelings of anxiety, tension, fatigue, and exhaustion” (Dale & Weinberg, 1990, p. 67).

Burnout has little regard for age, gender, ethnic background, or profession. Studies show that human service professions have higher levels of occupational burnout than non-service professions. People who are susceptible to burnout share some common traits. Some of these traits include people who are highly motivated, high achieving, and goal oriented. They generally accept more than their fair share of the work and are perfectionists with unrealistic expectations (Sullivan & Nashman, 1996). Even though people may possess these characteristics, they may not actually become burned out since it is an individualistic phenomenon.

Burnout has become one of the most studied aspects related to coaching. The first professional articles studying the effects of burnout were conducted in the mid 1970's (Dale et al., 1990). These articles initially focused on staff burnout, but in 1976, Christine Maslach expanded her research to encompass other human service and helping professions. Through her

study on burnout, Maslach developed what is known today as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1986, cited in Kelley, 1994).

The MBI has three subscales, which measure the burnout characteristics. Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment are the three subscales that measure burnout. The emotional exhaustion subscale contains nine questions. These questions characterize feelings of being emotionally overextended or exhausted at work. The depersonalization subscale contains five questions, which measures an unfeeling and impersonal response to the individual's clients or athletes. The personal accomplishment subscale contains eight questions, which determines competence and occupational accomplishment. Each question is rated by marking both frequency and intensity (Vealey, Udry, Zimmerman & Soliday, 1992). Some researchers have slightly modified the questions by changing some of the words in the questions. For example, they have replaced the word recipient with the word student to make the questionnaire more relevant to educators.

### Burnout and Coaching

As mentioned before, burnout has been widely examined in the coaching profession. This part of the paper will review how burnout is associated with different amateur levels of coaching. The first study was done using small college coaches. In this study, conducted on men and women Division III and NAIA teacher/head coaches, the researchers concluded that the subjects were in the moderate to high levels of burnout as measured by the MBI (Kelley et al, 1993). During their study, Kelley et al. (1993) determined that trait anxiety was the closest predictor of burnout. It was determined that there are stressors unique to coaching. They include interpersonal interaction with players, producing a winning team while yet handling defeat, long recruiting hours, and hassles from external factors such as parents, media, and booster clubs



(Vealey et al., 1992). In her 1994 study, Dr. Kelley used male and female head baseball and softball coaches from NCAA III and NAIA universities. She concluded that the subjects had moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion, but had low to moderate scores in the areas of depersonalization and personal accomplishment (Kelley, 1994). The female coaches in this study experienced higher levels of burnout than their male counterparts. In another study done on burnout, both college and high school coaches were used as subjects. This study done in 1992, consisted of 381 high school and 467 college coaches. Both male and female coaches were used in this study. Participants completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and a demographic/cognitive questionnaire. The results indicated that more than 200 of the coaches were categorized as having either moderate or high ranges of burnout (Vealey et al., 1992). Women coaches in this study scored higher on the emotional exhaustion section of the burnout test. However, trait anxiety was the greatest predictor for burnout among both male and female coaches. Coaches who approach their work feeling nervous and worried tend to be more burned out no matter what their gender (Vealey et al., 1992).

The following studies were done exclusively on high school coaches. Dossett's (1982) study on secondary school coaches in Nebraska discovered that 95% of the coaches had one or more symptom of burnout. In Pastore's and Kuga's (1993) study on coaches of women's track and softball team in the states of Iowa, Ohio, and Wisconsin found that the overall degree of burnout for the male coaches was average while the female coaches were found to be in the average to high levels of burnout. Oregon was the site for the next study. One hundred ninety three teacher/coaches were studied to identify their level of burnout. The researcher found that the secondary public school teacher/coaches were in the moderate range for burnout (Kosa,

1990). In a study conducted in six western states of high school basketball teacher/coaches found the mean score for total burnout of coaches was at the medium level (Sisley et al., 1987). Finally, a study was recently conducted on Wisconsin girl's basketball coaches. Wegge (2002) reported that in her study the overall degree of burnout for all coaches was moderate to low. In her findings, there was no significant difference in male and female coach's level of burnout.

