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## Athletics as a Life Curriculum: Lessons Learned Through Different Aspects of Athletics

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ATHLETICS AS A LIFE CURRICULUM: LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH DIFFERENT  
ASPECTS OF ATHLETICS

by

T.J. DAVIS

(Under the Direction of John Weaver)

ABSTRACT

For my dissertation, I decided to write a memoir to have the opportunity to go through the self-reflection process and learn more about my inner self. I wanted to learn how the life experiences I write about have affected me as a student-athlete, coach, teacher, parent, and how they have shaped me into who I am today. I took instances from my life in athletics that I believe are significant in the development of my overall being. Educational scholars such as William Pinar (1995, 2004), John Dewey (1916/2019, 1933), Frederic Gros (2011), Immanuel Kant (1908/2015), Nel Noddings (2005), and Paulo Freire (1970, 2005) were influential to me throughout this process in the area of curriculum while memoirists such as Claudia Mills (2004), Judith Barrington (2002), Mary Karr (2015), and Donald Hall (1993/2003) were instrumental in framing my understanding of memoirs. Authors Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2008) were significant in my understanding of Self-Determination Theory as well as John Scott (2000) in the area of Rational Choice Theory. Through curriculum theorizing and the reflections of my experiences, I have learned that athletics has a place and can be beneficial to the students-athletes who participate in them. I have also learned the importance of my position of a leader both as a teacher, coach, and parent. As I reflect, I come to terms with the emotions and thoughts my experiences stir and learn my journey is far from over. My findings include how and why I handled situations the way I did, and how I would handle them differently now. I include what I

have learned about how I can influence my students, players, and children in ways that will help them be successful academically, athletically, and personally. I realize how my experiences have affected my teaching, coaching, parenting, and the affect I have on my students, players, and family members. As I have grown and matured, the lenses and perspectives that I look through to see the world have increased, which will allow me to better connect with everyone around me.

INDEX WORDS: Student-athlete, Student, Athlete, Academics, Athletics, Baseball, Cardiology, Life lessons, Curriculum, Education, Transposition of the great vessels

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## DEDICATION

I would not be where I am if it was not for my family. They have supported me beyond more than I could have ever imagined. My wife Mary, and my three children Mason, Grace, and Blake have been my reason for this journey. Without them, I would not have started, nor would I have finished. This is not something that I did for myself, I did it for my family.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There have been many people throughout this journey who have supported me. First and foremost, my family. They have been with me every step of the way. I could not have done this without them. Coworkers, classmates, and coaches I am blessed to be friends with have all helped to make this possible. I can never repay the amount of support and encouragement you gave as I voyaged on this journey. Thank you.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	3
CHAPTER	
PROLOGUE .....	5
1 MEMOIRS, CURRICULUM THEORY, AND ATHLETICS.....	24
2 ATHLETICS ND EDUCATION.....	56
3 ALL MEN WERE CREATED EQUAL, THEN SOME BECAME ATHLETES .....	77
4 THE BUMP AND THE DISH .....	108
5. THEY WILL BE EVERLASTING.....	134
6. REFLECTIONS.....	153
EPILOGUE.....	182
REFERENCES.....	185

## PROLOGUE

In order to provide my story, I must start with what I believe makes me unique. I was, let us just say, a blessed and lucky little person at the age of zero, and I did not want to take the opportunity at a second chance at life for granted. When I was born, I was blue and had a very small chance at survival. I was diagnosed with Transposition of the Greater Vessels. In layman's terms, my heart pumps backwards. I have never known anything different, so it is the everyday normal for me. There are also mental and emotional components that go along with the physical. I believe that because I have had to face the world differently, the wear and tear come from the mental and emotional stresses of my condition more than the physical. The most prevalent example I have is when it is time for my yearly check-up. I get very concerned and overly anxious about what my cardiologist might find or see. I know physically everything is going well, but there is a worry that grows exponentially the week leading up to the appointment. So far, all my worry and anxiousness has been for nothing, but it is the process I go through every year. My concern is that something will need to be addressed and it will affect how much I can do or the time I have left with my family. I would be able to tell if something were to not be right, but I allow myself to overly worry and believe in the minute percent of a chance that something may be wrong. Because of this I cause more stress for my family and myself as I look forward to that day to be over. Of course my health is important, but it does not help to fret and worry continuously. Most people that know of my condition take it in stride, probably better than myself in some instances. But some people, which are very few because I do not tell many, give me a gasp and ask a handful of concerned questions. I answer them as in depth as they can understand, turn around, and continue with whatever task it was I was doing before the conversation started. This is how that conversation usually goes:

Questioner (Usually my older students or players) – What is something about you we don't know?"

Me – "I've had a couple of heart surgeries."

"Really? Why? What happened?"

"I was born with a closed circular system and I couldn't get oxygen to my blood. They did the Blalock-Hanlon when I was born."

"What does that mean? What is that?"

"They cut me open from here to here (under right pectoral, cutting to the right, to under the right shoulder blade,) and inserted a balloon to create a three chambered heart for a while."

"What was the other surgery you had?"

"It's called the Mustard procedure. That's the name of the Doctor who developed it. They took the atrium portion of my septum and made a baffle out of it to create a fourth chamber. They then had to replumb everything, so my aorta goes to my lungs and my pulmonary veins go to my body. Basically, the right side of my heart pumps blood to my body and my left side pumps it to my lungs."

"Do you have any issues?"

"No. I go for a check-up at the pediatric cardiology unit once a year. I know, an old guy walking into a pediatric office, but I'm comfortable with them and they have been great."

"Hmm, so that's what's wrong with you?" (some laughter)

"Yeah, I guess so." (much less laughter)

And that is about it. The most entertaining conversations I had as a student were when the service academies would call during my senior year in high school. They would introduce themselves and talk about all the opportunities I would have if I joined. I would then tell them

my story, and then I would get, “Well, sir, you have a wonderful day and good luck.” I started trying to cut them off before they got into their telemarketing spiel to try and save them some time. The most awkward conversation I had to have was with Coach Chaplain at Montreat College. I had been invited to a baseball camp at Duke University and I ended up in his group. Each group had about fourteen players and he was by far the most energetic coach there. Throughout the week he took time getting to know each one of us. I was by far not as talented as some of the other guys in the group. I had what I thought to be a pretty good showing throughout the week. As pitchers, we threw some flat grounds, a bullpen, and scrimmage innings at the end of the week. I did well, I got outs, and did my best to behave as an appreciative ballplayer should. The fall semester of 1997 got underway at the end of August. About three months later, Coach Chaplain calls me and says he would like to offer me a scholarship. First, I was astounded, then appreciative, and finally, excited. I had a little while to think it over and he would call back. When he did, I had just gone through my yearly check-up and my cardiologist, Dr. Strong, and he were not thrilled with the results. He was concerned about a few things. I started medication and was told to pay extra attention to my exercises, weightlifting, and running. If anything felt abnormally wrong, I was to contact the office immediately. He ran tests on me while I was weightlifting in an old office building next door they had changed into a facility where they could test during athletic workouts. Basically, a stress test laboratory. When Coach Chaplain called back, we had to explain to him what I had and what we were going through. Of course, we had put that information on the registration form for the camp, but I am sure if the physical we sent in said “healthy,” they did not pay it any certain attention. He was beyond understanding and stood by his offer anyway. He was supportive and offered to help in any way. I am sure the explanation of my condition cleared up why I was always last with long

distance running, but he did not seem to mind that. I went back to the cardiologist right before Christmas break and was retested again. Everything came back normal or better. Dr. Strong explained that he had presented my case to a convention of cardiologists in Virginia and they did not agree with his philosophy. His philosophy was if the benefits outweigh the risks, he would allow me to do whatever I felt that I could do, to an extent. Once it became reversed, we would have to take another approach. Well, it never reversed and at this point, he was talking about a seventeen-year-old athlete who was offered a college scholarship, and that idea did not coincide with the medicinal thinking at the time. People who have what I have are not supposed to be able to do the things I have done. There are usually complications in the early years, but there was progress in solving those issues by the time I was born. Luckily, my surgeries were in the late stage of those eras, so they had much better chances of success. Dr. Strong acknowledged that he got scared about what he was allowing me to do and just wanted to be extra cautious. Everything turned out well and I was able to go to college and play the sport I love.

To me, it is just a part of life. With the condition I have, I was “supposed to expect” limitations and enjoy a simple, not too stressful life; becoming a college athlete was not on anyone’s radar. With the surgeries I have endured and condition that I have, many sports were off the table. No football or other major contact sports – too much of a hit would crush the chest – basketball, soccer, or any other endurance sport was not an option – the process of oxygenated blood getting back to my muscles is a longer process than the normal process and I get winded faster than others. So now, as a four-year-old, I need something to do. I have no idea how I got started, but some of my earliest memories are from around age four in Mentor, Ohio, playing baseball. We moved to Georgia when I was five. My dad was a college athlete and my mom ran track in high school, so my parents had an understanding and love for sports/athletics that was

very noticeable for me, even at a young age. Columbia County was, and still is, a baseball talent heavy area; three county high schools have totaled seventeen state championships with a substantial number of players signing college scholarships and playing in the professional ranks. A few of the notable professional players are Todd Greene, Michael Leverett, Vernon Thomas, Derek Beasley, Josh Wirsu, Brandon Cumpton, Tydus Meadows, Nick Sandlin, Rich Poythress, and Jake Gilbert. As a young child, my parents took us to Evans high to watch as much as we could. Since I was always playing baseball, we would go watch Evans at whatever sport they were playing at the time. To them, exposure to and an understanding of all athletics and sports was just as important as being good at one.

As a student-athlete at Evans high school, I played for a legendary coach, Terry Holder. He won five state championship at Evans and three more when he left to open a new high school in our county, Greenbrier. He was the one teacher in the school everyone was afraid of. He was tough, demanding, serious, and wanted each student and player he encountered to be their very best. He knew how to motivate young people and pushed them well beyond their self-perceived limits. As a freshman with a heart condition, Coach Holder was not real sure how to handle me. Tuesdays and Thursdays in his first period weight training class were running days. Pitchers were afforded the luxury of swinging a sledgehammer into a load of sand. Privately to me he would say, "They've got seventy-five reps, you can do fifty." When we ran the mile for time, he would say, "Try to make it in ten minutes, but don't die on me trying if you can't." He said it in a way that he was looking out for me, but I took it as a challenge to match what his other players could do. I could do more, and wanted to do more, than he thought I could, because I did not want to seem as though I could not handle the demands a *normal* student-athlete should be able to handle. He was a great motivator and taught his students and players the importance of a good

work ethic and to never think they have reached their limit. There is always another step that can be taken or another challenge that can be met. After my sophomore year, he left to open Greenbrier and our next coach was Chris Segraves. He had the same expectations as Coach Holder, but he had a different style. He was a good motivator, understood baseball, and wanted the best for his students and players, but he was more open as a communicator and could talk to his players about anything. It was a little looser atmosphere with Coach Segraves, players were more open with him and each other. These are the two men that really inspired me to become a teacher and a coach. I was able to see them influence countless students' lives and make them better people by pushing them to be their very best, including myself. When I went off to Montreat College and played baseball there, Coach Chaplain was a mixture of both Coach Holder and Coach Segraves. Although I was three hours from home, I felt a little better knowing that he bore some similarities to my hometown coaches; tough, demanding, a good communicator, wanting his players to be their best on and off the field. Coach Chaplain gave me a sense of comfort, of home.

Whitlock (2007) discusses the idea of homeplace and that there is a sense of comfort and accessibility to it. She writes, "I write to shape homeplace into an idea that I can embrace, one that will embrace me right back" (p. 82). The idea that homeplace can be anywhere that one feels comfortable. For me, my homeplace has long been the field, and more specifically the mound. I feel at home and share it with people I love and enjoy. By understanding Whitlock's (2007) message, I have become more aware of how to see the world and where I fit in. My story is not only about acknowledging my homeplace, but also finding ways to remove my sense of comfort so I may grow and develop into a more well-rounded person. As an educator and a coach, I believe this is important so I can better reach my students and players. As a parent, I believe this

is important so I can better prepare my children for the challenges they will face when they venture into the world on their own. The similarities among my coaches are the things that really matter when it comes to athletics. Coaches must be able to reach their players and help them understand that they can be better than they were when they got there. Throughout that process, becoming a better player is almost inevitable. These three men understood that and made a lasting impression on a great number of young people. Once I became a teacher and a coach, I wanted to instill the same qualities these three men instilled in me. To push my students and players to be the best they can be. As a middle school teacher and coach, I worked to prepare those students and players for their high school experiences. As a high school teacher and coach, I work to prepare them for life beyond high school, regardless of the possibility of athletics being involved in their future. I have many conversations, especially with my juniors and seniors, about the lessons they have learned from their respective sports and how they can apply what they learn to their individual school experience or life situation outside of school.

Athletics has been a big part of my life. I was never very social or brave enough to take a chance at something, but athletics helped me to shed the lack of courage and try something new. I had just enough skill to be good, and while I was on my journey, I learned a thing or two about life along the way. There are lessons throughout athletics that allude the smartest and most routine people but are embraced by the ones who see the big picture clearly enough to understand why the lessons are important and how they can be applied to their own lives.

As a college athlete, athletics gave me an opportunity to work for an education while still competitively playing baseball. As a teacher and coach, athletics has given me an opportunity to impact student-athletes and make a positive difference. I am passionate about this topic because I can see how student-athletes can grow and change through the lessons they learn from their



individual sport. These lessons are all transferable in some way among the different sports, but when the student-athletes put in the dedication and commitment into both their athletic ability and the life lessons that are being taught, they mature and become better people, which in turn, provides the fuel for them to become better athletes. Athletics also gives some student-athletes a purpose to complete school and a reason to strive for academic success. In my case, I would not have been successful in the academic portion of my high school career if not for athletics.

Baseball is what forced me to keep my grades up and work towards the goal of graduation. I am not a good example of a great student, but I am a great example of a struggling student who figured out what mixing academics and athletics together can do, but one does not happen without the other. I see some of my players going through the same things I did as a high schooler, struggling with the school the same ways I did. I take it upon myself to help them recognize the issues keeping them from being successful and teach them how to overcome them. Because of the athletic opportunities I have had, I am where I am today with the opportunity to continue the education and molding of young student-athletes. I also understand that the lessons they can learn during their time in athletics will help them to grow, mature, and see the world in a variety of ways. Hopefully, I will impact them in a positive manner and influence them to do well once they leave our program.

I have been fortunate enough to coach a few players who earned enough scholarship money to pay for their education as well as offered an opportunity to play baseball. One player went to Francis Marion and became a dependable pitcher – eventually their closer – and an academic standout on his team and in his conference. In high school, he was a regular high school student with some athletic talent. He continued to apply the lessons he learned at Francis Marion and demonstrated the possibility that a student-athlete can excel at both aspects of the

term. Another player had to go through Tommy John surgery. This is where a ligament in the throwing elbow is either repaired or replaced. He went through it twice. After the second time, he became a successful pitcher at USC Aiken and helped them to make a playoff run. While he was going through these surgeries, he continued to work towards his degree and maintain his eligibility.

Both players played for a state championship in 2010, their senior year. We lost to Marist high school out of Atlanta. Marist also beat us the year before in the elite eight. Those two players along with the other returning seniors, always talked about getting back or progressing further than we did in 2009. They learned that the key to a successful program is to continue to push themselves to become better, a good team chemistry, and to focus on the positives while addressing the negatives. Specifically, these two players grew as individuals. The change started with them applying those lessons to their personal lives and it spilled over into their athletic abilities. Over their high school career, they turned into good young men and above average baseball players. Throughout their college careers, they developed into exceptional young men and true assets to their institutions. Some athletes in these situations would not have pushed themselves as hard and be as determined as they were to succeed. I am of the belief that these players were successful, as different as their paths were, because of the life-lessons that they learned through athletics. They understood what it took to be successful, no matter the setting, and pushed themselves to reach their goals. These are the unseen components of athletics. The benefits that student-athletes gain from the lessons they learn in their sport help them to be more successful in life. Many of the lessons are transferable among the sports, although presented in different ways. Because of this, athletes from different sports can relate to each other and the different challenges they encounter along the way. Athletics is not a topic that dominated my

class discussions throughout my Curriculum Studies program. While there is a variety of dissertation topics athletics affords, I chose to focus on what athletics provides in the sense of student-athletes. Student-athletes make up a substantial percentage of our high schools and colleges, and I believe it is important for them to understand what they can take away from their experiences and apply to the rest of their lives. I also wanted to learn more about myself and my journey from a baseball player to a coach to a student in a doctoral program. It is important that I understand what I have been able to take away from my athletic experiences and how I apply those lessons to the operation of my classroom and baseball program.

While I will concentrate on the athletics portion of high school, I am aware that academics has a greater emphasis. I do not want to minimize the importance of a solid education and the various learning dynamics that take place in the classroom. Without the academic foundation in the classroom, the connection to the lessons on the field are lost in translation. When the connection of academics and athletics is made, the connection to the reality of the world is much greater. Pinar (1975) declares, "Perhaps then we can grasp again the significance of academic studies and the potential contributions they can make to our lifetime" (p. 17). What is learned throughout students' academic careers is important to each one of them in a unique way. All students are geared toward certain disciplines and topics, but it depends on how they apply the knowledge they acquire and the extent they allow it to influence their lives. The level of influence can turn into passion, which brings those students to life, it invigorates their passion for learning. Those types of influences and passions are evident in athletics as well. Athletics becomes a part of a student's identity whenever they choose to take that role on. While I do teach literature to juniors and seniors, I am also the head coach of the high school baseball team.

Because of my experiences in athletics and the classroom, I feel I am in a unique position to share my story and the lessons I have learned through athletics.

I became a literature teacher because I see the power of words and stories. I enjoy reading and I believe stories can give us new perspective on a subject, teach us a new lesson, or show us a different path to achieving a goal we have in mind. Very rarely do I have a student who plans on becoming an English major in college, so I teach the stories in a way that my students understand the important messages the author is writing to convey. It is not always about the characters and the plot; it is more about the makeup and development of the characters, the actions that create the plot, and the lessons they can take from the stories. Since I teach the upper classmen, I believe it is important for them to see how other people, fictional or not, work through problems and make decisions that affect them for the rest of the time we get to know them. The reality of going out into the world is more eminent for those students, and I work to find readings they can learn from and adapt to their own lives. I do not perpetuate the “concept of banking” in my education practices. Freire (1970) discusses this concept and how “the people themselves are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in the (at best) misguided system” (p. 53). Although I am the one responsible for delivering educational and helpful information to my students, I must not forget they have a contribution to the conversations as well. Their intellectual property can enhance our endeavors that we take together through education in the classroom and on the field. We must communicate constantly so they can feel as though they have an investment as we take on the formidable learning we all go through.

I enjoy being an academic teacher and a coach. I get to see how our athletes are in the classroom. When I talk to a coach about players or write a letter of recommendation for them, I

can give a better description of what those student-athletes are like academically, as I often get questions about what our student-athletes are like off the field. I feel as though I can give a more accurate answer because I teach a core subject. My students and I will get into conversations about colleges and the varying levels of degrees. The question always comes up, “What degrees do you have?” I go through the ones I have and discuss my experiences in the doctoral program. I have brought some of the books I have read to class to discuss with my students the certain points that may be beneficial to them. I believe them seeing their teacher still in school has a positive impact on them, especially with me being a coach, as coaches are not usually seen as academics by trade. Hopefully, they see the dedication I have for them in the classroom, on the field, and to myself and family as I continue my educational journey. My players know I am in a doctoral program and I believe this helps them to see the importance of education. I believe it is good for them to see a person in a leadership role have the desire to continue learning. I want them to understand education can continue throughout their different life stages.

As an eighteen-year teaching/coaching veteran, there has been a noticeable shift in the mentality of the students we encounter. Not that the shift is bad or good, but the students are different than when I first started. I believe that a lot of that has to do with their access to technology and the avenues of communication and information gathering that are available now. For my last focal point, I want to have a better understanding of how athletics can stand the test of time and the fast-paced technological improvements to stay relevant in the lives of our student-athletes. This is a question that I am not sure will have a full answer by the end of this inquiry, but I am hoping for a better understanding of how to maintain athletics’ relevance and how I can advance the field forward. I want to be able to help our student-athletes grow as young

adults. To do this, I believe I need to have a better understanding of my own story. As the stages of life change, so do the stages of an athletic career.

As a coach, I want to know and understand what student-athletes take away from their experiences in athletics. Once student-athletes leave the athletic realm and begin to focus on life after sports, I believe the lessons they learn by participating in athletics influences their decisions, behaviors, family choices, and life paths. I want everyone involved in education but not involved in athletics to understand the role athletics plays in the development of the young students we are charged with fostering. The possibilities of opportunities to further their education and playing career can lead to impacts on the localized societies they move to. I want other educators to see how athletics is another vehicle to help students become better people, and becoming a better athlete is a byproduct of the lessons they learn. I am also hoping for parents of these students to understand that athletics is an identity, but that it does not define their child. Time and time again, as a high school coach, I have seen where parents are more concerned about their child's possibility of playing a sport or advancing to the next level to the point that all other issues surrounding that student are ignored. When this happens, the student is usually not very successful outside of the protection of his/her parents. As a result, those athletic careers come to an end much quicker than anticipated. This is when I wish those students and parents would take a step back and learn from their situation.

Although I am not one to hunt the spotlight, I have been told more than once that I have a unique story; one that should be told because not everyone understands the struggles of what student-athlete life is like mixed with a health issue or two. This also allows me the best opportunity to learn about myself and understand how and why I am the person that I am now. As my story continues, I want to have a better understanding of how I got to where I am today

and how much the world of athletics has influenced me. I also want to understand my connection more deeply with athletics in the sense of place. In *This Corner of Canaan*, Ugena Whitlock (2007) explains, “Place unclouded is central to the study, as interplays with social and cultural politics to inform and be informed by curriculum” (p. 2). In her memoir, Whitlock (2007) strongly focuses on the idea of place and how it has shaped her and her views of the world. I believe it is important to learn about one’s place, both physically and theoretically to the function of the universe. My story will focus more on my place in athletics and how I fit into the world. Doll (2000) conveys, “One does not “suffer” being to become more alive when one closes oneself off from the universe. Opening out is unskinning, and unskinning is experiencing an intrinsic interrelatedness, fusing, confusing” (p. 162). Writing this memoir will allow me to set myself free of the bonds I have personally put on. Like any shedding or unskinning, the process is not pleasant, but there is ample opportunity for me to grow and develop into a better teacher, coach, and person because of it. This process is necessary to make room for the new person I will become. Doll (2000) goes on to say, “To shed skin is to be inside and outside at the same time; it is to reconcile oneself to all that exists” (p. 162). Being inside and outside of my own skin will force me to see the world through other lenses, as well as help me to understand and appreciate the perspectives that are different from my own. This is an opportunity for me to make amends with some of my decisions I have made and the paths I have taken and learn how they have directly affected the people involved in those situations.

I am aiming to find the specifics that have either pushed or drawn me to athletics. As each person is different, so are the individual milestones that have driven each person to “buy in” to the idea of athletics and what their specific sport can provide. To better understand this information through the writing of this memoir, I need to focus on the following:

1. How has athletics shaped me as a teacher/coach/person?
2. How does what I do daily affect the students and athletes I am in charge of?
3. How can I teach my students and athletes better, so they are prepared for life after high school, and possibly after athletics?

The purpose of my inquiry through memoir is to examine the personal challenges, difficulties, milestones, setbacks, and successes that I have encountered throughout my interactions and experiences in academics and athletics. I expect to come away with a better understanding of myself and how academics and athletics has shaped me at the end of this inquiry. However, I do not believe I will have a complete understanding as I will continue to learn in both realms once the inquiry is over. After I complete this memoir, I am hopeful that I will be able to apply the lessons I learn and discover as I go through the processes of rediscovering my daily life. I also hope to inspire student-athletes to take a second look into their athletic experiences, reflect on what lessons they learned, and apply those lessons to their daily lives. I want to be able to show student-athletes that competition is a positive thing; in sports, in the classroom, and in life as it can be a necessity that can prepare them for life outside of high school.

My dissertation consists of life experiences and certain people that have been important in my evolution into a more educated person. Because of the academic environment my memoir is housed, I must include concepts and theories developed by authors and educators that support my assertions. Chapter one focuses on the importance and connections of memoirs, curriculum theory, and athletics. Memoir is a valuable genre as it gives a glimpse into the important experiences of individuals' lives. Some of the authors that I have read and helped me along my journey are Mary Karr (2015), Sven Birkerts (2008), Denis Ledoux (2006), and Beth Kephart



(2013). These authors helped to make the path clear for me to write my own memoir as they discussed the different viewpoints and techniques. Studying through the eyes of curriculum theorists such as Robert Lake (2010), Mary Doll (2000), William Pinar (1995), Ronald Reed and Tony Johnson (1996), and Paulo Freire (1970) helped me to form an understanding of the variety of lenses I can view the world.

Chapter two focuses on the balance of academics and athletics. Students working to become athletes and balancing high quality academics along with it can be a challenge. Learning through play is a major part of growing up as students develop physically and cognitively. Authors such as Friedrich Schiller (1795/2016), Paulo Freire (1970), and Christine Green (2008), discuss these subjects and make the clear connection between academics, athletics, and the dependency each has on the other. Martin Lynch (2010), Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000), and John Scott (2000) discuss the concept of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and how athletes must have it in order to succeed and survive in the ever-changing athletics arena. My journey through the Curriculum Studies program has led me to some significant information that meshed well with the concept of athletics. A few of the authors I will explore are John Dewey (1933), Nel Noddings (2005), and Frederic Gros (2011). Through the instruction I have enjoyed in my classes, these authors are key to the knowledge I have gained and I am applying in my everyday education of my students and players. They discuss the importance of play in education and the opportunities for personal exploration it allows. To help with this aspect, I have also included writings from Herbert Marsh and Sabina Kleitman (2003), Chris Barker and Emma Jane (2016), and Christine Greene (1988). These authors give perceptive insight concerning athletics and what they offer to young students.

Chapter three focuses on the identity of athletes. The choice to be a student-athlete is not an easy one, nor are the consequences that come along with it. Trying to fit in with different personalities can be difficult for high school and college student-athletes. In this section, I include writings from Craig Lambert (1998), Michel Foucault (1977/1995), Rebecca Symes (2010), and Jacques Derrida (2000). It also discusses the connection of the importance of equally mixing academics and athletics through the collegiate level. Writers such as Daniel Bowen and Colin Hitt (2013), Plato, and Michel Serres (1995) discuss the necessity of academics and athletics balancing each other. I also examine the topic of athletes leaving behind their athletic identity and the sometimes difficulty of that process. Erin Reifsteck and Iain Thomson (2014) contribute to this section with their knowledge and understanding of losing one's identity and what it means for the individual afterward. The focus then transitions to players holding onto their athletic identity and becoming coaches. It is difficult to stop playing competitively and learn how to teach the game to others. Teachers and coaches are important to education and I use Michael Coffino (2018) along with my own experiences and examples of former players who have become coaches to demonstrate their importance.

Chapter four focuses on competition. On the field and in the classroom, competition is necessary and can be intense. I examine writers such as Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2006), Catherine Drane and Bonnie Barber (2016), as well as an example of John Scolinos (1996) to help illustrate the different uses of competition in education and athletics. I then concentrate on the use of competition as a tool to motivate student and players alike. Walt Whitman (2007), Robert Harrison (2014), and Admiral William H. McRaven (2017) discuss how competition can be used and the effects it has on people with different perspectives. The final portion of this chapter focuses on the negative effects of competition and how it can impact the ones who take it

too seriously. Writers such as Craig Lambert (1998) and Alfie Kohn (1992), as well as an experience I had to grow from highlight the influence of too strong of a competitive nature.

Chapter five focuses on what athletes take away from their athletic experiences. First, I discuss the impact of athletics and the responsibility the athletes have when it comes to themselves and the self-direction they must take. I include Ludwig Wittgenstein (1980) along with many examples of well-known sports figures to support these ideas. Second, I focus on the comfort zones of athletes and finding their place. Stories from John Wooden (2004), Roy Williams and Tim Crothers (2009), and Joan Cronan (2015) highlight this portion and explain the importance of athletes finding their footing. Finally, I discuss the overall affect athletics has and how athletes take the lessons learned and apply them to other aspects of their lives. Jenny Moshak and Debby Schriver (2013) are lone writers in this section as my story accompanies and highlights their points.

Chapter six focuses on the findings and realizations I have come to during my venture of self-reflection as I wrote my stories. I discuss what I discovered as I went through the process of writing a memoir as well as the how to truly self-reflect and discover new things about myself I never knew were there. My findings will include my growth and maturity, the importance of using different lenses and perspectives to view situations through, and what I want my students, players and children to learn during the time I have with them. I realize how my experiences have affected my teaching, coaching, parenting, and the affect I have on my students, players, and family members. I also discuss areas of potential extensions of my study and where other fields could be explored.

The epilogue discusses what is going on with athletics presently. The changes due to Covid-19 and how they have forced the athletic world to adjust and continuously adapt to ever-

changing protocols has forced athletics to a new level of organization and preparedness. I discuss some changes at the national level as well as what I have experienced at the high school level.

## CHAPTER ONE

## CURRICULUM STUDIES AND MEMOIRS: HOW THEY RELATE TO ATHLETICS

This chapter focuses on the importance and connections of memoirs, curriculum theory, and athletics. Some of the authors that I have read and helped me along my journey are Mary Karr (2015), Sven Birkerts (2008), Denis Ledoux (2006), and Beth Kephart (2013). My journey through the Curriculum Studies program has led me to some significant information that meshed well with the concept of athletics. A few of the authors I will explore are John Dewey (1933), Nel Noddings (2005), and Frederic Gros (2011). To help with this aspect, I have also included writings from Herbert Marsh and Sabina Kleitman (2003), Chris Barker and Emma Jane (2016), and Christine Greene (1988). These authors give perceptive insight concerning athletics and what they offer to young students.

**“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” – John Dewey**

Through my educational journey in Curriculum Studies, I have come to understand that life’s stories are how we supplement the fabric of humanity. It is through our experiences that we grow and become more comprehensive people, which directly influences our presence in the classroom. In Brian Casemore’s (2008) book *The Autobiographical Demand of Place: Curriculum Inquiry in the American South*, he discusses the idea that if we challenge our memories and life experiences, we can enhance the education of the students that sit before us in our classrooms. These types of lived experiences delivered as stories will help our students see the world from a different perspective. As Casemore (2008) shares, it is through the space of autobiographical undertakings that we can “begin curriculum inquiry, curriculum inquiry specifically concerned with rejuvenating marred capacities for historical understandings” (p. 16). As an educator who teaches students with a multitude of backgrounds, it is crucial that I consider

my life experiences through the scope of Curriculum Studies to better understand my own positionality within the universe. I believe it is important for them to know and understand how my own experiences shaped who I have become and how I am present in the classroom and on the field. It is also important for my students to consider and interpret my pedagogical decisions.

I must be honest in sharing that I once thought my story was nothing but ordinary, not worthy of telling. Studying through the eyes of curriculum theorists such as Robert Lake (2010), Brian Casemore (2008), Mary Doll (2000, 2017), Ugena Whitlock (2007), William Pinar (1975, 1995), Ronald Reed and Tony Johnson (1996), Maxine Greene (1988), and Paulo Freire (1970, 2005), I have come to see the merit of human experience in a much more sophisticated way. In *Reconstructing multicultural education: Transcending the essentialist/relativist dichotomy through personal story*, Robert Lake (2010) testifies, “Every voice needs to be heard, not lowered to the least common denominator” (p. 45). Sharing human experience through autobiographical avenues is how we connect with each other, how we empathize with one another, and how we ultimately become more comprehensive in our understanding of the world around us. This directly impacts my students as the act of writing my own memoir not only challenges me to push further towards a more in depth understanding of my position, but pushes me to realize the limitations I may have once not seen. Reconsidering my experiences through the stages of writing a memoir allows me to apply newly learned theory from Curriculum Studies and see my life in a much different way, proving to be one of the most influential tasks of my life. What I have come to realize through memoir is that my story *does* matter because it shares a piece of humanity, stories that may influence some or even be a source of comfort or connectivity for others. I hope that readers who are new to what I have dealt with will see it as an inspiration, an education, or a change in perspective. In *The Mythopoetics of Currere: Memories*,

*Dreams, and Literary Texts as Teaching Avenues to Self-Study*, Mary Doll (2017) states, "What one selects to write about, who one's friends are, what habits one has developed, the mistakes one makes, the people one hates: these, upon reflection, can tell a story about the thread of one's life that connects all happenstances" (pp. 27-28). As educators, when we process our memories and lived experiences through personal reflective writings, such as memoirs, we are more able to recognize these nuances that make us who we are. When we better understand who we are in this way we can begin to reach beyond our realities towards understanding the positions of others. Through this lens, we can begin to understand those with whom we have been disconnected. Working towards understanding our own lives through these personal reflective writings and stories builds within us a sense of openness, hopefully leading towards more tolerant and beneficial teaching.

