

# **Practical Recommendations for Transitioning from Student-Athlete to College Coach and Implications of Covid-19**

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*Abstract:* Attaining a first collegiate coaching position as a former student-athlete can be overwhelming, tedious, and intimidating. After candidates apply for a particular coaching position, interviews usually follow. Even though there is some literature addressing early academic career positions, there is little research regarding student-athletes securing an initial college coaching position. Additionally, literature regarding best practices for college athletic coaches moving from one academic institution to another is also limited. This article provides recommendations for candidates pursuing their initial college coaching position and securing further college coaching positions. Although this article focuses on early career college coaching positions, most of these recommendations can be applied to any coach early on in their career. This article incorporates personal experiences, athletic search committee evaluations, athletic administrator feedback, faculty input, Title VII regulations, Title IX regulations, marginalized communities' implications of Covid-19, as well as recommendations for the resume, interview process, and negotiation of contracts. These important components are associated with attaining a college coaching position.

*Keywords:* Covid-19, college coaches, student-athletes, Title VII, Title IX, early career

## **A Pathway Toward Securing a College Athletic Coaching Position**

A multitude of collegiate athletic coaching positions are occupied by individuals with previous sport playing experience, either professionally or collegiately. Colleges vary greatly on their expectations of coaches and their coaching backgrounds. Some assistant coaching positions can lead to head coaching positions or other positions within the athletic department. Recent student-athlete college graduates pursuing college coaching may not be prepared for this profession, as many of these graduates have not focused systematically on a college coaching career. Additionally, recent student-athlete college graduates who seek graduate degrees and take on college coaching positions as graduate assistants might not be familiar with faculty, staff demands and expectations, faculty careers, and coaching differences among various academic institutions.

This article incorporates personal experiences and the experiences of colleagues. The purpose of this article is to highlight common guidelines regarding student-athletes who seek an initial position in collegiate athletic coaching. This paper will include personal experiences, athletic search committee evaluations, athletic administrator feedback, faculty input, Title VII regulations, Title IX regulations, marginalized communities, implications of Covid-19, as well as recommendations for the resume, interview process, and negotiation of contracts. This article focuses on the attainment and acceptance of a college coaching position and a coaching position that involves moving from one academic institution to another.

### **Part One: The Application Process and What to Expect**

Applying for college coaching positions can be overwhelming, tedious, and intimidating. At times, the job application or the hiring process can be ambiguous, leading to a misunderstanding of job expectations. Uncertainty associated with the college coaching job application process can even prevent one from employment as a college coach. In addition, the university's search committee could be biased. Biases during this process can compromise marginalized communities within the applicant pool, which can interfere with the integrity of the decision-making process. While higher education search committees are essentially representative, committee members still retain their own biases regarding age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and so forth (Leske, 2016).

Higher education athletic departments rely on people with specific skills to help their department succeed and face the array of challenges in intercollegiate sports. While there have been studies of hiring practices regarding top athletic administrators, there is limited research specifically addressing the hiring procedures of entry-level athletic personnel (Stahura et al., 2004; Stier & Schneider, 2004).

Many first-time coaches begin their collegiate coaching careers as graduate assistants or assistant coaches and have a bachelor's degree with experience either playing or coaching the sport (Colorado State University, 2020). Graduate assistants are usually offered assistantships for a nine-to-10-month period with tuition remission and a stipend. Most higher education jobs are advertised during the fall (Zackal, 2014). The hiring cycle, however, can last an academic year. Usually, candidates are offered positions by spring if they are beginning employment the following fall semester (Zackal, 2014). Even if the applicant lands an assistant coaching position, the applicant will probably have to relocate upon acceptance of the position. Often, obtaining a position in a preferred specific geographic area can be difficult, so candidates might have to adjust their job goals accordingly.

### **Title VII, Title IX, and College Coaching**

#### ***Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964***

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 “prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin” (Civil Rights Act, 1964).

