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The Impact of a Head Coaching Change on Intercollegiate Student-Athletes

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THE IMPACT OF A HEAD COACHING CHANGE ON INTERCOLLEGIATE STUDENT-ATHLETES

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
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In Partial Fulfillment
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By
Stacey A. Forsythe

August 2015
THE IMPACT OF A HEAD COACHING CHANGE ON INTERCOLLEGIATE STUDENT-ATHLETES

Date Recommended: June 22, 2015

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I dedicate this

To Les and Addison: The love of my life and the life of my love.

My motivation and my strength.

To my Mommy: My hero, the compass of my ambition.

The cultivator of my soul.
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During the writing process, when I should have been pouring over seminal pieces of literature and previous studies, I instead spent copious amounts of time reading the acknowledgement section of completed dissertations; the one section of a culmination of years of work in which the researcher (a human) can express emotion, creativity, thankfulness, gratitude, and the pure elation of being finished with such an all-encompassing task. The hope of being able to complete an acknowledgement section propelled me to finish. In my extensive research of acknowledgement sections, it is clear that, while the dissertation process is an individual endeavor, completion of such a feat is not possible without the support, guidance, and encouragement of others. This acknowledgement section is no different.

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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

- Statement of the Problem........................................................................................................... 3
- Purpose of the Study.................................................................................................................... 3
- Significance of the Study............................................................................................................. 4
- Theoretical Framework.................................................................................................................. 4
- Research Question.......................................................................................................................... 6
- Research Context........................................................................................................................... 6
- Delimitations.................................................................................................................................. 7
- Limitations..................................................................................................................................... 7
- Assumptions................................................................................................................................. 7
- Definitions of Terms...................................................................................................................... 8

**CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

- Organization of Literature........................................................................................................... 10
- Theoretical Perspective.................................................................................................................. 11
  - Psychological Contract Theory..................................................................................................... 11
  - Social Exchange Theory.............................................................................................................. 14
- Brief Historical Context................................................................................................................ 15
- Athletics as a Business................................................................................................................... 16
  - Intercollegiate Athletics: Big Business..................................................................................... 17
  - Intercollegiate Athletics and Coach Pay.................................................................................... 21
  - Intercollegiate Student-Athletes as Employees......................................................................... 22
  - Organizational Turnover............................................................................................................. 23
Organizational Turnover in Intercollegiate Athletics.......24
Student-Athlete Well Being.........................................................25
Stress and Motivation.................................................................25
Relationship with Head Coach.............................................29
Summary.........................................................................................33

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY.................................................................34
Research Question.................................................................34
Context.........................................................................................34
Research Design..............................................................................35
Data Collection................................................................................36
Interviews........................................................................................38
Participants.....................................................................................39
Informant Introductions..........................................................40
Research Quality...........................................................................41
Credibility.......................................................................................42
Dependability................................................................................42
Transferability.................................................................................43
Data Analysis..................................................................................43
The Role of the Researcher.......................................................45
Summary.........................................................................................45

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.........................................................................47
The Informants...............................................................................47
Themes...........................................................................................52
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Themes

Research Question

Discussion of Themes

Theme One

Theme Two

Theme Three

Study Limitations

Researcher Reflection

Implications for Practice

Recommendations for Future Research

Summary

REFERENCES

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

APPENDIX B: Confidentiality and Consent

APPENDIX C: Interview Schedule
LIST OF TABLES

1. Phases in Psychological Contract Formation ..............................................................13

2. Informant Summary ..................................................................................................48
The purpose of this case study was to discover the impacts on intercollegiate student-athletes subsequent to a head coaching change. One research question guided this study: What is the impact of a head coaching change on intercollegiate student-athletes? This qualitative study utilized eight case study interviews in order to achieve a rich description of the phenomenon of a head coaching change in one mid-major NCAA Division 1 institution in the Southeast. Using inductive analysis and the constant comparative method, three emergent themes were identified: (1) Student-athletes seem to accept head coaching changes, (2) Head coaches are essential to team success, and (3) The student-athlete-coach relationship is the core factor of the intercollegiate experience. This qualitative approach to data collection provided meaningful and rich information that has significant implications for athletic administrators, athletic support services, and college administrators.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The concept of organizational change has been widely researched. When an organization experiences a change in leadership, employees may undergo feelings of loss of control, a sense of job insecurity, and decreased individual self-esteem and well being (Kim, Song, & Lee, 2013). Kim et al. (2013) explained that when a major change occurs in an organization, “new norms and rules are often adopted, causing old norms and rules to be less important” (p. 1023). The corporate world and the world of intercollegiate athletics are similar in many ways, including the concept of employers (coaches) and employees (student-athletes). When a head coaching change takes place, the student-athletes, much like corporate employees, may feel the stress of the unknown as the organization (athletic program) experiences a change in possible leadership style, routine, environment, and self-efficacy. Part of the stress experienced by the student-athletes is a result of the relationship, good or bad, with the coach who recruited them to the program. Mossholder, Settoon, and Henagan (2005) stated that employees who have a high quality relationship with a leader who leaves the organization often experience feelings of psychological loss and withdraw.

Interested in the impact of a coaching change as it related to organizational change, Eitzen and Yetman (1972) conducted a study of 417 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions to examine the overall winning percentage and number of coaching changes from 1930 to 1970. They found that turnover rates and team success were negatively correlated; the data indicated, “coaching change tends to improve team performance” (p. 112). The researchers explained that coaching changes appeared to have little effect on team performance; however, when such a change
occurred, the new coach provided the possibility of long-term performance and success. Future studies were recommended to investigate the reason for the head coaching change.

Similarly, in a qualitative study regarding head coaching changes conducted by Molnar (2002), five major themes emerged: change, bonding, expectations, acclimation (or alienation), and growth. Three notable sub-themes also were present: shock/no surprise, relief/sadness, and frustration of the unknown. In a similar study, Beck (2002) examined the perceived effect of a returning head coach versus a new head coach on the evaluation of anxiety levels of student-athletes. Beck found that student-athletes returning to the same coach experienced feelings of concern regarding playing time, change in position/rank, and the relationship with the head coach. Student-athletes experiencing a head coaching change were more concerned with coaching philosophy, relationship with the head coach, and their scholarship expectations.

Molnar (2002) employed qualitative research methods to focus on the impacts of a head coaching change on intercollegiate student-athletes. Admitting researcher biases, Molnar expected individual and team performance to be the most significant impact of a head coaching change. Using the Gestalt ground/figure perspective, Molnar grounded his study in performance and determined the student-athlete-coach relationship was an existential core. Beck (2002) utilized quantitative methodology to examine the relationship of cognitive anxiety levels of intercollegiate student-athletes who had experienced a head coaching change and those who had not. Beck discovered no statistically significant difference in the cognitive anxiety levels of student-athletes who had experienced a head coaching change and those who had not; student-athletes had significant levels of cognitive anxiety, but all likely experienced those anxieties. Both
Molnar and Beck suggested that future research be conducted in the areas of the student-athlete-coach relationship and the general impact of a head coaching change in intercollegiate athletic programs.

**Statement of the Problem**

This study was initiated and motivated by the consistent turnover of head coaches at the intercollegiate level and the impact of that change on many aspects of a student-athlete’s experience, including stress, anxiety, and the student-athlete-coach relationship. In the 2013-14 season alone, 42 NCAA men’s basketball head coaching changes occurred (Borzello, 2014). For many student-athletes, the head coach recruited them to the program with assurances of playing time, a meaningful degree, a well-rounded co-curricular experience, and the glamour of being a star on the team. What happens when that head coach leaves the program after the student-athlete has committed to the university and the team and, in many cases, has played for that coach for a number of years? As the impact of a head coaching change on student-athletes is explored, necessary support services and programming can be developed to maintain success in the athletic programs.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to discover the impacts on intercollegiate student-athletes subsequent to a head coaching change. Little information was available regarding the impact on student-athletes after a head coaching change, although the assumption was plausible that such a change would greatly impact the student-athlete. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this study attempted to provide insight into the complications of a head coaching change, specifically the impact of such a significant
organizational change on student-athletes. This qualitative approach to data collection provided meaningful and rich information that may have great implications for athletic administrators, athletic support services, and college administrators.

**Significance of the Study**

Much of the literature surrounding organizational change has focused on the impact of turnover on organizational morale and productivity. As the success of an athletic program is contingent upon the individual abilities of student-athletes, the impact of a head coaching change is significant. A gap in the literature exists concerning the actual impact of head coaching changes on student-athletes. This study investigated that impact and the related implications of the results on improvements in student-athlete support services, head coach transitions, and player development.

According to Caroldine, Almond, and Gratto (2001), successful student-athlete support programs have commonalities in programming, to include academic advising, eligibility monitoring, peer mentoring, study hall, tutoring, and career counseling. The literature has provided no evidence of support programming for student-athletes during a coaching change, which is an increasingly common phenomenon. In the progressively evident business-based model of intercollegiate athletics, an understanding of the impact of such a significant organizational change has critical implications on many facets of athletic programs, institutions, and future research (Schoppmeyer, 2004).

**Theoretical Framework**

Merriam (1998) described theoretical framework as the structure and the lens by which the study is conducted. Green (2014) stated that conceptual theories and frameworks are important because they provide a purpose and serve as a guide in
research studies. Thus, “all aspects of the study are affected by its framework” (p. 47). Turning to organizational literature, two theories were identified to guide the framework of this study: Psychological Contract Theory (PCT) and the Social Exchange Theory (SET).

Dhammanungune (1990) noted “a psychological contract is the sum total of the explicit and implicit agreements between an individual employee and the organization to fulfill each other’s mutual expectations” (p. 100). This concept of a belief in mutual obligations was further explained as “subjective” in that each employee has a “unique effort/reward bargain” (Nichols & Ojala, 2009, p. 372). Rousseau (1995), a leader in organizational behavior, indicated that “social contracts are cultural, based on shared, collective beliefs regarding appropriate behavior in a society” (p. 15). From an organizational perspective, intercollegiate athletes share a cultural and collective understanding of expectations and societal norms.