In his book *Telling stories*, Lee Martin (2017) explains, "Memoirs are different animals. They work best when focused on a specific arc of time or when they're organized around a particular consideration" (p 29). The particular considerations I am writing about are my experiences throughout athletics as both player and coach. I will focus on my times at the different levels as a player and what I learned from each stop along the way. I will also discuss what brought me to coaching and why I believe it is important for me to teach through that capacity. Martin (2017) continues to write,

Know what your own experience was—a logical progression from point A to point B, perhaps, or a mosaic of events, associations, meditations—and find the form and shape that will best allow your reader to have the same experience. (p 29).

My experiences cannot be someone else's experiences. I am hopeful the readers will see the ebbs, flows, and culminations of those experiences and the meaning they have to me, although

they will not have the same reactions, understandings, or emotional investments. As I write, I am sure it will be more of a mosaic of events than a direct path from A to B. My memoir allows me the opportunity to articulate my narrative in a meaningful way so that I may work towards prompting an intellectual response from myself and learn from my own life. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) discusses the necessary understanding of reality. He states,

When people lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality. To truly know it, they would need to have a total vision of the context in order subsequently to separate and isolate its constituent elements and by means of this analysis achieve a clearer perception of the whole. (p. 85)

Throughout my coursework in Curriculum Studies, I have learned to view topics and issues of importance with a critical eye to better discern the reasons behind them and how to solve them if need be. Without viewing my story with a critical eye, I cannot continue to grow and nurture the ability to connect with myself and my students/players. For my story to be understood, I must include context and reflect critically on my experiences so readers can get a sense for the entirety of the events. By reflecting critically, I also have the opportunity to see the other side of my ideas, arguments, and rationalizations of decisions. This will also help me flourish as an educator, coach, and parent. When the opportunities are presented, I must be able to teach my students, players, and children how to view the world through a multitude of lenses and from a variety of perspectives. Pinar (1975) also discusses the importance of understanding one's reality when he states, "One can observe how one places upon reality one's ideas, and how, with currere, one can allow reality to release its own ideas" (p. 15). By writing this memoir, I am working towards excavating myself to find a way to learn the ideas of reality. With self-reflection, I will



have the opportunity to set aside my own agenda and rationalizations and take into consideration the reality of where I am in the world. I want to avoid losing meaning in the abstraction of the world and discover the place that I belong.

Stories bring the world to life. We all have numerous ones of ourselves, although reluctant to tell them depending on the company we are in. Some of the stories are worth more than others. The truth is we can never be too sure which ones will carry the most weight with someone. I never considered memoir as my choice of inquiry for my dissertation until later in the process; but as a reader, I have always enjoyed the autobiography/memoir genre as I gained a deeper insight into the authors' lives. I believe the development of a memoir allows the author to truly self-reflect and learn about the path he/she took throughout the journey that is the focus of the writing. Mary Doll (2017) writes,

To navigate the difficult passages of one's journey in life, one needs a thread. It is the thread that connects one not only to the exit but to the entrance, to one's beginnings...Forgetfulness protects us from discovering or uncovering our ghosts... (p. 28)

Memoir affords us this navigation. Through the process of challenging our memories and facing difficult emotion, we alleviate the ease of forgetfulness that, by nature, promotes recurrence of tragedy. As a coach and educator, my thread is my connection to my students. In my stories, I hold fast to the urgency that is my responsibility to all my students. Reliving my stories, though often difficult, grounds me in human emotion. Knowing the backgrounds and family circumstances of my students, some of them face this same emotion daily, quite possibly on a deeper level without anyone in their home life to guide through. Memoir, through this thread, places me in a different place in my life, a place where I can remember those vulnerable feelings

and fears. In *Like Letters in Running Water*, Doll (2000) declares, “To have no stories, to lack memory, to have a mouth but no words is to keep oneself in a constant state of hunger” (p. xvii). As she argues the need for the deeper connection people crave, I begin to realize that my story could satisfy the craving people have for the investment in a story worth believing in. As a literature teacher, I understand and stress the importance of stories to my students. I have grown to appreciate the development of stories and the intellectual and emotional pull they have on the writer. The combination of being a literature teacher and coach is a rarity in the high school setting. I believe having the perspective of an academic teacher makes my connection with athletics unique. I am able to understand and empathize with their academic expectations because I am aware not only of the rigorous expectation in my class, but the amount of time it takes me to prepare my lessons. I strive to transfer that type of planning and work ethic to my baseball program so my players can learn what it takes to be successful not only in baseball, but also life beyond the game.

In his article *The Method of Currere*, Pinar (1975) asserts that currere is the best route to learn about one’s self. He believes it is crucial to take stories of the past and learn from them for the future. Pinar (1975) states,

We can try to generalize on the basis of the stories we tell and the ones we hear others tell, taking them as evidence of a sort, and attempt to formulate in general terms the broad outlines of past, present and future, the nature of our experience, and specially our educational experience, that is the way we can understand our present in the way that allows us to move on, more learned, more evolved than before. (p. 17)

As I write this memoir, I want to be able to engineer my story telling a certain way to prompt a personal response from myself so I can continue to grow as a teacher and a coach. Personal

stories are sometimes overlooked and passed on when it comes to the scrutiny of academic tools. After studying in the program of Curriculum Studies, I have learned that there are a few different ways to uncoil myself and find a new dimension to my intellectual and emotional development. Telling my personal story will give me the sense of freedom that is rarely felt in education. In *Love, Justice, and Education: John Dewey and the Utopians*, William Schubert (2009) discusses the philosophies of John Dewey and how they apply to education today. He quotes Dewey (1933) saying, “It included faith in the capacity of the environment to support worthwhile activities, provided the environment was approached and dealt with **the right way**” (p. 207). Specifically, he is adding to the concept of *currere*. To build on this quote, he discusses the character of Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*. Schubert (2009) expresses, “Surely, a *right way* is illustrated in the conversion of Ebenezer Scrooge, by the spirits who led him to reflectivity reconstruct his life – an instance of *currere*” (p. 207). In Scrooge’s circumstance, he is shown his history from the stories of his past, his situation of the present, and his possibilities of the future. Scrooge learns from each spirit that certain situations and the decisions we make can change our life path. As I explore my history from the stories of my past, I will reflect on my situation in the present in hopes that I may improve myself for the possibilities I may have in the future. I must go through this process *the right way* and find my own path to find *currere*.

*In Philosophical Documents in Education*, Ronald Reed and Tony Johnson (2000) include a chapter on Maxine Greene and part of her article *The Dialect on Freedom* (1988). Reed and Johnson (2000) explain Greene’s ideas on the subject when they write,

Freedom means the overcoming of obstacles or barriers that one encounters that impede or obstruct our struggle to define ourselves and fulfill our potential. If one does not

understand the obstacle or recognize it as an impediment, or if one simply does not care, then genuine freedom is not possible. (p. 125)

For me, getting out of my comfort zone and writing about myself will give me a sense of freedom. Knowing that the biggest obstacle holding myself back is me, I will focus to find my internal landscape and move the impediments that are keeping me from realizing the power of my story. Greene (1988) discusses the idea that there is always something to learn when she writes, “There is always more. There is always possibility. And this is where the space opens for the pursuit of freedom” (p. 135). As I tell my story, there will still be many avenues not traveled as I explore what I have learned and how I have grown. Not all of my decisions have been correct, and there are multiple ways to study those situations and circumstances. Greene (1988) also asserts,

To recognize the role of perspective and vantage point, to recognize at the same time that there are always multiple perspectives and multiple vantage points, is to recognize that no accounting, disciplinary or otherwise, can ever be finished or complete. (p. 135)

My story is about the paths I took and the decisions I made to get there. As I contemplate those decisions, I will see the multiple perspectives and vantage points that were possible and reflect on the intellectual possibilities they can provide. Greene (1988) goes on to say,

It is a matter of questioning and sense-making from a grounded vantage point, an interpretive vantage point, in a way that eventually sheds some light on the commonsense world, in a way that is always perspectival and therefore forever incomplete. (p. 135)

Through my writing I will question my thought process throughout my story and learn from the rainbow of lenses in which those situations could be viewed. Through my experience in writing this memoir, I am hoping I will be able to show the effect athletics had on myself as a student-

athlete and how it shaped me into who I am today. I want educators to realize athletics can be a positive influence and a vehicle to help young student-athletes prepare themselves for the world outside of school and their respective sports.

**“The fact of storytelling hints at a fundamental human unease, hints at human imperfection. Where there is perfection there is no story to tell.” – Ben Okri**

There is nothing like being “in the know,” being the one with the “inside scoop” or “the skinny.” Memoirs are an opportunity for readers to get a look at the events of someone’s life from a first-hand perspective. We can find out what really happened or what was really said in some of the most important and influential times in those people’s lives. In some instances, those moments changed the course of a nation, influenced the decisions of a scientific research team, inspired a community of underprivileged people, or became the standard to which all else in that field is measured. In *The Art of Memoir*, Mary Karr (2015) says, “None of us can ever know the value of our lives, or how our separate and silent scribbling may add to the amenity of the world, if only by how radically it changes us, one by one” (p 218). Everyone has something to offer. We all have an idea of what we think is important, but depending on the reader’s life situation or perspective, a mundane story to us may be a motivational, life altering tale that helps the reader get back on track. The reader may have the feeling he/she is reading about his/her own life.

Writing one’s own life account can be a fulfilling and therapeutic process with a gratifying result at the end, yet I have found it to be the opposite, not quite torcher, but at the extreme end of difficult. I have come to recognize the necessity for self-reflection and understand how it can lead me to a new place in life. I have come to appreciate the stories of the past and reliving those experiences. What has made this so challenging for me has been the difficulty of finding time to complete the writing. Along with teaching my classes, I am coaching

high school baseball, teaching summer school, reading and studying throughout this process, working during the Masters tournament, and raising three kids. Trying to connect everything in my writings has been difficult because they seem to come in choppy increments. It has never been the work I am shying away from; time and energy seem to shy away from me. I have enjoyed the educational journey of writing and seeing how different aspects and time periods link together, but those have been discovered through the struggle of finding opportunities to tell my story. Although I have not found this to be what some would classify as enjoyable, I can see where it could be, but I see the value it has. As an English teacher, I see how writing can be a way to express ideas, events, emotions, and how they can come together to form a passion in a way that would otherwise be too difficult to describe. It is extremely hard for me to talk or write about myself. Even when I do, I normally get straight to the point. I have never been one to sit and tell stories about my adventures in life, but I have come to realize that perhaps I should share at least a few.

I chose memoir as my vehicle of writing because I believe it allows me the opportunity to relate the life experiences that are important to me and the ways they have shaped me into who I am today to my readers. Not that my recollections are any more authentic than someone else's that I include, but they are how I remember them and how they have affected me. The topic I am exploring, the themes I am captivated by, and the experiences I have lived can be clearly shown through my writing. My experiences within those themes allow me to express my concerns, wonders, interests, and pursuits in a way that I may reflect on them and learn how to improve myself as I move forward. Memoir is a genre of writing that demands the writers to take their accounts of meaningful life experiences and relate them as truthful as possible to the reader. I find power in personal stories and believe they show a glimpse into the type of people they are. I

have included the stories and people who have affected me the most through athletics and I hope they can be an inspiration to others.

The reason I am writing about myself is that I believe I have one of those stories that should be told. I am a heart patient that beat many of the odds and am living a happy and healthy life. I was a kid who was not supposed to be an athlete and ended up pitching in college. I was not a very good student in high school, but I am now working towards finishing my doctoral degree. There is nothing glamorous or gruesome in my stories I will tell, but the ones I tell are the ones that helped to make me what I am today. I believe people are inspired by the story that relays the message that although someone lives with a challenge(s), it is possible to be successful and have meaning. In *The Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading and Writing Personal Narrative*, Thomas Larson (2007) declares, “Writing memoir means that we combine what happened with how the exploration of what happened continues to affect us” (location 169). Not only am I writing my stories, but I am also dissecting my thoughts, actions, and emotions involved in those specific times of my life and how they influence me today. This is an opportunity for me to discover the deeper levels of myself and, in turn, use the knowledge I gain from this experience to improve as a person. In *Friendship, Fiction, and Memoir*, Claudia Mills (2004) further supports this as she declares,

I don't think the telling of stories is something that we should generally try our best to avoid doing or regret having done. I think a world where we didn't share stories would be a poorer world – a *morally* poorer world. (p. 113).

Although I am shy and often hold back details about my life, I am hoping to break that habit as I venture through this process. Some of it may be regretful, or embarrassing, but the only way for me to learn from those life experiences is to reflect on them as I write them out. Being a

literature teacher, I absolutely agree with Mills (2004) when she argues the world would be “morally poorer” without stories. We can make a connection with the characters and their circumstances; we can connect with their emotions and thoughts. As readers, we can see the moral compass stories can provide when we crave those extra connections and yearn for new perspectives.

When it comes to making connections, readers can make unbreakable connections to the stories they read and the inspirations they collect from them. In her book *The Power of Memoir: How to Write your Healing Story*, Linda Myers (2009) discusses the power words, and in her own case, the power of memoir. She states,

Writing a memoir turned out to be the path to a greater and deeper healing than I would have thought possible. Writing my story and translating it from imagination and memory into words on the page allowed me passage from victim to healing, taking all the separate bits and pieces of my history – my thoughts, feelings, regrets, and hopes – to weave myself whole again. (p. xvi)

Writing can be a mechanism for people to address and express life situations that are otherwise unbearable and unimaginable to talk about. The power of memoirs is that they can be the outlet for people to tell their story to find not just a healing, but a new path in life where they do not relive those circumstances repeatedly. Myers (2009) goes on to say, “Writing a memoir is like taking a journey without an exact itinerary” (p. 3). As I have weaved my stories together, I have found this to be true. There has not been any specific path I intended to follow, but the stories that have come forth are ones that have meaning to me and provide me with self-reflection and learning opportunities.



Throughout the memoir, there should be a voice. This voice should convey every thought and emotion of the writer that wishes to tell memorable stories. “Let your voice be heard” is something we tell our students in school, I have heard this in every college writing class I have taken, and it is hammered into us as teachers at professional development conferences. Writing a memoir is different. The voice is not just a component of the story, it is the backbone of the writing as a whole. In *Writing a Memoir*, Judith Barrington (2002) discusses the importance and necessity of a strong voice in memoirs. She writes, “In order for the reader to care about what you make of your life, there has to be an engaging voice in the writing – a voice that captures a personality” (p. 21). The experiences of the writer must come to life; therefore, the voice of the writer must be a driving force that is acknowledged throughout the writing. Voice is not just a necessity, but it can be the writer’s best asset when it comes to portraying his or her life stories and impacting the reader in a memorable way.

In *The Situation and the Story: The art of Personal Narrative*, Vivian Gornick (2002) mentions, “‘Good writing has two characteristics,’ a gifted teacher of writing once said. ‘It’s alive on the page and the reader is persuaded that the writer is on a voyage of discovery’” (p. 14). I am not a great storyteller. I tell what needs to be told, no more and no less. I do not feel as though I must hide anything from anyone, but I do not like the attention some of my stories would bring me. I have been pushed into the spotlight from time to time without knowing it. I have also denied the spotlight to the point people stop asking. As I venture through this process, I will need to make sure I supply the details necessary to bring my experiences to life. Writing this memoir will provide me with more than one voyage. I will be writing my life experiences, which is extremely new to me and hard for me to do. I will also consider the people and circumstances during those experiences and analyzing why they are important to me. I will learn why they are

significant milestones in my life and how they have shaped me into who I am today. When discussing the concept of *currere*, Pinar et al (1995) explains, “Stated simply, *currere* seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of his or her life” (p. 520). I believe not only have I learned lessons from my academic studies that I can apply to my life, but also from my athletic experiences as well. Reflecting on both of these aspects will allow me to have a better understanding of who I am and why I teach and coach in the styles that I do. In their article “Learning from research and Everyday Life,” Anna Neumann and Penelope Peterson (1997) discuss the concept of reconnecting with one’s self through memoir writing. They state, “A person’s efforts to re-present her everyday life reflect a deeper impulse to know and learn authentically – from her own questions, concerns, and understandings – rather than to assume unquestioningly the perspectives of presumably more knowledgeable others” (p. 229). The self-reflection that will occur throughout this writing process is exactly what Neumann and Peterson (1997) prescribe. Listening to others who are knowledgeable is important, but I cannot allow them to dictate the next steps I must take as I learn about myself. Working through the process of finding my own answers will assure that I will continue to be invested in the development of rediscovering myself.

Memoirs have come into question because of their lack of validity and the use of facts; in some cases, the lack of facts and the use of altered truths. The truth is that memoirs can be misleading. The truth can be sculpted, twisted, and worded in just the right way to show the author in the light to which he/she would like to be seen. James Frey (2003) found out the hard way. His memoir *A Million Little Pieces* was not a critically acclaimed “big hit” early on. It was when Oprah Winfrey read it and included it in her book club reading series that it became popular with the masses. Oprah Winfrey is a prime example of the sway the media has on

memoirs. All she had to do was mention it on her show and include it in her book club, and Frey's (2003) book took off as a wonderful sensation. It was on the New York Times bestseller list for fifteen consecutive weeks. With this endorsement sales took off, until questions arose surrounding the book's details. Four months later it was discovered that many nuances of the story had been fabricated and altered to create a wondrous tale. At the end of that fourth month, Frey (2003) spoke on Winfrey's show and confirmed the suspicions. His lies were so blatant that Oprah felt compelled to go on her show and criticize him for cheating the readers out of a true story and apologize for endorsing the book in the first place. By being on such a powerful platform, James Frey (2003) rose and fell within a very short time. Some would argue that not being truthful is adding to the quality of the art. Wilde (1905) says, "Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art" (p. 17). I do not believe Wilde is saying to outright lie like Frey (2003) did, but he may be arguing on the side of the embellishments that can make an uneventful story seem like a wondrous tale. Although the embellishments may take from the truthfulness of the stories, some argue that they help push the message the writer is working to get across to the readers.

This issue begs another question; do politicians rewrite history to polish their reputation, or to project a different persona onto the public? These types of memoirs not only look to alter the perception of the people who write them, but also can rewrite certain pivotal and powerful events in history; including the personal history of the authors who played integral parts in those historical events. There is a 1964 Supreme Court ruling, *New York Times Co. vs Sullivan*, that outlines what constitutes libel and falsehoods. It states that actual malice must be proven to be able to hold that person liable. Cassie Sustein (2014) explains it in her book *On Rumors* when she discusses the law involved in writings of questionable substance. She states, "Under the First

Amendment, the speaker cannot be held liable simply because they spread falsehoods. The Court also ruled out the negligence standard for public officials, even though that standard is common in most domains of the law” (p. 77). This gives some protections to the public officials when it comes to their writings and explanations of information consumable to the public. The application of the terms negligence and reckless must be understood, as many fewer writers are reckless than negligent. Both Democrats and Republicans have accused each other of falsehoods in their versions of certain events. Some would argue that Hillary Clinton (2015) did this in *Hard Choices*. She would have had a hungry audience as releasing a memoir before an election is a rising and hot trend, as well as the opportunity to make her case that she was on the right side of the decisions she had to make. While others would argue that George Bush (2010) did the same thing in his memoir *Decision Points*. His was released after his Presidency, but he still wanted to push his point that he acted and decided as he should have on the major events that consumed his time in office. In both cases, Clinton (2015) and Bush (2010) would have had the help from researchers, documented meetings, press releases, news reports, interviews, and other notes to help verify their side of the story. On one hand, their memoirs had a tremendous amount of help that most memoirists do not get and should be extremely accurate. On the other hand, their writings on the subjects that they presented only consisted of information they wanted to share, not information they had to share. Sometimes certain aspects of the events that the author chooses to include in the memoir, only certain facts are permissible because of the classification level or sensitivity to national security or the security of individuals that were associated with those events. Obviously, this could lead to an unbelievably biased, one-sided story. It could also drive the point home that political, and Presidential memoirs in particular, are written to present a clean, fresh perspective that has never been seen before. While in many cases this is true, these

versions of the events are usually the cleanly scrubbed versions that only provide a positive persona of the author, which give the public a different view and perception of the author and a reason to pick sides because they now use the examples from the memoirs to back up their choice.

In her article “Memories Lost, Memories Regained,” Deirdre Fagan (2007) states, “Memories are sometimes faulty, or are at least altered by perception” (p. 2). As I venture back to experiences that go as far back as my birth date, I will have to be careful and strive to recall the most accurate occurrence of those events I can. Truth can be elusive, but not always intentional. As I write my experiences, I understand the memories may have changed and shifted because my perception is much different than at the time of those events. Karr (2015) testifies, “Distance frees us of our former ego’s vanities and lets us see deeper into events” (p. 28). As I have grown and matured, I have learned from my experiences and my perception of what I learned has changed. As a younger, uber-competitive person, I am sure my ego took control of a few situations. As I have grown older and matured, I can see where those times could have been different if my ego was taken out of the decision-making process. Lauren Slater’s (2012) *Memoir Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* also forces a look at the issue of the altering of memories in memoirs. Her memoir is about her dealings with epilepsy, but it seems to be more than that. It reads as the title suggests, a metaphorical memoir, for something else in life. She states, “Perhaps I was, and still am, a pretender, a person who creates illnesses because she needs time, attention, touch, because she knows no other way of telling her life’s tale” (p. 88). She seems to be “lying” to be able to distance herself from certain experiences. Memoir allows this as it is the writer’s own interpretation of the events, therefore, her memoir is how she remembered it, not anyone else involved. It is her version of the through, however unlikely it

may seem. As a writer, I will have to be aware of those changes and work to preserve the thoughts at the time as best I can. Karr (2015) also states, “To manufacture stuff in hopes of selling more books means you never do honor to your own trials and conquests, what Faulkner might call your postage stamp of reality” (p. 149). I believe the point she is making here is to not outright lie or exaggerate to make certain aspects of the situations or individual seem different than they really are. I want to believe this is a rarity in memoirs as writers are relaying their emotions, circumstances, and important life moments to their readers. I believe my writing to be an honest, personal reflection of what I have experienced and I would want the readers to believe that as well. In *Turning Memories into Memoirs: A handbook for writing lifestories*, Denis Ledoux (2006) writes,

In the end, as a lifewriter, you are a historian who must verify facts to build a solid case for your version of history. Even one piece of dubious information can cause your readers to lose faith in all your stories. (p. 114)

Writing my stories will be based on the facts as best that I can recall them. At times, the foggiest pieces of information may need to be brought in to make a point or clearly relay the message I want my readers to experience. Ledoux (2006) speaks on that as well when he states, “Attribute your version of the truth to yourself when you cannot find documentation to back uncertain ‘facts’” (p. 114). Recalling every detail is a tough task to accomplish. There will be no intent to directly lie to my readers as I work to lay out the details as I can best remember them. With the passing of time, smaller details become harder to recall and there comes a point that a reader must be able to see the situation for what it is. In *Handling the truth on the writing of a memoir*, Beth Kephart (2013) writes,

What readers want is meaning. They want a story so rich, complex, thought through, and learned from that it can't, in fact, be revealed by a headline or two; it can't be satisfactorily summarized. Readers want to be able to participate. (p. 55).

I know the value and meanings of these stories personally, but I will need to elaborate the details and give the reader a clear picture as to what my experiences were at those special times. I want them to visualize and understand my experiences as I did, therefore I will need to dedicate as much of myself as I can to the stories I include. While I write, I will have to deeply reflect on my thoughts and emotions at the time and work to connect the reader with those same impressions.

When these aspects are brought to the forefront, I hope to provide the reader with a better understanding of my experiences and the elements that accompanied them. Ledoux (2006) articulates, "Don't take it for granted that anyone is familiar with the context of the story you are writing. Instead, assume no one knows anything. Portray your characters and their lives patiently and minutely with specific and striking details" (p. 64). As I describe my experiences, I will need to forget that I am writing for a panel of educators and sports enthusiasts and describe each person, or character, and the circumstances surrounding him/her as though they have never encountered the same situation. Knowing that we experience the same situations and circumstances on different levels, I will need to maintain a fluidity of description so that the readers get a clear understanding of the experience. The use of my voice as the narrator is not to be overlooked. The reader must be able to trust I am the speaker and that I am living out my experiences again through the telling of the stories. In *The Art of Time in Memoir: Then, Again*, Sven Birkerts (2008) conveys,

The narrator, who is also the narrative subject, can't be assumed. If the memoir is to be something more than a thin reportorial digest of events, if it is to *matter*, then the writer

must create her identity on the page, making it as persuasive and compelling as that of any realized fictional protagonist. (p. 26)

As much as I hate the spotlight, I will have to put the full array of my emotions into the experiences and stories for this memoir to have value. I want this memoir to matter, not only to the reader, but also to myself. I know reliving some of the experiences will require self-reflection and will impact my future decisions in similar situations. I also understand reliving these experiences will extract an emotional toll as I see where the decisions I made have led me.

Making the narrator of the memoir authentic will create the genuineness necessary. Discussing the identity of the writer, Larson (2007) declares, “What the memoirist does is connect the past self to – and *within* – the present writer as means of getting at the truth of his identity” (location 307). Memoir allows the writer to have two voices, both belonging to the other. As the writer, I am telling two stories: my past and my present, evaluating both throughout the process. Larson (2007) continues, “The thinking goes, *my* story is also *his* story; the person I am, I was – or I was, I am” (location 307). Writing a memoir allows me to reflect on my past self and observe how I have changed as I have aged. Do I still think the way I did back then? How do I comprehend the person I was compared to the person I am now? Do I still carry some traits of my younger self in my older persona? These are questions I will reflect on as I write and become more aware of myself. When describing the focus of the memoir, Larson (2007) writes, “The subject of a memoir is often the self in search of an earlier self, who is found in the person the book gives birth to and whose awareness of past and present, in turn, becomes the focus” (location 768). In literature, we discuss the quest of characters and what those quests are genuinely about. Characters such as Bilbo and Frodo Baggins, Harry Potter, and Odysseus are all on a quest to solve a predicament. Although the reason of the quest may seem to be to find the



solution to the problem, the real reason is for self-knowledge. Each of those characters learns new things about themselves along the way. They encounter obstacles that will test them and force them to develop as they work to overcome the challenges along their adventures. Not only do they overcome the challenges, but they also break the barriers within themselves to grow and change. They now have the new-found ability to see the world through different lenses and new perspectives. They become the focus instead of the solution they set out to find. The blueprint of literature requires a problem – solution model, but the real growth and development of the story happens within the characters. Memoir is similar. Although the stories are central to the writing, the development of my person, past and present, is the real focus of the writing. I will overcome obstacles when it comes to writing about myself and break the barriers that have been holding me back from evolving into the person I need to be.

I believe this process could have gone much smoother and been more fulfilling and therapeutic if I had written it as fiction. In “The Critic as Artist,” Oscar Wilde (1997) wrote, “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth” (p. 185). If I were to write a fictional story, the reader might have a better chance to see the truth come out in a lower, more insignificant plot line or small-role character. In his article “Memoirs True and False,” Robert Fogarty (2011) states,

When memoirists try to capture...a personality, famous or not, there is an effort to bring that individual back, to give them the voice they once had and convey their living presence. In that sense the memoirist is like the fiction writer who creates a character on the page, thereby compelling the reader to imagine that figure as they enter a story. (p. 784)

As authors cannot help but to inject their own experiences into their writing, some have infused parts of their lives into their fictional stories. Perhaps the authors see this as an opportunity for them to tell their story through someone else or disguise their story as fiction so that they can make it read and play out any way they like. J. R. R. Tolkien did it through *The Hobbit* (1937/1997) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954, 1954, 1955/1994). Mark Twain wrote much of his life experiences into *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876/2014) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884/1994). Charles Dickens did it in *A Christmas Carol* (1843/1991). All three of these authors needed to speak, and they used the genre of fiction to tell their memoirs.

*The Hobbit* has often been compared to Tolkien's life as a young man taken from his home and thrown into the adventures of war. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien (1954, 1954, 1955/1994) includes his experiences from when he was a soldier for the British Army during World War I. In fact, he contributes the character of Sam Gamgee to his experiences. In an article by Janet Croft (2002), Tolkien is quoted saying, "My 'Sam Gamgee' is indeed a reflexion of the English soldier, of the privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war, and recognised as so far superior to myself" (p. 6). In Book 2, *The Two Towers* (1954), the dead marshes of Mordor have a direct correlation with what he saw after the Battle of the Somme in Northern France. Croft (2002) acknowledges Tolkien stating, "The Dead Marshes and the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme" (p. 6). In Book 3, *The Return of the King*, the desire of Sauron and Saruman to send the Orcs to take Minas Tirith of Gondor is similar to Hitler and the Germans taking Paris of France. Both cities were at the heart of those countries and important to the country's survival. Croft (2002) quotes C.S. Lewis (1995) saying, [Tolkien's] war has the very quality of the war my generation knew. It is all here: the endless, unintelligible movement, the sinister quiet of the front when 'everything is now

ready,' the flying civilians, the lively, vivid friendships, the background of something like despair and the merry foreground, and such heaven-sent windfalls as a cache of tobacco 'salvaged' from a ruin. (p. 6)

If Tolkien's vivid imagination and real-life inspiration were removed from his books, would his life read as such interesting stories? Just because Tolkien applied his great talent of creating a new world and introduced elements from many legends and epics does not mean that his tales are less worthy of being considered memoirs; nor does it mean that his life was less worthy to write about. He just found it more comforting and easier to write his story into his fantastical world of Middle Earth. I enjoy these books as he loads them with symbolism. Frodo, the smallest of them all, going forward and accomplishing the great task of returning the ring to Mordor. Of course, he was tested along the way and had faithful helpers, but I can relate him to people of today. Many times, Gandalf aided them in their journey, but did not complete the asks for them. He is seen as the wise teacher that only intercedes when he must. The creation of the fellowship which consists of different races, talents, cultures, and skills, is appealing and they are loyal to each other throughout the stories. This is a unique and imaginative way to tell his story.

Mark Twain was a master at humor and could tell a good story, which can be a very rare combination. Born Samuel L. Clemens, his pen name Mark Twain is modeled after a boating measurement for the depth of water. His stories have been controversial, hilarious, sought out, and banned all at the same time, yet he continues to impress with the way in which he went about it. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain (1876/2014; 1884/1994) blended many parts of his life on and around the Mississippi River into his title characters Tom and Huck. The town in which he lived, Hannibal, Missouri, was renamed into St. Petersburg to fit his fictional world, yet the places and people were real. Twain witnessed

many things while in his hometown, and they needed to be described and discussed using a different genre. These stories also have a different quality about them. They have the qualities that are present in some memoirs and fiction alike, people's names are changed and situations are manipulated to protect the true people involved. This is done on purpose so that the writer may tell the story he/she needs to tell while protecting the people who were involved.

Charles Dickens (1843/1991) did some of the same, but in a different way. He hated the poor laws of his time. The creation of workhouses and the proliferation of poor houses were high on his hit list. So, when he wrote *A Christmas Carol*, he included pieces of his family in it to make the story more meaningful. In the story, Scrooge has a sister named Fan, based on Charles' real-life sister, Francis. In an interview with Patrick Sauer (2014) in December of 2014, Carlo Devito, author of *Inventing Scrooge*, discusses the connection between the character of Jacob Marley and Ebenezer Scrooge. He says,

The famed economist Robert Malthus died on the same day as the fictional Jacob Marley, and both had been gone for seven years when the book opens. Many of the heinous things

Scrooge says regarding the poor and the workhouses is straight from Malthus... (2014).