Each study has concluded that burnout is evident among coaches, however, each found a different level of prevalence for burnout. Some studies suggest that female coaches are more susceptible to burnout. Burnout is real issue in the coaching profession. The issue needs more study on how to help coaches cope with the stressors involved in their profession.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Description of Methodology*

This study was measured through a research survey originally developed by Dr. Betty Kelley. The original Coaching Issues Survey (CIS) was modified to eliminate questions that were not relevant to high school coaches. Each question was analyzed for mean score and the percentage of subjects indicating high or extreme levels of stress.

#### *Subjects*

The population for this study was identified through the 2003 online Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) directory. There were forty varsity high school football coaches identified from the following conferences in Western Wisconsin. The Dunn-St. Croix, Middle Border, Large Cloverbelt, Small Cloverbelt, and Heart O' North were the conferences used in this study. These conferences were selected because of their close proximity in enrollment size and the proximity to each other.

#### *Instrument*

An email containing an introductory letter, consent form, and a web link to the instrument were sent to the subjects requesting them to participate in the survey. The Coaching Issues Survey (CIS), developed by Dr. Betty Kelley and modified by the investigator, was used for the collection of data. Five items, from Dr. Kelley's original thirty-question survey were removed because they dealt with the recruitment of players. The researcher removed these items because recruiting is prohibited in high school football. Respondents used a Likert-type scale from "no" (1) to "extreme" (5) to rate the level of stress in the various areas. The modified survey was

transferred onto a web page and then the link was activated (Appendix A). The survey was constructed so that all twenty-five questions needed to be answered before the survey could be submitted.

### *Procedures*

An online survey was sent to the forty subjects identified on October 15, 2003. Each subject received his survey through his email account. The initial email included an 1) introductory letter 2) consent form and 3) the link for the survey (Appendix B). Data collection was timed so that it would occur near the end of the high school football season. The time of the year where stress might be greatest. Completed surveys were sent to the Webmaster at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Results were then forwarded onto the researcher. On November 18, 2003 coaches received a second e-mail reminding them that if they had not completed the survey to do so (Appendix C).

### *Data Collection*

Completed surveys were collected by the Webmaster at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Results were then available to the researcher for data analysis through PHP Easy Survey Package, version 1.3.

### *Data Analysis*

The researcher, using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows eleventh edition computer program analyzed the collected data. Results for each question were examined to determine the mean scores for each question. Then each question was analyzed to determine which ones had greatest percentage of respondents answering with high or extreme stress.

*Limitations*

Methodological limitations include the lack of control over the number of times a subject could complete the survey. Subjects could submit more than one survey. Another limitation was not knowing if the email containing the survey was ever opened and read. None of the emails were not returned to the researcher because of an incorrect email address, but it is unknown if all the coaches use their email account regularly.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### *Results*

The purpose of this study is to determine the level of stress in various areas of high school head football coaches in Western Wisconsin. The study sought to determine the three most common areas of stress. The study also determined which questions had the greatest percentage of coaches responding with high or extreme stress. The SPSS for Windows, Eleventh Edition, was used to analyze the data.

On October 22, 2003, forty surveys were sent to the subjects. Twenty-three surveys were returned within one week. A second email was sent to the subjects on November 20, 2003 and one more survey was returned. Twenty-four surveys were analyzed at a return rate of 60%. Raw data results for all responses are available in Appendix D.

Objective number 1: The three areas of stress with highest mean score include:

1. Placing pressure on myself to win, question number 17, had the highest mean score with 3.875.
2. Substantial number of hours spent working in a day, question number 23, had the second highest mean score with 3.667.
3. My career as a coach interfering with my family and/or social life, question number 12, was third with a mean score of 3.583.