The PCT is grounded in the SET (Blau, 1964, as cited in Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). SET often is used as a foundation in which to understand and explain the relationships between individuals and their respective organizations (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). SET generally is used as a means of understanding the way in which employees likely will respond when they feel their psychological contracts have not been fulfilled, and the result of that unfulfilled promise is that which they actually received (Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003). The concept of employees (student-athletes) feeling as though their psychological contract has been violated has great implications on the entire organization - or in this case, the team. During a head coaching change, student-athletes likely will feel that a promised obligation is being unmet.
Research Question

The following question guided this phenomenological case study: What is the impact of a head coaching change on intercollegiate student-athletes? As a rich description of the lived experiences of the student-athlete was anticipated, in-depth semi-structured interviews were utilized to explore the question. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix A.

Research Context

The institution selected for this study is considered to be a medium-sized university in the Southeast with an enrollment of approximately 21,000. The athletic department sponsors 18 sports (10 women’s and eight men’s) and has a storied success among similar mid-major NCAA Division I institutions. During the time of this study, four of the institution’s athletic programs were experiencing a turnover in the position of head coach (men’s basketball, women’s basketball, football, and baseball). Due to the significant turnover of coaches in the main sports, student-athletes from this particular institution were chosen as a convenience sample. Convenience samples often save time, effort, and money, as the researcher can easily access the participants and other supporting information that may be useful in the study (Creswell, 2007). In addition to selecting the convenience samples from the one university, a purposive sample was created by selecting specific student-athletes who had experienced a coaching change. The researcher formed relationships with the coaches and support staff and, therefore, had a connection with the athletic department. Due to these relationships and the turnover in coaches, the researcher chose to focus the interviews on this single institution.
Delimitations

The following delimitations were present in this study:

1. Informants were delimited to eight student-athletes at one mid-major NCAA Division I institution located in the southeast region.
2. The findings were delimited to four NCAA Division I sports: men’s basketball, women’s basketball, football, and baseball.

Limitations

The following limitations were present in this study:

1. The findings were limited to one NCAA Division I institution.
2. The informants represented only four sports at a single institution and gender was inadequately investigated, as only one of the four sports was a women’s sport.
3. The informants may have been familiar with the new coach if they had previously served as assistant coaches.
4. Certain responses from the informants may have been influenced by a recent incident in which continued to be emotionally involved.
5. During the study, five of the eight participants were currently playing for the team and may have held back on their thoughts.

Assumptions

The following assumptions applied to this study:

1. A phenomenological case study is a valid methodology for obtaining a rich description of student-athletes’ experiences while undergoing a head coaching change.
2. A rich description of the impact of a head coaching change has implications on many aspects of intercollegiate athletics.

3. The informants in this study were willing and able to speak openly about their experiences without shame or guilt, in order to articulate the impact of a head coaching change.

Definition of Terms

- Convenience Sample – a method of obtaining participants who are easily accessible (Creswell, 2007).
- Nested Case Study – case studies that evaluate a single program (Patton, 2002).
- Purposive Sampling Method – the selection of specific participants who can help provide an understanding of the phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007).
- Psychological Contract Theory (PCT) – an idea that employees and the employer share a “reciprocal obligation” within the organization (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).
- Social Exchange Theory (SET) – a method by which to understand the ways in which relationships exist between individuals and their organizations (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005).
- Phenomenological Approach – a philosophical approach to research that explores the reality of life through experiences as they appear to the person (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013; Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).
• Informant – “individuals with whom the researcher begins in data collection because they are well informed, are accessible, and can provide leads about other information.” (Gilchrist, 1992, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 243)

• Rich Description – “Providing enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situations, and hence, whether findings can be transferred.” (Merriam, 1997, p. 211)
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this case study was to discover the impacts on intercollegiate student-athletes subsequent to a head coaching change. Little information was available regarding the impact on student-athletes after a head coaching change, but the assumption was plausible that such a change would greatly impact the student-athletes.

Student-athletes are a unique student population who face many demands that other non-athletes do not encounter. They experience high-level demands and expectations both in the playing arena and in the classroom (Caroldine et al., 2001). According to Jolly (2008), these intense schedules and high demands create considerable amounts of stress, and in some cases depression, in student-athletes. Among these stressors exists the unique relationship between the student-athletes and the head coach. The purpose of this literature review is to describe impactful factors that student-athletes may experience during a head coaching change. During times of organizational change, such as the turnover of head coaches in intercollegiate athletics, the examination and knowledge of related literature is both useful and important to athletic administrators and student-athlete support services programming.

Organization of Literature

This literature review includes four major sections: theoretical perspective, historical context, athletics as a business, and student-athlete well being. The first section provides a theoretical perspective through which this study was conducted. Psychological Contract Theory (PCT) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) are introduced to explain the connection of expectations and organizational commitment between the organization (institution) and the employee (student-athlete). The next section explores a
brief historical context of intercollegiate athletics and the early shift to a business model. Next, the concept of athletics as a business, and the impact of organizational turnover in business and in sport, are examined. The last section describes the complexity of intercollegiate student-athlete well being in regard to possible impactful factors during a head coaching change. This review touches on literature relevant to this study and reinforces its importance by highlighting the gap in the literature in this field.

**Theoretical Perspective**

In intercollegiate athletics, in which the student-athletes live, practice, play, and travel together, success of the team relies heavily on the shared purpose and continuity within the program. The idea of shared purpose and the importance of team unity provided the foundation and theoretical perspective for this study. Merriam (1998) described theoretical framework as the structure and the lens by which a study is conducted. Green (2014) stated that conceptual theories and frameworks are important, as they provide a purpose and serve as guides in a research study. Thus, “all aspects of the study are affected by its framework” (Merriam, 1998, p. 47). Turning to organizational literature, two theories were identified that guided the framework of this study: Psychological Contract Theory (PCT) and the Social Exchange Theory (SET).

**Psychological Contract Theory**

Bolman and Deal (2008), experts in the field of leadership research, explained that change agents will fail when organizations ignore human, political, and symbolic elements. Change can disrupt the norms, relationships, and rituals leading to confusion and uncertainty for the future. Morrison and Robinson (1997) summarized that “a psychological contract is commonly defined as an employee's beliefs about the reciprocal
obligations between that employee and his or her organization, where these obligations are based on perceived promises and are not necessarily recognized by agents of the organization” (p. 229). The authors asserted that, when a violation of the psychological contract occurs, a negative impact is seen on employee (student-athlete) behavior, causing valuable employees to “reduce their contributions” (p. 227) to the organization. This reduction of contributions could have profound implications on the success of the athletic program, as success often is measured by wins and losses that are directly impacted by the contributions of student-athletes.

Adding to the discussion, Dhammanungune (1990) noted “a psychological contract is the sum total of the explicit and implicit agreements between an individual employee and the organization to fulfill each other’s mutual expectations” (p. 100). This concept of a belief in mutual obligations was further explained as “subjective”, in that each employee has a “unique effort/reward bargain” (Nichols & Ojala, 2009, p. 372). Rousseau (1995), a leader in organizational behavior, stated “social contracts are cultural, based on shared, collective beliefs regarding appropriate behavior in a society” (p. 15). From an organizational perspective, intercollegiate athletes share a cultural and collective understanding of expectations and societal norms. Rousseau (2001) further asserted that individuals can interpret psychological contracts in different ways. Therefore, exploring this perception of the different views of the psychological contract is a particularity relevant and interesting foundation for a multi-case study analysis.

Rousseau (2001) outlined the phases of the psychological contract formation, which are activated by pre-employment experiences, recruitment, and early socialization (Table 1).
Building on the PCT, Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005) investigated the link between the psychological contract and perceived organizational support (POS), or the perceptions of the employees concerning the degree to which they believe the organization cares about their well being. POS theory involves the *level* of perceived organizational support, whereas PCT encapsulates the *discrepancy* between “what is promised and what is fulfilled” (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005, p. 774). Turnley et al. (2003) explained that, when a breach occurs in the psychological contract, the primary result is resentment directed at the organization. When student-athletes are recruited to play at an institution and sign a letter of intent to be a part of the organization, they have certain expectations for their tenure at the institution. The head coach often is a major factor in the student-athlete’s decision to play for a particular team. When the head coach who recruited the player to play for team leaves, it is likely the student-athlete likely will
feel a sense of betrayal and a perceived breach of the psychological contract. As Rousseau (1995) pointed out, “commitments, like all promises, are subjective” (p. 23).

**Social Exchange Theory**

The PCT is grounded in the SET (Blau, 1964, as cited in Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). SET often is used by researchers as a foundation in which to understand and explain the relationships between individuals and their respective organizations (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). SET generally is used as a means of understanding the manner in which employees will respond when they feel that psychological contracts have been unmet and the result of that unfulfilled promise is that which they actually received (Turnley et al., 2003). The concept of employees (student-athletes) feeling like their psychological contract has been violated has great implications on the entire organization or in this case, the team. During a head coaching change, student-athletes likely will feel that a promised obligation is being unfulfilled. Conversely, Turnley et al. (2003) asserted that, in some cases, individuals may feel the organization has provided more than promised. However, prior research has suggested that the feeling of exceeded expectations is less likely to exist, as most employees generally feel a sense of under-fulfillment.

Building on seminal works regarding SET, researchers have begun to examine single social exchange accounts and to apply them to sport (Czekanski, 2012). Social exchange associations involve individuals within a dyadic relationship, similar to that of a student-athlete and a coach. In his work, Czekanski (2012) described the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) as an important factor in social exchange research. The basic tenets of the LMX theory, or “the quality of exchange between the employee
and the manager and…the degree of emotional support and exchange of valued resources” (Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002, p. 590), provide a foundation for an understanding of the complicated relationship between the head coach and the student-athlete. Further, the application of the SET in a sport setting adds to the growing body of research connecting sport and business. Czenkanski asserted that establishing the coach-athlete dyad and the implied connection of a team as an organization parallels the business model. Consequently, the social exchange between coach, student-athletes, and the organization is directly related to the ideologies of the psychological contracts and the implications of a possible breach of those expectations.

**Brief Historical Context**

The very first intercollegiate athletic sporting event involved a rowing race between Harvard and Yale in 1852 (Benford, 2007). In those early days, sports were administered by students apart from the universities (Benford, 2007; Suggs, 2009a). However, as popularity of sport contests increased, university presidents realized the value of athletic programs as a way of strengthening the external profile of the institution (Suggs, 2009a). Benford (2007) reported that, by 1883, concerns surfaced that the commercialization and corruption of intercollegiate sports already was an issue that needed reform.