Dickens (1843/1991) highly detested the way the poor were being treated and used this opportunity to denounce the New Poor Law of 1834, an Act that seriously reduced the amount of aid given to the poor by requiring every able-bodied person to work. It took until 1847 for parliament to mandate a work hour limit to ten hours a day for everyone, including children. Dickens' (1843/1991) book is one that falls into an exclusive category that very few writers are good at achieving. It reads as a fictional story, has the qualities of a memoir, yet calls attention to the issues of the times in which they were written. Whether with a serious tone such as *A Christmas Carol* and Herman Melville's (1851/2003) *Moby-Dick*, or more on the satirical

spectrum such as Lewis Carroll's (1865/1984) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, fiction can be an avenue that memoirs can offer for authors who wish to keep their stories shrouded.

Herman Melville (1851/2003) was ensorcelled by the story about the *Essex*, the whaling boat that went down after an attack by a great, white whale. The captain and crew dispatched themselves into three lifeboats and did their best to make it to land. After ninety-two days at sea, the last of the eight survivors were rescued, three of them being on the shore of a distant island. Once they recuperated, they returned to Nantucket and their story was told. Melville heard the story from Captain George Pollard and included a piece about him in his novel. Captain Ahab's boat the *Pequod* is based on the whaleboat the *Essex*. The story is full of meaningful names among the crew – Ahab, Starbuck, Queequeg, Stubb, Flask, Elijah, Moby-Dick; the boats – the *Rachel*, the *Pequod*, the *Bachelor*, the *Samuel Enderby*; and the narrator Ishmael. Each name has a specific meaning taken from different cultures and mythologies. Could it be, perhaps, that Melville's (1851/2003) novel is the memoirs of Captain Pollard and the disaster that his crew experienced? Pollard certainly had personal knowledge of the events of those ninety-two days and was obviously regretful enough to not write it down. That generates the question, Is any or all of Pollard's story true? Also, there are seven other members of the crew that survived that would have their own perspective to share. Are there characters or storylines given authenticity through the characters and story lines in *Moby-Dick*. By putting that story into the epic novel *Moby-Dick*, Melville wrote the story that Captain Pollard dreaded to tell and allotted the opportunity for the story of Pollard and his men to live on. As unbelievable as it could possibly be, it must have seemed believable enough for Melville (1851/2003) to write a novel-like memoir about it. Melville's (1851/2003) *Moby-Dick* opens another door into the world of memoirs. His novel is based on the life and events of Captain Pollard and his crew on their failed

voyage, yet the names were changed, which gave the real people some anonymity. This keeps the real subjects of the story protected from the public eye and an opportunity to hold on to their dignity. In Captain Pollard's case, not knowing all the facts, it seems that his horrifying ninety-two days were an absolute terrible string of bad luck incidents mixed with the rarity of a whale attack.

*Alice in Wonderland* has been discussed and associated with many different genres of stories. It is most widely discussed that it is a political satire; Wonderland symbolizes England; the Queen of Hearts is Queen Victoria; Alice stands for England's imperialistic/colonization ideals. The book also addresses the drastic disarray of the judicial system and the English version of justice. At the time, the saying was "sentence first – verdict later." Per Treasures of the New York Public Library (2016), Alice, was in fact, a real person. Carroll met her while her father was the Dean of Christ Church College. Lewis Carroll, the pen name of Charles Dodgson, met her and told her some tales while they were on a boating trip by the river. She liked them so much that she asked Carroll to write them down. Alice's two sisters, Lorina and Edith, are included in the story as Elsie and Tillie. Carroll (1865/1984) also puts himself in the story as the dodo bird, who speaks with a stutter like Carroll. He was also a mathematician, specifically a professor of mathematics at Oxford University, and offered many contributions to the field. He is known for his development of logic problems and mathematical explanations for a wide variety of subjects such as calculating at voting systems and the scoring of tennis matches. Because of the personal connection with Alice and the political issues at the time, could his book be considered a memoir? Perhaps it is possible that the adventures Alice has are laced with truths from Carroll's own personal observations and experiences in his own life. These authors wrote exhilarating memoirs through their stories and imaginations. Although these five examples

highlight the use of fiction as a memoir, this is something I cannot do. Beside lacking the imagination and time to create stories such as these, I feel as though my deficit in this area would lead to a worthless book of stories. I want this to be authentic, to be real. I believe the message I am trying to write about would be jumbled, a loud waste of time and ink.

Frederick Douglass (1845/1955) and Elie Wiesel (1955/2006) accomplished authenticity through their writings. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is Douglass' (1845/1955) memoir about his time as a slave on the different plantation homes he worked on. His story has the uniqueness of being both an autobiography and a memoir. It is about his life, as he was born a slave; but it is also a memoir because it is distinctly about his time as a slave. It is full of the accounts of his time as a slave and the atrocities that he endured while on those plantations. Knowing what we know now about the time of slavery and the horrible mistreatment they had, his book is one that captures one of thousands of other slave stories that were similar. Douglass' (1845/1995) book is one that has brought the life of slaves to the forefront and is a staple in eleventh-grade English classes. As it ties the antebellum South and the Civil War era together, Douglass (1845/1995) was a trailblazer in this genre as slaves were not allowed to be taught to read and write. The wife of one of his owners taught him and he put this skill to work in telling his story. Although this is a dark and tumultuous time in his life, he shuttles the message of tenacity and patience throughout his memoir. This is a memoir that can be seen as the foundation of the genre.

Elie Wiesel's (1955/2006) memoir *Night* is about his time in the German concentration camps. It is a disturbing reminder of the Holocaust and the destruction of humanity in the cruelest forms. *Night* is the first book of a three-book series, *Night, Dawn, and Day*. *Night* is a tenth-grade book that somewhat shocks the students into reality extremely quickly. Wiesel

(1955/2006) wrote it and had it published ten years after his liberation from Buchenwald. It is full of raw details, serious situations, and life draining events that Wiesel and his father dealt with while working and moving between camps. This book was originally on the twelfth-grade novel list. The older students are more mature to handle what is discussed in the book, but the simplicity of the read resulted in its' move to tenth grade. Although the content is not easy to get through, I enjoy teaching this book. It helps my students to realize there are circumstances more dire than what they experience. Wiesel's (1955/2006) writing brings these events to life in a way that makes the events stick with the reader long after the reader is done with the book. Much like Frederick Douglass' (1845/1995) book, Wiesel's (1955/2006) accounts are hard to doubt because of the knowledge of the Holocaust that we have today. Neither of these memoirs could have been easy to write, but they are necessary for us to have a glimpse of what they experienced in those monumental times in history.

To achieve the sincerity Douglass (1845/1955) and Wiesel (1955/2006) did, I will have to focus on allowing myself to be a genuine character in the memoir. Karr (2015) asserts, "You're seeking enough quiet to let the Real You into your mind. Inspiration – the drawing into the body of some truth-giving spirit ready to walk observantly through the doors of the past" (p. 31). I want the message of my writing to be clear to the reader. For that to happen, I must be able to clear my thoughts and emotions and concentrate on the experiences that will deliver the most vivid and valuable memoir I possibly can. This will also be a risk for me as I am not open and detailed about past events. In education and athletics, taking risks are essential for both the instructor and the pupil. My biggest successes and failures have come from risks. Either I succeeded and learned what the next possible steps could be, or I failed and learned what needed to be changed before the next experiment. In this aspect, teaching and coaching are closely



related. In *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future*, Gert J. J. Biesta (2006) writes, “To engage in learning always entails the risk that learning might have an impact on you, that learning might change you. This means that education only begins when the learner is willing to take a risk” (p. 25). Students who want to become athletes must get out of their comfort zone. They will learn what they can be successful at and what they will need to improve. I encourage these risks slowly as we progress our players from when they enter our program to when they exit. We work on them improving one skill at a time. Soon, those improvements begin to show up in two or more aspects of their game.

Athletics has been a big part of my life. I was never very social or brave enough to take a chance at something, but athletics helped me to shed the lack of courage and try something new. I had just enough skill to be good, and while I was on my journey, I learned a thing or two about life along the way. There are lessons throughout athletics that allude the smartest and most routine people but are embraced by the ones who see the big picture clearly enough to understand why the lessons are important and how they can be applied to their own lives.

As a college athlete, athletics gave me an opportunity to work for an education while still competitively playing baseball. As a teacher and coach, athletics has given me an opportunity to impact student-athletes and make a positive difference. I am passionate about this topic because I can see how student-athletes can grow and change through the lessons they learn from their individual sport. These lessons are all transferable in some way among the different sports, but when the student-athletes put in the dedication and commitment into both their athletic ability and the life lessons that are being taught, they mature and become better people, which in turn, provides the fuel for them to become better athletes. Athletics also gives some student-athletes a purpose to complete school and a reason to strive for academic success. In my case, I would not

have been successful in the academic portion of my high school career if not for athletics. Baseball is what forced me to keep my grades up and work towards the goal of graduation. I am not a good example of a great student, but I am a great example of a struggling student who figured out what mixing academics and athletics together can do, but one does not happen without the other. I see some of my players going through the same things I did as a high schooler, struggling with the school the same ways I did. I take it upon myself to help them recognize the issues keeping them from being successful and teach them how to overcome them. Because of the athletic opportunities I have had, I am where I am today with the opportunity to continue the education and molding of young student-athletes. I also understand that the lessons they can learn during their time in athletics will help them to grow, mature, and see the world in a variety of ways. Hopefully, I will impact them in a positive manner and influence them to do well once they leave our program.

I have been fortunate enough to coach a few players who earned enough scholarship money to pay for their education as well as offered an opportunity to play baseball. One player went to Francis Marion and became a dependable pitcher – eventually their closer – and an academic standout on his team and in his conference. In high school, he was a regular high school student with some athletic talent. He continued to apply the lessons he learned at Francis Marion and demonstrated the possibility that a student-athlete can excel at both aspects of the term. Another player had to go through Tommy John surgery. This is where a ligament in the throwing elbow is either repaired or replaced. He went through it twice. After the second time, he became a successful pitcher at USC Aiken and helped them to make a playoff run. While he was going through these surgeries, he continued to work towards his degree and maintain his eligibility.

Both players played for a state championship in 2010, their senior year. We lost to Marist high school out of Atlanta. Marist also beat us the year before in the elite eight. Those two players along with the other returning seniors, always talked about getting back or progressing further than we did in 2009. They learned that the key to a successful program is to continue to push themselves to become better, a good team chemistry, and to focus on the positives while addressing the negatives. Specifically, these two players grew as individuals. The change started with them applying those lessons to their personal lives and it spilled over into their athletic abilities. Over their high school career, they turned into good young men and above average baseball players. Throughout their college careers, they developed into exceptional young men and true assets to their institutions. Some athletes in these situations would not have pushed themselves as hard and be as determined as they were to succeed. I am of the belief that these players were successful, as different as their paths were, because of the life-lessons that they learned through athletics. They understood what it took to be successful, no matter the setting, and pushed themselves to reach their goals. These are the unseen components of athletics. The benefits that student-athletes gain from the lessons they learn in their sport help them to be more successful in life. Many of the lessons are transferable among the sports, although presented in different ways. Because of this, athletes from different sports can relate to each other and the different challenges they encounter along the way. Athletics is not a topic that dominated my class discussions throughout my Curriculum Studies program. While there is a variety of dissertation topics athletics affords, I chose to focus on what athletics provides in the sense of student-athletes. Student-athletes make up a substantial percentage of our high schools and colleges, and I believe it is important for them to understand what they can take away from their experiences and apply to the rest of their lives. I also wanted to learn more about myself and my

journey from a baseball player to a coach to a student in a doctoral program. It is important that I understand what I have been able to take away from my athletic experiences and how I apply those lessons to the operation of my classroom and baseball program.

One of the lessons I have learned during my time in Curriculum Studies is there is no one way to look at a topic. There are multiple lenses we can and should view the world through to have a better understanding of everything around us. We also can learn from everything around us, not just what is prescribed to us through approved curriculums and lessons. By applying Pinar's (1975) idea of *currere*, we can ensure that we will learn from our histories and be better for it in the future. That is why I believe the genre of memoir is powerful not only through the intimacies of the stories, but also the self-reflection that the writer and reader experience as they come together. Mills' (2004) idea that the world would be "morally poorer" without stories is absolutely right. Personal stories, and memoirs especially as they give a personal insight other genres cannot, penetrate the readers more as they live the experiences of the writers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ATHLETICS AND EDUCATION: MAINTAINING A BALANCE BETWEEN BOOKS AND BALL

This chapter focuses on the balance of academics and athletics. Learning through play is a major part of growing up as students develop physically and cognitively. Authors such as Friedrich Schiller (1795/2016), Paulo Freire (1970), and Christine Green (2008) discuss these subjects and make the clear connection between academics, athletics, and the dependency each has on the other. Martin Lynch (2010), Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000), and John Scott (2000) discuss the concept of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Rational Choice Theory (RCT) and how athletes must have it in order to succeed and survive in the ever-changing athletics arena.

**“Never say never because limits, like fears, are often just an illusion” – Michael Jordan**

I believe it is fear that holds athletes back from reaching their full potential. Once they face their fears, they can begin to progress toward their individual and team goals. As a teacher and a coach, I must continue to take risks and block the feeling of fear so I can clearly see the path forward. In *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those who Dare to Teach*, Paulo Freire (2005) declares, “I believe the best way to begin is by considering the whole issues of difficulty, of what it is that is difficult and that triggers fear” (p. 49). I must provide opportunities for my players to face their fears and learn how to adjust and adapt to overcome them. Athletes encounter fear the most when they are out in the open and must produce for the team. When the fear of failure is what holds them back, athletics quickly becomes an arena in which they cannot survive. I see it as my job to teach them how to overcome those fears and find ways to reach their potential. I had those same fears as a player, and I still experience fear as a coach. Not the

fear of losing or failing as a result, but the fear of failing my players by not preparing them as I should. To me, athletics is about much more than just winning and losing. Although that is a part of my job, I consider the art of preparing them substantially more important. It is also more than preparing them to be quality baseball players. While they are in my program, I want to prepare them to be quality young men as they mature, so once they leave Lakeside, they can be successful in the next stages of their lives. A key component of that success is self-confidence. Whether on the field, in the classroom, at a job interview, or on a college visit, I want them to have a high level of self-confidence. They must believe in themselves before they can have success consistently. This component, like many others, comes at a different time for every player. As players in all sports grow up in their sport, their needs grow and change with them. Different age groups require a variance of techniques, drills, styles, and expectations. Instilling self-confidence in them as they attempt new techniques, exercise, and drills helps them to envision and eventually reach the success we both expect.

Some athletes need different coaching styles to achieve success. Not all styles fit all players, but some players thrive in different conditions than others. Friedrich Schiller (1795/2016) discusses this idea when it comes to education. In *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, he states,

When a mechanic artisan takes up a shapeless mass to form it for his own ends, he has no reservations about applying force; for the natural material with which he works deserves in itself no consideration, and his concern is not with the whole for the sake of its parts, but with the parts for the sake of the whole. When the artist takes up the same mass, he likewise has little concern about applying force; he wishes only to avoid showing that he does so. He has no more respect for the material with which he works than does the

mechanic artisan, but he will seek through apparent pliancy to deceive the eye which guards the liberty of this material. (pp. 11-12)

Some players must be forced into finding their potential and becoming the best they can, others need gentle pushes along the way to achieve the same results. I have played for both types and can see the value in both styles, but success depends on the players more than anyone else. The players reactions dictate the next steps taken by the coaches to help them see their potential. As players are different, coaches must find out which type motivates each player and use those styles to help players find success. Some players require one or the other, some require a mix. In high school, where we build our teams with what walks in our front doors, the mix of kids can be wide-ranging. Once those teams are finalized, the coaches must find the combination of those styles that works best for reaching our players as individuals.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

Part of being an athlete is being driven by self-determination. According to Martin Lynch (2010), Self-determination theory (SDT), “suggests that, to the extent that social contexts support a person’s basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they facilitate greater well-being and vitality” (p. 1). SDT considers intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, but is deeply focused on the outside forces that continue to keep people positively motivated. These three basic psychological needs are key to individuals’ overall health. Some students are driven to be athletes intrinsically because they want to prove to themselves that they can accomplish something. They enjoy the excitement that their skill set brings them and want to spend time in that excited state. Many of these types of athletes truly enjoy what they are doing. Their sport does not feel like work to them. They push themselves to be better, but they also enjoy the demands and want to be better for themselves. Intrinsic motivation allows the athletes to feel in

control of their own path. They are working out, practicing, and competing because they want to. The autonomy athletics allows is empowering, but it does come with limits. Ryan and Deci (2000) discuss the sub theory of SDT called cognitive evaluation theory (CET). They state,

The theory argues, first, that social-contextual events (e.g., feedback, communications, rewards) that conduce toward feelings of competence during action can enhance intrinsic motivation for that action. CET further specifies, and studies have shown, that feelings of competence will not enhance intrinsic motivation unless accompanied by a sense of autonomy or, in attributional terms, by an internal perceived locus of causality. (p. 70)

The immediate connection of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations is profoundly impactful. As athletes continue their journey, almost everything they do, or do not do, happens because of an experience with either a positive or negative external source which then impacts their intrinsic motivation. How the athletes perceive the external and societal forces directly influences the intrinsic motivations they use to strive for success. Lynch (2010) notes, “SDT recognizes that, although the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy is claimed to be universal, the way in which the needs are satisfied may differ from culture to culture, and indeed from person to person” (p. 4). As every athlete’s needs are different, some athletes need more of an extrinsic push for motivation than intrinsic. The lifespan of people using intrinsic reasons for a majority of their motivation is short-lived. Extrinsic motivation usually takes over early in life as outside forces offer rewards or acceptance for individuals’ successes. Ryan and Deci (2000) state, “Research revealed that not only tangible rewards but also threats, deadlines, directives, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals diminish intrinsic motivation because, like tangible rewards, they conduce toward an external perceived locus of causality” (p. 73). In the case of the athlete, league, region, conference, state, or national championships, all-region, all-state, most



valuable player, all-conference, all-American honors, college scholarships, professional contracts, notoriety, and presence are all extrinsic societal pressures and tangibles that come with being a successful athlete. Ryan et al (2009) discuss a second sub theory of SDT called Organismic integration theory (OIT). Ryan et al (2009) state, “*Organismic Integration Theory* (OIT) describes different forms of extrinsic motivation that vary in their relative autonomy, affecting both persistence and performance. OIT suggests that more internalized extrinsic goals, being more volitional, are better maintained over time” (p. 107). The extrinsic motivators, whether positive, negative, or non-existent, can have a direct effect on athletes’ desire to continue their athletic journey and how they perform. Athletes are going to take some versions of extrinsic motivation personally. These are the ones that are internalized and used to push the athletes to either continue their journey or use their time and skills for another purpose. Ryan and Deci (2000) mention, “These different motivations reflect differing degrees to which the value and regulation of the requested behavior have been internalized and integrated” (p. 75). Some students are driven to be athletes extrinsically because they want to prove themselves worthy of having the label. Several athletes start out as students looking for acceptance. Rarely do the reasons for either students to choose to be athletes, or student-athletes to choose to continue to play their sport solely rest on the intrinsic or extrinsic side of motivations. In most cases, there is a mix as they easily go hand in hand. While intrinsically they work on developing their skills, there are many extrinsic factors that motivate athletes to play. Both motivations may push the athletes equally, and it is difficult to separate the two motivations from each other.

When athletes are confident and experiencing success in what they are doing, they feed the second element of SDT, competence. Jennifer Moss (2019) writes,

SDT also describes a person-environment dialectic, where what a person does affects her environment and in turn, the environment affects the person in a continuous cycle. This two-part relationship shows that people have agency over their situations; they can act upon their surroundings and make changes. (p. 18)

Competence can be derived from the value one puts on both motivations. For athletes, their competence can equal their self-confidence. If they believe in themselves and have the certainty they can perform to the standards of the external forces, they will be regarded as competent by themselves and those external forces. Once they feel competent, they will feel a connection with the coaches and players around them. This relatedness is the third step in SDT. Ryan and Deci (2000) state,

The primary reason people initially perform such actions is because the behaviors are prompted, modeled, or valued by significant others to whom they feel (or want to feel) attached or related. This suggests that relatedness, the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others, is centrally important for internalization. (p. 73)

Whether it is coaches, players, family members, or classmates, athletes want to feel an attachment to someone. They want to feel important to themselves and someone else. They want the important people and communities to be proud of them. This is a feeling that lasts well beyond the athletes' playing days. They begin to build a community they will be able to come back to later in life as some of those same connections can continue into adulthood as the athletes hold on to their athletic identification.

## **Rational Choice Theory**

Another theory that applies to athletics is choice theory. John Scott (2000) discusses the concept of rational choice theory, and when comparing choice theory with other social theories, he states,

What distinguishes rational choice theory from these other forms of theory is that it denies the existence of any kinds of action other than the purely rational and calculative. All social action, it is argued, can be seen as rationally motivated, as instrumental action, however much it may appear to be irrational or non-rational. (p. 137)

As athletes start to encounter competition for positions or membership on a team, they will sometimes make decisions that make that process easier. No matter how society sees the decision by the athletes or his/her family, the decision makers will always find a way to rationalize their decision, which in their mind gives it meaning. Because of the limited scope of reality that come along with the athletes' perceptions of themselves, the decisions that are made often have the interest of the individual in mind, not the team as a whole. Scott (2000) continues, "If people are able to obtain a particular goal only through one specific social relationship, then they are highly dependent on that relationship and so will have little power to influence the 'price' that they have to pay" (p. 141). The decision maker may have to give up more than he/she wants in order to make a move to better, in their view, their athletic opportunities, but he/she cannot negotiate the terms of the move. The price is the loss of friendships and relationships already forged, a comfortable environment, and an understanding of what is expected athletically.

Elinor Ostrom (1997) points out the value of rational choice theory when it comes to understanding the reasons people make decisions the rest of society may not understand. He states, "One of the most powerful theories used in contemporary social sciences – rational choice

theory – helps us understand humans as self-interested, short-term maximizers” (p. 2). When it comes to decision by athletes that can determine the opportunity for more playing time and how much it can amount to, they are usually made with an immediate result in mind. These can be hard choices for one to make considering “price” Scott (2000) discusses. Michael Hechter (1994) discusses role conflict and the unavoidability of hard choices. He states,

Rational people try to set up their lives so as to minimize their exposure to these hard choices. But no one can plan for unforeseen circumstances; the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune are likely to intrude on most peoples’ lives at one time or another, thereby presenting them with the hard choices. (p. 325)

Regarding every aspect of life, hard choices will eventually be encountered by everyone. The ability to look beyond the short-term is complicated as instant gratification aides in rationalizing the decision. People involved in athletics, like all other skill-based activities that involve a competitive component, fall victim to this dilemma constantly. There is plenty to learn from the decisions they make and why they make them; but those decisions are tough for people who are outside of those special circumstances to understand the decision maker’s justification.

The lessons from those situations can be hard ones to learn, especially for the younger athletes who go through that process. The decisions those athletes make can alter their path of their athletic journey. When a high school student-athlete decides to transfer to another school, it is usually for the opportunity of more playing time. This is not an easy decision to make since the athlete will be leaving behind friends and connections to the atmosphere he/she has been a part of for a specific amount of time. My catcher for the last two years was named Hayden. He transferred to my school from another local school his junior year. In his case, he was a player with talent and the drive to get better, but there were two other catchers who were better than he

was at the time. After a few weeks into the school year, we talked about the reasons he transferred and if he felt comfortable at my school. Through the conversation, he acknowledged that he knew he was giving up some friendships and relationships he made with his old teammates and classmates, but he believed it was in his best interest to transfer. I could hear him rationalize his decision to transfer throughout the conversation and I understood his perspective. We had one other catcher, but he was also going to have to pitch on occasion. Hayden became our starter that same year by developing his skills through his great work ethic. He blossomed when he was given the opportunity to be considered a contributing player. He made strong connections with the players and coaches and matured quickly in his new environment. As he improved, colleges became interested and he signed with a college last fall. His case is an example of everything coming together and ending with positive results.

A situation that is not so clean cut is the athletic growth of my ten-year-old son, Blake. He is playing baseball for the first time and is enjoying it for the most part. He is different from my other two children for many reasons. First, he is uber competitive. He has the perspective that he should be successful every time he goes out and plays and gets severely disappointed when he fails. The other two are competitive, but not to the extent he is. Mason, my oldest, is competitive, but in a sense of competing with himself and working to get better. He understands that learning to play is a process and it takes time to develop skills. Blake demands that he gets it right the first time. If he or the team fails, he rationalizes why. Second, he is the youngest of three, has some talent, and is a bigger kid in his age group because of his birthday. Blake has spent as much time, if not more, at my high school field watching practices and games. He has the tendency to take what we expect at the high school varsity level and carry those expectations to his ten-year-old team for the recreation department. He believes every play should be made and the idea of

catching and throwing at his level is “not that hard.” He expects himself and his teammates to be as skilled as the players I coach. Because he has watched so much high school baseball, he believes he already knows how to play and does not take the learning curve of the game into account. Third, Blake has always played soccer and is extremely comfortable in that arena. When he decided that he wanted to play baseball instead of soccer this spring, we were surprised, but looked at it as a chance for him to try something new. He has had to adjust to the pace of the game and we can see his frustration when it becomes slow. When we talk on our rides to and from practices and games, I can hear his rationalization for his play-making decisions, his perception of the skills of him and his teammates, and his adjustment to the pace of play. He has had a tough time learning that every decision has a consequence and that his expectation level is not the same as everyone else on the team. In both cases, although at extreme age differences, the processes they have gone through and rationalizations they have made have provided learning opportunities for both to reflect and grow from. These are the types of lessons the concept and opportunity of play can offer athletes. Athletes must learn from the decisions he/she makes and work to understand the long-term effect of those decisions. I believe this is one of the many lessons student-athletes learn through the concept of play. Play presents opportunities to become more aware of the different aspects of life through different perspectives. Play is an essential element in the development of all students of all ages, but because of their athletic abilities, student-athletes get caught up in the aspect of their respective sports and they do not realize they are learning.

**“I think whenever you balance academics and athletics and do it at a level of greatness, you’re to be commended.” – Keith Freeman**

There is much more to learning than what is in the textbooks and grade-level standards. Lessons that last well beyond the ones taught in class can be learned outside the confinements of the latest curriculum guide. Immanuel Kant believed that play is necessary for the development of children. In *The Educational Theory of Immanuel Kant*, Kant (1908/2015) lays out many of his theories on education and how they apply at different stages of youth. One of Kant’s (1908/2015) theories is, “Running is a healthy movement and strengthens the body. Leaping, lifting, carrying, hurling, throwing at a mark, wrestling, racing, and all such exercises are excellent” (p. 160). Kant (1908/2015) believed in the use of physical activity and that it could advance the mind as well as the body. These types of activities were considered important enough to become part of the school curriculum. Schubert (2009) argues for the significance of play based on the theories of Dewey. Schubert (2009) writes,

Too often, even play is distorted by imposition of purposes in most Earthling schools.

Without such imposition, play is likely the source of the greatest Earthlings learning, though too often Earthlings designate it as mere leisure pursuits, and thus do not value the role of play in learning. (p. 79)

For many students, play is a way for them to learn not just academic lessons, but also lessons that carry beyond the classroom. When students are involved in play, the different activities incorporate multiple skills at one time. These activities also force the students to make decisions that advances them further along in the activity. Play is not only for leisure, but it can, and also should be used for enhancing learning opportunities so students can get the most out of their education. Although athletics are taken more seriously at the higher levels of school, the students

are still learning simple lessons as they amplify their skillset. They also continue to expand on their skillset not directly related to their sport. Schubert (2009) continues, “Children know that play is the most worthwhile kind of work” (p. 79). Not only do students enjoy their learning experience during play, but they also have a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment once they complete the task, activity, or game. Lessons other than the academic ones being addressed are developed such as working with others, communication, learning new perspectives, problem solving, and sharing, which can all be beneficial in the students’ development. This is the skillset students must cultivate as the requirements for them are ever evolving in our fast-paced world.

Physical Education (PE) class was once considered a time for students to get their nervous energy out so they could sit still and concentrate in their academic classes. It is now recognized as a necessary class for the overall development of the student, especially the primary/elementary aged students. Paul Wright and David Walsh (2015) discuss the importance of PE In their chapter “Subject matters of physical education.” When discussing the ideas of Martin Randall (1967), they state,

The ultimate aim for PE was to contribute to the overall education of young people, including a variety of sports and pastimes, both competitive and recreational, as well as fitness and health. He also believed that PE should contribute to enjoyment, satisfaction, character development, team cooperation, and individual effort. (p. 2)

Young students need to experience physical education in such a way that drives them to want to continue to pursue physical activities as they grow older. As they experience the feelings of enjoyment and satisfaction Randall (1967) talks about, they will also learn lessons along the way that will help them in their academic classes and life beyond the classroom as they move on to secondary school.



In *A Philosophy of Walking*, Frederic Gros (2015) discusses the importance of sport and movement while he intertwines the stories of four select people; Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Rimbaud, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Henry David Thoreau. First off, Gros (2015) does not believe walking is a sport. However, he does give his various definitions and descriptions of what a sport entails and should include. A sport should include keeping a score, rank, or time. There is also “a kinship between war and sport” (p. 1). He goes on to say, “Sport also obviously means cultivation of endurance, of a taste for effort, for discipline. An ethic. A labour” (p. 1). As a philosopher, Gros (2015) recognizes what sports or athletics entails and that there are some lessons, and possibly educational material and purpose, to enhance one’s life somehow. Although he believes that walking is not a sport, he acknowledges the influence and impact that sport can have on society and a person’s life. Gros (2015) also discusses how the four men mentioned earlier applied walking to their lives and their purposes and goals they were working towards. Through all four vignettes, the idea that movement is necessary to be productive was clear. The activity of walking clears the mind, opens the blood vessels, and allows creativity and learning to take place. There have been countless times I have been stuck on a problem or working through a situation that is difficult for me to figure out and I put it down and go for a walk or some type of physical labor. I must move to be able to clear my mind and rethink the problem. This usually results in a successful solution once I return. Many of the skills that are developed and perfected in athletics are useful in other aspects of life. In *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the philosophy of education*, John Dewey (1916/2019) discusses the importance on play in schools and that it is more than merely movement. He writes,

Play has an end in the sense of a directing idea which gives point to the successive acts.

Persons who play are not just doing something (pure physical movement); they are trying

to do or effect something, an attitude that involves anticipatory forecasts which stimulate their present responses. (p. 248)

For athletes, practices are not just for pure physical activity. There is a purpose in mind and a path designed to get them to the successful end. Their daily work at perfecting their skills to be successful at a game comes with checkpoints. When they reach the checkpoint successfully with one skill, they move on to another. This continuation of practice is necessary as skill levels come and go as other physical and mental traits take over, but there must be a goal in mind. Mundanely going through exercises and drills for the sake of doing them does not help athletes progress to those checkpoints needed to be successful. Once those goals and checkpoints are reached, the exercises and drills can be built with more complexity to continue to develop and combine the addressed skills. The success of making those checkpoints soon becomes the standards and expectations of the program, which goes back to the idea of developing and continuing the culture of success.

To me, the concept of play has its own curriculum. Play is more than just playing around; I believe it is more about being involved in a physical activity of any kind. There are many skills that go along with the actions of play. Basic ones are running, jumping, throwing, and catching. Advanced ones are timing, spatial awareness, actions and reactions (the science of motions), and body control. When I was a child growing up, I was the one who had to be called multiple times to come in for dinner. I loved being outside playing or doing something constructive with my time. There was always something physically I could do that I wanted to apply my time to and work on to accomplish. When I was playing, the dedicated time I had to work at being a ballplayer was something I looked forward to everyday. It was a way for me to reconnect with myself each afternoon and think about things from different perspectives. Being a

pitcher, the mound can be the loneliest or most comfortable place on the field. I used my time there as almost a therapy session as I could relieve stress or think about other things while I threw. The days that I was solving problems were some of the best days I had as a pitcher. As a coach, I can see the same kid I was in some of my players. I understand how an afternoon of working on their skills can change their outlook on life. When it comes to the quality of practice time, the good days outnumber the bad days. I work to make sure they understand that there is something to learn and grow from during both types of days.