Table one displays the mean data for all survey questions.

Table 1.

Mean Score for Each Question

| <b>Question</b>   | <b>Mean</b> |
|---|-------------|
| Placing pressure on myself to win.  | 3.875       |
| Substantial number of hours spent working in a day.   | 3.667       |
| My career as a coach interfering with family and/or social life.  | 3.583       |
| Player's inconsistency in executing the fundamental skills or game plan.  | 3.458       |
| Handling defeat.  | 3.417       |
| Not reaching my coaching goals.   | 3.375       |
| Not having time for myself.   | 3.125       |
| Momentum turning against my team during a game.   | 3.125       |
| Not having enough time to devote to my coaching responsibilities.   | 3.042       |
| Making decisions that are not popular with my players.  | 2.917       |
| Injury to one of my starters or top players.  | 2.917       |
| Not successfully fulfilling my responsibilities outside of coaching duties (teaching)   | 2.833       |
| Inconsistent judgment calls during a game.  | 2.792       |
| Not successfully fulfilling my responsibilities outside of coaching duties (speaking engagements, committee assignments, etc.). | 2.792       |
| Not being able to hire adequate assistant coaches and support staff.  | 2.750       |
| Understanding my athletes' emotional responses and motivations.   | 2.667       |
| Being concerned that my players will not be eligible for the next term.   | 2.583       |
| Negative media coverage.  | 2.542       |
| Being able to help my players grow personally, as athletes and as people.   | 2.500       |
| Being a source of help to my athletes.  | 2.333       |
| Personality conflicts with my players.  | 2.208       |
| Not knowing the criteria by which I will be judged.   | 2.125       |
| Being a "role model" for my players   | 2.083       |
| Inadequate travel budget for contests with highly competitive teams.  | 1.917       |
| Other sports or campus events conflicting with my team's use of facilities.   | 1.833       |

Objective number 2: Determine which questions had the greatest percentage of respondents answering with either high or extreme stress.

1. Placing pressure on my self to win, question number 16, had the greatest percentage.  
75% (n=18) coaches responded that this internal pressure level was either high or extreme for them.

2. Not having enough time to devote to coaching responsibilities, question number 3, was ranked second with 54.1% (n=13).
3. Handling defeat, question number 22, also had 54.1% (n=13).
4. Substantial hours spent working in a day, question number 23, 54.1% (n=13).

Table two is sorted by the frequency of subjects reporting high or extreme stress.

Table 2.

Percentage of Respondents Answering High or Extreme Stress

| Question  | Frequency | %    |
|---|-----------|------|
| Placing pressure on myself to win.  | 18        | 75   |
| Substantial number of hours spent working in a day.   | 13        | 54.1 |
| Handling defeat.  | 13        | 54.1 |
| Not having enough time to devote to my coaching responsibilities.   | 13        | 54.1 |
| My career as a coach interfering with family and/or social life.  | 11        | 45.8 |
| Players inconsistency in executing the fundamental skills or game plan.   | 11        | 45.8 |
| Not reaching my coaching goals.   | 11        | 45.8 |
| Momentum turning against my team during a game.   | 9         | 37.5 |
| Not having time for myself.   | 8         | 33.3 |
| Making decisions that are not popular with my players.  | 6         | 25   |
| Injury to one of my starters or top players.  | 6         | 25   |
| Not successfully fulfilling my responsibilities outside of coaching duties (teaching).  | 6         | 25   |
| Not being able to hire adequate assistant coaches and support staff.  | 6         | 25   |
| Inconsistent judgment calls during a game.  | 5         | 20.8 |
| Not successfully fulfilling my responsibilities outside of coaching duties (speaking engagements, committee assignments, etc.). | 4         | 16.7 |
| Understanding my athletes' emotional responses and motivations.   | 3         | 12.5 |
| Being concerned that my players will not be eligible for the next term.   | 3         | 12.5 |
| Being able to help my players grow personally, as athletes and as people.   | 2         | 8.3  |
| Not knowing the criteria by which I will be judged.   | 2         | 8.3  |
| Inadequate travel budget for contests with highly competitive teams.  | 2         | 8.3  |
| Negative media coverage.  | 1         | 4.2  |
| Being a source of help to my athletes.  | 1         | 4.2  |
| Personality conflicts with my players.  | 1         | 4.2  |
| Being a "role model" for my players   | 1         | 4.2  |
| Other sports or events conflicting with my team's use of facilities.  | 0         | 0    |