The NCAA was formed in 1906 by university presidents as a way of regulating and promoting intercollegiate sports (Suggs, 2009a). A 1929 study by Howard J. Savage of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching found that the strict organization of intercollegiate athletics created a commercialized environment to the point that the game no longer was joyful for the student-athletes (Suggs, 2009a). Suggs
(2009a) explained that, as athletic departments had evolved into a venue through which to generate revenue and to entice alumni to produce financial support, athletic departments evolved into “quasi-independent” organizations that were somewhat free from the academic and financial restraints of the university.

Courts began recognizing the commercial impact of “big-time” intercollegiate athletics in the mid 1970s and began enforcing antitrust laws to regulate the business of intercollegiate athletics (Mitten, 2000). In 1984 the Supreme Court held that the NCAA was not exempt from antitrust laws because, although it was a “nonprofit entity with educational objectives,” (p. 3) the NCAA and its member institutions were in the business of maximizing revenues (Mitten, 2000).

Despite the evolving propensity toward a business model, intercollegiate athletics required external subsidies to balance their budgets (Denhart & Ridpath, 2011). Carson and Rinehart (2010) suggested that “what is played out on the fields of college athletics 142 years later has nothing to do with the character and minds of our students, but has everything to do with high-stakes entertainment” (p. 1). Intercollegiate athletics, while a major part of the overall college experience, have evolved from a leisure activity organized by students to a multi-million dollar industry linking the higher education and business worlds.

**Athletics as a Business**

As intercollegiate athletics has evolved, it has become increasingly commercialized. College athletics evolved from a regional activity into a national phenomenon, a “distinct financial enterprise” (p. 2) that has prompted intercollegiate athletic programs to pursue financial gains through various avenues, such as media rights,
ticket sales, merchandise, conference shares, and alumni giving (Carson & Rinehart, 2010). Suggs (2009b) noted that most athletic programs receive annual subsidies and funding from their universities, and use student fees and state funds in order to operate. Suggs added that the broad perception exists that, when universities invest in their athletic programs and the programs do well, it is beneficial for institutional advancement.

A common viewpoint holds that intercollegiate athletics provide a “window” into the university (Stinson & Howard, 2010). Due to this shift to a business enterprise model, many researchers have believed that the amateurism and commercialism of intercollegiate athletics have taken the joy out of the game (Suggs, 2009a). Hart-Nibbrig and Cottingham (1986) described the idea of a “corporate athleticism” and pointed out that the public not only wants a “winner”, but also wants a winning program due to the structure of commercialized sport.

**Intercollegiate Athletics: Big Business**

Prominent intercollegiate athletic programs began to do that which was necessary to win at all cost as early as the 1880s (Ridpath, 2002; Root, 2009). Root (2009) explained that, even during the Great Depression, intercollegiate athletics continued to earn financial rewards for participating universities by engaging in media contracts. During the 2013 year, the NCAA reported $905,419,498 in revenue from television and marketing rights, championships, investments, sales, and contributions (ncaa.org).

Commenting on the state of American institutions, Bok (2003) asserted, “American universities, despite their lofty ideals, are not above sacrificing academic values – even values as basic as admissions standards and the integrity of their courses – in order to make money” (p. 54). Division I intercollegiate sports programs have become a big
business and “are in direct competition for the entertainment dollar” (Schoppmeyer, 2004, p. 13).

Mitten (2000) argued that, in order to maximize the athletic brand, universities must exploit their economic value to produce winning teams. The NCAA sought to regulate this exploitation by striving “to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the student body and, by so doing, retain a clear line of demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports” (NCAA Manual, art. 1.3.1., as cited in Mitten, 2000, p. 2).

Many have criticized current intercollegiate athletic program practices because of the obvious drift away from academic standards, yet the system has been upheld due to the revenue and media exposure associated with athletic success (Carson & Rinehart, 2010). Pinkerton, Hinz, and Barrow (1989) suggested that many athletic programs have focused more on maintaining eligibility than on academic progress and future success of student-athletes as a result of the high stakes associated with potential financial revenues and institutional prestige.

Many sources of funding exist in college athletics, including state funding, ticket sales, game guarantees, concessions/parking, facilities rentals, donations, media contracts, marketing/sponsorships, and NCAA/conference distributions. All public state universities receive funding from the state and, in most cases, some is distributed to the athletic program budgets. In some situations, the athletic departments are self-sufficient and do not need funding from the university. Goff (2000) asserted that the revenue generated by most athletic programs (i.e., merchandise, concessions, parking, special events, etc.) is attributed to the university’s general fund.
Perhaps one of the most controversial forms of athletic funding is the use of student fees to supplement the athletic budget. Berkowitz, Upton, McCarthy, and Gillum (2010) stated “students were charged more than $795 million to support sports programs at 222 Division I public schools during the 2008-09 school year...Adjusting for inflation, that's an 18% jump since 2005, making athletics funding at public schools a key force in the rapidly escalating cost of higher education” (para. 5). Denhart and Ridpath (2011) indicated that little research has been conducted to examine whether students even know that large portions of their tuition are being used to fund athletic programs.

Many Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) students were displeased when, in 2011, full-time students had an increase of $50 that was partially designated toward “improving men’s basketball, including helping to fund salary increases for [the coach] and his staff” (Berkowitz, 2011a). Berkowitz wrote, “Virginia’s public colleges cannot use state money or tuition money for athletics. Over the last five years, 75% to 80% of VCU’s athletic revenue has come from student fees” (para. 7).

Steve Berkowitz (2011b), of USA Today, worked to compile a database of institutions’ financial records that are sent annually to the NCAA. Berkowitz discovered that “nearly $6.2 billion was spent last year on athletics at the 218 schools. That means athletics spending grew by 3% in 2010. Total revenue grew by 5.5% in 2010” (para. 4). Although some institutions are becoming more self-sufficient, they continue to charge students for athletic fees. Berkowitz et al. (2010) claimed, “schools’ reluctance to make public how much athletics departments get from student fees runs counter to federal, and some state-level efforts to require greater transparency of college costs” (A Matter of Transparency Section, para. 1). Berkowitz et al. continued that some students do not
mind paying athletic fees, as institutions such as James Madison University “provide free admission to events, puts student sections in prime seating areas” (We Don’t Ask Where It’s Going section, para. 4).

While many critics who oppose have opposed the use of student fees to offset the cost of intercollegiate athletic costs, a broader perception exists that intercollegiate athletic programs are a critical piece of institutional advancement, and college athletic programs are the “front porch” of the institution; universities benefit when the athletic programs do well and gain attention (Suggs, 2009a). Contributing to the discussion concerning athletics providing an opportunity for increased external funding, Goff (2000) added that some donors who are interested in the general welfare of the university and the success of the athletic programs have only a fixed amount to donate. In such cases, donors are more likely to give those gifts to the athletic departments if the programs are successful. Additionally, Goff suggested that success in athletic departments may have an effect on student interest, measured by the type and quality of students who show interest in the university.

Intercollegiate athletics are now tied to the entertainment industry; with continued diminishing state funding, colleges take advantage of the possibility of increased revenue potential from media deals and other such opportunities (Carson & Rinehart, 2010). The pressure to win has generated fierce competition among universities to fund winning programs, including recruiting and coaches, to fully “exploit” their products (athletes, stadiums, coaches, etc.) in order to maximize fan and booster support that leads to more revenue and exposure (Mitten, 2000). The competition and the excitement of athletic
programs that continue to remain a part of higher education likely will be long-lasting (Ridpath, 2008).

**Intercollegiate Athletics and Coach Pay.** Tsitsos and Nixon (2012) described a “star wars arms race,” the phenomenon that providing intercollegiate coaches with astronomical amounts of money and compensation packages (star wars) produced increased expenditures by schools in the same conference (arms race). The authors investigated whether participating in the star wars arms race resulted in any pay-offs for the institutions - the relationship between a coach’s salary and winning percentage. They reported that athletic directors and the universities feel they must do whatever is necessary to hire and retain coaches who win. Institutions, administrators, boosters, and trustees place a high value of success in intercollegiate athletics, and the coach’s prestige is a large factor in the sense of value.

Coaches who have experienced a great season are lured to bigger and better jobs. Likewise, coaches who have had poor seasons are fired and replaced by those coaches with a record of success and the ability to take the team to the next level. The authors believed that if coaches earned less than university presidents, a lower level of coaches would exit the profession. The “coercive pressures” of the arms race forced institutions to engage in expensive practices to obtain the best coaches and players in order to compete with their counterparts; they do what is needed to win (Burton & Peachey, 2013).

Benford (2007) contributed to the discussion on the arms race as it related to coaches’ salaries by noting that coaches’ salaries often are not only higher than university chancellors or presidents, but they also have the opportunity to earn more if the team is
successful in post-season play, if they offer summer camps, and if they participate in media shows/commercials. [the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics] conducted a nationwide survey of faculty attitudes regarding their universities’ athletic programs, revealing that 72% of the respondents thought head football and basketball coaches’ salaries were excessive (Sander, 2007).

In his 2004 report to the Knight Commission, Robert Frank (2004) stated:

Any given athletic director knows that his school’s odds of having a winning program will go up if it spends a little more than its rivals on coaches and recruiting. But the same calculus is plainly visible to all other schools...the gains from bidding higher turn out to be self-canceling when everyone does it. The result is often an expenditure arms race with no apparent limit. (p. 10)

**Intercollegiate Student-Athletes as Employees.** Due to the multibillion-dollar industry that constitutes the media spectacle of intercollegiate athletics, student-athletes are trapped in the spotlight of attention and potentially earn thousands in revenue for their institutions (Kennedy, 2007). In what can be described as a full-time job, student-athletes practice up to 20 hours per week, attend study hall and classes, as well as travel for games (Kennedy, 2007; Root, 2009). Although playing intercollegiate sports provides an opportunity for some athletes to attend college, who would not otherwise have had the opportunity, the balance of competing and maintaining scholastic success is difficult (Ridpath, 2002).

In 1929, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching published the results of an extensive study, *American College Athletics*, and found that commercialization of the sport removed the joy from the game (Suggs, 2009b). Carson
and Rinehart (2010) expanded upon this sentiment by stating that “the commodification of college sports has also led to the exploitation of our student-athletes” (p. 5). Further, they suggested that student-athletes are now considered part of the labor force. The commercialization of student-athletes has fundamentally transformed athletic programs into feeders for professional sports.