As a teacher, the concept of play has a different context. In the classes I teach, play may be in the form of a group project where they must create something, the performance of a skit, or a scavenger hunt throughout the building. It is important for my students to move while they are learning or working. Being a kinesthetic learner myself, I understand how movements and actions can relate to the material they are responsible for learning. I do think athletes have a more familiar way to connect to the material in the classroom because they are active. Learning how to play a sport is through instruction and action. Players go through countless repetitions of doing something the right way and adapt through instruction and feedback. Being a literature teacher, I see the power of words and how they can affect people in different ways. Giving instruction and feedback to my students is just as important to their success as it is to the success of my players. The use of words and the tone in which they are said can build up or tear down a student or an athlete immediately. I believe teaching literature has a direct correlation to my ability to connect with my students in the classroom and players on the field.

Athletics can teach lessons and drive the athletes to be better people. Herbert Marsh and Sabina Kleitman (2003) discuss this very idea in their article “*School Athletic Participation: Mostly Gain With Little Pain.*” They state, “Marsh argued that AP – athletic participation –

could enhance school identification, involvement, and commitment in a way that enhances more narrowly defined academic outcomes as well as the nonacademic outcomes” (p. 206). To expand on this statement, Marsh (2003) continues, “AP fosters identification with the school and school-related values” (p. 206). Athletes have a unique advantage of being able to take the lessons they have learned and shape and adapt them to their own unique lives and situations. Just as artists and musicians, the finely specialized abilities must come from the development of the early forms of those raw skills. As a band member through high school, I learned many skills and ways to increase those skills necessary to become successful at playing music. I also learned lessons from my experiences in music and apply them when I can to my life today. In this aspect, athletics is no different. Athletics can influence the lives of the participants and help them to shape their own idea of the world and how it works. There is culture within athletics. Each sport having its own set of written and unwritten rules, concepts, theories, ways of doing things, and a language it speaks. Chris Barker and Emma Jane (2016) discuss what makes up a culture and how it is built. They propose, “Indeed, all cultural practices depend on meanings generated by signs. Consequently, culture is said to work ‘like a language.’ This makes all cultural practices open to semiotic analysis” (p. 89). I have always been under the impression that the people make the culture, and the culture makes the people. Athletics has that relationship in a variety of ways. In high school sports, some areas are deeply tied to and defined by the athletic successes and failures of their local high school. Certain locales are identified by their football, baseball, soccer, or softball prowess. In college athletics, the cultures are spread much broader across the states. College prospects from all athletic programs have chosen their collegiate teams partially on the culture that has been developed there and in the surrounding community. There is a relationship between the two that influences both parties for a great deal of time afterward.

Richard Anderson (2004) asserts an assumption of meaning that is created through our environment and social surroundings; "Human existence is intrinsically linked to meaning--to comprehend meaning, to communicate meaning, and, in our most distinctively human capacity, to create meaning" (p. 279). There is a great deal of meaning that comes from the sports athletes play. When championships are being played, the stadiums or arenas of the visiting teams are full of their home fans cheering them on. The connection of those fans and their teams is a deep-rooted relationship. At times, fans will allow the success or failure of their team to define their mood, livelihood, and value. This is not healthy, but it is a by-product of the athletic-minded and athletic-centered society we live in.

Athletics can also help the student-athletes be more successful in school. For some high school students, it gives them a reason to stay in school and graduate. Being one of those students, I understand the influence athletics can have on students who struggle academically. The opportunity to play a game I love and enjoy was the push I needed to maintain the right academic direction. For others, it is a place of security and a sense of family. In *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, Nel Noddings (2005) states, "When we understand that everyone wants to be cared for and that there is no recipe for caring, we see how important engrossment (or attention) is" (p. 17). Sometimes, students just need someone to show them that they are important, that they matter. Athletics is an opportunity for them to become part of a group and be cared for. Sometimes, it is the sensation of what success feels like on the field that is the great motivator when it comes to success in the classroom. Dewey (1916/2019) professes, "Experience has shown that when children have a chance at physical activities which bring their natural impulses into play, going to school is a joy, management is less a burden, and learning is easier" (p. 244). By no means does athletics solve the problems of every student, but

they do help make what can seem like the burden of school more bearable. Physical activity is a healthy release for many students. That is why my fourth grader goes to recess and why my two middle school kids go to the weight room with me with the baseball team. I believe it gives them a little perspective as they let out some of their nervousness and anxiety. It also offers an opportunity they are excited about. Physical activity and organized athletics give students an opportunity to find themselves again when they get lost. In *The SAGE Guide to Curriculum in Education*, Marla Morris (2015) suggests, “If students have the opportunity to explore their own experiences in relation to a larger educational context, perhaps students would be more interested in school because school would be more interesting and meaningful” (p. 103). I believe this applies both academically and athletically. Academically, students are better off when the schools offer a wide variety of courses for them to explore and experience. With the development of pathways in the high school curriculum, students have the options to choose a set of courses that are interesting to them, which intrinsically increases the value of their education. Athletically, I believe the same applies. Each athletic program offers a unique curriculum within itself which can enhance the student-athletes educational experience. Simon (2008) discusses how athletics can be beneficial to academics at the collegiate level, but what he says can also apply to high schools. He states,

While it may best fit many Division III and other non-scholarship institutions, such as those of the Ivy League, that maintain that their athletics program has significant educational components, it also may have value for any educational institution that is attempting to better integrate athletics and academics. (p. 41)

The more curriculum our student-athletes can be exposed to with their athletic programs, the more knowledge they can acquire and take with them once they leave. The multi-sport athletes

have the fortune of experiencing curriculum that is transferable among their varying programs. Not all high schools have the capacity to offer every athletic program, but the programs they do offer may help the students navigate their way through their high school educational adventure.

The many lessons, differences, opportunities, difficulties, challenges, and realizations that we can learn from sports are limitless. Sport brings people together for an opportunity for healthy competition, but often there are many other causes and opportunities that are present themselves outside of and within that competition that make a much more profound impact on the world. The levels the majority of these lessons are learned from are the amateur ranks, high school and college; and the ones bringing these lessons to life are the student-athletes who are sacrificing their time and body to bring these to us amongst a great competition. I also think certain parts of these three issues came to light because of the athlete's willingness to be different and go against the grain when it came to certain aspects of these issues. Derrida (2002) discusses the need for this and that it is a responsible action. He states, "...A responsible response to the urgency of actuality calls for these cautions. It calls for dissent, for the dissonance and discord, of this untimeliness, the just disadjustment of the anachrony" (p. 9). Athletics gives its members an opportunity to do just this. They can create dissent and discord in a way that is acceptable because of the vehicle in which it is delivered. Many times, it is the young athletes, the ones in school, who change from participants in athletics to ambassadors for a cause and shed light on something that can be life changing. The special ones are the ones who can balance the academic and athletic loads and still find time to be a part of something greater than themselves.

Athletics influences the athletes' lives in the areas of academics, social life, identity, and access to athletic and life opportunities. The change to a life that happens by being a student-athlete does not disappear once that part of life is over. The relating of what the student-athletes

learned over the course of their participation in athletics to their personal and professional lives often occurs. As Christine Green (2008) writes,

Sport participation is commonly believed to develop positive character traits, to assist young people to become better citizens and more successful adults, to reduce delinquency rates and risky behaviours, to assist with moral development including a sense of fair play, and to instill a strong achievement orientation. (p. 130)

Athletics and the students who participate in them understand what they can take from those activities and apply to their own lives. Athletics is also an opportunity for teaching. Robert Bullough (2001) discusses the characteristics of good teaching and outlines this with his twelve points that he uses as a guide. He writes, “Whenever students are being helped to see major concepts, big ideas, and general principles and are not merely engaged in the pursuit of isolated facts, good teaching is going on” (p. 106). Athletics are not about winning and losing. They are about what the students learn while participating in them. As they progress as players, the athletes’ views on these concepts grow, mature, and become part of them. To me, this is more important than teaching baseball to my players. As the head coach, I believe my job is to help prepare them for the next step in life and how to handle the situations that may come up. If they learn those lessons while in my program, they can become better, more prepared young men. As a result, they become better players as a by-product of understanding these concepts.

Athletics could be classified as its own school and the individual sports would serve as the different subjects. Each sport has something unique and distinctive to its nature, but the themes and lessons are interchangeable across the board. I was the player who was fully bought into SDT before I knew it was an official theory of study. I do believe it has helped me get to where I am and I have a hard time understanding why others do not have that same type of



motivation. As I have grown and matured, I understand that not everyone is from the same background and circumstances, therefore, their approach to life, and athletics, will vary amongst them. Ryan and Deci's (2010) concept of Self-Determination Theory and Ostrom's (1997) concept of Rational Choice Theory are applied to well beyond athletics, and for the student-athletes who learned lessons about life in their respective sports, they can apply those theories to their lives and understand where they fit as they go.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ALL MEN WERE CREATED EQUAL, THEN SOME BECAME ATHLETES: THE IDENTITY OF AN ATHLETE

This chapter focuses on the identity of athletes. The choice to be a student-athlete is not an easy one, nor are the consequences that come along with it. In this section, I include writings from Craig Lambert (1998), Michel Foucault (1977/1995), Rebecca Symes (2010), and Jacques Derrida (2000). It also discusses the connection of the importance of equally mixing academics and athletics through the collegiate level. Writers such as Daniel Bowen and Colin Hitt (2013), Plato, and Michel Serres (1995) discuss the necessity of academics and athletics balancing each other. I also examine the topic of athletes leaving behind their athletic identity and the sometimes difficulty of that process. Erin Reifsteck and Iain Thomson (2014) contribute to this section with their knowledge and understanding of losing one's identity and what it means for the individual afterward. Teachers and coaches are important to education and I use Michael Coffino (2018) along with my own experiences and examples of former players who have become coaches to demonstrate their importance.

**“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” – Robert Frost**

To this day, I still identify as a student-athlete. Not that I can play and keep up with my high school players like I wish I could, but I understand what their lives are like and I want to help them understand the peaks and potholes of their decision. I played baseball consistently from the age of four to twenty-two. I mixed a season or two of basketball in to shake it up a bit, but that was not going to be where I could be successful or help anyone become better than they already were. My unique health situation does not allow me to benefit from or enjoy any of the

endurance sports. It is a choice to become a member of this group and survive in the lifestyle that it is. It is not the easiest path to walk, but it is a path some can successfully navigate.

Finding an identity as a young kid is not easy, especially for the ones who are considered “different.” I tend to look at trying to find an identity as its own project, there is never a “right time” to start finding it, and once the process has gone so far, there is no turning back. That is not a bad thing, but it can be difficult. My dad worked at nuclear power plants for thirty-six years, so we moved a few times before settling here in Georgia. I do not remember anything until we got to Ohio when I was four years old, so I did not miss out on anything that I know of. I started playing baseball there, probably so I could participate in something with the “normal” kids. When we moved to Georgia, I kept playing. I did not truly identify as a baseball player until I was nine years old, and that was more because it was something I was good at. I enjoyed playing and I liked practicing. I did not realize what that would turn into as I played through middle school, high school, and college. Becoming a student-athlete is an identification that is sometimes thrust upon us and all we can do is adjust and learn on the fly.

The word student-athlete is a unique term designated for a small population of students from each school. These students are generally seen as the ones who can handle the academic and athletic balance that must happen for them to be successful while trying to find their own path and identity. There are many factors that figure into this intense identity and they must find ways to be successful in both paths of life. At times, student-athletes can be perceived in the negative light. They can be considered mean, aggressive, unintelligent, narrow minded, selfish, coddled, and lackadaisical. Many people believe athletics to be just activities, something to do when nothing else will suffice. Athletics were once classified as easy to understand, simple hobbies meant for the students who were not scholarly enough or had little talent in the arts.

Craig Lambert (1998) discusses the idea of the dumb jock and how that person is viewed. He says,

The left-handed compliment *he's a brain* reflects our opposition of mind and body, thought and action, intellect and sports. Our culture enshrines many tiresome stereotypes; among them is the “dumb jock,” who excels on the playing field but is a dolt in the classroom or anywhere else that requires mental power. The jock’s musculature supposedly continues above the neck. (p. 25)

I mention this because I grew up classified as a “dumb jock” and am now working towards the highest degree possible. Athletics has played a major role in my success and has helped shape me into who I am today. Along my path, there were many competitions I had to participate in that forced me to look at the scope of where I really was at the time and how I could get to the next stage. Being a student-athlete made me work hard at realizing the limits of my abilities and compete with myself as much if not more than I had to compete with others, both in and out of the classroom. Lately, the perspective of the student-athlete has shifted to a much more positive meaning. By listening to coaches, teachers, players, and officials, society has learned that athletics are much more complicated than perceived before and these students work just as hard in the classroom as on the field.

It takes special student-athletes to be able to excel at both sides of their scholastic careers. The ideas of before have been replaced with the understanding that the student-athlete is a dedicated, respectful, and hard-working person who is driven to make the most out of their opportunities. There are lessons from both aspects they can learn that are interchangeable that can be beneficial to them. For this to be a reality, the student-athletes must realize what they are attempting to accomplish, discover qualities about themselves and learn to utilize them to

complete this daunting task successfully. To be more than a novice in any athletic activity, the athlete must understand it takes determination, tenacity, and a dedication to work ethic to hone the craft he aims to perfect. It is a craft, not a social experiment or experience, not a continuous activity or career for the weak-hearted or over-emotional, but a craft that must be developed, built-upon, expanded, and made as consistent as possible.

Alongside the pressures of maintaining high levels of performance, tough standards and expectations, mountains of unwarranted attention and the everyday grind of being a student, there are also many societal pressures that come with the identity of a student-athlete. As young members of society, there are many struggles that come along with even being just a student trying to find an identity that he/she fits with. As a high school student, there is a struggle with finding an identity among the different social groups within the school. There is a wide variety of possibilities to lay the foundations of being an artist, musician, military member, scientist, actor, singer, a lover of foreign or the English language, and an athlete. Once one of these is chosen as the student's desirable identification group, the questions then becomes 'What am I willing to give up to be a part of this group?' Between the ages of 14-19, it is hard enough to grow up and deal with all the normal changes that adolescents go through, much less attempt to decide and understand a future that may possibly be a grand opportunity. Identifying with one of these groups means that the other possibilities are now lesser of an option because of the severe time constraint that goes along with balancing both the extra activity and the required academics.

As high school student-athletes continue in their sports, they have an opportunity to extend their identification with their specific group. Although they are older and accustomed to the demands of their identification, they are not always wiser. The distractions multiply along with the pressures of on-the-field performances and the newfound academic stress that can make

their time there difficult, especially if they decide to continue this identity at a top tier university. Attention – positive and negative, fame, opportunities to speak to the press, social media outlets, and contemplating going professional are just a few of the issues that they try to juggle as 18-22-year-old students. Yet, at this level, the identification of their academic ambitions will also change the way they behave and interact with others. They must be able to set themselves up for a life after athletics and all the difficulties that come along with it, including adapting back to life without a group to identify with.

Finding an identity is hard enough for people who live a “normal” life. At times, it can seem easier for athletes because they belong to a certain group, but there is no easy way to be an athlete. They identify with their sport easily enough, identifying with the group within that sport is the tough part. Once they do identify with a sport, they are trained and driven a certain way and each sport has its own forces and requirements that separate it from the rest. There is also the dilemma of the multi-sport athletes. How do they work equally at all sports and fit in with both groups? Those multi-sport athletes are then in season much longer than one sport athletes, so there is a tighter restraint on time and efficiency that they can contribute towards their academic life. The in-season life is often filled with longer days that are needed to prepare for the next competition. In some ways, athletics can act as a prison and the student-athletes are the inmates. Yet, unlike prisons, these inmates have chosen to be a part of the institution. Michel Foucault (1995) mentions that Louis-Pierre Baltard called prisons “complete and austere institutions” (p. 235). As Foucault describes the functions of the prison, it fits the institution of athletics as well. He writes:

In several respects, the prison must be an exhaustive disciplinary apparatus: it must assume responsibility for all aspects of the individual, his physical training, his aptitude

work, his everyday conduct, his moral attitude, his state of mind; the prison, much more than the school, the workshop or the army, which always involved a certain specialization, is 'omni-disciplinary'. (p 235-236)

Everything described as responsibilities of the prison are also responsibilities, or assumed responsibilities, of athletics, and by extension, the athletes themselves. Rarely can someone manage all these aspects of life at one time successfully; in some cases, a few are ignored entirely. Yet student-athletes are expected to handle these with ease and perform their best every time they compete. So, once a student decides to add "athlete" to the end of the title and identify with that select group, there is an automatic agreement and expectation that all these facets will be looked after in a complete and austere manner. This is not always fair to the student-athletes, but it is a group to which they have elected to be a part of and identify with until another path is laid before them a decision has to be made.

Students that choose to belong to a group begin to take on a different persona. They are trying to identify with their new group, and they are part of an ever-changing youth. At times they may feel like displaced persons. Derrida (2000) talks about this in his book *Of Hospitality*. He writes, "'Displaced persons,' exiles, those who are deported, expelled, rootless, nomads, all share two sources of sighs, two nostalgias: their dead ones and their language" (p. 89). He is discussing the feelings of these displaced persons and how they still relate, or want to relate, to their past or physical place from whence they came. This can also apply to the students that choose to identify with a specific group. Once this happens, in a way, they are now displaced persons. They no longer belong to the old group or old ways of living and must now quickly adapt to their new life. The dead ones Derrida (2000) refers to are the friends or ways of life that were once a part of the newly identified student's life. The language is the way they used to

communicate or terms that were once applicable and a way to associate with people outside of their new group. The change and the pace of that change that student-athletes must accompany themselves with is massive and rapid to a high school student.

John Wooden was a legendary basketball coach at UCLA. His teams won 10 national championships in a 12-year span, 7 of them in a row. He is one of only four people, Tommy Heinsohn, Bill Sharman, Lenny Wilkins being the others, to be inducted into the Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach. What many people do not know is that he was a high school English teacher after graduating from Purdue as an honor student. He understood the message his players needed to hear, and he impacted them well beyond the basketball court. He focused on the character of the player along with the skills needed to play the game. One of the lessons he hammered home with his players was this; “Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation, because your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are” (2004, p. 68). Players often identify with their sport so much they forget there are many more important aspects of life than just their athletic life. As a student-athlete, it is more difficult than a professional athlete for a few reasons: (1) there is an academic standard that has to be met every semester with no real room for mistakes, (2) these student-athletes are around the culture of the great importance society puts on sports that they tend to forget about who they really are and let their character develop and shine through their public persona, (3) these student-athletes have other talents and skills in addition to their athletic ones and they tend to forget and neglect those as the use of their athletic skills dominate the majority of their day.

Becoming a member of a team can be nerve-wracking. Then there are the multiple sport student-athletes who can belong to two very different groups whose dynamics are vastly diverse



and must adjust at the turn of the season. There are also the student-athletes who have talents for the arts. These two groups have the potential to be polar opposites when it comes to personalities, dynamics, politics, and friendships. I was the student-athlete who fit into this group. I was in the band in middle and high school. I was probably a little nerdy, but I was good. I was on the snare line in high school as a freshman, which is a rare thing. I enjoyed playing music and making friends with the different personalities that I encountered. I was perceived as the “jock” of the drumline, but I was also perceived as the “band geek” who played baseball. My “jock” identity in the band was two-fold, I was more athletic than many of the other band students, and I had a hard time reading music. I know that does not sound correct, but it is true. All the marching band music is written on staves like all other music, but drumline sectional music is much easier to follow. The snare line and each bass drum have their own line on the staff to follow. I did not have to read notes on drumline, I just had to play the beats written for my section. Each bass drum, we had six of them, has their own line to follow as well, so there was never a problem of reading another player’s line. The quints (tenors) music is all inclusive as each player plays five different drums. Concert music is a different animal. When it came time for me to play the xylophone or chimes, I had to put tape with the letters of the notes written on them on the bells and tubes. Needless to say, I did not play those sections very much. I could play the timpani drums as I could recognize the placement of the peddles rather than the note difference, then I would write everything in on my copy of the music. As bad as I am at reading musical notes, I helped write a drumline cadence in high school. That was a much easier concept for me to grasp than matching notes together. My “band geek” identity on the baseball team was just that; I was a band geek because I could read some music and write a decent cadence. I was seen as more intellectual because the concept of music and marrying sounds and beats together

make sense to me, but I was still the geek. One of our players asked me, “If we had a state playoff game and you had a concert the same night, which one would you choose?” I said, “Playoff game, no question.” His response was something that surprised me, he said, “Sweet.” That was it, one word. That one word did a couple of things, 1) it made me feel as though I was wanted in the “jock” group, 2) it made me confront the choice of being in one group or the other, but I still considered myself as a member of both. Either I was, and probably still am, considered either a “jockey nerd” or a “nerdy jock.” These two dynamics were hard to meld together. The drumline was like a smaller, separate team inside of the band, so I treated it as such. We had twenty-seven players who all had different talents and responsibilities – sort of the same way a team is compiled. But it is a different experience as the worlds of arts and athletics usually do not come together very easily. Being a student-athlete cannot be all about the sports(s) that they participate in. It is also being able to have a personality outside of athletics and being able to separate the two.

As a fourteen-year-old freshman joining a new group with eighteen-year-old seniors who had been part of back-to-back state championship teams, I was a bit intimidated to say the least. I had to learn to trust my talent, rely on my work ethic, and hoped to fit in with some of the guys at some point. The atmosphere that I was a part of in 1995 is much different than the atmosphere of 2020. To have academically and athletically successful players, both factoring into the continued success of the programs, there must be a sense of community building. As a student-athlete, I was a small part of a larger community with each program that I was in. Within those communities was a sense of everyone was getting better and improving for the overall benefit of the community. Whether it was academically or athletically, our jobs were to make the program more consistently successful in some aspect of that localized community. It was easier to do this

in college as we all had an understanding that we belonged there. In high school athletics, there are a few players who believe the world is against them and look out more for themselves than for the good of the team. For athletic programs to be successful, the student-athletes must understand each one of them plays an integral part in the teams' overall success, and without every players' buy-in, the team will not reach its' full potential.

The advancement and continual play of travel baseball teams and endless resources to continuously work on skills allows today's players to identify as athletes year-round. I did not have the same opportunities then. Fall baseball leagues had just started up and travel ball started as all-star teams from county to county by either age groups or grade levels. There was either an invitation or a tryout to be able to participate on these teams and in these leagues. There were many good high school baseball players doing something else in the off-season. I was one of those players a time or two, but it allowed me to re-identify with myself and enjoy other aspects of life. It is hard to watch other guys play knowing that I could have been in their shoes, which means somebody would have had to have been in mine.

**“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” – William Butler Yeats**

Athletes want to succeed, to do this, they must continuously learn all they can about their sport/position as long as they are playing. Life and education are the same way. To succeed in life, we must continuously learn all we can to have a better understanding of the world we live in. Education, like anything else, is what we make of it. If we fully buy-in, it will be a great life-altering experience. Academics should not weigh us down; they should not be a burden for us to bare. Being academically successful takes just as much work, if not more, than being athletically successful. Many student-athletes have talents in their respective sports that is already established, or they would not be playing for their high school or collegiate teams. Some of them

do not have as much talent academically as they do athletically, so they must work harder and differently than others. As a high school English literature teacher, I understand that all material that is covered is not life-or-death important for life after schooling. Very rarely do my students who have gone on to be bankers, lawyers, HVAC technicians, or automotive mechanics use any of the Shakespeare I taught them, at least not on the surface. I would hope they learned through Shakespeare, and everything else we cover, more about the process of learning and what it takes to come to a successful conclusion. I want my students and players to be inquisitive, to always want to learn more. Academics should light a fire, whether it is a desire to learn more as we travel through life, or as a light for a path to find success at the end of the journey. Each side, the athletic and the academic, takes work. How each student-athlete defines work will determine how successful they will be and will plot the course they will take to get there. Donald Hall's (1993/2003) book *Life Work* discusses the concept of work and how it takes on different meanings for every individual. He discusses an artist names Henry Moore and how he would spend countless hours working on models and drawings. He quotes Moore on his idea of the secret to life. Moore says,

The secret of life is to have a task, something you devote your entire life to, something you bring everything to, every minute of the day for your whole life. And the most important thing is – it must be something you cannot possibly do! (p. 54)

When people find an avenue to use their skills, they get the sense of enjoyment and fulfillment from it and it does not take on the social definition of “work.” Hall (1993/2003) writes, “I’ve never worked a day in my life” (p. 3). Although athletes enjoy their respective sports, that does not mean they do not have to work at developing their skills for them. The one thing athletes cannot be in their sports is perfect. There will always be an aspect on their skills they can

improve on and develop. They take these aspects and look at them like small, individual projects they can work on as they aim to have the best possible finished piece at the end of their career. Hall (1993/2003) recalls a story about Roger Clemens, a pitcher for the Boston Red Sox, at the time, and a career seven-time Cy Young Award winner. He was a hard-throwing right hander who worked to get better. In reference to a quote from Clemens, Hall (1993/2003) writes, “Asked why he worked so hard he answered, ‘People write articles about how you’re *blessed* with the right arm... That might be true, for some people, but I had to work to get where I’m at” (p. 39). Clemens would work continuously through a variety of exercises and drills that he thought would help improve his skills. There is nothing wrong with obsessing about work, but work cannot become the obsession. A satisfaction is essential for work to continue to be productive. There will always be certain things about work people do not like to do, but the process of doing the work is what is appreciated. The same goes for the classroom. I have taught student-athletes who seem to work all the time, either on their athletic skills or their academic classes. Those students have found success because of the work they have done, but also enjoy the process of making themselves better and becoming a more equipped person. The sense of work in the classroom is becoming lost as the generations change.

Although the athletic side of “work” is much different than the academic side, there is still an emphasis on the academic side that is missing. Once these student-athletes reach the collegiate level, their athletic attributes seem to out-value their academic ones. Many times, the student-athlete loses sight of what can be learned or gained from the opportunities that they are talented enough to experience. The passing of classes, the promise of money, fame, notoriety, setting records, awards, and reputation are all discussed, but rarely is the academic, altruistic, or life-after-sports perspectives ever included in these discussions. While students identify with

being an athlete, they lose sight of everything outside of athletics at times because of the pressure put on them to succeed on the field or court. The other side of that is the academic side can be just as demanding and harsh, but the student must find a field that he/she is passionate about and have the discipline to make that commitment. Once that is accomplished, the “work” is taken out of the equation and it then begins to feel like play, which for a student-athlete, is the key to success.

At the middle school level, many players rely on talent and ability to play different positions. Many of them do not have an understanding of the commitment it takes to be a full-time student athlete. Once these players get into high school, they are introduced to a more intense version of their sport; the weight room, longer practices and seasons, and a tougher academic schedule along with the daily expectation that they must be consistent. They must be able to adapt. Some of the multiple-sport athletes decide to concentrate on one less sport so they can maintain their academics. When they become upperclassmen, they are expected to be role models for the younger players coming in. Also, as upperclassmen, they are now looking for an opportunity to continue to play their sport at the collegiate level. Once they reach the collegiate level, their daily schedule is dictated by four things, their academic schedule, team workouts/practice, competition at home, and competition away. The demands of a college athlete are exponentially increased over those of a middle/high school player. There must be an emphasis on the academic side of their athletic careers, or they will never truly succeed.

Something I consistently tell my players is that there are two sides to the student-athlete; they can be as athletic as they want to be, but if they are ineligible, they are doing nobody any good. Academic and athletic achievements have a correlation, and when one does not go the student-athlete’s way, the other usually suffers the same fate. What many student-athletes forget

is the student side of the equation. Athletics can only get them so far. There must be a willingness and drive to excel and compete in the classroom as well. In fact, research shows that positive athletic programs can enhance the education experience of the students. Daniel Bowen and Colin Hitt (2013) support this idea by saying, “Successes on the playing field can carry over to the classroom and vice versa. More importantly, finding ways to increase school communities’ social capital is imperative to the success of the school, not just the athletes” (para. 18). There is a direct correlation to the number of positive experiences that a student encounters in athletics and academics. Any and all positive attributes for the school can help the build the community around them and garner support for the students and their activities. Both can affect each other in a way that can also improve on the character of the student-athlete. Plato said it best:

He who is only an athlete is too crude, too vulgar, too much a savage. He who is a scholar only is too soft, too effeminate. The ideal citizen is the scholar athlete, the man of thought and the man of action.

According to Plato, student-athletes are the individuals who can succeed in all aspects of life. They have a good balance between the worlds of academics and athletics. Academics are equally important to the overall development of the student-athletes we teach and coach. This type of identification is much tougher for a student-athlete to make and maintain. An idea from Serres (1995) comes in play here as he talks about fitting in. In *Genesis*, he writes,

The unique relationship between two singular units reveals specificity in space. An elaborately cut key has the same relationship to the original lock. It has no relationship to other locks...Made smooth, the key becomes a pass key. The one multiple relationship gets easier and easier the indeterminate the one is. If it is determined, it excludes much, it denies, the symbol fits no one, the key is almost of no use. (p. 29)

I think the point he is making that can be applied here is each person has a uniqueness about himself/herself. These student-athletes must make the academic identification in the field they have a passion for. The next step is to identify with the types of academic demands and opportunities they will want to experience. While this used to only apply to college students, this now applies to high school students with the introduction of pathways. These allow students to earn a certificate in a certain field such as certified nurse assistants, engineering, and cyber security. These can help set up a student to be ahead of the game, academically speaking, as far as what their course load will be at their prospective college or university. With the completion of pathways, students do start post-secondary school with more of an interest in the academic side of being a student-athlete. On the other hand, making the academic identification now comes earlier in their careers, and for some of them, that aspect is tougher to see clearly and accomplish at the younger ages. This is a time in their lives when the concept of SDT would apply. The students who complete a pathway in high school who are looking at it as a possible career choice will experience a mixture of motivations. They could see it is a chance to set themselves up for a college program, a chance to sharpen their skills for a career choice, an opportunity to explore the option within a particular field, or any other intrinsic motivation that fuels them. They could also see it as a chance to remove themselves from a certain situation, make a good salary, have opportunities for travel, or any other extrinsic motivation they deem beneficial.

I was not a good high school student. Being the son of a teacher, one would think I would have been more studious. I was not the best example of a teacher's kid. I usually started projects the day before they were due, which means they would turn into a family affair. Everybody had a task to complete to get it done, sometimes perfectly correct was not the most optimal option. I



hated to read, and really was not a good reader to start with, so my mom would read novels to me while I sat at the dinner table and worked on the questions that went along with them. Once, I got the highest grade in the class on a biology test. When the teacher first told me, I did not believe her. I was embarrassed to take the piece of candy meant as a reward because I did not think I was smart enough to do that well. We, my mother and I – she works in the same school I do, tell these stories to my students and their reactions are usually the same. “Coach, she’s lying. IS that really true?” “Coach, you didn’t read books? But you teach English and you have to read books now.” “Aren’t you getting your doctorate?”

My answers are also usually the same. “Nope, she’s telling the truth and I like to read, but life is very different as an adult than a teenager. I am still going to school and this is why we tell you these stories.” I want them to see what I once was so they can find the potential in themselves and work towards the best they can be. I was not what I would consider today as a student-athlete; I was more of an enrolled-athlete. I worked to stay eligible, barely, so I could play drums in the fall and baseball in the spring. We were told school was important, but we were not told why. We were told school opens opportunities, but we were not told what those opportunities could be. I could have possibly gone to a different, “better” school if my academics were more of a focus than they were, but I did not connect the two at the time. Now, I am glad I went to Montreat College and would not change it for anything, but I did not know that was something coaches/scouts looked for. When coaches are recruiting my players today, I get as many questions about their non-athletic qualities as I do athletic questions. Once I got to college, I made much better grades and had better study habits, but it was a focus that came from my coach. He made the point to us that if we could not stay eligible, he wasted money getting us

there as he has lost out on a player, and that we would probably not be brought back unless significant improvement was made.