### *Unanticipated Findings*

No unanticipated findings were found in this study.

### *Summary of Findings*

Findings from the research questions of this study indicate that high school head football coaches in Western Wisconsin perceive putting pressure on themselves to win as the highest stressor related to their professional lives. In addition, the hours spent working and coaching interfering with their social and family life were also considered as common areas of stress. Sources with the least amount of stress come from include inadequate travel budgets and conflicts arising from the use of facilities.

This survey also discovered that eighteen (75%) of the respondents reported that internal pressure placed upon themselves to win was either ranked high or extreme stress. Thirteen (54.1%) respondents indicated that the number of hours spent working in a day, handling defeat and not having enough time to devote to coaching responsibilities were also high or extreme stress for them. Conversely, conflicts with the use of facilities (0%), negative media coverage (4.2%), being a help source (4.2%), role model (4.2%) for players and personality conflicts (4.2%) from the interaction between coaches and players as areas with the least intense sources of stress.

In summary, it appears that coaches perceive that greatest source of stress comes from an internal source. They tend to place a significant amount of pressure on themselves to win, ranking as the top score in both statistical areas researched. The coaches also find that the many hours spent working and not being able to spend time with their families as other sources of stress.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to determine the levels of stress in the various areas of Wisconsin high school head football coaches. An additional purpose was to identify any areas of high or extreme stress.

Results of this research indicate that the internal pressure to win was the highest source of stress and with the greatest intensity. Theobald (1991) also found that that self-imposed pressures are leading areas of stress. In addition to this internal pressure, the substantial number of hours working in a day was reported as a high source of stress. This is consistent with Theobald's (1991) and Wu (1991) findings that time restraints cause stress. Areas where low levels of stress were reported include the conflicts arising with the use of facilities and inadequate travel budgets with competitive teams. In addition, the relationship and interaction with players whether it is personality conflicts, sources of help, or being a role model were also areas of low overall stress.

Research indicates that coaching and teaching have been characterized as a volatile, high stress occupation involving many pressures. (Capel et al. 1987 & Pastore et al., 1992). Stress is necessary to function, but elevated levels of stress over long periods can lead to physical problems. If stress and stressors are not managed properly, they can lead to occupational burnout.

Many studies have also been conducted on the effects of burnout among coaches. Burnout affects coaches and teachers at a higher rate than any other public service profession (Schamer et al., 1996). Most studies have reported that female coaches are more susceptible to

burnout than their male counterparts (Kelley, 1994 Pastore et al, 1993Vealey et al, 1992).

Results of these studies are all unique, yet they offer some insights into areas of stress among coaches.

Ruder (1991) listed twelve stress-reducing strategies to help coaches manage stress. Techniques included organizing and planning for the season, developing a positive rapport with administrators, scheduling time for family, and learning more about their sport by attending clinics and workshops. Other ideas for reducing stress were meeting with parents before the season so expectations and goals for the season are understood, as well as, building a positive relationship with them, acknowledging time restraints, planning for career options, promoting positive relationships with all team members, and preventing panic situations by preparing for unexpected situations. According to Ruder (1991), the most important stress management strategy is self-monitoring. Getting enough sleep, eating properly, and eliminating destructive habits are very important for successful stress management. Coaches can reduce the stresses of their occupation by implementing the strategies proposed by Ruder (1991).