**Organizational Turnover**

Voluntary turnover in an organization can be detrimental and can cause dysfunction (Wells & Peachey, 2011). However, Wells and Peachey (2011) pointed out that little research exists on the relationship between leadership and voluntary turnover within the realm of sport management. Head coaches are no different than other individuals searching for jobs in that the right location, the right position, and the right paycheck could persuade them to leave a comfortable position in search of more prestigious endeavors.

Industrial-organizational physiologists have investigated organizational turnover and its relationship to work motivation and satisfaction. Locke and Latham (1990) proposed that motivation to work is explained with three theories: goal setting theory, expectancy theory, and social-cognitive theory. The authors claimed that self-efficacy and rewards and satisfaction lead to organizational commitment; they increase as an employee meets goals. As such, the assumption can be made that intercollegiate athletic coaches and their counterparts in the business world develop an enhanced commitment to their organizations as they win games/build success in their organizations.

**Organizational Turnover in Intercollegiate Athletics.** A change in leadership within an organization can cause tensions and uncertainties associated with the change,
which create a shift in performance of employees (Grusky, 1960, 1963, 1964, as cited by Brown, 1982). In a study on administrative turnover and team performance in NCAA Division I football programs from 1978-1995, McQueary (1997) found that head coach turnover was significantly related to team success, with a negative relationship. McQueary examined 103 institutions classified as NCAA Division I-A football programs. Using descriptive statistics, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and a regression analysis, McQueary discovered a significant relationship between a head coaching change and team performance. The findings reflected a relevant significance in the shift of athletics toward a business model and the impact of that shift on team performance and success.

In another study on head coach turnover in collegiate football, Soebbing and Washington (2011) examined leadership succession impact and the factors related to head coach turnover in athletics. They reported that college football coaches are among the highest paid employees at a university, with salaries often higher than that of the university president. They discovered three emergent perspectives of coach succession in the literature: common sense theory, vicious cycle theory, and ritual scapegoat theory. Soebbing and Washington (2011) explained the three perspectives as follows:

- Common sense theory implies that, when a leader is replaced, an organization will improve, emphasizing the level of control of a coach over the organization.
- Vicious cycle theory describes a relationship between leadership succession and the adaptation to new procedures and other changes,
highlighting the difficulty of change and the time needed to implement successful change.

- Ritual scapegoat theory implies the coach is a symbol and no relationship exists between leadership succession and team performance, signifying the importance of hiring the “right coach.”

**Student-Athlete Well Being**

Student-athletes face a variety of stressors and demands, as compared to their non-athlete counterparts, due to the pressure of performing at high levels in which winning is an expectation (Vallerand & Losier, 1999; Denny & Steiner, 2009; Lu, Hsu, Chan, Cheen, & Kao, 2012; Julal, 2013). Athletic departments, in conjunction with the NCAA continually develop programming to ease the burden of academic and social stress for student-athletes (Kennedy, 2007).

**Stress and Motivation**

Lu et al. (2012) asserted that student-athletes are confronted with many stressors including substance abuse, injury, academic struggles, relationships, professional success, and other demands. In their study, focus groups were utilized to achieve a description of student-athletes’ life stress. Additionally, two rounds of surveys assessed stress, burnout, and positive state of mind. They found that performance demand, coach relationships, training adaptation, interpersonal relationships, romantic relationships, and academic requirements were significant contributors to the stresses faced by student-athletes.

Not only is the success of athletes attributed to their physical prowess, but success also is dependent upon psychological strength (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). As such, Vallerand and Losier (1999) believed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are
important concepts of motivation of student-athletes. They found that many important social factors contributed to student-athlete motivation, including success and failures, competition and cooperation, and coach’s behavior.

Self-efficacy is a factor of motivation that is essential to the success of athletes and the team. Self-efficacy is the extent to which an individual feels confident about performing a task, with the understanding that, as confidence increases, the motivation to perform increases as well (Bandura, 1977). Albert Bandura is credited with developing the self-efficacy theory, claiming that perceived self-efficacy directly impacts behavior. Bandura (1993) indicated that efficacy influences nearly every aspect of human behavior, including the way in which individuals motivate themselves. Bandura (1993) asserted that self-efficacy manifests through four major processes: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection.

The effects of motivation on a team are extremely powerful. When individuals are motivated to compete, possess self-efficacy and the desire to achieve high goals, and maintain high performance, the entire team is motivated. Bandura (1993) pointed out that motivation is cognitive and revolves around that which individuals believe they can accomplish. If athletes believe they can win a tough game with the necessary skill to do so, they likely will succeed. If a team believes they will lose, their motivation to perform well would be low. Outcome expectations are important in the overall motivation of a team, as the team strives for positive outcomes and likely will be able to perform well in order to reach a positive outcome (Schunk, 1995).

Schunk (1995) explained that three factors influence self-efficacy and in turn, motivation: models, goal setting, and feedback. If successful models are present for
athletes to emulate, they likely will learn and follow the same actions in order to be successful. Schunk’s research illustrates that athletes are more motivated to succeed when they have positive role models. Likewise, goal setting directly affects the outcome expectations of achievement.

Goals motivate individuals to perform well and to participate in activities that will produce goal achievement. Feedback is essential for the successful motivation of a team. Performance feedback, or feedback that can help an individual’s awareness that they are performing well, and goal progress feedback, or feedback that provides markers in the attainment of goals, are two important aspects that lead to increased motivation (Schunk, 1995). When motivation is lacking, a team will be unsuccessful.

Sullivan and Strode (2010) noted that Self Determination Theory has been a predominant motivational theory in sport management literature. They explained the importance of motivation in relation to research by Ryan and Deci (2002) on Self-Determination Theory and intrinsic motivation. According to Ryan and Deci (2002, as cited in Sullivan & Strode, 2010), one who is intrinsically motivated finds the activity to be enjoyable. Ryan and Deci reported that “motivation concerns energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality – all aspects of activation and intention” (p. 69).

Self-Determination Theory explains the reasons that individuals choose to participate in activity (Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005). Hollembeak and Amorose (2005) stated that, “intrinsically motivated individuals are more likely to choose to participate and work hard when extrinsic rewards and reinforcements are not available, experience lower levels of performance-related anxiety, and exhibit greater levels of skill learning relative to those with a more extrinsic motivation orientation” (p. 21).
Building on the research of Ryan and Deci (2002), Sullivan and Strode (2010) expanded on the concept that motivation (internal and external) is a continuum in relation to autonomy. On one end of the continuum, an individual can be amotivated, or not motivated at all. On the other end is intrinsic motivation. Excluding amotivation and intrinsic motivation, four degrees of extrinsic motivation exist: external regulation, introjected regulation, regulation through identification, and integrated regulation.

Sullivan and Strode (2010) discussed Ryan and Deci’s (2002) four degrees of extrinsic motivation:

- External regulation consists of very little autonomy and relies on outside sources to provide motivation and is, therefore, completely external in the locus of control.
- Introjected regulation is slightly more internally regulated and individuals tend to participate to maintain self-esteem and image and to minimize guilt. Therefore, it is and is somewhat external in the locus of control.
- Regulation through identification implies that an individual who views the activity as personally important will be motivated to participate and is, therefore, somewhat internal in the locus of control.
- Integrated regulation occurs when individuals participate in something because they believe it will increase their success in another activity and is, therefore, internal in the locus of control.

Expanding on the importance of the relationship between external and internal factors, Denny and Steiner (2009) examined factors that contribute to happiness in elite college athletes as they manage stress and other demands. The researchers focused on
two external factors: playing time and scholarship, and internal personality factors to determine happiness. They concluded that internal personality factors contribute more to happiness than external factors. Additionally, they concluded that “athletes perhaps put too much weight onto the importance of athletic achievement in regulating self-esteem and happiness at the expense of factors which are less short lived and more likely to be important throughout their life span” (p. 70).

In a further examination of the stressors and mental health challenges faced by student-athletes, Beauchemin (2014) investigated the “Five Cardinal Mental Skills” of sport psychology - relaxation, imagery, routines, self-talk, and concentration - as they related to overall student-athlete wellness. From his mixed-methods study, Beauchemin found that programming to assist in coping with the “Five Cardinal Mental Skills” was essential to the overall success of the student-athlete. In addition, engaging student-athletes in the discussion of coping with pressures and stressors is critical to the outreach process.

**Relationship with Head Coach**

Recruiting in college athletics often is a very intimate process, whereby student-athletes and their families form a close relationship with the coaches. Universities make sales pitches to student-athletes to attend the institution and offer promises of a degree and, oftentimes, fame. This highly competitive process makes the relationship between the student-athlete and coach a crucial factor in the success of recruiting athletes (Root, 2009).

According to Sullivan and Strode (2010), coaches are a crucial, if not the most important, factor for an athlete’s motivation. Coaches strive to help them realize their
potential in hopes they will become self-determined and motivated to succeed. The coach has responsibility for defining goals and promoting an environment in which athletes will desire to perform well. They further discussed the importance of outcome goals and process goals.

- Outcome goals are beyond an individual’s control. In athletics, outcome goals are concerned with victory or defeat. If coaches focus on outcome goals, they are doing little to help their athletes’ perceived confidence.

- Process goals are controllable and based on effort. Coaches who set process goals, along with outcome goals, help their athletes to develop confidence and, in effect, increase motivation.

The research by Hollembeak and Ambrose (2004) also indicated that coaches who display high levels of democratic tendencies and fewer autocratic tendencies lead to increased autonomy and intrinsic motivation (IM). They also noted that positive support and feedback from coaches is associated with an increased intrinsic motivation and the athlete’s sense of relatedness. In their study, perceived competence, autonomy, and relatedness were tested to determine whether particular coaching behaviors were linked to motivation. The results from the study indicated that coaches who spent significant time training and instructing players significantly impacted autonomy, which affected the athletes’ intrinsic motivation. Their study also indicated that coaching behaviors are directly associated with the motivation of the athletes. Greer (2002) reported that coaches need to establish an environment in which players cheer for one another to promote team unity and “team spirit” (p. 41).
A study in 2006 conducted by Turman examined coaching behaviors in relation to student-athlete satisfaction. The study consisted of 307 athletes from 20 high school athletics programs and suggested that, when coaches were autocratic and gave positive feedback, the student-athletes reported higher levels of learning. While most of the literature in the Turman study indicated that positive feedback and environment are ideal for student-athlete satisfaction, an indication also was seen that the reverse behaviors lead to diminished motivation. Turman pointed out that when coaches embarrassed their players, treated a player with favoritism, or were aggressive, lower levels of satisfaction, good sportsmanship, and motivation resulted. The student-athletes did not enjoy playing for a coach whose character they did not respect. Additionally, in a study conducted by Robbins and Stanley (2012), results indicated that the coach-player relationship is very important in reducing player regret to refocus efforts on performance. The researchers noted that helping athletes focus on their abilities, rather than on their inabilitys, helped them work toward their future goals.