**“Never look backwards or you’ll fall down the stairs.” – Rudyard Kipling**

Being a student-athlete was one of the greatest experiences of my life. It allowed me to do things, see places, and meet people I did not think was possible. At the time, I did not know athletics could afford me the opportunities and experiences it did. I got to play baseball at a regionally known high school. I got to see many different venues and stadiums through high school summer tournaments, all-star tournaments, college baseball, and a collegiate summer league. I earned the opportunity to play for a well-respected collegiate coach and program, completed my degree for a career which I enjoy, met my lovely wife, and played over-seas in Nicaragua and Venezuela. While I enjoyed playing and loved the different experiences, I knew at some point it would come to an end. Leaving athletics as a player is not easy for any athlete from high school all the way through the professional ranks. It was tough for me to know my playing days were over. I had done it for so long and I saw the routine as necessary, and enjoyed it. That is the key; I enjoyed it. Although the grind was continuous, it never felt like work.

Athletics gives students an opportunity to impact the world in a unique way. Their talents and skills are valuable in the athletic realm. Those attributes can bring them all the social rewards imaginable along with bringing the institution they represent, whether high school or college, attention and a positive reputation. But when the athletic days are over and either the desire to pursue that career is no longer present, the professional opportunities do not resent themselves, or the body gives out in ways that prevent the athlete from playing further competitively, there is a tie of re-entry into the “normal” world, and that can be a tough thing to accomplish in a short time period. At this point, student-athletes who are no longer playing begin

to lose that identity or become disassociated with it. They have been used to the intensity, notoriety, attention, physical and mental development and deterioration, long days, and tough academics that go along with life, and the ceasing of all of that at one time can be life altering.

Often, the now former student-athletes must find other ways to fill those voids in their lives, changing their daily routine. The identity of being an athlete is now gone. Some of them turn to coaching, training, recreational play within their sport, or some other type of association with athletics to be able to have an extension of their earlier identity. Some find other skills they possess to develop with the same intensity. There is a fear of losing that identity because that is what they have dedicated themselves to being for a major part of their lives, an athlete. The NCAA recognizes this problem and is working with athletic departments to help athletes in this transition. Erin Reifsteck (2014) wrote an article for the NCAA and discusses this point:

Student-athletes may struggle with this transition and find it difficult to maintain their activity levels once they are no longer competing. Colleges and universities can fulfill their commitment to the holistic development of their student-athletes by implementing educational programming and incorporating specific strategies to promote lifelong physical activity among their student-athletes. (para. 7)

There is a wider, more educated understanding that the loss of the athletic identity is hard on the student and there must be supports and outlets in place for them to transition out of their continuously competitive role. This concept can also apply to high school student-athletes because there is a greater amount of them that do not continue that identity once they graduate. This holistic approach must start at the high school level and help those that lost the athletic identity at an earlier age than the collegiate athlete. Hopefully, in both cases, they have set

themselves up for the future by focusing on the academic side of their experience just as much as the athletic.

Iain Thomson's (2005) book *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* discusses Heidegger's thoughts on education. Heidegger uses the word 'paideia' which is a Greek term that means a system of broad cultural education. He explains, "Paideia means the turning around of the whole human being in the sense of displacing us out of the region of immediate encountering and accustoming us to another realm in which beings appear" (p. 159). This defines the situations of most student-athletes. Once they leave their respective sport, they go through a second paideia. In a sense, they must go through a reentry phase and learn their footing as "every day, regular" people. In this case, I am not talking about the professional athletes. That is a different aspect entirely. This applies to the collegiate athletes who finish athletic competition, complete their degree, and graduate. Once they graduate, student-athletes must acclimate themselves to a new environment. This environment usually does not require the level of competition they are used to. They can still fill that void with other competitive activities, pick-up basketball or softball games, weightlifting or a gym routine, or a hobby that involves a specific skill. The adjustment can be tough as they progress in their professional career and familial obligations. The dedicated time to athletics and competition dwindles with the more responsibility they take on. This can be a tough transition for them as they get used to their new way of life.

Once athletes come to terms with not playing and competing every day anymore, their second paideia begins. They must be able to make peace with that concept so that it does not affect the other aspects of their life. Only around eleven percent of collegiate student-athletes become professionals, either through the draft in their sport or through the free-agency process.

That number is derived from only NCAA participants. Not included are NAIA or JUCO student-athletes. As these schools usually have a lesser enrollment than NCAA schools, their number of participants is smaller as the number of athletic programs they offer is smaller. For all the issues the NCAA has with their athletic rules and regulations, they are very proactive in the area of helping their athletes prepare for life after college once their playing days have ended. The NCAA understands that out of their 1,100 colleges and universities that support athletic programs, most of their students reach their athletic pinnacle in college. Therefore, their life after the game, the second paideia, is much more important.

Entering into the second paideia is a rediscovering of one's self. These individuals are being displaced for a second time, possibly within a span of two to four years depending on circumstances, and having to find a new direction in life fairly quickly. Leaving a familiar setting and group of people and starting over with a gaping hole in their day and feeling of purpose and drive is a tough adjustment for many student-athletes. Unfortunately, some of them unintentionally fill those gaps with substance abuse or a deterioration of their mental health. They do not recognize life without their competition, familiar surroundings, or people they depended on for a number of years. Sometimes they leave the game because of a negative circumstance, career-ending injury, a lapse in academic eligibility, being replaced by another player, or lack of affordability due to little or no scholarship. These are all difficult situations and contribute to the struggle student-athletes have in moving into another phase of life. Of course, it is not always bad. Many student-athletes transition through their second paideia and find success on the other side. They form new friendships, find purpose in their professional careers, and develop a healthy routine to stay active as they grow and mature.

I was one who fit into this category. As soon as I graduated I was looking for a teaching job and getting married that same summer. Life was moving fast and I was getting a whole new education about how to live life outside of school and athletics. Finding housing, handling student loans, figuring out finances with a spouse, and trying to keep my athletic connection somehow was a lot to handle at once. Mary and I worked out and ran all the time, but it was not the same, the competition against someone else was missing. The time had come for me to find a new identity. The concept of SDT, Self-Determination Theory, can be applied here as I was now motivated to succeed in this new world I rapidly entered. I had to be mindful of the changes and understand how my needs had changed. Deci and Ryan (2008) discuss the importance of mindfulness as a newer development in their research. They state,

Mindfulness has been associated with autonomous motivation and with a variety of positive psychological and behavioral outcomes. Accordingly, promoting mindfulness or awareness has been theorized to be a central element in psychotherapy, one that allows inner exploration, reflective examination of needs and feelings, and the development of a more autonomous orientation. (p. 184).

I had to develop a mindfulness of what my new life was like once I graduated college. The autonomous orientation they discuss became an orientation Mary and I would share as a newly married couple. The inner exploration I would experience allowed me to find out who I was without athletics. I had to take the energy I used for competing and put it into things that would benefit us as a family. This was not easy as our transition was very fast once we left Montreal, but over time the understanding of what it would take for me to fill my athletic needs became more evident as I made a new daily routine to follow. The life of former student-athletes is a difficult challenge as they must find their niche in the world and become responsible adults

immediately. They will encounter different challenges as they set-up the next phase of their lives. They must compete with others for jobs in their same field. They must also compete with themselves to stay focused and prepare themselves for their future. On one hand, this can be extremely difficult as they notice the lack of everyday grind of workouts, practices, and games. On the other hand, their bodies can recover and they can focus more on their future after athletics.

**“He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.” – George Bernard Shaw**

Now, this quote is a semi-cordial way to say the ones who are less skilled are the ones who teach others how to do something. I do not believe this applies to the profession of teaching. Just because a high school teacher is teaching students how to write or play an instrument does not mean these individuals cannot write or play, they choose to teach others how to be successful in those fields. As an educator, I did not get into it for the education. I think of education as the arena where I can positively affect more people than I could in any other arena. Many college professors participate in the field they teach, archaeology, medicine, music, law, architecture, etc. These are often the best teachers; they have experienced real life scenarios that will help them to prepare their students for when it is their turn to go into those professions. I am not the best literature teacher in my school, but I pride myself on the job I do with helping my students understand the process of reading and writing and to take nuances of those skills to accomplish their goals and be successful once they leave my school. I enjoy reading and tolerate writing. Although writing is not my strong suit, I am working to push through this dissertation to show them that it can be done. I believe it is important for teachers to have those experiences and connections to their students, but more importantly, they have the desire to teach and affect

young people positively. That is what makes a great teacher. I am more of the mantra “I teach because I want to, not because I have to.”

I think it is different when it comes to athletics. When quality players stop playing and begin coaching, it is usually not because they are poorly skilled. They may not have had the skills to reach the next level, which is usually the professional ranks, or there is not a professional team for them depending on the sport. Some are tired of waking up sore and going through the consistent regiment of the required fitness or physical demand of the job. Rarely do I find them not smart enough or skilled enough to coach another generation of players. Coaching is really teaching; it is just a different classroom. Being able to coach is a way for former student-athletes to stay connected to the game they love. Some coach multiple sports, either out of love for it because they were multi-sport athletes, or out of necessity at their respective school; but relating to athletes is transferable no matter what sport they coach. When I got into coaching at the middle school level, I saw it as an opportunity to teach the game I love to a younger set of players. I also thought of it as an opportunity to help my players become successful and deepen their love and appreciation for the game they enjoyed. As stated before, I was not the most talented pitcher to step on the mound, but I learned and understood the process of becoming a better pitcher through the experiences I had at the different levels.

Pitching is an art form. Many high school pitchers believe they must throw hard to be successful. They think they must throw ninety miles per hour to be considered for the next level. I was not that guy. I threw mid-eighties and had good off-speed pitches to complement. I knew I was not going to overpower many hitters, especially when I got to college. I grew up watching pitchers like Tom Glavine, Steve Avery, David Cone, Greg Maddux, and Al Leiter. These guys were not power pitchers, but they were successful, even winning Cy Young awards. I learned



how to be an effective pitcher by watching their pitch selections on certain counts and the movement of their fastballs. I tried to recreate that same movement through my mechanics, and it proved to be successful for me. I continuously worked on arm strength, lifting weights and long tossing, but I never could reach the ninety-mph mark. After learning how to make the ball move like I wanted, I worked on dissecting the hitters at the plate. I considered where they were in the box, their swing path, if they hit opposite their throwing hand, and the height, distance, and spin of their foul balls. I consistently worked on control and hitting my spots. That was the only way I could be successful with the talent and tools I had. This is why I got into coaching. I want to teach players to understand that at the high school and collegiate levels, their talents and tools can work for them if they adapt them to their abilities. Every athlete's ability is different. Part of my job as their coach is to encourage confidence in their skills and guide them to polish those skills. Talent and skills come in all different levels. The less-talented players can be successful too if they consistently work on their skill set and hone their craft.

When I was offered a teaching and coaching position at Columbia middle, it was on the recommendation of the athletic director, who was the parent of a former teammate of mine while at Evans. I took that as a belief that I could be responsible and teach the game the right way to about thirty young kids excited about baseball. It was a good experience for me, and we (the players, assistant coaches, and I) enjoyed our time together while helping those kids get better. I got to watch a few of them play in high school, then I got to coach against them when I transferred to Lakeside high.

I came to Lakeside after the first nine weeks of the school year in 2006. When I got here, almost immediately I began to coach basketball. It was not the ideal situation, especially with a four-month-old baby boy and having just finished coaching football at Columbia middle. I am

not a basketball guy, but I knew the coach as he coached soccer at Columbia middle and had just been named the head coach of the boys program the summer before I came over. I was the head jv coach and his varsity assistant. Ryan Morningstar is a great example of going against the idea “Those who can’t, teach.” He played basketball at Lakeside and graduated the same year I did, 1998. He is a great guy who puts an emphasis on faith and family before anything else. He knew I was coming over and since I would be in the school, I could help him with a lot of the administrative work that goes along with being a head coach. Coach Morningstar did not play in college. Since I had never seen him play or remembered seeing him play in high school since I attended the cross-town rival, I cannot say whether his skills were not ready for the collegiate level. What I can say is that he was, and still is, a constant student of the game. He is very smart and has a knack for seeing avenues and opportunities during the game, adjusting for them, and putting his team in a great position to win the game. At Lakeside, we had a lot of athletes of other sports who played basketball as something to stay in shape. He did a tremendous job coaching those athletes into good basketball players. The most consistent attribute about his teams is that they were intense from the start to the finish and always wanted to play hard. Coach Morningstar is a great connector with young people and is still experiencing success today. He left a few years later to spend more time with his three kids. He then became the head girls’ coach at Evans and took them to the state playoffs and competed in the region every year. Last year he left and went to another cross-town rival, Greenbrier. He took them to the state playoffs this year and is looking forward to more success in the future. He has been named All-County coach and Region coach of the year throughout his career at the different schools. He stays connected with his players and enjoys teaching them life lessons that help them to be successful in every facet of their lives.

Ricky Beale is the head baseball and softball coach at Evans. He has been in baseball longer, but has been successful in both. Coach Beale played for Coach Holder at Evans and won two state championships as a player. He went on to play at Augusta College and complete his education degree. When he became the head coach at Evans, he had some great teams and playoff runs. He made the final four in a classification cycle that placed them in a class above where they should have been. Multiple players have gone to the collegiate and professional ranks. His softball teams won two region titles in three years and have gone to Columbus every year he has been the head coach. Coach Beale is an example of a skilled former student-athlete who has been a successful coach. Again, coaching is different when it comes to labeling teachers as ones who cannot perform.

The most interesting example is Shane Ramsey from Heritage high. We got reclassified together three years ago. This is the first time the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) experimented with four-year classification cycles. Heritage is a school that is in a tougher area than most. They have athletes, but keeping them out of trouble, out of gangs, and off drugs is a challenge they face daily. Our first series against each other was unique. It was the first region series of the year and we had gone to a new format, where we play the same school three times in one week. In the past we had been on a rotation that usually correlated with the football schedule. They came to us that Monday and I was not sure what to expect from him. He had coached in other places before and I am not sure what brought him to Heritage. He was very complimentary of our field, he liked our facilities, and we hit it off pretty good. After the game we talked about the plans for the Wednesday matchup. His wife was pregnant and was due to go into labor at any moment. Well, that moment came three days later. Their son Colt was born that Thursday and was not doing well. There were complications and I could tell when I was on the

phone with him that he was in a tough place. He was at the hospital all day and had not been to school yet. All his assistant coaches worked at either a different school or a different job altogether. It had rained Tuesday night and some Wednesday morning. He thought we might be able to still play but did not know for sure since he had not been at school and none of his assistants could get to the field to assess it or work on it. I called him that afternoon and said, “Look, baseball can wait a day. Let’s play Thursday and Friday. If things haven’t improved we can play a double header at your place and even it out next year.” He said, “Are you sure you don’t mind?” I told him, “There are things more important than baseball, and this is one of them. I’ve got three kids of my own and I was once the one in the hospital. Just call me and let me know how things are going.” I could tell in the relief in his voice he was appreciative since I did not have to do that. Being new to each other, he was probably concerned that I could have pushed the issue and tried to play knowing that the game change would put a stress on pitching. So, under the guise of a rainout, we pushed the game to Thursday. Since then, we have stayed in close contact and become great friends. His players were ok. He had some talent, but they were mostly sophomores and were still a little green. Over the next two years, he won two region championships and the state title last year. He took a bunch of kids who played just to play and turned them into champions. He has now moved on to another school, but still calls and texts me on a regular basis to check on me and my team. Along with being forever thankful for his friendship, I am appreciative of the way he teaches his players and connects with them on a personal level.

All three have their own styles of coaching and their own ways of reaching their players. I also believe them being involved in different sports allows me a different view of them than others may not notice. Coach Morningstar works hard to keep his players positive and upbeat

throughout the game. Coaching basketball is much different than baseball or softball. The pace of the game is much quicker and the recovery time from a negative play must be much faster than other sports. By coaching with him those two years and observing him develop different programs, I learned the power of positivity. Not that I did not believe in it before, but baseball has a different pace and there is time between plays to correct a player or address an issue. Basketball games can change in the matter of seconds and everyone involved must rapidly move on to the next play. He showed me how staying positive as long as possible can turn a game, drill, competition, or practice into a productive session for everyone involved. Coach Beale does his best to provide whatever he can for his players to be successful. We have a yearly, sometimes quarterly, discussion about money that is spent, or not spent on athletics. Usually without fail, he will spend almost all of his money in his baseball and softball accounts every year. Along with the equipment his players need, he spends his money on their athletic experience. He tries to make sure they have a nice locker room, he takes them out of town early in the season to experience new venues and new opponents, he feeds them when he can and makes sure they are taken care of. We both played for Coach Holder and the composition of the county was much different then. He wants his players to appreciate and work for what they have, but also wants them to enjoy their time in his programs and to want to come back and support the following crop of players. Coach Ramsey was somewhat of a misfit at Heritage, but he was the right fit. The majority of the population of that school is extremely disadvantaged in every way imaginable. Although he had come from a school that was opposite of Heritage, he knew how to relate to the students. He is gifted at building relationships with his players and getting them to buy in to what his vision for them is. His players truly loved him when they played for him. Although he has moved to another school and his players have gone on to their new adventures,

they still call and text him to talk about situations that they believe he can help them with. He is seen as a father figure to them, and he has continued that at his new school. We have talked about the ways he connects with his players and he has taught me how to make those relationships last much longer than just while the players are in high school.

These examples are all local to me, but they are only a small snapshot of what goes on in the world of coaching in high school. Athletics can introduce us to people we would never otherwise be able to meet. One example is the friendship between Bob Knight and Ted Williams. Knight was from a small town in Ohio and went to see the Boston Red Sox play when they would visit the Cleveland Indians. Later in life he got to go fly fishing with Ted Williams. When discussing what basketball had done for him, Knight and Bob Hammel (2002) write,

And here I was, fishing with him...because of basketball...I met Ted Williams because basketball introduced me to some people who could make it happen...I learned to fly-fish, my second-greatest sports passion, because of basketball. I was picked to make the trip, because of basketball. And I could afford to do it, because of basketball. (p. 2)

Although Bobby Knight's situation is unique to only a select number of people, the sense that basketball played a part in him experiencing people and hobbies he may otherwise not have come in contact with is one impactful testament to the opportunities athletics can offer people. As mentioned earlier, coaching is teaching, it is just a different classroom. A lot of it has to do with having a comfort zone. As a teacher I am comfortable in the classroom. I know how it should flow and how the connections can be made. As a coach I am comfortable on the field, sometimes more comfortable than in the classroom. To me, the field is just a larger, more open classroom that offers more opportunities to teach the young men I coach. For student-athletes to be successful, whether in the classroom or on the field/court, they must step out of their comfort

zone. Michael Coffino (2018) talks about this in his book *The Other Classroom: The Essential Importance of High School Athletics*. He states,

Taking leave of personal comfort zones is a worthy end in and of itself. The benefits of stepping outside the stubborn edges of comfort are many: (1) challenging ourselves to perform at peak; (2) becoming comfortable with risks that help us grow and equally so, being willing to fail; (3) inspiring us to be more creative; (4) aging better and staying sharp; (5) facing and overcoming fear, especially of the unknown; (6) giving us more life choices and identifying paths that allow us to evolve continually. (p. 40)

As an educator, all of what he says is what we try to do through our curriculum. Whether it is interpreting Shakespeare, figuring atomic numbers, deciphering polynomial equations, or understand the world's governments, we teachers are all trying to accomplish the same things. Part of it is having the students understand the material. The other part is having them understanding the process of understanding the material and why it is more important than the material they are learning. Our job is to push our students in a direction that will academically challenge them and get them out of their comfort zones. Our job is the same as coaches. We must push our players out of their comfort zones to get them to realize they can do more. No matter what the next level is, it is somewhere they have never been before, and it is something for them to build on. Both teachers and coaches thrive on the connections they make and the relationships they build with their students and players. Therefore, I believe that teachers and coaches both teach because they can, not because they cannot; and they have a place in the dynamics of developing young minds and bodies for the future.

Choosing to be a full-time, high-quality student-athlete is a two-fold commitment. They are committing to the academic and athletic standards/expectations set forth by their institution.

Although most athletes like the physicality of the work, they know their sports will take a toll on their body in the long run. Heidegger's idea of paideia is a process that students, once they make their choice to identify as an athlete, will experience multiple times as they find their niche within their groups and society. Student-athletes are what Derrida (2000) would describe as "displaced persons," but they are displaced by choice. They see an opportunity arise because of their athletic talents and choose to step away from one group and into another, eventually realizing they must adapt to survive in both worlds. Coffino (2018) understands the importance of "the other classroom" and believes coaches have the opportunity to be creative and reach our players in ways classroom teaching cannot. As an eighteen-year teaching veteran, I have learned to adjust quickly and there are times we go through several "paideias" throughout the school year, especially with the evolvments Covid-19 has forced in the school system.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BUMP AND THE DISH: COMPETITION

This chapter focuses on competition. On the field and in the classroom, competition is necessary and can be intense. I examine writers such as Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2006), Catherine Drane and Bonnie Barber (2016), as well as an example of John Scolinos (1996) to help illustrate the different uses of competition in education and athletics. I then concentrate on the use of competition as a tool to motivate student and players alike. Walt Whitman (1007), Robert Harrison (2014), and Admiral William H. McRaven (2017) discuss how competition can be used and the effects it has on people with different perspectives. Writers such as Craig Lambert (1998) and Alfie Kohn (1992), as well as an experience I had to grow from highlight the influence of too strong of a competitive nature.

**“It’s not the size of the dog in the fight, it’s the size of the fight in the dog.” – Mark Twain**

To me, competition is an everyday part of life. Many times, the idea of competing is thought of as two teams fighting each other for one outcome, two boxers fighting in a ring, wrestling or cheerleading tournaments, or a tennis or volleyball match. Competition is defined as two opposing forces fighting against each other, but the definition of those forces can mean something else entirely. As a literature teacher, I can compare the conflicts competitors will see in the athletic realm to the forms of conflict characters face in literature; man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. society, and man vs. himself. In every athlete’s career, high school, collegiate, or professional, he/she will face a multitude of these at different times on different levels. Some people consider them conflicts, I consider them competitions, opportunities, numerous chances to get better. A chance to prove either to myself or others that I can be successful by overcoming an opposing force. That is my ultimate satisfaction when it comes to my intrinsic motivation. I

believe that the man vs. himself conflict is confronted more than any other. There are countless movies, tv shows, superheroes, and athletic stories where the protagonists compete with themselves to be one step faster, one step better, or one step ahead of where they were before. Athletes are the very definition of competitors. They must be in order to survive the toll it can take on them over a substantial length of time. Their skills are on display where multiple people can see them live, newspapers write about them, highlight reels are shown about them, and they are over criticized and over compared to the fullest extent. As they progress through the athletic levels, the degrees of these examples increase. Being just an athlete is not easy, being a student-athlete is even more demanding. Those young adults must perform at equally high levels in both the academic and athletic arenas, otherwise they are looked upon as lost causes, wasted talent.

Competition is an essential component for people to get better at whatever they set out to improve within their lives. It can be used as a tool that provides individuals and teams a chance to make themselves better. Often, individuals compete with themselves more than any force from the outside. This can be a healthy process if it is done correctly, but it can destroy a person if it is not. Sometimes I fall into the latter category. I am extremely competitive with myself and I hate to fail at anything I do. I look at the failures as a reflection on my ability, whether they are academic, athletic, or personal. As a teacher and a coach, I compete with myself in different ways. As a facilitator both in the classroom and on the field, I work to set up positive learning environments in both settings. I aim to run an efficient classroom when it comes to teaching the material, students working in groups or individually, and handling information dissemination as all school announcements and events that are run through the literature department. I aim to run efficient practices so the players get as many positive repetitions as possible during the time we have scheduled. When these processes fail, I assess what can be done differently and implement

those ideas in the next session. If I continue to make the same mistakes, I am ultimately failing my students and players. This becomes unfair to them when they are expected to perform at certain levels and I do not provide the opportunities for them to meet or exceed those levels. As a leader, I encourage my students and players to improve their skills they already possess and to not accept failure. Whether in the classroom or on the field, there is always something they can improve on. I emphasize that concept with them and myself daily.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2006) discusses the different words used for competition and how they can be applied. In his book *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, he discusses the two Greek terms agon and arete. He states,

Agon is perhaps best translated simply as competition. Among other things, we associate competition with the domestication of potentially violent fights and tensions through institutional frames and stable rules. Arete, by contrast, means striving for excellence with the consequence (rather than the goal) of taking some type of performance to its individual or collective limits. (p. 70)

As agon covers the entirety of athletics, arete defines it much tighter as to what happens before the athletic competitions. Agon is the competition, game or match, between two teams. Arete is what takes place as the athletes prepare for the competition so that they may perform at their best when it comes time for the competition. Gumbrecht (2006) goes on to say, "If I were to praise competition rather than excellence, I would confirm a vision of sports that has given them a bad reputation among so many intellectuals" (p. 72). Although the competition is what fanatics go to see, it is the excellence the athletes strive for that continues to bring them back. People who are not-athletically minded or sports-oriented see no need in them. They are vices that waste time

and prevent people from advancing themselves intellectually. There must be a sensible balance between the two.

The bump and the dish are baseball terms; the bump is the mound where the pitching rubber is, and the dish is home plate. Baseball, softball, and cricket are the only team sports in which the defense has the ball and there is no clock. Theoretically, a game could last forever. I have played and coached in a few that felt that way. As a pitcher, the bump can be the loneliest place on the field when things do not go as planned, but it can also be the most comfortable place in the game of baseball when they do. As a pitcher, I grew to love my time on the bump. It became my second home. It was easy to get lost in the workings of the game; become the boss of my workplace, the pace setter. I could tailor the mound's dirt how I wanted it so I could keep consistent mechanics and have something to work on to get rid of nervous energy. I am proud to say that the majority of the time I was successful, and the mound was a comforting place to me. There were some games that I either pitched well but ran into a great hitting team, or my stuff was absolutely horrendous that day and either I got hit hard or could not find the strike zone. It happens to everybody who has ever stood on that hill of dirt. Having a good defense helps to make life easier up there, but I still had to compete. I had to compete with two things: the hitters and myself. I wanted to prove that I was good enough to be on the bump and pitch well to whoever was on the schedule. Especially being the player who was lucky to be up there in the first place. My health situation did not have anything to do with my talent, but I do believe it has something to do with my self-determination and motivation to have a solid work ethic. I wanted to compete. At an extremely young age I had to compete to survive. That carried over into my athletic life and helped me push myself as much as anything else. In middle school, I could get by on my talent to a point, but I had to put in extra work to keep up with the other players. When

I got to high school, things changed. This was a new type of pressure and demand on a body that had not proven what it could handle. After I had graduated and Coach Holder was working in the same school as my mother, he told her that he was not sure how to handle me. His first words to me on the first day of baseball tryouts were, “Don’t die on me, boy.” He never had a player with anything I have and was not sure how far to push me, and he was the most demanding coach I have ever been around. In weight training class, he would cut my repetitions down compared to the other players’ requirements. The timing of my running was never used as a grade, more of a measurement of where I was in case something was not right. But I had a desire to do as much as the other players because I wanted Coach Holder to know I could do just as much as everybody else. That meant I had to compete, with myself more than the other guys. I pushed every day to be better than I was the day before. Deci and Ryan (2008) discuss this when they state, “When people are autonomously motivated, they experience volition, or a self-endorsement of their actions” (p. 182). Coach Holder gave me the autonomy to do as much as I could, and I worked every day to do at least as much as the “normal” players did. I did not want to seem like I was taking advantage of my health situation. Gagne and Deci (2005) state, “With integrated regulation, people have a full sense that the behavior is an integral part of who they are, that it emanates from their sense of self and is thus self-determined” (p. 334). I felt that my health situation defined me at times, and I was determined to make my work ethic and resolve to be the best I could replace that definition. When I went off to Montreal to play, the competition increased. Not just athletically, but academically. I believe the sense of urgency and an emphasis on competition is something that lacks in atmosphere of our student-athletes today, both in the classroom and in their athletic realm.

Student-athletes are the type of people who thrive on competition. There is a want to compete against someone else and prove that they are the best. This can be a good thing if it is used to help propel them in the right direction. The field and the classroom are places where there is constant competition. As a high school teacher of seniors and the head coach of the baseball program at my school, I see clear evidence in a decline of the push for competition that festers during the middle school years. Academically, many students come to high school and expect to get credit for showing up or be allowed continuous chances to redo a test or quiz to improve their score. Athletically, some of the athletes have been the best in their age group and at their respective middle school, but they do not realize the pond just got much larger and they are now a much smaller fish. These athletes have been told how good they are and have relied on talent alone. Once the high school level is reached, work must be put in to improve or other athletes who work and compete with others and themselves will pass the ones who do not. This is where the lack of competition hurts the overall student-athlete. Academic and athletic achievements have a correlation, and when one does not go the student-athlete's way, the other usually suffers the same fate. What many student-athletes forget is the student side of the equation. Athletics can only get them so far. There must be a willingness and drive to excel and compete in the classroom as well.

The pressure on athletes to perform at their top level each and every time they compete is an overwhelming task that is unavoidable. When that is mixed with the difficulties and demands of the classroom, their high school or collegiate experience then becomes much more difficult. There seems to be a bigger emphasis on academics now more than ever. As far as the collegiate experience goes, it is becoming tougher to get into state schools who used to accept anybody. GPA's must be higher, high school classes must be more rigorous with the expectation of more

AP classes being taken, SAT and ACT scores must stand out, and an abundance of clubs, societies, and athletics seem to help the athlete's chances of becoming one of the "elite." This can lead into another identification problem for student-athletes. How much time must truly be spent on a vast number of clubs and societies when their opportunity to be a part of something they have a passion for is in the realm of athletics? There is no right answer because every institution will have their own.

This is when the choice of the academics comes into play. Where a student-athlete goes to school is not only a daunting athletic choice, but also a choice of how he/she will academically set themselves up after the athletic opportunities are over. Athletes attending Stanford, Duke, Rice, Northwestern, Harvard, and Notre Dame have a very different makeup compared to students at Oklahoma, Miami, Colorado, Ohio State, Washington, and Tennessee. Although the latter schools will have great academic programs, the former schools are among the elite in academics along with having great athletic programs. When athletes are also students at one of those elite schools, they are looked at very differently than the athletes that are at a school that is perceived to be academically incomparable. Part of the issue is the graduation requirements are different from state to state. Ashley Gard (2017) discusses how this issue makes it tougher on the incoming freshmen. Although states and the NCAA have noticed this problem, "they have not changed their academic requirements at the same rate. As a result, this leaves student-athletes potentially unprepared for the academic rigors and challenges of college" (p. 406). With graduation requirements, SAT or ACT scores, high school GPA, and class rank discrepancies required for admission, rarely are the students on a level playing field when it comes to their preparedness for their first year of college. When it comes to NCAA schools, there is a sliding scale that correlates with each division. NAIA and JUCO schools have their own criteria for

admission. These are a special group of athletes who want to be pushed and strive for being the best at the best institutions; but getting into those institutions is just as competitive as the course requirements once they arrive. Catherine Drane and Bonnie Barber (2016) take notice of the athletic influence on academics. They state, “There is extensive evidence for the role of extracurricular sport participation in adolescent development, with participation positively associated with indicators of academic performance” (p. 1). In many cases, athletic involvement helps the student-athlete in school and vice-versa, although it is not a guarantee.