### *Limitations*

There were several limitations to this study. These include only selecting football coaches from Western Wisconsin, selecting schools with small enrollment, and not collecting demographic data from the subjects. Another limitation to this study was there were no questions on the effects of parents leading to stress. Previous research indicated that parents contribute to a major source of stress (Wegge, 2002 & Theobald, 1991).

### *Conclusions*

Coaches are susceptible to the effects of burnout, with the majority of coaches experiencing some level of burnout during their careers. How a coach perceives and handles that

stress is an individualistic phenomenon. Stressors that lead to burnout can come from both internal and external sources. Western Wisconsin high school football coaches reported that the stress with greatest intensity comes from within, the pressure to win. Theobald (1991) also concluded that internal pressures are the greatest sources of stress in coaches, which is consistent with this research. The subjects also indicated that the lack of time and the number of hours spent working in a day were areas of stress. Theobald's (1991) and Wu's (1991) findings identified these sources of stress as well. Coaches tend to be motivated, high achieving, and goal oriented, all characteristics for people who become burnt-out. Although coaches are unable to separate stress and burnout from their profession, learning and implementing coping strategies may help coaches deal with the pressures they will experience.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the results of this study the following recommendations may help to direct future research. The Coaching Issues Survey should have questions addressing what role parents play in the lives of coaches. Further research should focus on identifying strategies that help reduce the level of stress and burnout among coaches. Coaches need to identify and understand the risk factors that can lead to occupational burnout. Studies should also focus on coaches who have already left the profession and investigate why they chose to leave. It may be difficult to find coaches who are no longer in the profession.

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## APPENDIX A

**Coaching Issues Survey**

Please rate the DEGREE to which each issue described below causes or produces stress in your coaching situation.

DEGREE:

| 1            | 2             | 3                  | 4              | 5                 |
|--------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| NO<br>Stress | LOW<br>Stress | MODERATE<br>Stress | HIGH<br>Stress | EXTREME<br>Stress |

DEGREE (1-5)

ISSUES:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Understanding my athletes' emotional responses and motivations.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Not having enough time to devote to my coaching responsibilities.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Negative media coverage.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Other sports or campus events conflicting with my team's use of facilities.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Personality conflicts with my players.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Not successfully fulfilling my responsibilities outside of my coaching duties (i.e. teaching).
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Not being able to hire adequate assistant coaches and support staff.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Not having time for myself.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate travel budget for contests with highly competitive teams.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Being a "role model" for my players.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Making decisions that are not popular with my players.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ My career as a coach interfering with family and/or social life.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Not reaching my coaching goals.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ Not knowing the criteria by which I will be judged.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ Injury to one of my starters or top players.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Placing pressure on myself to win.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ Players' inconsistency in executing the fundamental skills or game plan.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ Being concerned that my players might not be eligible for the next term.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ Inconsistent judgment calls during a match.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ Being able to help my players grow personally, as athletes and as people.
21. \_\_\_\_\_ Momentum turning against my team in a match.
22. \_\_\_\_\_ Handling defeat.
23. \_\_\_\_\_ Substantial number of hours spent working in a day.
24. \_\_\_\_\_ Not successfully fulfilling my responsibilities outside of my coaching duties (i.e. speaking engagements, committee assignments, etc.)
25. \_\_\_\_\_ Being a source of help to my athletes.

## APPENDIX B

Dear Coach,

I am a coach and graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. As a coach, the stressors involved with coaching intrigue me. I am asking you to fill out a short survey about coaching and stress.

Dr. Betty C. Kelley, an Exercise Physiologist at Arizona State University, created the Coaches Issue Survey. The survey consists of 25 questions, which you will be asked to rate from one to five, one being low stress and 5 being extreme stress. I feel this topic is an extremely important one and needs to be studied. I realize that your time is extremely valuable and the survey can be completed online in 10 minutes. I hope you will find the survey interesting and provide me some valuable feedback concerning this topic. The answers you give will be kept confidential. If you are interested in the results, I can provide them to you.