It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or to otherwise discriminate against any individual with respect to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex or national origin. (*Civil Rights Act, 1964*)

*The intention of Title VII was to offer comprehensive safeguards and eliminate discrimination at work. "Although Congress enacted Title VII primarily to confront racial discrimination in the workplace, courts have struggled to properly address the prevalence of subtle racial discrimination that plagues today's minority employees" (Ritenhouse, 2013, p. 88). Racial bias has become more surreptitious, and it is challenging for the untrained observer to detect (Ritenhouse, 2013). "Because the pervasive and subtle nature of this discrimination goes beyond easily understood and identifiable types of racial bias, the statutory and judicial techniques developed to combat overt racial discrimination are simply ineffective against this evolved type of discriminatory treatment" (Ritenhouse, 2013, p. 88). Subsequent to the passage of Title VII, implicit bias still occurs in the workplace (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).*

### ***NFL and NCAA***

African American head coaching football candidates in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and National Football league (NFL) encounter numerous challenges in their pursuits to become head football coaches: "...black coaches rarely get the opportunity to lead the best football programs ..." (Hill & Purdy, 2012, p. 24). "The hiring process is simply not in place for minority coaches to get the best shots at the best jobs" (Hill & Purdy, 2012, p. 25). Outmoded, groundless, and implicit biases have seeped into hiring processes that contribute to the systematic exclusion of competent African American head football coaching applicants. "At the end of each season, when head coaches were fired or stepped down, very few African American and minority candidates were interviewed for the job openings-and only a small fraction of those interviewees were being hired" (Hill & Purdy, 2012, p. 19).

**Rooney Rule.** In 2003, the Rooney Rule was created mandating "that every NFL team interview at least one minority candidate upon the vacancy of a head coaching position" (Collins, 2007, p. 871). The Rooney Rule had a significant positive influence on the possibility that a minority applicant would be hired as a head coach in the NFL (Dubois, 2016), as it allowed for a more diverse and wider applicant pool. In 2011, the NFL employed a record seven African American head coaches (Johnson, 2019). At the start of the 2019 season, however, only three African American head coaches were employed (Johnson, 2019). Although legislation ameliorates some bias, it is difficult to change people's hearts regarding stereotypes and stigmas (Johnson, 2019).

### ***Bias in Athletics and Higher Education***

Reducing bias in the nexus of athletics and higher education is easier said than done. "Racial minorities in the US have a history of facing stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination-a pattern that continues today" (Cunningham, 2021, p. 3). These biases can affect the under-representation of minorities in coaching.

**Russell Rule.** Recent advances are being made to expand equity, diversity, inclusion, and antiracism within the NCAA. In 2020, The West Coast Conference adopted the Russell Rule requiring “each member institution to include a member of a traditionally underrepresented community in the pool of final candidates for every athletic director, senior administrator, head coach and full-time assistant coach position in the athletic department” (West Coast Conference, 2020).

### *Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972*

It has been almost 50 years since Title IX was passed, but the percentage of females coaching women’s collegiate teams has significantly decreased (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; 2014). Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, enacted June 23, 1972, is a law protecting people from discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs receiving federal financial aid. It wasn’t until 1978 when schools had a mandated compliance date for Title IX (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). The three-prong compliance test for Title IX stipulates:

- (1) The number of male and female athletes is substantially proportionate to their respective enrollments; or
- (2) The institution has a history and continuing practice of expanding participation opportunities responsive to the developing interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex; or
- (3) The institution is fully and effectively accommodating the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex. (U.S. Department of Education, 2020, p. 1)

Title IX restructured the college sport landscape, particularly since 1978, as universities began to add opportunities that more than doubled the sports offered to females in higher education (Benbow, 2015). In the 1980s, universities began adding the senior woman administrator role within athletic departments as the NCAA absorbed the previous women’s collegiate sport administrative body, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (Hoffman, 2010). In spite of these progressions, female coaching positions have primarily been filled by males, as men were reported to account for more than two-thirds of vacant women’s coaching positions (Greenwell, 2012). Over 57% of males coach women’s teams. Only one out of five NCAA sports teams are coached by a female (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; 2014). The passage of Title IX provided women’s sports with money and generated more jobs. These jobs, however, went to men. “The representation of females among the ranks of head coaches for men’s teams remains low, between 2 to 3.5%, near where it has been since before the passage of Title IX” (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012, p. 17).

In 1972, 90% of women’s teams were coached by women. By 2014 that percentage dropped to 43% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Sports with a huge decline in female coaching included tennis, track and field, and basketball. In 1978, 72.9% of the tennis coaches were female. By 2012, the number plummeted to 29.9%. In 1978, 52.3% of track and field coaches were female. By 2012, the number dropped to 19.2%. In 1978, 79.4% of basketball coaches were female and by 2012, the number fell to 59.5% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Although Title IX has helped increase the enrollment and participation of women in sports, it has had an adverse relationship with female coaches. In 1972, nine out of 10 coaches for women’s teams were

female. In 2014, four out of 10 coaches for women's teams were female. Ninety-seven out of 100 coaches of men's teams were male (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

Even though it has been close to 50 years since Title IX was passed, the percentage of female collegiate coaches has significantly declined (Stark, 2017). From 1972 to 2010, about 2% of females coached men's teams (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). The percentage of female coaches for women's college teams dropped from 90% in 1972 to 44% percent in 2002 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). At the NCAA Division I level, female coaches have been mostly restricted to coaching women's sports whereas men have been able to coach women's and men's sports. This discrepancy can significantly impact a female applying for a NCAA collegiate coaching position.