Competition is also a vital component of the classroom. If it is not, it should be. The definition of competition in the classroom has more to do with the student and his or her surroundings than other opponents/students. The four types of conflict still apply, but I believe they apply to the classroom setting differently than the athletic field. As a teacher of a core subject, I see students competing more with their surroundings than each other. There will always be competition with themselves as they work to improve their study skills and the knowledge of subjects, but I see them competing the hardest with developing and maintaining good study habits, time management, socio-economics level, resources at home, and responsibilities outside of school. These are the qualities that are overlooked at times by educators, high schools, and universities, but the students who can maintain high standards and expectations and rise to the challenge of exceeding them are the ones who continuously compete to better their situation. At many high schools, the competition for the valedictorian is fierce; the title of best project is highly sought after; the highest SAT score and title of STAR student are coveted positions; so why is there a faction to get rid of the competition in the classroom? Some school systems believe class ranks and GPAs force too much separation among the students. Others redesign their class ranking systems to assign all students above a 4.0 a number one



ranking, resulting in a college admissions counselor's nightmare trying to discern among the student applications from the same school. In Virginia, school boards in Virginia Beach and Montgomery County are eliminating the class rank and GPA system and will stop naming the valedictorian and salutatorian. In their eyes, this helps to put the students on a level playing field when it comes to applying to colleges. Even at the middle school level, the mentality that participation in extracurricular activities is more important than the success of the programs strips away the idea of competition. This is the area where the concept of competition is maligned shows itself. Why would educators and coaches not want to push the students and athletes to be the best that they could? It is understandable that for some students, class rankings, academic titles, and GPAs are pressure packed situations; but for the other students, the possibility for those accolades and accomplishments are what pushes those students to perform at their best. Most student-athletes are used to the competition in their sports and transfer that drive over to the classroom. Along with the rules set forth by schools and state athletic associations, the threat of not playing because of a lack of academic progress also pushes those students to work hard to maintain or improve their academic status.

I do believe there is a difference when it comes to the concept of competition as it applies to athletics vs academics. When it comes to competition in athletics, there is a direct need for competition, from player vs himself, player vs player, and team vs team. Without the consistent drive to be competitive, it is difficult for many players to reach their full potential. The goals of championships are attained by those who have the appetite for constant competition. In athletics, there are clearly defined winners and losers. I have noticed in high school sports that the players that are consistently competitive begin to separate themselves from the rest. They develop their skills quicker and become stronger, physically and mentally. I also see the scarcity of these types

of athletes when the entirety of the athletics population is considered. The percentage of these types of athletes is much smaller as the amount of athletic participation grows. When it comes to academics, competition has its place and can be used as a motivator, but not as the driving tool of the students earning their education. The understanding of the information/concepts so the students may continue to grow is the larger motivator. Knowledge, in my case – the curriculum my students must learn, is attainable by a higher percentage of the population. As the academic population grows, the percentage usually increases along with it. There is more success in academics when competition is applied correctly as everyone is gaining something out of their drive to learn the material.

The dish is where one eats, either the pitcher or the hitter. I have no idea why it is called home plate, but this is my thinking. One way to look at it is this: as a pitcher, if I have good command and my stuff is good that day, I am nibbling on the corners; just taking what I need to get by, not being too selfish and risking taking more than what is sufficient. If I am having command problems and my stuff is not very good that day, I am serving it up to every hitter that gets in the box, and they are loving every helping. Another way to look at it is this: accountability. I only get seventeen inches to be successful – those are the east and west boundaries, 8.5 inches on each side of center. The north and south boundaries depend on the hitter. Everything is determined by the umpire's strike zone that day, but I will take the seventeen inches as a good starting point.

John Scolinos (1996) was a baseball coach who was inducted into multiple university and coaching association halls of fame. He was the head football and baseball coach at Pepperdine University and the head baseball coach at California State Polytechnic University Pomona. He gave a speech in 1996 on the topic of those seventeen inches and how it applies to our everyday

lives. Basically, we are all held to the same standard. Our players should be too, regardless of talent level. The idea he presents is no one gets less or more than what is provided by the game. Then it is left to the players' work ethic and determination to be successful. He then takes this concept and applies it to home life, church life, teaching, and coaching. We must all be accountable in some way to help keep our lives on the right path. I believe the concept of competition can hold us accountable. It is the great equalizer, either one can perform, or one cannot. This was made evident to me the fall semester of my senior year, 1997.

While I was already going through my trial with my heart condition my senior year of high school, it was determined that I would need to have shoulder surgery if I wanted to continue to pitch. It was not a serious procedure, but there was enough damage to my rotator cuff and other minor cleaning up that needed to be taken care of. The injury was the result of pitching continuously for two years. This is a topic I relentlessly harp on with my players. In fact, I encourage them to play as many sports as possible while they still can. By multiple sports I mean for them to play the sports that are offered throughout the different seasons at my high school, football and cross country in the fall, basketball, swimming, and wrestling in the winter. This will give them the opportunity to rest some of the baseball specific muscles and prevent overuse in most of the problem areas we see. The initial ruling was that I may get about a half a season when and if I could come back through the rehab successfully. The surgery was in early October, which meant I only had about three months to get back in shape before we started in mid-January. I just thought I knew what competition was. I had no idea what I was about to encounter as I went through the next three months. In my view, I was now competing with myself to get back to where I should be in order to be effective, with my teammates' confidence in me, and with my coaches' opinions of whether I would be a beneficial asset to the team. I worked as hard

as I could to improve my physical shape. I lifted what weights I could, rode the bike, ran, worked my core, did therapeutic band exercises religiously, and never missed a physical therapy appointment. I did everything I could to make it back in time. Baseball was something that meant the world to me. Going back to the idea of identity, this was it, this was my identity. I could either continue to be a baseball player with the opportunity to go to college, or I would give up and just be a kid. Not that the latter idea is a negative one, it just was not for me. I thrive on the bump; I love the idea of competing against whoever is at the dish. I saw this set back as an opportunity to win every competition I could. I tied to make a competition with myself every day. To go along with SDT, I was motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically, for many reasons. One, I loved baseball and I was not ready to give that up. Two, I had the respect and love for and from my coaches that made me want to help them out if I could. Three, I knew baseball gave me an opportunity to go to a college my family otherwise could not afford. Even the little amount of scholarship money I was awarded was not enough to make up the difference for me to be able to go and experience a great opportunity. I still had to acquire student loans to be able to attend. Four, I felt as though playing my senior year and going to college to play was a way to say thank you to the coaches who put their energy and dedication into developing me as a person. To not do that would have been a disgrace to their efforts.

**“The game of golf would lose a great deal if croquet mallets and billiard cues were allowed on the putting green.” – Ernest Hemingway**

Like math, teaching the concept of competition can be taught many different ways. There is no one way to teach the idea, and no one way to apply it to life. One thing is certain, without it, athletes will not succeed. I believe it can be applied to many aspects of our daily routines. One of my favorite times to teach competition is during our weight training sessions. The Georgia High

School Association, or GHSA, imposes a time period called dead week. This is usually the week of July 4<sup>th</sup> and it is a period where no activity is to take place at the school for any athletic programs. It is built in as a guarantee that coaches and players get some time off to rest and get away from the daily grind of working every day, especially the multi-sport coaches and players. This past year, the GHSA considered adding a second mandatory dead week in June. This would allow the multiple sport coaches and athletes who just completed their spring season to have a rest period before their summer activities began. Those are the ones who burn out the quickest over the course of the year. For my guys, I give them the month of July and about half of August off. During that time, they are either beginning football season, or finishing out their travel baseball schedule. Once everyone settles into their school routine and class schedules are solid, then we begin our weight training program. I try to make sure we get as many players as we can into weight training during the school day. The ones who do not, usually the underclassmen, are the ones we have come to our workouts four times a week. Each day is something different with new challenges they must overcome. Our weight training calendar runs up to exam week of the first semester. During this time, not only do we stress on developing an overall athletic body, but we also stress the concept of the athletes competing with themselves. The first three weeks are always the toughest. After that, they begin to see gains and understand what they are doing is working. Some of our younger players have never been taught to work before and do not understand what being a student-athlete truly entails. This helps them to understand the commitment it takes to be as good as they believe they can be. They must compete with themselves every day and every week. Each workout cycle lasts for a month with the daily exercises changing week to week. Once that cycle is over, we change our main lifts to avoid becoming stale. As we progress from month to month, the reps and sets change with a select few

of the same exercises. We want them to focus hard on these as they can see gains as they progress, but they also understand the importance of competition and working to get better. We also incorporate a session at the end of each lifting day called team time. This is where they must learn to work as a team. We work on driving home the concept that they will succeed and fail together. They cannot succeed without everybody doing their part, but they can fail if even one person neglects his duties at any given moment. This has transferred to the field. We can see the improvements in their work during practice. The idea of the team concept is taken to heart and they are better because of it.

This is the “arete” that Gumbrecht (2006) talks about in his book, the competition through the preparation process that proceeds the competition of one team or individual against another. Without this preparation, no athlete would reach the excellence they strive for. The main component is the competition within the athlete to put in the work to achieve the success he/she desires. High school and college football are notorious for being in the arete stage from the last day of the previous season to the first day of the new one. Many people outside of athletics do not understand, and some student-athletes for that matter, that the arete stage is needed for all athletes in all sports throughout the year. Maybe not with the intensity that football infuses into their year-round workouts, mainly because the repetitional use of certain joints and muscles will tear the athlete down more than build him/her up, but with the mindset that the three to four weeks from the start day to the first game is not enough time to prepare to achieve what athletes want to achieve. The most dedicated, young athletes are the ones we must scale back what they do because they do not understand the concept of limitations. For high school baseball, once we come back from our Christmas break, we usually have one week before our official start day. Usually that time is taken by coaches working on the field and preparing for the tryout period, so

we have to trust that our players are doing the right things in the arete stage of competition to be ready for the first day. Most high school sports are built that same way. Per the GHSA, there is a limit to the number of players we can have per facility at a time during the offseason. Every state handles this differently, but this mandate makes it hard for us to develop the skills of our players outside of our season. The only time we can have a full team together in the offseason is during weightlifting or conditioning sessions. There cannot be any sport specific skills being taught during these sessions. During these offseason workouts, the coaches can really see who is self-determined in their quest to improve and develop. We can tell which student-athletes want to excel at both parts of the job as they combine both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to push them through this downtime. College is different because we can see the difference as there is more time for the athletes, coaches, and trainers to work on what is needed to keep them in optimal shape as well as develop their skills. The agon stage of competition is where the results of the arete stage is put on display. Did the athletes compete amongst themselves and other teammates enough to yield improved results? That answer is what is sought after by every coach who truly cares for the development of his/her players.

What keeps us from teaching or using competition in the lives of our students is the concept of the older generation wanting their children to have a better experience or life than they had. The concept is not wrong. What is wrong is when the parents misinterpret the concept from better to easier. This sets the foundation for our students to find the easy way out instead of the right way out. What is easier is not always better, and the twisting of the original concept makes it harder for us in education to do our job, which is to prepare the younger generations for the world they are going into. This is how concerned parents turn into helicopter, lawnmower, bulldozer parents. They clear out all obstacles that stand in the way of their child so he/she can

be successful. If the rules are changed to make concessions for certain students and athletes, then nothing is accomplished, and the entire credibility of the institution takes a hit. Finding easier ways to get things done is not an evil idea, but there are times when they do not help with the development of the individual, nor do they keep the integrity of the original concept intact. This becomes a real issue in the classroom and on the field as requirements must be met and positions must be fought for. If students want good grades, they must compete with themselves and study. If athletes want playing time, they must compete with themselves and the other players. Neither setting should allow for mediocrity to take the place of striving for excellence, but it does happen.

As a teacher, I see this issue come up regularly. I teach American literature to juniors and British literature to seniors. Junior year is usually the toughest year. A lot of that depends whether or not they intend on going to a four-year college or university. The vast majority of them do, so the foreign language requirements for that are usually finished up their junior year. In my county, we have a seven-period day for high school, so some of my students have six to seven academics depending on foreign language and their pathway choice. Those classes are usually considered as close to a core class as an “elective” could get. When some of these students begin to struggle, they will get too far behind in a couple of their classes to be able to catch up and pass them by the end of the semester. This opens a couple of options for them, and we begin to see their reasoning. There are times it is a true situation of taking too many academic-type classes. But there are a few who do this intentionally. Their original thinking was that they could take the class in summer school since it is built for the students to pass. Now, with the inundation of online class options, the counselors will enroll these students in an online version of the class, which can be completed and passed with a week’s time if worked on



consistently. I have taught summer school the past eight years and some of these types of students are habitual attendees. With no hesitation, they will tell me that the summer school version of the classes is much easier, and they fail their regular school year classes on purpose. When we talk to the parents of these students, they truly believe that this is an acceptable way for them to complete their education. My question is, what are they really learning? They are not learning the material as they should, nor are they learning the amount of material they should if the online classes can be completed within a week. Where is the motivation for these students, or why is there a lack of motivation in these students for them to end up where they do? To me, I see them learning ways to make life easier and not have to compete with themselves to become better than they were. I am sure that is the student-athlete/coach in me, but I do not believe they are setting themselves up for a better life experience when they are done with schooling.

I see this similar issue transfer over into athletics. The “trophy for everyone” philosophy is exactly opposite to what coaches at the competitive levels, high school, college, and beyond, are trying to instill in their players and programs. Everybody does not always win. As these students come up through the recreational and travel ball leagues, there is a sense at these games and practices that there are no real winners and losers. Fox example: My son played in the Y youth soccer league. They participate in a spring and a fall season every year. Some seasons there are more teams, which is usually the fall, as kids are very busy in the multitude of sports and activities in the spring. Two years ago, there were six teams in his league. Usually, the top four teams advance to the playoffs. This particular year, the director said that everyone will make the playoffs so no one is left out. What is this teaching the kids? I am all for teaching the concept of playing for the love of the game, but at the advanced and older levels – all-star, high school, college, and professional tournaments – there have not been any teams admitted to the

playoffs with zero wins on the year, yet that was the case during that soccer season. At the high school level, it seems as though the middle school level players receive mixed messages at times. There is nothing wrong with playing a game for the love of it. I tell my players when it stops being fun, it is time to be done. At the high school level, players have to enjoy it for it to matter to them; but players at the middle school level are going to enter into a setting that requires them to produce and win, and some of them are not used to that idea. At some point, the idea of success is needed to advance to the next level must be taught.

Walt Whitman was a huge fan of sports and understood the purpose behind them. In *Leaves of Grass*, the poem "A Song of Myself" discusses many of his perspectives on life. In section 47 Whitman (2007) states, "I am the teacher of athletes, He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own, He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher" (p. 74). He believes that the student must become better than the teacher. One aspect of that philosophy is it ensures that the craft will continue just as good if not better than it was. Another is the student must push, challenge, and compete with himself to become the best he can be. I have had players that were decent high school players, but not skillful enough to start. In some cases, even getting consistent playing time throughout the season would be tough. I have learned my lesson of keeping too small a team. Last year we started with eighteen varsity players. At one point we had seven players injured, two were out for the year. We finished the season with a jv infield starting in a playoff series because we had run out of players. This can be a good thing as it can help those players develop faster than they would by strictly remaining at the jv level. The situation that upsets some players, and mostly upsets their parents, is when younger, more talented players play in front of the older, less talented players. I have seen athletes in different sports at my school leave to go to a smaller private school so they

could play. Sometimes it is the athlete realizing he/she is not talented enough to play at the level we expect so we can be competitive. Sometimes it is the athlete's parents who want more, or want the experience more, than the athlete does. I had a baseball player that started for me as a sophomore named David. He was the designated hitter that year, and our right fielder his junior year. He was a tall, muscular kid, he had good speed, a great arm, a good hitter, and could pitch. He was an overall good high school baseball player. Out of nowhere I am told David is transferring to a small private school because he wants to play first base. The starting first baseman, Kohl, and David were in the same grade level, and Kohl is great. He is solid defensively and has led the team and the region in hitting for the last three years. I could not, in good conscience for the overall benefit of the team, replace him with the David. Kohl could not play another position being lefthanded and not very fast. With one in right and one at first, we had two solid bats in the lineup, and I could use another in the designated hitter spot. After it all shook out, David transferred and had a decent year, but sorely missed his teammates and experiences he had with us. I could have recruited him out to be a collegiate outfielder, but that was not acceptable according his parents. As it turns out, he did not go to college to play. I truly believe he lost opportunities to play in college because of the transfer and desire to play only first base. This bothered me for a few reasons. One, he was a great kid, everything we could want in a returning player; a good leader, book smart, clean discipline record, loved to work out, but he absolutely hated confrontation. When this first came up, he could not talk to me one on one without breaking down. He got removed from the atmosphere and teammates he loved because of a decision he could not approve or disapprove. Two, after talking to his parents and learning of his decision, I still offered to do whatever I could to help him in the future. There were a few coaches interested in him, but when he transferred and changed positions, some of those coaches

could not use him at that position, so they dropped out of the recruiting. Along with the fact that college coaches are also mindful of the parents of the recruits. The reasons for the decision to transfer may have changed their perspective as well. Three, what bothers me the most is that he learned he did not have to compete for a position he wanted. He could just leave and find it somewhere else. I know transfers happen a good bit in college for number of different reasons, but for it to trickle down to high school is a shame. I could see that he was a competitor, he competed around us to be better, he competed in the classroom to have good grades. We got to talk to him later after he had graduated, and he told us that he wanted to stay, but his mom really wanted him to play first and be the standout there. Why not allow him to compete for a spot that HE wanted? To this day, I hate that he left for the reason he did. In his book *Juvenescence*, Robert Harrison (2014) discusses the purpose that youth serves. When describing the age of youth today, Harrison (2014) says,

We do not promote the cause of youth when we infantilize rather than educate desire, and then capitalize on its bad infinity; nor when we shatter the relative stability of the world, on which cultural identity depends; nor when we oblige the young to inhabit a present without historical depth or density. (p. xi)

I believe this applies directly to the situation of David and his parents. He was not allowed to mature and recognize what he needed to do to be successful. He was forced to go to another school and play for a team and a position his parents wanted. By making the choice for him, David lost the opportunity to develop and grow as a person in a situation that was uncomfortable.

Harrison (2014) also talks about adults still wanting to have child-like experiences. He states, “A creature born into the support structures of human society has the luxury of prolonging its juvenile development so extensively. In sum, our genius as a species lies in our reluctance to

grow up” (p. 20). In David’s case, his parents took this to the extreme and tried to live their own child-like experiences and desires through him. This made David a pawn and did not allow him to be his own person. When the concept of having an inner child is applied properly, some adults can find joy in things people of their age usually do not. How great would it be to know that as a young person that he/she would get to play games for about half a lifetime? Having an inner child as an adult can be great thing if exercised properly. It continues the feeling of excitement and wonder that are too often lost in the late adolescent years. There are many immature adults and over mature children in society. The adults who never grew up or understood life, and the kids who were the “old souls” of their generation. The combining of these two can create a person who clings to the feelings of childhood yet understands the adult life he/she must adapt to. This type of make-up makes for great athletes who understand their responsibility to their societies but play like a twelve-year-old still hunting something special.

Admiral William H. McRaven (2017) is a retired Navy SEAL who gave a commencement speech at the University of Texas that was turned into a book called *Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life...And Maybe The World*. In it he talks about failure and the choices we have once we experience it. When he failed during SEAL training, the instructors would assign them to the Circus. The Circus is a two-hour period of extra exercises and calisthenics that was meant for punishment at first but ended up making the Circus attendees stronger and more prepared. He says this, “In life you will face a lot of Circuses. You will pay for your failures. But, if you persevere, if you let those failures teach you and strengthen you, then you will be prepared to handle life’s toughest moments” (p. 51). When athletes are given the easy way out, they do not get any better. At some point in their life, it must stop being acceptable to fail. Athletes will always fail. In fact, baseball players understand that if they choose to

participate, they will fail on a consistent basis. I believe what sets the student-athletes apart from the general population of students is how they treat their failures. If they can learn from them and compete to fix the problem and prevent themselves from failing as often, their only option is to be better. When they apply this idea to their academics, as well as other parts of their lives, they will fail less often and build on their successes. As a teacher and a coach, I would rather give them the tools to help them succeed later than to make it where they are successful instantly. The age of instant gratification is upon us. I see it in the classroom every day; short attention spans when it comes to reading, writing just enough to answer the question with very little to no support to back it up, more time spent on looking for free answers instead of doing the work themselves. It seems to be easy to find a way to get results immediately in many of the things we do. In the cases of our student-athletes who do not learn to compete when their situation becomes tough, they quit and move on to something else that is easier.

**“Golf is a day spent in a round of strenuous idleness.” – William Wordsworth.**

Understandably so, competition can become more of a distraction or a burden to some students and athletes than others. In some ways, it can be detrimental to their success. Ultimately, the students and athletes need to understand that once they leave the academic setting, competition in the real world will take hold and determine the outcomes of many situations. Applying for jobs, buying a house, acquiring a loan, opening/running a business, placing their children in the best school/school district, all of these are laden with competition to see who can become the best and provide the most for themselves and their family.

In his book *Mind Over Matter: Lessons on Life From The Art of Rowing*, Craig Lambert (1998) discusses many different aspects of rowing, or crew, and how they apply to the everyday world of students and athletes. Like life, and especially competition, there is a fine line that one

must walk to remain stable. He states, “So rowing this boat demands a delicate balance. Just as when walking a tightrope, you must keep your body precisely centered; throw your weight even slightly to one side or another and severe trouble immediately ensues” (p. 19). The key is the big picture. There is always a wide lens view of all that goes on and the students and athletes must be able to recognize where they fit into the grand scheme of things. If one takes the competition too seriously and tips the scale too far in that direction, that person becomes the one that holds himself/herself back. If one takes the competition too lightly, others will pass him/her and he/she will lose playing time, possibly a starting position. I believe the most dangerous of the two is when competition is taken too seriously. As productive and purposeful as competition can be, it can also be taken to the extreme and take on a negative connotation in athletics. The need for competition and the desire to be the best can become an obsession. Alfie Kohn (1992) discusses this in his book *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*. He writes,

Our leisure time is filled with highly structured games in which one individual or team must defeat the other. Even within the family there is rivalry – a muted but often desperate struggle that treats approval as a scarce commodity and turns love into a kind of trophy. (p. 2)

Competition can be a healthy thing, but it must come with limitations and not treated as a necessity to set out and accomplish a task. Even when they are little, children compete to be the best at everything. As they grow up, some students and athletes can be so competitive in their setting that they become their own worst enemy. They become the very obstacle that prevents them from achieving success, whether in the classroom, on the field/court, or along the everyday path of life. There must be an even balance of competition throughout the lives of students and athletes. It can consume them very easily and become an addiction that ruins them as well as

many aspects of their lives. It can cause irreparable harm to one's relationships, job opportunities, leisure activities, and overall outlook on life. Until I grew much further along in my years, I struggled with separating competition from the experience of enjoying something I thought I could do. I was, and still am at some things, extremely competitive. I took everything as a challenge and was determined to win at everything. If someone wanted to make that person with that personality truly miserable, introducing that person to the game of golf would accomplish that task, and much more. It is even worse when the super competitive person introduces himself to golf, which is what I did.

I consider myself to be fairly athletic. I can do a handful of skills well enough to challenge myself to get better at them. When I come across something that I absolutely cannot do, I back off. I had hit a few golf balls early in my life and I performed the task sufficiently enough to have the notion that I could be decent at it and it would be enjoyable. I quickly learned that a full round of golf is not built for the new golfer. My drives were nicely labeled as wide right. My mid-iron shots were about forty yards shorter than I perceived they should be, and that was when I did not top the ball and watch it roll thirty feet. The only shot I could hit with any confidence and worth the entire round were the pitches about 100-120 yards from the hole. I was phenomenal at those, but then I had to putt, and that was not going well. I would get beyond angry at myself hitting all of these shots everywhere except where I was supposed to. I would internally chastise and yell at myself, slam clubs into the ground, and just all around embarrass myself in front of whoever happened to be near me at the time. I would end these rounds exhausted for a couple of reasons: One – every time I hit a bad shot, I would hit another one until I got it where it needed to be; two – the self-beratement and loathing took a toll on my physical ability to play as long as I had to. My dad asked me why I get so competitive when playing. I had



not played very much and it was all very new to me. My answer was, “Because I’m going to win. I hate losing.” That mindset and approach to a game that is difficult for the professionals, much more for the amateurs, is what caused me many growing pains for the years I learned to play. I could not take the competitiveness I had to have on the bump to the tee box or putting green. I had not yet learned to take into account the little wins throughout the rounds and only focused on the struggles and failed adjustments that only incensed me more. I had plenty of self-determination to drive myself to get better, but I was doing it completely the wrong way. As I learned how to view the big picture and continued to play, I began to enjoy playing and figured out how to curb my competitiveness for the appropriate times. I ended up becoming pretty good. I had a group I would play with and we would win some of the local tournaments on the weekends. This is when I figured out that a high degree of competitiveness is not always healthy in every situation.

This is a hard lesson for all student-athletes to grasp as they make the transition into an everyday life. The uber competitive ones have the hardest time because of the nature of either their student-athlete experience and atmosphere or their personality. I was at a small, NAIA college that only had 500 students on campus. The athletic pressure and demands were intense, yet manageable for me. I could not imagine myself in the pressures and demands of a NCAA division one or division two school. Every person has their limits, and I recognized early on at Montreat that my limits had been reached. My unproven academic record along with newly found footing with my health mixed with competitive nature would not have been a great mix at a larger school far from home. I am grateful for my time at Montreat, but like all student-athletes, I had to adjust to life outside of athletics and learn when and where to apply the qualities needed on the field to my everyday life.

Without competition, I would not be where I am today. Competition comes in many forms and can be applied to different situations in unique ways. But as Kohn (1992) discusses, we must be careful when and how far to push competition in our lives as it can be the downfall of people who could accomplish great things. The inclusion of competition in the classroom is vital to the development of successful students, but again, caution must be taken to ensure they are not overwhelmed with the expectations that are put upon them. Through his stories of SEAL training, Admiral McRaven (2017) shows that it is not about being successful instantly every time, it is about failing and learning from those failures about the tools that can help you be successful later in life. I do believe as a teacher and a coach this is my job. My students and players need to be competitive, but with an understanding that during the competitive times, tools will be gathered for them to be successful once they leave my school and program.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THEY WILL BE EVERLASTING: HOLDING ONTO THE “ATHLETE”

#### IDENTITY THROUGH COACHING

This chapter focuses on what athletes take away from their athletic experiences. First, I discuss the impact of athletics and the responsibility the athletes have when it comes to themselves and the self-direction they must take. I include Ludwig Wittgenstein (1988) along with many examples of well-known sports figures to support these ideas. Second, I focus on the comfort zones of athletes and finding their place. Stories from John Wooden (2004), Roy Williams and Tim Crothers (2009), and Joan Cronan (2015) highlight this portion and explain the importance of athletes finding their footing. Finally, I discuss the overall affect athletics has and how athletes take the lessons learned and apply them to other aspects of their lives. Jenny Moshak and Debby Schriver (2013) are lone writers in this section as my story accompanies and highlights their points.

**“Sports were supposed to be a reflection of life, A life lesson, A test of endurance, A great preparation for the world.” – Harlan Coben**

There is a great deal of meaning that comes from the sports athletes play. The affect athletics has on the participants influences society as well. Localized societies tend to identify with those sports programs and athletes. Many professional teams have theme nights and events to draw a crowd and involve as much of their community as possible. Names like Mike Trout in Los Angeles, Aaron Rodgers in Green Bay, Stephen Curry in Oakland, Sidney Crosby in Pittsburgh, Nick Saban at Alabama, David Shaw at Stanford, Mike Martin at Florida State, and Lebron James in Los Angeles all have a tremendous following as the fans of those players and teams flock to the stadiums and arenas to see them coach or perform. Many college towns shut

down on college football gamedays, each collegiate baseball team's fans have their own traditions in the stands, cities will close down roads for a parade celebrating their championship teams, and city and state recognition days for those teams are declared, all because athletics was put at the forefront of their society. While these conditions seem favorable to all places, there are underlying issues that athletes must adjust and adapt to. Although their talents and skills are on display, there is a responsibility that comes with them.

Once the students choose to identify with athletics, there will be a handful of issues, views, and choices that they will encounter. Athletes must be able to work with many different people and personalities to achieve their purpose, to build a team and culture. This is where athletics plays a huge role in setting these issues to the side, showing the observers that there can be a purpose, and everyone can come together. Student-athletes are still impressionable young members of society, observing and listening to find their own views on society and paths in life. While a few bring their biases and demeaning ways to the field or court, the overwhelming majority understand what it means to be accepting of each other and disregard the outside forces that are trying to push them one way or the other. Stunning examples such as Jackie Robinson, the 1966 Texas Western championship basketball team, Charlie Sifford, Althea Gibson, and Fritz Pollard are only a few of the major lessons learned from the minority of the sports worlds of their times. At the end of the long day, the goal is the same, to be a part of a winning team. Sometimes, those outside forces are out of the players' control. Mississippi State has enjoyed perennial success by competing in the Super Regionals three years in a row, earning a trip to the college world series last year. They were also on their third head coach in three years; this year they got their fourth. One of the most compelling stories comes out of Conway, South Carolina about the Chanticleers of Coastal Carolina. Gary Gilmore has been the head coach there for

twenty-two years. His teams accomplished fifteen Regional tournaments and three Super Regionals. Although his teams did not reach the College World Series consistently as other teams, his team made the best out of their lone appearance in 2016. They won the College World Series despite being a 'Mid-Major' team. Each of these programs, in their individual situations, learned to push the outside forces to the side and work together as a group, a team. During the process, they learned how to press and stay the course when the odds seemed stacked against them. When everyone plays for each other, great things can happen.

One of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1980) philosophical nuggets is, "talent is a spring from which fresh water is constantly flowing. But this spring loses its value if it is not used in the right way" (p. 10e). Talent is only part of the equation. Whether it is academic, athletic, artistic, musical, or any other skill, individuals must spend time to develop their talent or it is wasted and their potential is never reached. This applies to all aspects of life, especially student-athletes. They have the unique opportunity to hone their skills in two separate realms and apply those lessons and talents to the opposite realm equally. They must understand how to separate those two realms and treat each one as its' own entity. Although this is a responsibility of theirs to learn, there is also enormous pressure on them to succeed at every level and every task, and the academic side of this life is no different. There is a concerted effort to give these student-athletes as many reasonable chances as possible, but with the number of academic rules combined with the number of athletic rules they must follow, the odds are against them. Once these athletic rules are broken once or twice, or the academic rules/regulations are not met, the student-athlete is dismissed from the athletic program, and sometimes, the academic institution they are a part of. There is a sense of disappointment felt because they have many people depending on them to be at their best, and at some point, the pressure of the demands catches up with them. Therefore,

they must use their talents to help them in all aspects of life and to know who they are outside of their athletic realm.

**“Not all who wander are lost.” – J. R. R. Tolkien.**

In his book *They Call Me Coach*, Wooden (2004) mentions he sent a letter to his recruits that not only welcomed them to the opportunity to play basketball at UCLA, but also made the point clear that there would be much more to learn than basketball. There is a sample letter included in the book and, while too long to include here, would be a great reference or insight into what athletics is about much more than the sport itself. Coach Wooden lays out the general rules and expectations any potential UCLA basketball player must abide, as well as discuss what the potential players must do to succeed. In his letter, there are our points that he addresses, but his third is the most in depth. It states,

Remember that you represent others who are responsible for you as well as yourself and your personal appearance and conduct should not reflect discredit in any way upon yourself or upon those whom you represent. Cleanliness, neatness, politeness, and good manners are qualities that should be characteristics of those who are of great influence on young people and you certainly qualify for that category. Be a good example. (p. 239)

Coach Wooden (2004) understood there is much more to life than basketball and that the life qualities and characteristics that he was looking for stood out in a select group of young men. When all of the players come together to form a team, regardless of the sport, the individual characteristics can be seen through their words, actions, and interactions with others. Although all of these credentials are ones we would like to see in our athletes on an everyday basis, high school students have a hard time understanding what being a student-athlete entails. Because of

the differences in our society today as compared to Coach Wooden's time, not all of the qualities are as prevalent as they should be. Part of that is that no one has taken the time to teach the young student-athletes these individual qualities that make an outstanding representative of the institution. Athletics are about life; sports are just the vehicle.