In addition to the literature that has expressed the importance of the student-athlete and coach relationship (Jowett, 2007; Jowett, Shanmugam, & Caccoulis, 2011), coaches have also expressed the importance of knowing athletes on a personal level (Gilson, Paule-Koba, & Heller, 2013). In their empirical study, Gilson et al. (2013) investigated the “social-psychological impact on sport and academics when athletes experience a coaching change” (p. 166). The researchers interviewed 47 collegiate student athletes on topics such as social pressures related to a head coaching change, the academic stress of a head coaching change, and self-regulation processes used by the student-athletes during this change. Upon analysis of the interviews, the researchers
found that seven themes emerged: emotions, academics, goals, leadership, negative effects, positive effects, and change culture/structure. Future research was suggested to investigate the way in which student-athletes’ experiences developed subsequent to a head coaching change.

In their 2011 study on the importance of a coach to an organization, Jowett et al. found that the coach-athlete relationship was important to the overall success of the team and athlete satisfaction. Gallimore and Tharp (2008) highlighted this crucial relationship in a profile on Coach John Wooden that encompassed nearly 30 years of observations. The researchers attended practices, observed individual workouts, and spoke with Coach Wooden. The data were compiled to provide an overall picture and linkage between coaching and teaching. Through their research, Gallimore and Tharp successfully highlighted the importance of the student-athlete-coach relationship and that is critical to the success of a team and the general success of an individual.

Highlighting the importance of the student-athlete-coach dyad, Beck (2002) studied the effects of a head coaching change on the cognitive anxiety of student-athletes. A survey was distributed to 201 returning intercollegiate athletes with incumbent head coaches and 54 student-athletes who experienced a head coaching change in order to measure the cognitive anxiety levels of the student-athletes. Overall, student-athletes in both groups were found to experience a low level of cognitive anxiety, indicating a head coaching change may have little impact on student-athlete well being and organizational success. While much of the anxiety was attributed to the unknown factors of a head coaching change, no significant difference was noted between the cognitive anxiety levels of student-athletes who did and did not experience a head coaching change.
Summary

This review of literature summarized the theoretical perspective, historical context, athletics as a business, and student-athlete well being. These topics are important in the consideration of the possible impacts of a head coaching change on student-athletes. While the breadth of literature surrounding the business empire of intercollegiate athletics was large, research on the actual impact of organizational turnover on the student-athletes was minimal. Continued studies on the implications of such a transition are essential to, not only the success of athletic programs, but also a critical factor in student-athlete well being.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study explored the experiences of male and female intercollegiate student-athletes who had undergone head coaching change during their time as a student-athlete at a NCAA Division I institution in the Southeast. The purpose of this study was to discover the impacts on intercollegiate student-athletes subsequent to a head coaching change. Little information was available on the impacts on student-athletes after a head coaching change, but the assumption was plausible that such a change would greatly impact the student-athlete. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the researcher attempted to provide insight into the complications of a head coaching change. The study involved eight semi-structured interviews with a focus on achieving a rich description of student-athletes’ experiences during a transition in leadership (head coach). This chapter describes the research context, design, data collection process, and data analysis process. Research quality and the role of the researcher are also addressed.

Research Question

The following research question guided this phenomenological case study: What is the impact of a head coaching change on intercollegiate student-athletes?

Context

The institution selected for this study is considered to be a mid-major NCAA Division I institution located in the Southeast. The athletic department sponsors 18 sports (10 women’s and eight men’s) and has a storied success among similar mid-major NCAA Division I institutions. During the time of this study, four of this institution’s athletic programs were experiencing a turnover in the position of head coach (i.e. men’s basketball, women’s basketball, football, and baseball). Due to the significant turnover
of coaches in the main sports, student-athletes were chosen from this particular institution as a convenience sample. Convenience samples often save time, effort, and money, as the researcher can easily access the participants and other supporting information that may be useful (Creswell, 2007).

In addition to selecting the convenience samples from this university, a purposive sample was created by selecting specific student-athletes who had experienced a coaching change. In qualitative research, the concept of purposeful sampling is used to provide an understanding of the phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher formed relationships with the coaches and support staff and, therefore, had a connection to the athletic department. Due to these relationships and the turnover in coaches, interviews were focused solely on this single institution.

**Research Design**

This research utilized a qualitative case study approach to describe the impacts of a head coaching change on intercollegiate student-athletes. This study involved an in-depth examination of eight student-athletes at one institution and their experiences with a head coaching change. A phenomenological approach was used to achieve a rich description. A phenomenological perspective seeks to understand structure and meaning of the lived experience of an individual or a group of persons (Patton, 2002). In order to achieve a rich description of the perspective of the student-athletes, a qualitative case study approach emerged as the most suitable means to study the phenomenon.

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to research that explores the reality of life through experiences as they appear to the individual (Tuohy et al., 2013; Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher must be reflective and aware of
preconceived understandings and must use techniques, such as bracketing and reflexive journals, to manage these preconceptions (Finlay, 2008). An exploration of the phenomenon of the lived experiences of student-athletes who have experienced a head coaching change is of major concern, as well as the impact of that change on their sense of well being and purpose. The implications of such a change are an evolving phenomenon, as they relate to the continued shift of intercollegiate athletics to a business model. The characteristics of qualitative research involve an examination of social phenomena by using the researcher as the key instrument in order to produce rich and descriptive data and to analyze that data to identify emergent themes (Creswell, 2007; Slavin, 2007).

Case studies involve the collection and organization of data for an in-depth comparison of specific cases (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002):

> The case study approach to qualitative analysis constitutes a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data; in that sense it represents and analysis process. The purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest. The analysis process results in a product: a case study. (p. 447)

Thus, a descriptive phenomenological case study approach was used to explore the impact of a head coaching change at a single institution.

**Data Collection**

> “Qualitative data describe...qualitative data tell a story” (Patton, 2002, p. 47).

Marshall and Rossman (2011) described case studies as strategies by which the researcher is immersed into the setting, thus highlighting the importance of the
worldviews of both the researcher and the participant. As explained by Patton (2002),
two forms of case studies can be used: layered or nested. For the purposes of this study, a
nested case study was utilized, which evaluates a single program (the institution). Within
that program, several participants were involved (student-athletes). Patton explained that,
in a nested case study, the analysis begins with the individual cases (student-athletes),
followed a cross-case pattern of analysis on each individual case. Above all, the
researcher’s first responsibility is to analyze each case to achieve a rich description of the
phenomenon.

Case studies are descriptive by nature. Olson (Merriam, 1998) developed a list
that highlights the descriptive nature of a case study:

- Illustrate the complexities of a situation – the fact that not one but many
  factors contributed to it.
- Have the advantage of hindsight yet can be relevant in the present.
- Show the influence of personalities on the issue.
- Show the influence of the passage of time on the issue – deadlines, change of
  legislators, cessation of funding, and so on.
- Include vivid material – quotations, interviews, newspaper articles, and so on.
- Obtain information from a wide variety of sources.
- Cover many years and describe how the preceding decades led to a situation.
- Spell out differences of opinion on the issue and suggest how these
  differences have influenced the result.
- Present information in a wide variety of ways...and from the viewpoints of
different groups. (p. 30)
Marshall and Rossman (2011) explained that case studies typically rely on “historical and document analysis, interviewing, and some forms of observation for data collection” (p. 267). Merriam (1998) pointed out that the three methods of data collection are rarely used equally. Focusing on interviews, and on analysis of those interviews, the researcher attempted to achieve a rich description of the phenomenon. As Patton (2002) explained, qualitative methods of research often are highly personal and naturalistic and, therefore, bring the researcher into the lives and work of the participants. In-depth interviews can be intrusive and often elicit a greater reaction than what can be achieved from most quantitative approaches. Thus, the researcher was careful to be mindful of the sensitive and personal topic and conducted the interviews with close attention to IRB protocols.

**Interviews**

In order to gain entrance into the phenomenon in question, the researcher utilized many connections, with care to not cross any boundaries. At the university in this study, an entire academic advising and assistance program exists, which was referred to as the Success Center (SC). The researcher needed to gain access to the SC and to the student-athletes. The researcher met with the Director of the SC to arrange the use of a conference room for all interviews. The Director also assisted in making initial contact with the selected informants in order to schedule an interview time. As most of the informants were required to complete study hall hours, conducting the interviews in the SC, in which study hall is located, was a comfortable and convenient setting. Additionally, the interviews occurred during study hall hours to avoid requiring
informants to make a special trip to the SC. Upon agreement by the informants to participate in the interview, the researcher followed up to confirm a time.

Prior to the interviews, approval was obtained from the university’s Human Subjects Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A). At the time of the interview, the participant received an informed consent form to read and sign (Appendix B). The interviews were recorded with a hand-held audio recording device and were saved to an electronic file to be transcribed at a later date. To protect the identity of the informants, the researcher made it clear that no names or other identifiable information would be shared with coaches, administrators, or others. The researcher asked the same open-ended questions of all eight informants (Appendix C). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning or the phenomenon and does not require a large sample size (Dworkin, 2012). Dworkin (2012) reported that “literature suggests anywhere from 5 to 50 participants is adequate” (p. 1320).

Participants

Using purposive sampling methods, participants (student-athletes), herein referred to as “informants,” were selected based on particular criteria and asked to participate in a face-to-face, semi-structured interview. In qualitative research, informants are “individuals with whom the researcher begins in data collection because they are well informed, are accessible, and can provide leads about other information” (Gilchrist, 1992 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 243). In order to be included in the study, participants had to be on the current roster of their respective teams and they had to have experienced a head coaching change during their time on the team. Both male and female student-
athletes were included in the study. The sample size was limited to three sports: football, men’s basketball, and women’s basketball.