### **Networking, Contacting Coaches, and Resume**

Building relationships is essential when a candidate is searching for a college coaching position. Networking is important, as it enables candidates to promote quality relationships that could lead to interview opportunities. Networking allows candidates to benefit from personal connections instead of depending exclusively on a resume.

Additionally, candidates applying for a college coaching position could contact head coaches, assistant coaches, and sport-specific athletic department staff prior to applying for a job. Candidates can also contact the head of the search committee. Making these contacts are important, as they display a candidate's sincere interest in the coaching position while simultaneously providing the candidate with an opportunity to make a quality first impression. Making these initial contacts assists the applicant in gaining a greater understanding of the position's requirements, duties, and responsibilities. Initial contact can be made through e-mail or phone. This contact should be brief, focusing on asking a few pertinent questions that relate to the cover letter and resume. In addition to the application form, employers utilize the resume most often to screen job applicants (Farr, 2011). Some questions to ask during the initial contact might be: What are your recruiting requirements? What is your recruiting process? What is the daily and weekly schedule for your program? What are your team's athletic and academic expectations?

A candidate should avoid asking questions that are clearly stated in the job description. Information garnered from the initial contact can be used in the resume. A college coaching resume should be one to two pages and free from typographical, grammatical, and punctuation errors (Farr, 2011). The resume should include specific skills, accomplishments, and credentials (Farr, 2011). Transferable skills developed as a student-athlete should be highlighted. Some of these skills can include time management, self-motivation, teamwork, and leadership (Texas Christian University, 2017). When submitting a resume, it is important to "...highlight specific parts of your past that demonstrate that you can do a particular job well" (Farr, 2011, p. 16).

One day after the interview, the candidate should send a thank-you note to everyone on the search committee (Farr, 2011). Sending a thank-you note gives the applicant "... a great advantage over all the competing job seekers who don't take time to do this. Thank-you notes can be handwritten or typed on quality paper and matching envelopes or e-mailed" (Farr, 2011, p. 373).

## **Application Process**

Some of the duties an assistant athletic director is generally responsible for within the athletic department is hiring, evaluating, and supervising personnel. In addition, the assistant athletic director is also responsible for ensuring athletic program equity, Title IX regulations, compliance with NCAA rules and regulations, and representing the athletic department on various committees (Penn State University, 2020). The assistant athletic director, in consultation with qualified staff and other appropriate department personnel, can appoint a search committee. The search committee is usually comprised of individuals concerned with decisions made within the school's athletic department. External committee members can also be included in the committee, as they provide an outside perspective (Valdosta State University, 2018).

Criteria that includes certain duties and required and preferred qualifications should be used to judge all candidates. All applicants must be treated equally throughout every phase of the evaluation and selection process (Valdosta State University, 2018). Candidates who do not have the minimal qualifications might be excluded from future consideration. Candidates who are under consideration might be contacted via phone call or email to determine if they are still interested in the job. During this time, candidates can clarify certain items such as the selection process, timeline, and any athletic department questions. The committee might telephone or video chat candidates with a set of predetermined questions. Also, the committee could contact candidate's references with a set of predetermined questions. During this process, the committee members might document all conversations, as this documentation is part of the committee file. The committee can then rank candidates for an on-campus interview (Valdosta State University, 2018).

The head of the search committee usually contacts the Athletic Director with selected applicants for campus interviews. These applicant recommendations are reviewed. Applications are then submitted for approval from the Office of Affirmative Action. Upon approval, applicants can then be interviewed (Valdosta State University, 2018).

## **The Interview Process**

The search committee and other qualified staff prepare for the interview process by reviewing search protocol outlined by university policies and procedures. During the interview process, all applicants are to be treated equally (Valdosta State University, 2018). The head of the search committee is responsible for developing and assisting each candidate's interview itinerary at the university. This can include travel arrangements and reimbursement (Valdosta State University, 2018).