Roy Williams and Tim Crothers worked together on their 2009 book *Hard Work*. While it details Williams' life, it also discusses the role athletics played in his life as a young man and in the making of who he became later in life. Williams' takes the lessons he learned through athletics and applied them to his own life in North Carolina as well as his coaching endeavors once he finished college. He talks about discipline, dedication, and how athletics became an outlet through a rough childhood as well as the basis for his work ethic when he worked as a salesman. Without the experience he gained by being involved in athletics, Williams (2015) acknowledges that he would not have been as successful, nor would he have been as influential on his players.

Williams (2009) has a theory when it comes to recruiting that works well for him. He says, "Recruiting is about convincing kids that they are the missing piece that we need to be complete" (p. 169). Yes, the student has to feel as though he/she fits into the program or the school, but there is another factor that applies to students, no matter which group they decide to identify with, even if they identify with none at all. It is the fact that someone cares for them and will be there to guide and aid them if necessary. Jon Gordon (2014) discusses the factor of caring from the perspective of a carpenter. He says, "Caring leads to success...Caring draws people to you. We all want to work with people who care. We want to help people who care. When you care, you attract people like a magnet" (p. 77). This is a very important factor in a young person "buying in" to an identification. If the person that is leading the group cares about the success of

the whole group, then the whole group will be willing to put forth the effort needed to be successful. As far as athletics goes, high school students are looking for someone they can relate to and someone that will help them prepare for their future, whether athletics are a part of that or not. At the collegiate level, these students have to be comfortable being in a place, possibly far from home, that is new and where the process is unfamiliar. They will need to find the coach that will care for them as a person and not just the benefits of their athletic skills the student brings to the program. In both cases, the high school and collegiate athlete, a caring leader helps to form the athlete's character in a way that builds them into leaders as well. Wooden (2004) worked on this with his players. He would tell them, "Ability may get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there" (p. 152). He was trying to get his players to see beyond their athletic ability and apply this lesson to their everyday lives.

Joan Cronan (2015) was the Women's athletic director at the University of Tennessee for thirty years. She retired in 2012 when the men's and women's athletic departments merged into one. Her book *Sport Is Life with the Volume Turned Up: Lessons Learned That Apply to Business and Life*, has great insight into the life of an athlete or coach. Cronan's (2015) book focuses more on what athletics teaches rather than the business side of running an athletic department. Although she was a women's basketball coach at the University of Tennessee and the College of Charleston, her biggest impact came as an athletic director. She understands how athletics can prepare players for the life beyond the sports arena. When talking about Tennessee's Women's basketball coach Pat Summitt, she states,

Pat Summitt was a great coach because she was a great teacher. She was a teacher with passion, and her basketball court was her classroom. The lessons she taught there have



made a difference in so many young women's lives – lessons about discipline, hard work, commitment, responsibility, and accountability. (p. 200)

I believe what made Coach Summitt successful as a coach was everything she taught outside of basketball. The attributes she taught her players helped them to realize their potential and took them to another level. These are the same attributes I teach my players, but I believe it is tougher to teach them to high school athletes for a few reasons. One, some of them do not take the concept of team and family as serious as I do, which makes it harder to get the messages through to the younger players. Two, the amount of time I have with them is much more limited compared to a college setting. Unless my players are in my classes, I only get to see them for about three hours a day while in season. If they are multiple-sport athletes, my time with them is shorter as they are not with us as much in our off-season training. Three, it is tough getting fourteen-year-old freshmen to understand the same things I am trying to teach my eighteen-year-old seniors. The freshmen believe they have all the time in the world before they get to that stage of life and some of the lessons and attributes we are teaching are not required of them yet. However, I do enjoy seeing them mature and grow up into responsible young men when they leave. As difficult as these attributes are to teach in high school, I still believe it is an integral part of learning to grow up. Growing up is not easy, and the amount of access students have today to a plethora of information at their fingertips is scary. Amongst the constant barrage of news and information, and they a small percentage of stories related to athletics. Cronan (2015) discusses this in reference to the athletes at Tennessee. She writes,

I think what the world doesn't know is that at Tennessee we have five hundred male and female students who are not only outstanding athletes but also outstanding people.

Unfortunately, the public only hears about the one percent who make a mistake along the way. (pp. 159-160)

I also believe this applies to the percentage of elite greatness in athletics. The accomplishments and failures of the elite players are the headlines that the majority of the news outlets use. The everyday, average athletes are the stories that are rarely told. There is a small feature included in the Saturday morning broadcast of College Gameday on ESPN throughout the college football season, but there are many more stories like those that are not covered. These stories are more important than the ones at the opposite ends of the spectrum. Programs, whether athletic, artistic, musical, or anything else should not be defined by the extreme cases on either side. What the programs develop on a year to year basis consistently give a clearer definition of the values of those programs and what they teach their students.

Pat Summitt, the winningest coach in NCAA women's basketball history, was a fierce competitor and motivator. She understood athletics as a whole and the ways it can influence athletes to be better people. She understood that competition and commitment are key components that go together. Summitt said, "We keep score in life because it matters. It counts. Too many people opt out because they're afraid to commit. They're afraid of failure." I believe that is true, not just with athletics. There are many daily things that people do not commit to for a variety of reasons, with some of them leading to great regrets that the commitment was not made, the risk was not taken. In some ways, athletics is all about risks. Coaches taking a risk on a player hoping he/she will be the player they believe he/she can be. Athletes risking comfort and complacency to hopefully find something more meaningful and purposeful while enjoying it along the way.

Michael Lewis' (2005) memoir is about his time as a member of his high school baseball team, but it more about the development of character and the lessons he learned from his coach, Billy Fitzgerald. He credits Coach Fitz as the man who taught him the most during his time as an athlete. At the end of the book he is discussing what he was thinking about after a conversation with Coach Fitz. He says,

And that's how I left him. Largely unchanged. No longer, sadly, my baseball coach.

Instead, the kind of person who might one day coach my children. And when I think of that, I become aware of a new fear: that my children might never meet up with their Fitz."

This was a man that was demanding and would work to get the most from his players. As teenagers, they could not see the reasoning that fueled his methods. Lewis conveys that he now understands that he learned more than he thought he did while he was playing for Coach Fitz. His coach Fitz seems a lot like my coach Holder in the ways of motivations and teaching lesson to boys to help them become men. Lewis (2005) talks about the impact coach Fitz had on him and that Fitz could reach him better than anyone else ever had. After a bad pitching outing that ended in a broken nose, Lewis (2005) found a new purpose that related to baseball. He states, "It was as if this baseball coach had reached inside me, found a rusty switch marked Turn On Before Attempting To Use, and flipped it" (p. 52). The "it" he is talking about is the effort it takes to win. Coach Fitz had a paper with a quote on it he was going to give his players. Lewis (2005) writes,

The paper contained a quote from Lou Piniella, the legendary baseball manager: He will never be a tough competitor. He doesn't know how to be comfortable with being

uncomfortable. “It” was the importance of battling one’s way through all the easy excuses life offered for giving up. (p. 54).

Coach Fitz, like Lou Piniella understood the importance of pushing his players to get out of their comfort zone. He wanted them to become uncomfortable so they could adjust and adapt to what the situation needed so they could find success. Lewis (2005) appreciates what Coach Fitz did for him and understands the importance of lessons like these that help make student-athletes better. I am not successful at getting out of my comfort zone. Because of how much I work and the number of responsibilities I have, it is hard for me to find the time to take on or trying something new. I had more time before I got into the doctoral program and teaching summer school. Now, I am working almost year-round. I try to learn new things and view issues from multiple perspectives, but I do not feel as though I have the time to intentionally force myself out of my comfort zone. This is something I would like to improve on as I get older and my daily schedule gets into more of a routine.

Trying to emulate Coaches Fitz and Holder, I decided to discuss some topic of interest with my players. About three weeks into our season this year, I brought all the players, jv and varsity, into the locker room and we talked about life. I gave them information on college eligibility and how each brand (NCAA, NAIA, JUCO) and division has its own eligibility requirements. We talked about school, what GPA means, what SAT and ACT scores mean and how they are determined, and graduation requirements. I also gave them information on scholarships, what each brand and division can give and how that money is split up amongst the student-athletes. We also talked about the percentages of high school players who go to play at the different levels of college. We also discussed discipline records, in school and out, what college coaches and professional scouts ask when they contact us, and anything and everything

that could educate them about how collegiate athletics work. It was eye-opening for some as they had never heard that information before. I call it Athletics 101. They had some questions, especially my older players, and I did my best to answer them with the information that I knew was correct at the time. At some point the concept of fairness came up. As my earlier stories will display, the “life isn’t always fair” mantra rings true with me, and I explained what I could do to them. I told them I believe that there are times student-athletes are unfairly held to a different standard. One example is scheduling. Our school schedules like most schools in the state. There is a list of preferentially scheduled students that are scheduled first; AP and IB, special education, band, chorus/choir, and JROTC. The rest of the students fall into the general population category, including our athletes. Looking at what they would need to make their day run smoother, give them the best opportunity to be successful, and allow, if possible, a time/place to study before their athletic responsibilities begin does not always happen. There are a few that have a schedule built for a student-athlete, but many do not. We can see a noticeable difference when we go play other schools who do have schedules built for their student-athletes. We play schools that have sport specific weight training classes, which allows them to work on sport specific skills training in the off season. In season, they have the opportunity to complete the individual portions of their practice in these classes. This allows them to cut their team practice time down in the afternoons, which allows more time for their players to study. When our players expect and are expected to out-perform these opponents, that is a tough task to accomplish given the shorter amount of time allotted to prepare, both athletically and academically. So, our players must really dig into the self-determination forces and find it in themselves to want to succeed for more than the tally in the win column. They must use the traits

and concepts athletics has taught them to overcome these odds that seem to be stacked against them.

A habit coaches get into is asking for our older returning players to be leaders. We hold them accountable for not leading the team the right way and expect more from them while they are in the school building because they are an athlete and supposed to be a leader. I came to realize that very rarely are any of these athletes taught what it means to be a leader and what the tools are that will help them accomplish that. They have the opportunity to represent the school in a unique situation because of their skills, but we cannot demand more of them than what they are aware of. There should be options for them to learn the qualities of a good leader and opportunities to display those skills. We should not require it of them just because they are older.

On the other end of the spectrum, we talked about how being a student-athlete should not be an excuse for them to show bad judgement and neglect all of the traits and concepts we are trying to teach them through athletics. The age-old story of the athlete and a non-athlete student that break the same rules and do not get the same punishment plagues almost every school. Time and time again this issue comes up and because he or she is an athlete that does so much more for the school, the athlete avoids punishment where the non-athlete pays the price. Just because the student happens to be an athlete, this is not an excuse to allow privileges that would not be afforded to the non-athlete students. Student-athletes have the stigma of being allowed to get away with more because of their athletic status. Being a minute or two late to class, turning in an assignment later than the original due date, or any other “perk” that comes with being an athlete can be a divider when it comes to the acceptance of those students. Ideas such as, “she’s the top swimmer,” or “he’s the top soccer player,” should not carry weight when it comes to academic and behavior expectations, but sometimes they do. It is not fair to the ones who are not an

athlete, but are in band, JROTC, show choir, or all AP courses working to go to a top medical school. This is when student-athletes get the reputation of being “jocks.” Ten years ago, we had a senior football player who was caught stealing phones and tablets from the locker room. He could have been sent to the hearing officer and could have been charged by the police department. The administration let it go because we had two meaningful region games that needed to be won. Of course, it is unfair that he could get away with this, but that is not the worst part. He was caught doing the same thing his freshman year in college. He was dismissed immediately and did not truly understand why. Then, two years ago in the summer, he was arrested for credit card theft. Although the athlete disregarded what the coaches at multiple levels had been trying to teach him, it ended with him becoming a felon. The lack of disciplinary action from our school administration enabled the growth and continuation of this behavior. Now, having a strong administration to handle negative behaviors is another topic and must be dealt with, but the decisions that were made affected him beyond his athletic ability. Sports are just the vehicle for the student to learn the lessons athletics can teach them, but they mean nothing if the player decided to take them at face value.

We ended up staying in the locker room and talking for forty-five minutes. When we got done, some of the players thanked me and said they had never heard of this information before. Some of them seemed overwhelmed with the amount that I covered. In their defense, it is hard for fourteen-year-old freshmen to understand that what they do now will affect their lives and career choices three years later, but that is the opportunity that athletics gives these young adults. If taught correctly, which I believe most coaches do, it allows them to have a better understand of what is expected of them and what they will face when they go off into the world. Athletics does not have every answer, nor does it teach everything the players need to learn, but it does

give them a base to work from with the limited time high school student-athletes have. Growing up is not easy. They need to know what they are preparing for is an immense thing that takes a solid base of skills that will help keep them on track in life, and I believe athletics can do just that.

A few of our players have gone on to do great things on and off the baseball field once they left Lakeside. To me, the best part about them is their drive to be great in the classroom as well. The following student-athletes were in good academic standing throughout their careers at their respected colleges and universities. Jeffrey graduated in 2010 went to Francis Marion, began his career as a starter and later becoming the closer. He got a save against South Carolina on the opening night of Francis Marion's new stadium in 2012. Clayton graduated in 2010 and was awarded the GHSA player of the year for class 5-AAAA that year. He went on to play at Armstrong Atlantic and was invited to the San Francisco Giants tryout after graduation. Although that did not work out, Clayton continued his education and became a Physician's Assistant. Daniel graduated in 2016 and went on to play at USC Aiken and was awarded Peach Belt All-Academic Team three years in a row. Daniel was awarded a fifth year of eligibility because of Covid-19 and will continue his education by pursuing a minor to go along with his major. Jake graduated in 2015 and played baseball at the Air Force Academy. He was named to the Academic All-Mountain West team his last two years. He was signed as a free agent last year by the Cincinnati Reds and is scheduled to try out for the USA baseball team. If those do not work out, he will begin active duty in the Air Force. Will Childers graduated last year and is now at the University of Georgia. He was drafted by the Arizona Diamondbacks, but decided to go to UGA instead. He became a starter for them in the first four weeks of the season this year before everything was shut down due to Covid-19. These are only a few of my players that have go on



to be successful after high school. What makes them special to me is they are successful in their academics, professional careers, and life beyond sport. I believe the lessons they learned through their time in athletics helped to shape them into the young men they are today.

**“It’s not what you look at that matters, it’s what you see.” – Henry David Thoreau**

In their book *Ice 'n' go: Score in Sports and Life*, Jenny Moshak and Debby Schriver (2013) discuss the impact athletics can have on young people and the lessons they can apply to the outside world. This is their take on athletics as a whole:

In spite of their demanding schedules, student-athletes can take advantage of their unique situation. Traveling to new places can expand their interests, pique their curiosity, and open their world to different cultures. Community service is emphasized, with activities that provide athletes an understanding of their many blessings and instill a “give-back” philosophy. Their tight schedules teach discipline and time management. Athletes tell me that their grades are often better during the competitive season because they have to be focused and efficient with the time they have to study. They learn to set goals and work very hard to achieve them. They also learn how to win and lose with sportsmanship and grace. The relationships they develop with their teammates are priceless. Strongly bonded, athletes are very often friends for life. (p 87)

This has been my personal experience as an athlete as well as a coach of athletes. I get to see my players grow into better people and begin to realize what life expects from them once they leave high school. The most significant change I see at the high school level is their level of discipline to prioritize their activities for the day once school is over. In my case, baseball is not just a practice-when-you-want-to type of sport. If players are not working on their skills, honing their

craft, working out to get stronger and faster, then other players are passing them, and the team is not as complete as it should be. Once they leave us, we continue to stay in contact with them as often as we can. The most rewarding is when they come back to the field to watch our games after five or ten years have passed since they played. They come back to talk to us and reconnect, which tells us they are appreciative of their time spent with us and the help we gave them along the way. Moshak and Schriver (2013) go on to say,

Although the student-athlete experience differs from that of other college students, I see that our athletes who do embrace their many opportunities are transformed from inexperienced freshmen to graduates ready to take on the world. How rewarding it is to be a part of their growth. (p 87)

This applies to the life of a high school student-athletes as well. I see our student-athletes who genuinely work and take advantage of the opportunities that our programs can offer flourish in their collegiate years. Whether they continue to play is not important, it is about the growth and development through our athletic programs that has helped them to become who they are.

As a former athlete, I remember trying to soak up as much as I could from my athletic experiences and applying it to my life at the stages that it was appropriate. As a freshman in high school, I would stay late after jv practice to watch and listen to the rest of the varsity practice. I wanted to understand what Coach Holder expected his players to know, so when I got to that level I would be able to perform. In college, we had good player leadership. The returners were like small group leaders once the coaches were done with the large group. Since the pitchers always traveled in a group, we spent a lot of time together not just talking about expectations, but also why they were the expectations. They knew that we were there to help them win, so they would talk us through situations and circumstances during practices and drills. If the younger

ones messed up, we were told what should have been done by more than one player, along with the coaches. At times, we were the only ones on campus, so our coaches would take the time to have conversations about topics outside of baseball. This allowed me to see how they integrated the life lessons they wanted to teach into the workouts and practices. Still to this day, I hear the voices of my coaches in my head directing me towards ideas and decisions I make throughout my normal day routine. I carry them with me daily, and I try to combine their philosophies and tactics to help me tackle situations on and off the field. As a current high school teacher and coach, I try to be a voice that will help direct my students and players toward the choices that are best for them. Whether they continue their athletic career in college, decide to concentrate on academics in college only, go to the military, or go straight into work, I get to see them transform into young adults who have a passion for what they do and what they can become. To me, that is the most important part of my job.

As I grew older and my life began to take shape, I had to figure out what direction I would go. I have always absolutely hated the idea of having a five-year plan or ten-year plan. Everything can change and then disappointment of some kind will set in. As a high school student, I could barely see a week ahead, much less years. As a college student knowing professional baseball was not in my future, I had a little better idea of what graduation would mean and the opportunities that an education degree would offer. As a student-athlete, I was granted extra study sessions in the lessons and traits that athletics would offer to the other aspects of my life. The following is a short list of those lessons and traits taught to athletics' participants: hard work, dedication, trust, selflessness, team, tenacity, fortitude, commitment, discipline, passion, sportsmanship, optimism, confidence, overcoming adversity, and use of body language. It all depends on how the participants decide to take those lessons and traits and use them in their

everyday life. As former student-athletes continue to use these lessons later in life, they develop into behaviors that are evident in the way they live their lives on an everyday basis. As a member of this group, I try to incorporate these into my life as well as my children's. I have not done as good as a job as I would like to in this area. My problem is that I work too much. I teach school, teach summer school, drive for the Masters' Tournament, coach baseball – which usually takes me from mid-January through the end of June along with off-season training, and keep up the facilities throughout the year. I have not had the typical opportunities that many fathers have to teach their kids what they believe is important. Hopefully, because of what I do, I can teach them these traits and concepts in a way that resonates with them when they leave for their own adventures, athletic or not. The best way for me to teach these are through an athletic reference or background of some kind. All three of my kids like sports and they play different ones. Not that I believe what I do is the most important thing, but I want them to experience what I do, how I do it, and the lessons my players learn through baseball so they can recognize these lessons when they venture out on their own. I believe by understanding these lessons, they will be more prepared when they face obstacles and encounter challenges. Optimistically, I hope they will have someone in their lives that can continue to teach them once they are beyond my reach. If it happens that my kids give up sports for something else, hopefully they can take what lessons they did learn during that time and apply them to whatever their next adventure is.

No matter what one does after a career of something, it will always be difficult to give that part of life up. Finding a new path after spending the majority of a life on another is a difficult transition. Players who transition into coaching have an opportunity to hang onto the identity of being an athlete. By doing so, Wittgenstein (1980) idea maintaining the value of one's spring – in this case talent – is applied as the new coaches are teaching what they have learned to

the new generation of athletes. It all comes down to the willingness of the student-athletes to embrace their experiences, which is what Moshak and Schriver (2013) discuss. They believe student-athletes have a considerable advantage over other students as they are exposed to a unique curriculum and experiences places and people otherwise not possible, but it is up to them to take what they have learned through those advantages and apply them to their lives and their communities.

## CHAPTER SIX

### REFLECTIONS

Chapter six focuses on the findings and realizations I have come to during my venture of self-reflection as I wrote my stories. I discuss what I discovered as I went through the process of writing a memoir as well as the how to truly self-reflect and discover new things about myself I never knew were there. My findings will include my growth and maturity, the importance of using different lenses and perspectives to view situations through, and what I want my students, players and children to learn during the time I have with them. The I also discuss areas of potential extensions of my study and where other fields could be explored. I realize how my experiences have affected my teaching, coaching, parenting, and the affect I have on my students, players, and family members. I also discuss areas of potential extensions of my study and where other fields could be explored.

**“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” – J.R.R. Tolkien**

Through my dissertation inquiry, I began my journey to comprehend who I am because of who I was. I know I am considered “different” because of my health history, but I did not know how much that affected my perspective on situations and issues that I have dealt with throughout my life until I reflected back on those instances through this memoir. As a teacher and a coach, I wanted to know how my experiences through athletics have shaped me into who I am. I wanted to understand how I can better serve my students and players with the lessons I learned through athletics. By writing a memoir, I was able to recount those important experiences and reflect on the way I dealt with them. The self-reflection that writing this memoir forced me to do aided me in understanding myself and how and why I teach and coach the way I

do. It also made me aware of areas that I can improve on to make the education of both my students and players a more meaningful experience.

**“To gain your own voice, you have to forget about having it heard.” – Allen Ginsberg**

The inquiry of memoir was the best form of inquiry for me as it allowed me to apply my research directly to my own experiences. This was the best opportunity for self-reflection as I relived the circumstances, conversations, and decisions as I wrote them out. As I self-reflect on these experiences, I had the opportunity to see and evaluate some of my life experiences through different lenses; a student-athlete, teacher, coach, husband, parent, and student. This was not an easy task for me. I would have to agree with Allen Ginsberg’s quote, “Every voice is to be heard, everyone’s story should be told,” I just never thought of my story as one that was important to tell. This was a frustrating process for me as I worked to get the details correct, in order, and on paper to give the readers snapshots of my life. The different lenses I used to reassess my experiences are the same ones I struggled to balance as I wrote my memoir. While writing, there were never enough hours in the day to accomplish what I wanted to and at least one of my roles would get neglected for an amount of time longer than I would have liked. This gave me the opportunity to self-reflect on the number of tasks I take on at one time, knowing that some will be unavoidable and will have to coexist. Through this memoir, I learned how I work, think, act, and believe, and I felt vulnerable and exposed as I self-reflect on those situations and experiences. Through self-reflection, I recognized what I learned about myself was brought about by the material and viewpoints taught in my doctoral classes. My professors introduced the multiple lenses I used to assess my life experiences. As I applied those lenses, I learned valuable lessons from my life experiences and discovered who and what has influenced me on my path to who I am today. Reading multiple sources on a plethora of topics from writers such as Dewey

(1916/2019), Kant (1908/2015), Gros (2011), Pinar (1975, and Morris (2015), that I will later discuss, allowed me to see my life from an assortment of perspectives. I also realized that I have been taking the lessons I learned as a player and have continued to apply those in my professional and personal life. I continue to challenge myself scholastically by teaching an AP class, taking a gifted training class, and going through the doctoral program. I am persistent in my quest to continuously make the people around me better as I work with my players in the off-season constantly searching for new training techniques that will be beneficiary to them, working with my students to find what pushes them academically and help them be successful, and endlessly striving to help my own children in their athletics and schooling. I now feel as though I am equipped to view situations I encounter and evaluate the circumstances with more clarity because of what I have learned through my academic program. Writing this memoir is the culmination of those classes and the opportunity to put viewing through multiple lenses into action. I not only reflect on my life experiences, but also take the feeling of vulnerability and turn it into something positive. Reliving the past is not easy to do, but one can learn the most about where he/she is going from where he/she has been. As I wrote, I saw early on that this applied to me as I realized how my perceptions of those situations changed as I aged. I saw many of the experiences differently as I wrote them than when I lived them. Though the thoughts and emotions I had then are still associated with those experiences, I began to realize how they were perceived from outsiders looking on.

As I relived the experiences as I wrote them, I saw that my time in athletics was not wasted. The people, places, circumstances, and meanings associated with those experiences bring me to where I am today. By taking the lessons I learned from my former coaches and I working to teach them to my students, players, and children I believe my time in athletics was



beneficial and not wasted. My time in athletics has taught me to know the differences between short-term and long-term gains, immediate and future success, and that everyone has a different skill set to contribute to tasks we work on collectively. The short-term gains are not always in the best interest of the player. Finding a way to get an immediate return on the investment may be harmful to the overall outcome down the road. Pitching my best guy on short rest could be detrimental to his health, cheating him of a possible future at the collegiate or professional level. Although we (the team) would hopefully benefit from him pitching that day, the stress on his body and the possibility of ruining his chances to further grow his skills is a disservice to him. The long-term gains are the ones that are the most important. Gradually increasing my best pitcher's pitch count, sufficient rest days throughout between appearances, and physical care taken between appearances will give him the best opportunity to have a future in the game as well as an education. By maintaining those specifics, the team may not get the results we would want, but it is in the best interest of that player. By following those specifics, it also allows other pitchers the opportunity to use their skill sets and work towards the goals specific to them. As long as they are making progress towards what they want to do or what they want to become, I can rest knowing we are doing the right things. The same thing applies to the classroom. My job is to get them ready for the next grade level, pacing their work and difficulty so that it is beneficial to them in the future. Allowing them to be academically dishonest or take the easiest way out of a tough assignment will not be beneficial to them as they progress to become seniors in high school or college freshmen. Along with my own children, teaching them to manage their time, to use their resources – which is much different than looking up the answer, and increasing the critical thinking skills will allow them to handle the more complex assignments and projects as they continue to grow and mature.

Being a student and a player is much different than a teacher and a coach. Watching my coaches build teams and interact with players throughout the seasons has taught me how to take the strengths and weaknesses of my classes and teams and make the best decisions for the overall productivity of both groups. It is not easy, and I have learned to adjust and be fluid and adapt as we work through our time together. My case may be a little different than others. I still get the opportunity to walk the schools I attended, coach on the fields I played on, and see the coaches that were my mentors. In some ways, I have the opportunity, even for a short, occasional moment, to relive some of those experiences before a game or before a class. Walking the halls where I had to take summer school classes twenty years ago in the same school building I now teach in is a reminder to me that students who struggle can still find success. I use that experience to try to reach the struggling students in my classes. When my team travels to play at Evans, I remember my experiences there and the emotions of the big games I was a part of. At Evans, there is a black banner with a white 25 on it. This is in remembrance of Reynold Borseth, one of my teammates that was killed in a car wreck his freshman year of college. He had gone on to Anderson College to pitch and was coming home for the weekend. He came to Evans his junior year and wanted to learn how to pitch. We would work on mechanics and strategy to go along with his arm strength. Before a game there, I remember the work he put in and the dedication he had to becoming better. It is sad that he died so young with such a promising collegiate career ahead of him. He was not given anything in his short career but an opportunity to prove himself, and he did just that. He went from an athletic body to a collegiate pitcher over a two-year span. I reflect on those times with Reynold before our game time at Evans and use that as a personal story to tell my players to hopefully inspire them to continue to improve. As I experience these short moments, some of them painful and some of them uplifting, I understand

now that these moments are also opportunities for restoration. Whether it is restoration of belief, understanding, compassion, empathy, intentions, or self-confidence, the experiences I wrote about have newly focused my attention on those traits rather than the outcomes. The outcomes may have been the same, but if I altered my perception on a situation, it may have turned out differently. Seeing players transfer with no specific reason offered, missing a teachable moment with my children, and seeing the worry on my parents' faces as I grew up with the many questions surrounding my health as a child are all things I wish I could have either known, changed, or made a little easier somehow. Although writing those stories and reliving those experiences were not easy, they were necessary. They forced me to re-evaluate and self-reflect on my positions now vs the past and find new ways to better serve my students, players, and family members. What I have taken from this experience is the fact that I have grown and matured as a person from the times of the experiences I have written about. Some of it may be the mellowing with age, but most of it is an understanding of how everybody's perspective on the situation and the lens they are looking through all vary. There are different ways and approaches to every situation and the combination of those ideas of how to handle the situation is better than just one outlook all the time. As I wrote these experiences, I struggled with the emotions that were stirred within myself and the thoughts of second guessing what I had done and said. I know that through my studying and reading, this is the main by-product of writing a memoir. The emotions and thoughts are stirred within because they are necessary to make the connection with the past. By connecting with these past events, I can learn from them and work towards making the future events better experiences for all that are involved.

Although memoir is a tool for self-evaluation, it also allows some freedoms that other forms of writing do not. Memoir as fiction is an option for writers to protect themselves and

others as they tell their stories. It allows writers to create composite characters, show the raw characteristics and emotions of the characters, and reinvent some truth as the details of the experiences may be lost. In *Memoir: An Introduction*, Thomas Couser (2011) says, “Characters in memoir are of course authorial creations; we know them only as effects of words on a page. But at the same time, they are representations of real people, who are vulnerable to harm” (p. 13). Although memoir is the path some writers may want to take, they feel safer placing their characters and life experiences in the fictional setting of a novel because of the harm that could come to those individuals. When discussing how authors of memoir and fiction decide what to draw from their own life and place into their writings, Mills (2004) writes,

I have wrestled with these dilemmas in my own career as the author of children’s fiction, where all my books are based either on memories of my own childhood (and so on my relationship with my parents, sister, and childhood friends) or on the ongoing experiences of my two school-age sons. I’m always having to agonize over how much of these memories and experiences to reveal in my fiction, and how to do this in a way that honors my obligations to my loved ones. (p. 102)

The idea of protecting people from what ridicule or praise may come their way through their inclusion in a memoir is a responsibility that falls back on the author. I believe memoirists want to give credit where they should and honor those who have impacted their lives. I also believe memoirists genuinely attempt to bring their life experiences to the reader in an authentic way.

Thomas Larson (2007) explains,

Fiction and memoir become synergistic. With memoir as an option, writers can reinscribe something *other* about the self in fiction. The standard adage about writing what you

know in a novel no longer applies. The writer today is treatment-minded: she can assess how she wants to write the truth – imaginatively in fiction, personally in memoir. (p. 162)

Fiction allows authors the opportunity to protect themselves and use creativity to tell their story I feel as though the safety and cover fiction gives authors allows them to be freer with the details they include to describe their characters and storylines. Elizabeth Nunez discusses this concept when explaining her notion on the idea of truth and protection. She states, “It is the necessary aesthetic distance the writer needs in order to transform the ordinary, the mundane, into a work of art, offering at the same time cover for the writer, the veil of illusion behind which she can safely hide herself from the glare of the public eye, and—this is more personal—from the glare of perhaps disturbing introspection” (p. 501). The author may need the separation from the material fiction can offer in order to be as truthful as possible when telling personal experiences. I feel that fiction allows for therapeutic creative writing for those writers who have trouble revisiting troubling times in their past. They can more easily confront their life experiences and work to write about them in a more detailed, truthful way.

This is an option I did not choose as I began telling my story. I wanted to stick as close to the original people, places, and events as possible and was concerned I would become wrapped up in the art of storytelling rather than the substance of the material. Tolkien, Melville, Twain, Carroll, and Dickens all worked their lives successfully into their respective fictional stories, but I did not feel this would be appropriate for me as I told my story for the first time. I wanted it to be as authentic as possible and I wanted to relive the experiences as a first-person character, not a fictional being. Gornick (2001) writes, “Modern memoir posits that the shaped presentation of one’s own life is of value to the disinterested reader only if it dramatizes and reflects sufficiently on the experience of ‘becoming’...” (p. 93). My “becoming” was one that I did not want to

disguise through a fictional character. I wanted to put myself at the forefront and feel the realizations and new understandings through the self-evaluating that took place as I wrote. As I evaluated and reflected my experiences, I learned through the process of becoming through writing that athletics gave me a way to fit into the world. I understand that athletics does not define me, and I am sure I do not define athletics, but I do believe that it is a delicate mixture of both. Being involved in athletics gave me the opportunity to be exposed to a variety of lessons delivered through unique opportunities in the setting of athletics. When I mention I am a teacher and a coach, I think a stigma is assigned to me because of the word “coach.” When people outside of education hear the word coach, they think of a PE teacher who gets to play all day. The coaches who are “real teachers,” who teach a core class, are associated differently with the word “coach.” People outside of education are surprised that I teach English and an AP Seminar class. I try not to let my association with athletics or being an athlete define me, but I think others do because of the word “coach.” They are surprised when I tell them I am a doctoral student. They do not associate coaches with book smarts. I do believe I am still defined by my athletic experiences by other people as they see me as a former player, a college athlete, a “jock” who works to stay in the game he loves. But, I have worked hard to include a variety of life experiences to build a well-rounded person and to show I can excel in other areas. The term ‘jock’ that follows athletes throughout their lives is still applied to me today, but now understand and try to turn that term into a descriptor rather than a label. I want to transfer the changing of the label into a descriptor to my players and my own children as they grow and continue their athletics journeys in their respective sports.