**Informant Introductions**

The informant introductions provide a snapshot of each in an attempt to build an understanding of their circumstances in order to develop a rich description of the impact of a head coaching change on the student-athletes.

1. Informant 1 was a white male who graduated in May of 2014 and had experienced one head coaching change.
2. Informant 2 was a white female who graduated in May of 2014 and had experienced one head coaching change.
3. Informant 3 was a black male who was a senior and had experienced one head coaching change.
4. Informant 4 was a black male who had experienced one head coaching change.
5. Informant 5, a senior, was a black female who had experienced one head coaching change.
6. Informant 6, a senior, was a black female who had experienced one head coaching change.
7. Informant 7, a senior, was a white male who had experienced three head coaching changes.
8. Informant 8 graduated in May of 2014 and was a white male who had experienced one head coaching change.
Research Quality

Lincoln and Guba (1985), who are seminal qualitative researchers, addressed the concerns of credibility, dependability, and transferability in their work, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (as cited in Marshall & Rossmann, 2011). Lincoln and Guba developed a list of procedures that are useful in a qualitative study to ensure trustworthiness:

- Triangulation
- Searching for disconfirming evidence
- Engaging in reflexivity
- Member checking
- Prolonged engagement in the field
- Developing an audit trail
- Peer debriefing

Peer debriefing and reflexive journaling were utilized to strengthen the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the current study. Marshall and Rossman (2011) described peer debriefing as a way in which the researcher can share findings with knowledgeable colleagues during data analysis. Patton (2002) described reflexivity as a way of emphasizing “the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (p. 64). Patton advised researchers to be critical of self-knowledge and biases as a means of strengthening the study. In order to account for this reflexivity, many researchers (Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Creswell, 2002) suggested maintaining a reflexive journal in which the researcher takes notes and writes down thoughts during the process.
Credibility

Slavin (2007) discussed the importance of adequately stating the parameters of a setting and population in a qualitative study in order to establish credible research. Credibility in qualitative research is established by clearly articulating the rigorous methods of fieldwork on the part of the researcher. Additionally, purposeful sampling, critical evaluation and analysis, and use of theoretical framework place “boundaries around and limitations on the study” (p. 252). Patton (2002) indicated three elements on which a credible study relies: rigorous methods, the credibility of the researcher, and the philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry” (p. 552). The researcher was present at the university at the time of the head coaching changes and, thus, had knowledge and the ability observe the perceived impact of the change as it occurred and continued during the study. The researcher also had established a connection with the athletic department that served as a valuable source of peer debriefing.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the way in which the researcher accounts for changing conditions (Slavin, 2007). To account for these changing conditions, a reflexive journal was maintained to document observations, feelings, and thoughts. As a result, the researcher was able to conduct and analyze the interviews while minimizing personal biases. As this study was based entirely on the data gathered from interviews, the use of a reflexive journal and peer debriefing was crucial in strengthening the dependability and confirmability of the study.
Transferability

Slavin (2007) defined transferability as the “ways in which the study’s findings will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice” (p. 252). The goal of this phenomenological case study was to achieve a thick description of the phenomenon. Merriam (1998) asserted that, when researchers provide adequate description, others can determine whether the findings are transferable to their situations. Describing the impact of a head coaching change at one university through the use of rich descriptions of single case studies allowed readers to understand and determine whether the results may transfer to their situations. The purposeful sampling of the eight student-athletes provided an in-depth examination of the impacts of a head coaching change and the manner in which such a change could impact other institutions.

Data Analysis

Much like quantitative research, data analysis in qualitative research begins with data collection. Qualitative research involves many methods in which to analyze the data. Marshall and Rossman (2011) indicated that the analysis of data is a challenging phase of research and “demands a heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention to those data, and an openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social life” (p. 214). Merriam (1998) simply stated that “a qualitative design is emergent” (p. 155). Yin (2003) explains qualitative analysis as a holistic analysis of the entire case. Qualitative research, such as this case study, creates a story from the data and is heavily framed by the theoretical framework by which the study was conducted (Patton, 2002). Patton added that, once the data has been formally collected, the researcher can organize the data
by questions that were generated in the design phase of the study and “insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection” (p. 437). Thus, the analysis presented in Chapter IV attempts to provide a rich description of the story of eight student athletes who experienced a head coaching change.

The analysis began with descriptions of each student-athlete (informant) who was interviewed. Each served as a separate case study, whereby the researcher systematically gathered in-depth information on each “case of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 447). Throughout the study, the researcher utilized inductive analysis methods, or the process of “discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Merriam (1998) stated that the “right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection” (p. 162).

In qualitative data analysis, the researcher assesses the data, compresses it, and composes a narrative to explain the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998). Categories or themes are constructed that encapsulate any patterns found throughout the data analysis process. According to Constas (1992), the guidelines found in literature for constructing categories are very general “and their applications are subject to the situational demands of a given study” (p. 255). The constant comparative method of data analysis was employed for this study.

Using the constant comparative method of data analysis developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) a particular event from one of the case study interviews was analyzed and then compared it to an incident in a different interview. Merriam (1998) suggested that the comparisons between incidents can lead to tentative categories in which themes emerge. Merriam suggested the researcher begin by reading each transcript thoroughly
and making notes beside the data that are interesting and relevant. The researcher then groups the notes into categories. Subsequent to the analysis of interview transcripts using the aforementioned process, the researcher identified the categories in an attempt to answer the research question: What is the impact of a head coaching change on intercollegiate student-athletes?

**The Role of the Researcher**

In order to collect data, the researcher conducted in-depth, interview-based research. The researcher maintained her role by holding semi-structured conversations with the informants, listening to their experiences, and drawing conclusions on the impact of the coaching change on many aspects of their lives. Additionally, a reflexive journal was maintained to capture thoughts in order to avoid obscuring the data with personal feelings. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher worked to form connections with the informants by listening to their stories, providing assurance of confidentiality, and maintaining a high level of transparency about the reason for the study.

**Summary**

This qualitative research was comprised of eight case study interviews of intercollegiate student-athletes who had experienced a head coaching change at a mid-major, NCAA Division I institution in the Southeast. The constant comparative method was utilized as a guide to analyze this phenomenon of a head coaching change. The data were analyzed and linked to provide a rich description that attempted to answer the research question. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability
contributed to the quality and relevance of the research. Chapter IV provides the analysis of the interviews in the form of a descriptive narrative to introduce the emergent themes.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this case study was to discover the impacts on intercollegiate student-athletes subsequent to a head coaching change. Due to the qualitative nature of the research question, a phenomenological approach was used to achieve a rich description of this lived experience. This chapter presents the experiences of eight informants who have undergone a head coaching change. The chapter consists of three distinct sections that identify the core themes of the interviews.

An initial interview was conducted with the eight informants, each considered a case study, and the researcher utilized reflective journaling to capture her thoughts, additional questions, and ideas. Prior discussing the experiences of the informants, a brief synopsis of each informant was presented in order to build context. In an effort to achieve open and flowing dialogue, complete anonymity of the participants was assured and the researcher developed succinct synopses of each. As such, the informants were assigned a number, using as few identifying factors as possible.

The Informants

The informant introductions provided a snapshot of each in an attempt to build an understanding of the circumstances in order to develop a rich description of the impact of a head coaching change on the student-athletes. A summary of the synopses is presented in Table 2. All information contained in the following paragraphs was obtained by mining the statistics and game notes on the university’s athletics website.
Informant 1 was a white male who graduated in May of 2014 and had experienced one head coaching change while on the men’s basketball team. In high school, Informant 1 was named area and district most valuable player and was a McDonald’s All-American nominee. He was recruited by Coach A and was a key player during his freshman year; as a sophomore, he started in 27 games and led the team in three point and free throw percentages. Informant 1 played only four games as a junior before he was sidelined for the remainder of the season with a shoulder injury in which he was granted red-shirt status at the end of the season. In the middle of his junior year, following a rather unsuccessful start to the season, Coach A was replaced with Coach B, one of the assistant coaches. After that season, Coach B was named the official head coach. Informant 1 continued to play for the team after his recovery and was a vital player for the team as a red-shirt junior and senior.

Informant 2 was a white female who graduated in May of 2014 and had experienced one head coaching change while playing women’s basketball. In high school, Informant 2 was a four-year letter winner and also played softball. She helped lead her team to an AA basketball championship title and was an All-State selection in
softball all four years. She was recruited by Coach A and played in 29 games her freshman year. Her sophomore year, she started in 16 games and played in all 29, averaging 3.4 points per game. In the off-season between her sophomore and junior years, Informant 2 experienced a head coaching change when Coach A was replaced by Coach B, who was a former alumnus of the program. Informant 2 continued to play for the team; under the new leadership, the team experienced success. Informant 2 started 29 in her junior year and nine her senior year. During her senior year, she played in the first round of the women’s NCAA tournament.

Informant 3 was a black male who was a senior and had experienced one head coaching change as a player on the men’s basketball team. Informant 3 played high school basketball in the same city as the university, was rated a three-star recruit by Rivals.com, and had an impressive high school career. He signed with the program during the early signing period and played for Coach A for half of his first season. In the middle of his freshman year after a rather unsuccessful start to the season, Coach A was replaced with Coach B, one of the assistant coaches. During his freshman year, Informant 3 had 24 starts and played in all 31 games. He was named the Conference’s Most Outstanding Player. At the end of his freshman year, Coach B was named head coach. Informant 3 averaged 12.8 points and 6.6 rebounds per game during his sophomore year and led the team to the second round of the NCAA tournament. He had six-straight double-figure games and led the team in field goal percentage. During Informant 3’s senior year, he was named to the National Association of Basketball Coaches All-District First Team, led the team in rebounds, and had 12 double-doubles.
Informant 4 was a white male who had experienced one head coaching change. During high school, Informant 4 earned Honorable Mention All-State and First-Team All-District honors and was rated 44th-best tight end by ESPN.com. He was named a three-star recruit by both ESPN.com and Rivals.com, and was recruited to the program by Coach A. Informant 4 played in 11 games during his freshman year and had two receptions and a touchdown. During his sophomore year, he had three touchdowns, started in five games, and played in 12. Coach A left after the 2012 season and was replaced by Coach B, who was a well known coach. During the 2013 season, Informant 4 played in all 12 games, started in six, and was the main pass-catching tight end. Subsequent to the 2013 season, Coach B accepted another position and was replaced by Coach C, who was an assistant coach. During his senior year in 2014, Informant 4 played in 12 games, had 4 touchdowns, and rushed 489 yards.