We want to keep good coaches in the profession. By completing this survey, you will help me to identify issues that are important for new coaches. Below you will find a consent form. Please read and then click on the link to access the survey. <http://www.uwstout.edu/survey/birdm.html>

Sincerely,

Mike Bird  
UW-Stout  
244 Johnson Fieldhouse  
715-232-1423  
[birdm@uwstout.edu](mailto:birdm@uwstout.edu)

### Consent Form

I understand that by returning this questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Mike Bird, the researcher, at (715) 232-1423 or by e-mailing [birdm@uwstout.edu](mailto:birdm@uwstout.edu). Dr. Steven P. Terry, the research advisor can also be contacted with concerns at (715) 232-2161 or by e-mailing [terrys@uwstout.edu](mailto:terrys@uwstout.edu). Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI 54751, (715) 232-1126.



## APPENDIX C

Dear Coaches,

Thank you for responding to my survey, your help is greatly appreciated. If you have not filled out the survey (it takes less than 10 minutes), it can be found at <http://www.uwstout.edu/survey/birdm.html>.

If you cannot click on the link, move your mouse so the pointer on the link and hold down the control key (this will turn your cursor into the hand) and left click with your mouse and it should direct you to the survey. You can also cut and paste the address into internet explorer.

Thanks for your help,

Mike Bird

UW-Stout

244 Johnson Fieldhouse

715.232.1423

[birdm@uwstout.edu](mailto:birdm@uwstout.edu)

## APPENDIX D

Raw Data for Each Question

| <b>Question<br/>Number</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>Low</b> | <b>Moderate</b> | <b>High</b> | <b>Extreme</b> | <b>Total<br/>Responses</b> |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 1                          | 1         | 9          | 11              | 3           | 0              | 24                         |
| 2                          | 2         | 8          | 13              | 1           | 0              | 24                         |
| 3                          | 0         | 1          | 10              | 9           | 4              | 24                         |
| 4                          | 10        | 8          | 6               | 0           | 0              | 24                         |
| 5                          | 2         | 16         | 5               | 1           | 0              | 24                         |
| 6                          | 4         | 4          | 10              | 4           | 2              | 24                         |
| 7                          | 3         | 6          | 9               | 6           | 0              | 24                         |
| 8                          | 2         | 4          | 10              | 5           | 3              | 24                         |
| 9                          | 11        | 6          | 5               | 2           | 0              | 24                         |
| 10                         | 7         | 9          | 7               | 1           | 0              | 24                         |
| 11                         | 1         | 6          | 11              | 6           | 0              | 24                         |
| 12                         | 0         | 3          | 10              | 5           | 6              | 24                         |
| 13                         | 1         | 5          | 7               | 7           | 4              | 24                         |
| 14                         | 4         | 15         | 3               | 2           | 0              | 24                         |
| 15                         | 0         | 9          | 9               | 5           | 1              | 24                         |
| 16                         | 1         | 3          | 2               | 10          | 8              | 24                         |
| 17                         | 0         | 2          | 11              | 9           | 2              | 24                         |
| 18                         | 2         | 10         | 9               | 2           | 1              | 24                         |
| 19                         | 1         | 9          | 9               | 4           | 1              | 24                         |
| 20                         | 3         | 8          | 11              | 2           | 0              | 24                         |
| 21                         | 0         | 6          | 9               | 9           | 0              | 24                         |
| 22                         | 1         | 3          | 7               | 11          | 2              | 24                         |
| 23                         | 0         | 2          | 9               | 8           | 5              | 24                         |
| 24                         | 2         | 7          | 11              | 2           | 2              | 24                         |
| 25                         | 5         | 7          | 11              | 1           | 0              | 24                         |
| <b>Totals</b>              | <b>63</b> | <b>166</b> | <b>215</b>      | <b>115</b>  | <b>41</b>      | <b>600</b>                 |