**“Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery.” – J. K. Rowling**

This advantageous occasion for self-reflection also provided the opportunity for me to re-discover myself in my professional role as a teacher and a coach. Reflecting on my experiences and the people involved in them helped me to see that the view of the world is vastly different as an adult in a leadership role rather than a student in the classroom and an athlete on the field. The amount of responsibility on the teachers and coaches can be overwhelming at times and the students and players do not realize the weight of that burden. As COVID-19 has become an enormous factor into how we handle and conduct education, the burden on all school personnel seems to stay at the overwhelming state. The requirement to adjust constantly and still maintain some sort of consistency with our students has been a tremendous challenge. Now, we are not only held responsible for the education and coaching of those children, but we are also held responsible for their health and safety. We, teachers, coaches, and administrators, have become more focused on the little things throughout the school day and after-school activities to make sure the students can be as successful as possible as well as have the access to everything that will help them along the way. Wearing, masks, social distancing, phone/Google Meet/Zoom conversations, online classes, protective equipment for athletics, academic and athletic travel restrictions, and limited family/fan interactions have all been new aspects of our lives we work on improving every day. These aspects also show our students what all goes into making their academic and athletic opportunities possible. I have realized that through my writings, decisions seem to be simple from the perspective of the child, but the reality is those decisions are usually complicated by complex variables. The results of those decisions effect more than one person and the lenses teachers and coaches must view the circumstances through can change their

perspective. I noticed that my perspective has changed on the experiences that I wrote about as the lenses I view them through have increased as I have garnered more responsibilities.

As a teacher and a coach, one of the results from my self-evaluation is the realization that my students and players depend on me more than I had realized in the past. Reflecting on my time as a student-athlete, the connection with my coaches was strong the majority of the time. When my connection was not where it should have been, I could see where there was a hole left for me to fill. Some of my students and players come from hard backgrounds and need more of a connection with their teachers and coaches. They do not have the support they need at home to help them find their potential. Some of them do not feel as though their story matters, which is opposite of what I have learned writing this memoir. I still have students and players contact me for advice. I see this as another opportunity to teach them something that I did not get a chance to when they were at my school. I also see this as an opportunity to learn something about them to get a better understanding of their life goals and ambitions. Part of my becoming will be to work towards making better connections with my students and players so they feel as though they have someone to depend on. Another result from my self-evaluation is that I must be better at the application of the lenses that I have learned to view life through. Keeping what I have learned from writing this memoir to myself would be a mistake. I want my students and players to better understand the world they are going to step into once they graduate. I want them to understand that life is vastly different outside the walls of Lakeside and, in many cases, not as secure and comfortable. A small number of my students and players have lived those types of situations first-hand. Some are living in the extreme opposite and have no idea about what the other students go through on a daily basis. This goes back to having a balance. It is not all about school or athletics, and it cannot be all about one perspective or lens. Teaching them to notice the



different perspectives and lenses in which they can see their own circumstances and situations, as well as the circumstances and situations of others possibly not as fortunate, will hopefully help them to have a better understanding of the decisions they will need to make. I am reminded of what Freire (1970) says when he writes, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 53). I want to give my students and players the best opportunity to find the knowledge they desire so they will want to continue their own inquiries to continue to grow. As a literature teacher, the knowledge they can learn from the characters is more important than the structure of the story itself. The growth and development of the best characters is what I want for my students. As a coach, I want my players to learn from the situations they are in and be able to recognize the adjustments they must make to be successful the next time that situation arises. I want them to be able to take what they learn from athletics and apply it to their own lives. I must be able to help them make the connection between the two. Part of my becoming is I have realized I must be a better teacher on the field and a better coach in the classroom. The skills are transferable, so why not use them in ways to best reach my charges? I noticed it is easy to separate them once the venue changes, but for me, they are more co-dependent than I had realized. Managing large numbers, planning schedules of activities throughout the week, allocating instructional time for certain skills, deciding which skills need to be remediated, making decisions that best serve each group as a whole, relating new techniques/material to the students/players so that it is understandable, and connecting with them on a personal level are all key elements that I must do as a teacher and a coach in their version of a classroom. Maintaining these consistently throughout the year is the key to helping the students and players reach their fullest potential with the time I am allowed with them.

Going through this evaluation of my life was a scary, yet necessary process in order for me to be the best I can for my students and players. Reliving the experiences I wrote about pushes those emotions and thoughts to the forefront and have forced me to re-evaluate how I handled them. I realized I hold onto situations with students and players longer than I probably should. I take my job as a teacher and a coach personally because I feel as though I am heavily invested in their lives and want the best for them. I allow their failures and successes and our bonds and disagreements affect me on a personal level. I view them as my family. While we are in-season and for some periods of the school year, I see them more than I see my own children and family. It is hard for me to separate myself from their lives once they graduate or decide to leave. When I discussed the issue of David transferring to play first at another school, I reflected on what I may have done to cause his parents' desire to move him. I believe in their case, they did what they believed was best for David, regardless of what he thought at the time. I viewed it as a lost opportunity to continue to develop a good player and continue our connection we had made over the three years he was there. I thought about what I could have done differently to make it so he wanted to stay, but I do not believe what he wanted was every really a factor in the decision. When I discussed about learning to play golf and how I would become insanely infuriated by my performance, I had an expectation of what I should be able to do. I did not expect to "lose," but I had not thought about the little "wins" along the way throughout the round. When I discussed the Athletics 101 material with my players, I did it the way I believed would get the message across to them the best. I believe some of them have never had someone be upfront and brutally honest with them about how things work outside of the high school setting. For some of them, it as a shock, and the shock may scare them more than educate them about the processes and circumstances I was hoping to get across. As I wrote this memoir and

relived those experiences, I noticed that everyone comes to those decisions from a different angle. I noticed that each person brought a different set of talents to their new school. Not just talents and skills, but the way they approach situations and how they reach their decisions. I am reminded of Donald Hall (1993/2003) and his book *Life Work* when he discusses his experience about reading his poem that was published in the *New Yorker*. He writes,

When I had finished the poem-version, published it in the *New Yorker*, and read it from the platform, I discovered that responses to the poem divided people. Half felt the exhilaration I felt in the ox-cart man's work-cycle; another half found the story discouraging, all that work and you have to do it over again. Temperament, temperament.

Each human division reads the same story; each responds from an opposite place. (p. 22)

Everyone's nature, or approach to life, is different. Going through my self-evaluation and self-reflection, I learned that what I believe is right or correct is not always what others will believe is right or correct. We all have different talents, skills, perspectives, and lenses we bring to and view the world, and that enriches our experiences as we work together to find solutions. This is part of my becoming as well. As a leader both in and out of the classroom, I must understand that I do not always have the answers. I must trust others, students and players included, when I cannot provide a solution.

Personally, I have learned much more than I expected. I know education is important to me, but I never truly thought about what the term life-long learner meant until I was deep into writing this memoir. Earning my previous degrees and working towards my doctoral degree, I thought I understood that a schedule, classes, and instruction are what made up being a life-long learner. With the number of responsibilities I have, I believed those regimented approaches were the only paths toward learning. Writing my experiences through memoir presented the

opportunity for self-reflection that would have otherwise been disregarded. It has allowed me to learn from a certain aspect of my life, and with what I have learned, apply those insights to my life in the future. This process has and will continue to encourage me to apply what I have learned from my self-reflections and continue to apply them to future life experiences. Through my self-reflection while writing this memoir, I have understood that all aspects of life can be learned from, many of them unscripted. Not everything that is learned happens in a formal setting or at a scheduled event. Sometimes we can be surprised by what we realize later in life. At the age of forty, I did not think I would be able to learn what I have about myself through this process. Coming from the mentality that the formal setting of school or class is essential to learning, I believed I would learn more from the classes I took while in the doctoral program than writing the dissertation. Writing this memoir and learning what I have about myself has been refreshing. I now have a more invigorated outlook on education and the different process I can present to my students. Memoir allows me to see the paths I have taken, apply what I have learned and look for a new path as a newly discovered person who will continue to look for opportunities to learn. Reflecting on my experiences while writing has allowed me to look at those situations through the lens of an adult, teacher, coach, friend, mentor, leader, husband, father, and son. I took multiple looks at those experiences through these lenses and noticed how different each one affected me. I realize that whenever possible, I must take time to view as much as I can through these different lenses. Doing this will allow me to have a better understanding of how life's experiences will affect myself and others. I have also come to realize that I must do a better job of separating my responsibilities from each other. I noticed that I let the frustrations of the responsibilities, whether instances directly related to one or the overwhelming managing of multiple, to affect my performance and demeanor towards people I

interact with in other capacities. When this happens, the people I must interact with in the next phase of my day do not get my full devotion as they should. This leads me to neglect my students, players, family members, and friends when it is not fault of their own. The process of my becoming will take time as I find ways to move from one responsibility to another without letting the previous ones affect me in a way that will negate the opportunities and of the people I interact with. I hope that once I am done with my doctoral program, I will have a chance to slow down and reflect more on my decisions, thoughts, and emotions. It is not in my nature to take a break and relax. I find reasons to stay busy to ensure I am being productive either at home or at school. I take the amount of my responsibilities in teaching, coaching, and being a family member seriously. I also want to make sure I have a purpose every day so I find things to keep me busy. My desire to stay active is not out of a fear of my health condition, but a desire to make the most out of the life I have. I recognize I need to slow down and take breaks in order to recharge myself and enjoy life.

I have also learned through my self-reflection that my story is one that is worthy of being told. For many years, I have held tight onto information about myself and have guarded myself from publicity as much as possible. As a life-long patient, I have not known anything different, so I consider my “abnormality” my “normal.” The idea of qualifying as a posthuman never crossed my mind until I learned about what it is in my doctoral classes. In *Educating the Posthuman*, John Weaver (2010) brings a fresh perspective on my condition. He states, “In a practical sense, the posthuman condition is an enhancement of natural human capabilities” (p. 11). In my case, my natural human capabilities would not have lasted very long past birth. The condition I was given was a life limiting one that the medical community had just turned the corner of addressing it successfully. Although I did not receive an organ, and the option of the

Jarvik-7 was considered, I believe I would fit in to the category of an extension. Weaver (2010) explains, “When a recipient receives an organ or possibly multiple organs, their lives are literally extended, sometimes years, beyond the prognosis without a transplant” (p.11). The technology, research, and development of medical procedures are what gave me the chance to continue my life. I was extended well beyond the years thought possible at the time. The Mustard procedure was at the end of its use as the arterial switch had become the new way to correct the condition. Weaver (2010) goes on to explain that we posthumans face the world differently than others. He says,

The posthuman condition requires each individual to face a radical other, a different image in the mirror. This radical other, like the digital image, is polymorphorous. It can take the form of blood, a DNA sequence, a non-organic mechanical device, an organ, or a computer image. No matter what shape this radical other takes, each individual has to recognize it is often the radical other that makes life possible and bearable. (p. 12).

The shape of my radical other was in the form of scars. As I grew up, I looked at my scars as part of me, my story. To others, it was a conversation starter and something to fear. They had no idea how many hours, how much research, and how much effort was put into making a tiny heart work and be able to grow and develop as expected with “normal” children. To me, it was an opportunity to experience life. An opportunity to have a life some did not think was possible. An opportunity to get lost in the game of baseball and find a comfort zone where no one and nothing could bother me. Nothing could hold me back except myself and I liked idea of taking on that challenge every day. Although I do not fit Weaver’s (2010) definition of a Fyborg, requiring the use of technology, I do rely on technology to help diagnose any issues that may arise as I age. Every year, I have an echo cardiogram taken, and electro-cardiogram (EKG or ECG) taken, and

usually come home with a Holter monitor for a twenty-four-hour period. These are part of my yearly routine to ensure my heart is functioning as it should. I have also undergone heart catheter procedures and had a magnetic resonance image (MRI) done as additional preventative procedures. As Weaver (2010) explains,

Without technology, the “magic of art” is nearly impossible in the posthuman condition. It is nearly impossible because technology is not something that is alien to the human body, it is a necessary part of humanity. Technology is part of amor fati, the invention and embracing of life no matter how it may come. To ignore the impact of technology and to shun technology as an outsider is to ignore humanity, to say no to humanity in all of its forms including the biosciences and fiction. (p. 143)

Although my use of technology as a posthuman is not as extensive as others, it is a main component of my preventative medicine plan I depend on to survive. The development of technology and its integration into the various facets of society is happening rapidly, and to not accept it as a part of life and the advancement of humanity is a detriment to the very society we are trying to build.

Brad Petitfils (2015) continues the concept of the posthuman and the development of science and medicine. He states, “Think of how very quickly things are changing today, and how radically different things have already become when compared with just twenty-five years ago, not to mention how the present compares with the Enlightenment, the Renaissance, or the medieval period:...” (p. 41). The world is vastly different from when I was a five-year-old walking into the pediatric cardiology department at MCG. I have seen the evolvement of the technology, machines, procedure and understanding of medicine over the last thirty-five years move at a rapid pace, and I cannot help but believe it will continue. I still go to the same

pediatric cardiology department and see how far things have developed. Hopefully, the integration of the advancement of technologies into that medical facility has been able to help other posthumans like myself continue to experience life. Rosi Braidotti (2013) believes in the concept that we are headed toward a more integrated era. She writes,

The relationship between the human and the technological other has shifted in the contemporary context, to reach unprecedented degrees of intimacy and intrusion. The posthuman predicament is such as to force a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories, for instance between the organic and inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems. (p. 89)

The rapid development of technology and the uses for the advancements in the field make the integration of it into our lives, and possibly our daily functions, more conceivable. Not that everyone will qualify as a Cyborg, but people with health conditions that at one time would have severely limited their activities and experiences would then be able to live an extended, fuller life. After writing my story and reliving some of my experiences, I realize that I must embrace my story of who I am and be comfortable with letting others know. This is part of what makes me a unique person. I work to blend into the different roles I have so that I do not stand out and garner unwanted attention. Writing this memoir has taught me that it is acceptable to be known for the condition I have and that it does not define me. For too long I have feared that my condition would hold me back in a sense that I cannot do what I enjoy doing. So far, I have maintained great health and can do the things I enjoy without restrictions. My self-reflecting showed me that I need to not take so much upon myself to the point that my health could suffer. This will be part of my becoming as well as I learn to say no and not take on so many



responsibilities as something will have to give. Through the self-reflection and self-evaluation processes of memoir, I have come to learn that I still have work ahead of me, I am incomplete. I believe that can be a good thing as there is always work to be done, something to improve, something or someone to make better. In *Life Work*, Hall (1993/2003) discusses the concept of work and that one's life work is never really done. As he was beginning chemotherapy, he came to a realization. He was at a point in his life where he could no longer take on larger writing projects, but he would continue writing smaller works. At the end of his book *Life Work*, he includes a symbol that shows there is more work to do, the job is not complete. He includes the picture of a hederia on the last page, the punctuation symbol for a break between paragraphs. After reading his book, I believe it was placed there with a purpose. Not to represent its' original punctuational meaning, but to resemble that he was taking a break. He had more to do and other aspects of life to attend to, so the placement of the hederia symbolized that he would be back. I think it fits my story as well. Writing my memoir served as my hederia, my break. I took time to write, reflect, evaluate, and learn; now I must take the knowledge I have gained and apply it to my life so that I can better affect the people around me, help them find their potential and hopefully find mine. My students, players, family, and friends will benefit from me working to be better, to help them on their paths as they search for their potential and continue their educational and life journeys, both on and off the fields.

**“Athletics carries its own set of truths, and those truths are diminished when manipulated by people with agendas.” – Chris Crutcher**

Athletics has a great deal to offer its participants when it functions in the correct manner. Athletics is only the vehicle that can be used to get the players where they need to be, not just in the sport, but also in life. The student-athletes involved can take advantage of many benefits

athletics and athletic programs have to offer to help them academically, athletically, socially, and emotionally. They have the opportunity for a unique type of “education” in unique venues. They have a support group in the form of teammates and coaches that is there to help them when they are having trouble. Some of those connections can turn into life-long friendships. They learn how to communicate with people from different places and backgrounds. They also must deal with and handle their emotions, both ups and down, which can change instantaneously. Learning to be accountable to each other as well as themselves is a lesson that never ceases to be applied.

Problems arise when student-athletes are not held to the same standard as the rest of the student body. Allowing academic extensions for missed assignments, behaviors being overlooked or addressed more sternly, the neglecting of the student-athletes because they fall into the category of a “jock, and expecting more from the student-athletes because they are representatives of the school are a few examples of how the student-athletes experience can be tainted. Their academic and educational experiences are different than the non-athletes, but exceptions to the rules and unreachable expectations should not apply to them as a separate population within the high school or university.

As I worked through the process, I noticed there is a lack of literature on the subject of athletics in curriculum studies. There are memoirs by athletes and coaches about their experiences, but there is an extremely limited amount of literature as it connects to curriculum studies or any other academic field. Connecting the life experiences in this memoir to curriculum studies scholars was a challenge, but a small number made a direct impact. The teachings of Dewey (1916/2019), Kant (1908/2015), Gros (2011), Pinar (1975), and Morris (2015) on the importance of play, sport, and currere were important to my development of my writing. Dewey’s (1916/2019) ideas about play in the school curriculum are crucial to student learning.

He says, “The grounds for assigning to play and active work a definite place in the curriculum are intellectual and social, not matters of temporary expediency and momentary agreeableness” (p. 244). The application of a curriculum in the area of play should not be applied as a secondary curriculum. It should be applied as its own concentration as well as in the academic classes when possible. He goes on to say, “Play and work correspond, point for point, . . . in learning how to do things and in acquaintance with things and processes gained in the doing” (p.244). Students can learn through activity, and at times, is a necessity depending on the type of learners they are. Kinesthetic learners need the activity to grasp the concepts. Athletics emphasizes the use of activity to teach the concepts, actions, and material to the players involved. Kant (1908/2015) also believes fiercely in the concept of play. He states, “Physical education is identical to bodily care” (p. 159). To wholly take care of and educate one’s self, the physical component must not be overlooked. Schools and the concept of education can become fixated on the mental capacity of learning that the concept of physical learning is equally important. He also explains, “Playing ball is one of the sports for children, since it involves running which is very healthful. In general, those plays are the best which, along with the skillfulness they develop, also train the senses . . .” (p. 160). He believed that students would learn more than just the sport they were playing; judging speed, distance, angles, timing, and force are the facets that made up the sports that include a ball and therefore, teach more than just the sport itself. I believe both Dewey (1916/2019) and Kant (1908/2015) correlate with my work as I also believe in the importance of play and understand the necessity of it in education. The skills that are necessary for the variety of sports also create a unique curriculum within athletics as they teach more than just the game. They teach skills that can be replicated not only in the classroom, but also in life once their time in athletics is over.

Gros (2011) looks at walking as an opportunity for clarity. He does not believe it is a sport, but does believe in the usefulness of the physical activity. He writes,

You're doing nothing when you walk, nothing but walking. But having nothing to do but walk makes it possible to recover the pure sensation of being to rediscover the simple joy of existing, the joy that permeates the whole of childhood. (p. 83)

Physical activity, even as simple as walking, can be a stress reliever. It allows time to clear the mind, think through situations and problems, and self-reflect on issues one may be facing.

Walking and other physical activities are beneficial for all age groups and can help them feel more productive. As student-athletes become older, there has to be a balance between play and work. There has to be some "play" or enjoyment that carries one through the tough aspects of "work". Gros (2011) references Henry David Thoreau throughout *A Philosophy of Walking*.

Thoreau desired simplicity in his life, and Gros' concept of walking matches well with Thoreau's thinking. Gros (2011) goes on to say, "Walking isn't always an aimless stroll, a solitary wander. Historically it has sometimes taken codified forms which governed its conduct, termination and purpose. Pilgrimage is one of these major cultural forms" (p.107). We are all on a journey of some type. Everyone's journey, or pilgrimage, is of their own choosing, but all of our paths include an education of some kind. I believe we are all looking for something and hope to see clearly whatever that is. He continues, "The walker on nameless glaciers, under futureless skies, across plains devoid of history, scatters the flashes of his gaze into the very substance of things. When he walks, it is to cut through the world's opacity" (p. 110). Athletes are continuously searching for ways to make themselves better, looking for clarity as to where they stand in their sport. Being an athlete, especially a student-athlete, requires a pilgrimage they must see a

purpose in for it to be successful. Walking aimlessly is acceptable from time to time, but being a student-athlete requires a stronger sense of purpose and understanding.

The concept of *currere* is important to the development of people in all walks of life. It also fits well with the process of writing a memoir. Self-reflection is a key factor in learning from the past experiences. Pinar (2004) describes *currere* as,

The method of *currere* – the infinitive form of curriculum, promises no quick fixes. On the contrary, this autobiographical method asks us to slow down, to remember even re-enter the past, and to meditatively imagine the future. Then, slowly and in one's own terms, one analyzes one's experience of the past and possibility of the future in order to understand more fully, with more complexity and subtlety, one's submergence in the present. (p. 200)

My understanding of *currere* is that it incorporates the education of the whole person: past, present, and future. Education is not just about what students can learn at that moment in the classroom. They must have an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and learn from their actions, thoughts, and emotions. I believe through athletics; students have an opportunity to work towards their own *currere* and become a more wholly educated person. I also think of the process of *currere* and the idea that Gros (2011) presents on the pilgrimage are closely related as they both work towards the same process. There is self-reflection and learning that takes place over a period of time, and without that learning, the person will not be as educated as they potentially could. Morris (2015) makes an argument for *currere* when she says,

*Currere* – as the examination of our lived experiences – is a way to explore our interiority, our inner lives in the context of education and in the context of our relations

with others and the larger society. The self cannot be understood in a vacuum but only in the context of the world around us. (p 103)

Learning about ourselves is one component of currere. Learning about our surroundings and how we fit into them is another component that is often overlooked. Morris (2015) goes on to say, “Currere offers a method to examine the inner life in relation to the larger society in order to deepen learning and understanding” (p. 103). Understanding how the circumstances surrounding us dictated certain aspects of those life experiences will help us progress toward a better education of ourselves. Identifying where we fit into society is a crucial element to understand when we are working to learn about ourselves through self-reflection.

The lack of material connecting athletics to the education and development of young men and women is a detriment to the field. Being a living testament to the power of athletics, stories like mine need to be told more often. Hearing other stories of student-athletes who did not have the best outlook or prognosis on life and still finding success can be uplifting and inspirational to the growing number of student-athletes I see in my school and throughout other athletic programs. There is also not a significant presence of athletics in curriculum studies because it does not fit with any one theory or ideology that curriculum studies focuses on. The athletes and their situations or circumstances may fit into those theories and ideologies, but the concept of athletics as a whole does not. This deficit made my connections to curriculum studies more challenging as I had to work to find material to associate the unrelated topics. I am hoping that writing my memoir and connecting it to curriculum studies will help to broaden the field and be a contribution that will be expanded on in the future.

### **Potential Extensions for Study**

As an educator in a field that is becoming less about education, I feel as though I am always reading, searching, and studying to find the next important lesson my students need. Completing this memoir has rekindled my passion for reading for a purpose, not just for a story. As a literature teacher, I am drawn to the concept of memoir through fiction. I believe it is fascinating what Tolkien, Melville, Carroll, and Twain were able to do and I would like to search for more readings that fit into this genre. I believe this genre is a route for a more genuine depiction of ones' self through an invented character and creative setting. As an incomplete person, I believe these works are ones I can learn the most from as I venture into someone else's life story, knowing that somewhere in the lines of text is the truth.

As a coach, I am intrigued by the stories of individuals and teams who have overcome insurmountable odds to become successful. I would like to continue my research on the impact of athletics on the lives of its' participants. I am interested in how their time as athletes has affected their personal lives and the personal and professional directions they have chosen. I would like to take the writings of Deci and Ryan (2008) and apply them to the cases I would like to study.

As a parent, I look forward to teaching my children about what I have learned from my time studying Curriculum Studies and writing this memoir. Both have been exhilarating and excruciating as the process is not easy. They have both changed the way I see the world and myself and I want my children to get a glimpse of what the world can offer them through education and beyond. Everything has a lesson; everything has a point. I want my children to understand that the most important lessons are the ones they must work for, and those can best be

found in an education that encompasses everything around them, as long as they are ready and willing to begin the endeavor.

As I have reflected on the twists and turns of my journey, something I have noticed through this process is the lack of equal emphasis on both academics and athletics. The question arises, How serious are we about academics and athletics? We tell our student-athletes there must be a balance between the two, but that is not what we see the majority of the time on various levels. Collegiate athletics, most noticeably football and basketball, dominate television schedules and change the routine of everyday life in their locations. We see this when the assignments are made for conference tournaments and championships, the increase of traffic throughout the area, the lack of access and availability of hotels, restaurants, and public venues change and disrupts the everyday life of the ones who reside in those locations. Because of the changes brought on by Covid-19, there has been more talk and consideration about the fall athletic schedules, mostly football teams although other fall sports do exist, than the academic schedules those students will have at their institutions. Are they not there to go to school? Where is the considerations and concerns about the importance of their learning not part of the scheduling conversations? How is it not safe for them to go to class, yet close contact sports such as football can continue? Many of my former students that are now in college tell me they are mainly in an online learning environment. They are concerned they are not going to be prepared and understand the material they must know in order to be successful in their path of study. At the high school level, athletics has fueled the conversations about coming back to school more than the learning environment of the students has. The idea was floated that schools had to be have a version of face-to-face learning to qualify to play any athletics because of certain GHSA eligibility rules. Those have now been amended so athletics could take place for counties that are



fully in an online learning environment. The amount of consideration for athletics is understandable, but there should be an equal emphasis on the academic aspects of school and the needs of students as well.

There is another point of view on the athletics side of this argument. At the high school level, athletics are dependent on funding generated through the individual programs. We are caught in the conundrum of being an important facet of the school with high expectations, but not receiving funding at the county level. How does that happen? Seeing what I have seen and knowing that athletics brings some students to school every day, how is athletics not funded by county money? In my county, people involved with athletics can see the lack of equal emphasis between academics and athletics. If we spent the amount of money on each student-athlete we spend on each student, our athletic programs, facilities, and equipment would be unrivaled. We would then be able to offer our students the best opportunities we can for them to be successful. We buy mobile computer labs for all grade levels, projectors for classrooms, AP exams and online credit recovery classes are provided through scholarships, re-design our media centers into learning commons, yet the only funding athletics receives from the county is \$13,000 a year for stadium maintenance. Everything else comes from program generated funds through fundraisers and concessions. Other programs such as drama, art, band, JROTC all have after school or extra-curricular components, but they receive some funding for elements of the class. For example, JROTC received \$7,600 for curriculum support, equipment for their teams, and county bus transportation costs. Art receives \$12,000, but that is spread over three classes, visual art, ceramics, and photography. Those funds are used for classroom materials and curriculum support, supplies, and equipment needed to complete their works such as a kiln, camera, and projectors. Band also receives \$12,000 for music and instruments. They, like art and JROTC,

must fundraise for any extra activities outside of the classroom. Although these funds do not fund any competition, they do pay for the necessities of the classes/programs. Our individual athletic programs do not receive funding, which requires them to be self-sufficient having to raise funds for required equipment such as balls, bases, helmets, pads, and nets. Physical education is part of the Department of Education's curriculum with multiple standards for evaluation. Are athletic teams not an extension of those standards? If so, should they receive funding? Coaches feel as though we are in a position where we cannot be truly successful; we can never do enough for our players, we can never provide enough for our players, we can never develop our players enough although we are constantly and consistently at our fields, in our gyms, and in the weight room. Finding an equal balance between the two is a challenge. Being a teacher and a coach, I see both sides and feel and live the frustrations of both. Hopefully, curriculum directors will see the advantages of investing in athletics so that they are equal to the academic investments.

## EPILOGUE

The landscape of athletics is much different now because of the restriction that have been put in place due to Covid-19. Being a life-long fan of sports, watching televised games with a limited number of fans, cardboard cutouts of fans, and no fans at all is unsettling. I have come accustomed to seeing venue seating with at or near full fan capacity at athletic events at high schools all the way to the professionals. As a spectator from home, I can feel the tension by reading the noise of the crowd, whether it is thunderous roars of joy or the deafening silence of defeat. The sway of momentum can be brought about by the energy from the fans backing their players and chastising the opponents. Home field/court advantage is now a thing of the past. The absence or lack of fans makes the atmosphere foreign to even the perennial players at their respective arenas. Covid-19 has forced us to be more vigilant in our approach to social interactions, but our passion for athletics has not wavered.

In early March, athletic events were canceled at every level. High school seniors lost their last season. In some cases, their chance to go to college; their sport would have taken them there. College players lost opportunities to move on to the professional ranks at an earlier age than planned. Professionals were forced into retirement a season early as their seasons were either cut short or delayed and they simply deemed themselves incapable of meeting the physical strain to come back. All athletic administrators, coaches, and athletes were compelled to make the right decisions when it came to the health of all involved. The caution and concern for the health of everyone outweighed the many unintended possibilities shutting down could cause. As we progressed through the summer, news of college programs dissolving started to reach the public. The University of Cincinnati cut the men's soccer program, Furman University cut its baseball and men's lacrosse programs, Florida International University cut men's and women's indoor

track programs, the University of Akron cut men's golf, men's cross country, and women's tennis. These are only a few of the examples of colleges at all levels cutting athletic programs because of the impact from lost funds due to Covid-19. Football and basketball are usually the biggest financial backers for the remainder of the programs. But without conference and national tournaments for basketball and a limited or postponed football schedule, many colleges and universities are losing money through ticket sales, merchandise, concessions, and television packages. Although these two sports take center stage throughout society during their tournament and bowl seasons, they do drive the continuation of the other athletic programs at their respective institutions.

For the spring collegiate athletes, all players were granted a fifth year of eligibility. That is a huge benefit for the seniors who needed another year to complete school or move on to a graduate degree. It also allowed them another season to play in hopes to make it to the professional level. The problem now lies with the underclassmen and incoming freshman. Some underclassmen would see more playing time once the seniors graduate, but some will have to wait another year. Most schools have decided to honor the scholarships of the incoming freshmen, but some have had to pull their offers because of program funding issues, too many players on the rosters and in certain positions, and the lack of facilities and personnel to field a freshman team to keep them in their programs. Because of these issues, some players have decided to move on to the working world of an everyday job, or moved on to becoming only a student at a local college.

As a coach at a high school, the precautions and protocols put in place have changed the nature of our jobs drastically. From checking players in and out asking Covid-19 related questions while checking temperatures, wearing masks on the sidelines, in the weight rooms, and

in the dugouts, limiting travel rosters and driving more buses/trucks to games, having limited access to weight rooms/gyms so we do not mix teams together, limiting our gameday staff to a skeleton crew, and limiting our fundraisers to contactless or minimal contact options are only a few of the challenges we are facing. Knowing funding our programs will be a struggle is a worry all programs have in a normal year; this year that concern has grown exponentially. All of the precautions, building of schedules, field work, and training we are doing are only in hopes that we may have a season when our turn comes around. The coaches for spring sports have a belief that we must provide the best we absolutely can for our players this upcoming season to make up for the previously shortened season. We are doing our best, but because of the changes in our academic schedule, the demand on the teachers, who are also coaches, has also increased exponentially and finding time and resources to get everything done has been well beyond challenging.

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