### ***Interview – Virtual/ In-Person***

Candidates should treat a virtual interview as though it is a face-to-face interview (Glodz, 2020). They should dress appropriately to make the best impression in both situations. In an in-person interview, candidates should make good eye contact with the interviewer. According to Glodz (2020), in a virtual interview, candidates should look directly into the camera, the background should be clutter-free and clean, and lighting should complement a candidate's face. Candidates should also prepare a series of questions for after the interview pertaining to the position. Some recommended questions may include: How is an employee evaluated in this role? What are the opportunities for growth and development within the organization? Can you describe the organization's culture? (Green, 2020). Bringing in five questions to an interview for the search committee is recommended, as a few questions may be answered during the interview. Candidates should never ask about vacation time or personal time off, salary, or general benefits during an interview. Instead, candidates should save these questions for the contract negotiation phase after a position is offered.

### **The Job Offer**

Candidate evaluation forms are usually used by the search committee to provide feedback on interviewed applicants. Finalists are ranked and a list is submitted to the Athletic Director (Valdosta State University, 2018). After an applicant is selected and approved, the search committee discusses an informal offer with the applicant. If this offer is accepted, salary negotiations will be addressed. As soon as a salary and other terms and conditions are agreed upon, the Athletic Department will send the candidate an official offer and contract (Valdosta State University, 2018).

A job is usually offered by phone or email. In the event a candidate is offered a coaching position, the candidate can now decide to accept or decline the offer. If the candidate chooses to accept a position, negotiations can be considered prior to the candidate's acceptance of the offer. Depending on the institution, some components of the position can be discussed. These can include salary, relocation reimbursement, professional development, summer opportunities (Hull, 2018), and tuition reimbursement.

On the first day of hire, candidates should arrive early, dress professionally and appropriately, and bring ID for completing new hire paperwork. Most likely, on the first day candidates will attend an orientation program which will include benefit programs offered to university employees.

## **Part Two: The Second Coaching Position**

### **Changing Jobs and Reasons to Leave**

Advancement in coaching is boosted by experience, knowledge, skills, and confidence. A candidate should envision their next coaching career move by assessing their skill set and knowledge with the necessary skills and experience needed for a new coaching position. New

career moves, both upward and lateral, can broaden a candidate's coaching network. A larger network can favorably affect future career changes.

There are various reasons why a coach might consider moving from one higher education institution to another. Some reasons include a better salary, athletic conference, environment or location, colleagues, facilities, and working conditions.

### **Covid-19 and College Sports**

The Covid-19 pandemic has been adversely affecting numerous collegiate athletic programs and their budgets. Universities and administrators are reexamining coaching salaries and staff positions are being reassessed. Several university athletic departments have laid off personnel, furloughed staffers, and have had coaches take pay cuts (Meyer, 2020). In particular, many non-revenue sports are being eliminated due to cutbacks (Moody, 2020; Ott & Lawrence, 2021).

There are 51 Division I programs, 56 Division II programs, and 52 Division III programs that are slated to be cut due to budgetary reductions or university closures associated with Covid-19. Popular sports being cut include golf and tennis for both men and women (The Associated Press, 2020). In August 2020, the University of Iowa announced the elimination of the following sports: men's gymnastics, tennis, swimming and diving, and women's swimming and diving after the 2020-2021 school year (Bohenkamp, 2020). The College of William and Mary will eliminate seven varsity sports after this year (Johnson, 2020). These sports include men's and women's gymnastics, swimming, and men's track and field and volleyball. University of Michigan's athletic department, in its goal to reduce expenses, has stopped hiring, instituted salary reductions and freezes, and eliminated 21 positions. Texas Tech University's athletics department is eliminating 40 staff positions and reducing the salary of its current employees. The [University of Nebraska](#) has furloughed 51 employees (Nietzel, 2020). Covid-19 has had a major negative economic impact on college athletic departments across America. Due to the reduction of sport programs in universities, coaching positions have decreased, networking opportunities have dwindled as industry conferences and events have been canceled, and new college coaching opportunities have been eliminated.

### **Conclusion**

This article offers insightful advice for applicants seeking a college coaching position. It is especially relevant with the disruptions of this current unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic environment. A myriad of factors should be considered when a person launches a new job search. Presently, certain collegiate sports are vulnerable to the negative economic impacts of Covid-19. Networking with other collegiate coaches, either in person or online, is essential during this pandemic crisis. An applicant who played a sport or is currently employed as a graduate assistant coach or volunteer assistant coach may have an inside track to certain coaching positions. Aspiring early career college coaching candidates should seek mentors, attend conferences, either virtually or face-to-face, and collaborate with colleagues within the athletic department. Familiarizing oneself with the hiring process can be an asset to an applicant seeking a career in collegiate athletic coaching.

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