Informant 5 was a black female who had experienced one head coaching change as a women’s basketball player. In high school, Informant 5 averaged 24.5 points and 16.4 rebounds, earning her a spot on the State All-Star team. As a freshman in high school, she helped to lead her team to a state championship. Informant 5 was recruited to the program by Coach A and started 12 games and played in all 30 games during her freshman year. In the off-season between her freshman and sophomore years, Informant 5 experienced a head coaching change when Coach A was replaced by Coach B, a former alumnus of the program. During her sophomore year, Informant 5 was named Conference Defensive Player of the Year and was the first player in program history to win the award from the league. She was named Player of the Year in the program and was All-Conference First Team. During her junior year, Informant 5 was named 2014
Conference Defensive Player of the Year and averaged 22 points per game. During the 2014-15 season, the institution changed conferences, and she was named Conference Player of the Year in the new conference. She was on the Naismith Watch List and was one of five players nationally who were added to the Wade Trophy List.

Informant 6 was a black female who had experienced one head coaching change while on the women’s basketball team. Informant 6 was a very productive player on her high school team, averaging 23.3 points and 8.8 rebounds her senior year. She was a McDonald’s All-American nominee and was recruited to the institution by Coach A. During her freshman year, Informant 6 played in all 30 games and started 17 times. In the off-season between her freshman and sophomore years, Informant 6 experienced a head coaching change when Coach A was replaced by Coach B, a former alumnus of the program. During her sophomore year, Informant 6 was named All-Conference First Team and averaged 20.3 points per game. Prior to her junior year, she was the Preseason Conference Player of the Year and had a very productive season. During her senior year, Informant 6 was named 2014-15 All-Conference First Team, was an Allstate Good Works Team nominee and a senior CLASS candidate. Additionally, she was named High-Major Player of the year. She scored 20 points in the first NCAA tournament game of her career.

Informant 7 was a black male who had experienced three head coaching changes as a player on the football team. In high school, Informant 7 was honored as the team’s co-most valuable player and boasted 208 tackles and 19 sacks. In 2012, he was recruited to the program by Coach A, an alumnus of the program, and red-shirted his freshman year. Coach A left after the 2012 season and was replaced by Coach B, who was a well
known coach. Informant 7 did not see any minutes his second year. In 2014, Coach B accepted another position and was replaced by Coach C, who was an assistant coach. Although Informant 7 was on the roster, he did not see any playing time during the 2014 season.

Informant 8 was a white male who had experienced one head coaching change while on the men’s basketball team. Informant 8 was from a country outside of North America and attended and played at a prestigious preparatory school in the United States, at which he rated as a two-star recruit by Rivals.com. Informant 8 was recruited to the institution by Coach A. While he was a very productive member of the team, he suffered many injuries that led to minimal playing time. In the middle of his junior year after a rather unsuccessful start to the season, Coach A was replaced with Coach B, one of the assistant coaches. After that season, Coach B was named the official head coach. Informant 8 continued to play for the team. Although he was on the bench several times due to injuries, including one that required surgery, he played an important role on the team.

Themes

The themes that emerged from the individual phenomenological dialogues were unique to each informant, but also were relatively similar to the group as a whole. The individual descriptions of the informants’ experiences of a head coaching change were analyzed to provide a detailed description of each individual’s experience in an attempt to provide a broader description of the phenomenon.

Three major themes emerged from the dialogues: (1) Student-athletes appear to accept head coaching changes, (2) Head coaches are essential to team success, and (3)
The student-athlete-coach relationship is the core factor of the intercollegiate experience. Although all themes and related sub-themes represented individual experiences, when combined, they created a broader description of experiencing a head coaching change.

In the following sections, a description of the themes are presented as they related to the experience of a head coaching change. A rich description of the themes and any related sub-themes is presented. In order to achieve a richer description, various quotes from the informants are used to illustrate the phenomenon of a head coaching change. Some of the informants’ quotes are marginally edited in order to provide a succinct and clear description. Although marginal edits were made to the data, the utmost care was taken to preserve the integrity of the informants’ experiences as they described them. Several lengthy quotes are included in the following sections, to allow the informants to tell their stories with as little interference as possible from the researcher. The researcher used inductive analysis methods, or the process of “discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (Patton, 2002, p. 453), as well as the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Using the aforementioned methods, each case study was analyzed and themes began to emerge.

**Theme One: Student-Athletes Appear to Accept Head Coaching Changes**

The first question asked of the informants allowed the opportunity to talk about their experience. Many, including Informant 6, expressed a sense of shock.

I think we were just shocked because it happened so fast. We finished conference tournament, a few people went home, and some went back to [city]. I was actually home when I got the text that was like we have to have a conference call and we were like okay, and [two teammates], us three being so close we got on like a three way call and [teammate] was like, I know already I know Coach A is leavin’ so all of us were like...it was just a lot of shock and surprise and just how it went down because we never had a chance to speak to her ourselves she never like reached out to any of us when she left. (Informant 6, women’s basketball)
Informant 2, a women’s basketball player, described a different situation in which she explained the experience to be more difficult for others, but not for herself.

Uhh, it’s a different situation. You go in...especially when you’re recruited by somebody, and you kind of know what you’re getting. Those coaches know what you can do, and then you go into a different situation where the coaches...First of all, you don’t even know who the coaches are going to be, and then you just kind of see if you fit along. And I know a lot of my friends didn’t even make it through the change. So it’s just kind of a different experience. I think I’ve been better because of it. You know, it’s been good for me. But I could definitely see where it’s you know, something that’s hard on a lot of people. (Informant 2, women’s basketball)

Informant 8, a men’s basketball player, described his experience in a very different manner. The situation was not shocking or stressful.

I really didn’t have much stresses. Umm I just I was just looking for like if friend, like friend, coaching relationship. I would just walk in the office with Coach B and just go in and talk and I just wanted to feel comfortable. He said in the first meeting he had. Feel, like feel comfortable. “I just want you guys to be comfortable”. He said in the first meeting he had with us. He didn’t want us to be stressed or think about none of the crazy stuff. I didn’t have much stress. (Informant 8, men’s basketball)

Anxiety. Throughout the interviews, a recurring sub-theme of lack of anxiety was noted as it relates to the experience of a head coaching change. Many informants indicated a healthy amount of anxiety at the time of the transition due of factors of the unknown. Most mentioned that the highest level of anxiety was related to not knowing who the new coach was and the extent to which that coach would value their abilities. Informant 6 described her anxiety and the way she coped with it.

I think only in the beginning. Then I went through, I know high schools different because your gonna be, but I went through three coaching changes in high school, I had three different head coaches... I just knew that everybody’s, you just have to adapt to whatever coach you get and just adapt to them and still be the same player you are and I think why didn’t stress is because of that and my family and my dad just reminded me that, like if you don’t play that means that you didn’t do something right. Either you weren’t working hard enough or it wasn’t in God’s
plan. So I think that I just prayed about it a lot and control the things that I could control, which Coach B had mentioned to me in the beginning and something that I had always reminded is just control what you can control. Like if you’re not playing it’s something that you can control that you’re not doing. (Informant 6, women’s basketball)

Informant 7 had similar thoughts and described his coaching transition as one in which the anxiety developed, as he would need to adapt to a new coaching style.

I wouldn’t say stressful. But it was difficult. Difficult because you have to get used to all new coaching. I have had three different position coaches and head coaches, so you just have to get used to different rules and stricter coaches. Some are more lenient than others. So just different processes. (Informant 7, football).

Informant 4, also a football player, was concerned about the transition of learning a new coaching style.

It was just kinda like, it was kinda like coming into college again when the next coach got here umm… you know how to learn every new offense, had to build new relationships with all the other coaches and you know that was probably the hardest thing, is building those relationships back that you already had. (Informant 4, football)

Informant 6 discussed the anxiety and awkwardness of the coaching change.

I think I was a little apprehensive to the coaching change. I’m not big on change and of course being recruited by Coach A I wasn’t expecting it to happen… umm. Coach B initially arrived there was… I think 7 of us left or 8 of us...Maybe I’m not sure. Ummm the process went on a few people either chose to leave or you know were released so there was four of us remaining from the original team so that was a little bit like made it a little more or a little awkward you know… Stressed a little at the beginning just because when you get a new coach you don’t know what they’re gonna do, you don’t know if their gonna keep you, get rid of you, and if they do decide to like get rid of you it’s no time period of when it could happen, like it can happen you know at the end of the year and then you don’t know where your gonna go. That part was probably stressful but once I realized I was gonna be around it wasn’t as stressful I guess. (Informant 6, women’s basketball)

In a follow-up question to Informant 6, appeared to have very little stress and apprehension about the coaching change, she was asked whether her teammates experienced any other stresses as they related to the coaching transition. Informant 6
described a teammate’s situation and indicated that the teammate experienced much stress.

I think you say that and definitely some people, [teammate] did. I mean [teammate] I think if people who don’t know her besides on the court you don’t realize why she didn’t play until this year, she just stressed so much she’s like, her brain goes like a mile-a million miles an hour. She thinks and analyzes she’s just so dog gone smart and she just stresses herself out and that’s what she did her freshman year, sophomore year, junior like she just stressed and worried all the time about not bein good enough and I think some people stressed but…(Informant 6, women’s basketball)

In a contradictory description, Informant 1 articulated a sense of hope that the coaching change would ease some of the existing anxiety he experienced at the time.

I guess there was a lot of problems going on throughout the organization I guess and it needed some change. So I was sort of looking forward to seeing what that change was going to be… I was hopeful more than anything. Just cause I knew where the program had been and where the potential lied. So I was kind of hopeful about what could happen (Informant 1, men’s basketball).

During the interviews, Informant 4 was the only individual who described significant stress and anxiety during the actual season following the coaching change. He articulates that his grades suffered due to the stress of playing for a new coach, who was admittedly stricter than the former head coach.

Yeah I mean it did because I mean that was, that semester of football when he was here, that was my lowest GPA score and by a lot I mean it went from like a 3.5 to like probably like a 2.6...and it wasn’t because I was taking, I mean my classes might have been a little harder but it wasn’t like I was having a demanding schedule it was just I was so tired, so stressed out about all that stuff it was like I didn’t even want to focus on school like I had no motivation to focus on school kinda. (Informant 4, football)

Although Informant 4 admitted that he experienced impactful anxiety after his second coaching change, he was not nervous prior to the new coach beginning. Coach B, who was hired in 2013, was a well known coach who had great success at other prestigious programs.
No, I was never nervous about it. I knew it was still going in the right direction and you know you’re bringing in a big name of Coach B, so I mean obviously you know it’s not gonna fail. I mean, he is a good coach, he’s succeeded everywhere he’s been so I was never nervous about, if anything I was probably you know thought it was going in a more successful direction you know. (Informant 4, football)

**Transferring.** During the interviews, informants were asked whether they thought about transferring while experiencing going the coaching change. Various answers were given, but the idea of transferring was an obvious sub-theme of the general overarching theme of anxiety and coping as it related to a large and impactful change of that nature. Many informants considered transferring in the time between the former coach leaving and the new coach arriving. A few, including Informants 2 and 6, considered leaving before the former coach left: “…I’d pretty much made up my mind I was going to leave. So when they were deciding to bring in a new coach I wanted to give her a chance before I just totally ruled it out. So yeah…that’s about it” (Informant 2, women’s basketball). Informant 6 also expressed her thoughts of leaving the program prior to Coach A being removed.

I think if… Probably if Coach A stayed I probably would have left and I think even, I think it was decided in my mind that I wanted to leave. I just wanted, I was just so homesick and we weren’t winning and I was just like, I just want to go home. Like I don’t know if this is right for me, like I think either way I was dead set on transferring until talkin to just [two teammates] and then once we found out about Coach B, and [teammate] was like well I know her a little bit, and she’ll be a good one, and let’s just give it a chance. (Informant 6, women’s basketball)

When asked the reason she chose not to transfer, Informant 6 explained the impact of her current teammates on her decision to stay.

I just didn’t know what I was gonna do. I mean we didn’t have the greatest year anyway so there was talk of some of us that we maybe wanted to leave but we were like well… [two teammates] and I made a pact and we were just like were not gonna leave each other were gonna stick it out, gut it out and turn this around and with Coach A leavin’ we were like well you know that kinda sorta might be a
sign that...we just all three need to go our separate ways and just figure it out but I think just a lot of talkin’ to those two just no matter what we sorta figured out we were gonna try and stick together...Yeah but I think it was an obligation to the yeah I guess sorta kinda to my team and then my parents were just like you chose to go there so your gonna stick it out. You’re only gonna leave if you have to leave, not by choice. (Informant 6, women’s basketball)

Informant 7 spoke about his teammates and the possibility of transferring.

Similar to Informant 6, Informant 7 indicated that he remained in the program because his teammates chose to.

A lot of my teammates were talking about transferring for the same feelings like he walked out on us. Like they really came here for Coach A, so when he left and all that was going on I was feeling like everyone was going to leave. Not following the leader, but I was considering going back home to where I actually knew people. Because I was just getting accustomed to meeting these guys and if they were going to leave it was going to be really hard for me to stay. When I figured out no one else was leaving I was just like, I can stay... And I didn’t know who I was and I really was thinking about quittin playin football because I wasn’t really enjoying it at the time but after words you know I just began to love it even more and I just felt better about it. And then I began to motivate my own self so that’s how I knew it was something that I wanted to do. (Informant 7, football)

In each of the interviews, informants were asked whether the athletic administration asked their opinions about the person who should be chosen as the new head coach. All informants indicated they were not consulted, and only one remembered a meeting with the athletic administration. As a result, she remembered only the discussion about options for transferring.

I think in the meetin, I think he honestly asked like who was considerin like transferin and whatever and I don’t think anybody was really honest about raising their hand, just like we uhh won’t grant releases until you know until there’s an actual coach here that you have to give a chance or whatever. And a few people were still like no I don’t care I want my release. But I remember him tellin us that at least give the new coach a chance before you ask for a release. (Informant 6, women’s basketball)

**Loyalty and trust.** For the most part, the informants were very loyal to their teammates, to their respective programs, and to the university. As loyalty related to the
idea of transferring, the informants who were interviewed expressed that loyalty (i.e., to program, teammates, university, commitment, etc.) was the main reason they chose to remain at the institution. Informant 6 described a pact between she and her teammates: “We made a promise like I’ll be here till we graduate no matter [what]” (women’s basketball). Similarly, Informant 5 described her commitment: “No matter who was comin in I was gonna stay and then hopefully like Coach B they were gonna make me better and… make it like help us become a winning team so” (women’s basketball).

Informant 3 stated, “I was loyal to this school and I was loyal to my family. I felt like this was a great place.” (men’s basketball)

Informant 1 was hesitant to divulge that he had opportunities to leave and to transfer elsewhere, but he admitted that his love of the university and city were factors that compelled him to remain.

Yeah, I thought about it… Okay, obviously I had other options and I just kind of looked at it. But when I talked to my parents, I mean I made a commitment a long time ago when I decided to come here. And I stuck with it. But I love this place, I mean I already had friends and kind of got built into the community. (Informant 1, men’s basketball)

Informant 8, who was injured for most of his intercollegiate career, described his role.

I did not think about transferring at all. Because I wanted to finish the season first. Even though I was hurt, I was hurt at that time, I was just focused on getting that championship ring. I wasn’t thinking about transferring nothing all that. I just wanted to finish the season first and then we’ll go from there. I knew I had a job to finish even though I was on the bench. (Informant 8, men’s basketball)

Informant 2, who struggled with thoughts of transferring prior to Coach A being removed, explained that her loyalty to and love for the university was the major factor in her decision to remain.
[The University] That was really one of the reasons I wanted to stay and it was such a hard decision. But yeah, I loved it and wanted to figure out a way I could stay but I didn’t want to be miserable with basketball because that’s what you do the majority of the time. (Informant 2, women’s basketball)

Many of the informants discussed their trust in the program and in the administration. During the change, the informants relied heavily on each other and in the level of commitment they perceived the university to have. Although no direct question was asked about trust, they freely discussed their acceptance and trust in the administration to make decisions, as well as trust in the new head coach to develop a successful program. Informant 2 discussed Coach B’s ability to bring everyone up to speed. “Our first year was all about that, that no matter what else was going on, the core seven who had been through the change stayed together. And would get over this next hump of what we had to do.” (women’s basketball)

Informant 3 described the players’ trust in Coach B, as well as Coach B’s trust in the players.

We’ve talked a lot, we’ve talked about a lot since I’ve been here. The thing we wrestle is it’s all about who you trust. If the coach has seen you do something a dozen times and knows you can do it, and maybe you’re not having a good game, so he takes you out for a few minutes he’s going to put you back in because he’s seen you do it before. You know? He trusts you. So it doesn’t matter if you’re having a bad game or an off game, but people who don’t think they’re playing enough, that’s their opportunity to step up and show they can do it as well. Which means he can trust them as well. More players can play. (Informant 3, men’s basketball)

**Athletics as a business.** When speaking with the informants, it was clear that they knew they had a specific role. In regard to the informants’ acceptance of the head coaching change, they were very much aware that the expectation to produce wins was of the utmost importance to the institution. Although the athletic administration did not ask the opinions of the informants prior to hiring the new coaches, the informants expressed
that the administration had a job to do, which was to hire the best individual. The informants unknowingly adhered to their roles as employees, and the administration made the best business decision for the program.

Informant 1 admitted that he was neither happy nor sad, he “just kind of look at it from a business standpoint, I mean things like that are going to happen. (men’s basketball)

Informant 5 pointed out that “at the end of the day like I said its business. They want to bring in somebody that’s gonna win. Cause knowing us we would pick somebody because of their personality or maybe, like Coach A, she had a nice personality but some of the stuff she did like we wasn’t winnin you know?” (women’s basketball)

Many of the informants used business rhetoric when they described the coaching change. Informant 4 explained that, when he was in high school and was being heavily recruited by many colleges:

I thought they were about to offer me like their coach got fired or they cleared house and they were gone and then they stopped recruiting me because these new coaches didn’t know about me, so I mean going into college I kinda knew. I mean that’s kinda the business nowa days. I mean two or three years for a coach is kinda a decent amount of time [laughs]. (Informant 4, football)

Informant 7 was not even upset about the way in which the coaching change was handled, as “it wasn’t like a smack in the face because it’s all business in football, you know?” (football) Informants 4 and 7, both football players, continued to describe the transition as it related to a business. When Informant 4 spoke about Coach A leaving, he said, “I mean it wasn’t like they fired Coach A, I mean he decided to leave so I mean at the end of the day they had a good coach and I mean he was the best coach out there on the market you know so why not go ahead and get him.” Informant 7 asserted, “The
university tryin to make money, the football program is tryin to make money you know because we’re on the rise, so I mean I understand but…I honestly don’t feel like our opinions would really matter as much because at the end of the day their gonna bring in the coach that they feel is best for the program.”

Most informants spoke about athletics as a business in some form or another. Informant 3, a men’s basketball player, had a very laissez faire attitude about the transition of the coaches and continued to comment on “the nature of the business.” His stress did not involve playing time, etc., rather, it involved the amount of outside individuals who had a stake in the program and tried to pry information out of the team members for inside knowledge.

It wasn’t really too bad. I mean it’s a business - college basketball. College sports in general is business. People get fired and players get let go every day, every season. So can’t look at it like, oh I feel sorry for that guy. Well I do feel sorry for him, but it’s a business and he understood that as well…the worst part was that, and maybe just hearing about it a lot outside of our program… Not really the media, just people out in the community. People wanted to know who the leads are. You know, you go to the barbershop and the barber wants to know maybe this person, who do you think it’s going to be, ya know? You just say hey, I’m not going to be involved in this like everyone else. (Informant 3, men’s basketball)

**Theme Two: Head Coaches are Essential to Team Success**

During the course of the interviews, a similar comment was expressed by nearly all informants, in which they indicated that the head coach and the assistant coaches were important, if not the most important, factors to the success of the program. Although the importance of head coaches was anticipated to be paramount, the researcher underestimated the impact of assistant coaches, not only on recruitment and in-season performance, but also on their importance during the transition of coaches.
Informant 6 highlighted the importance of assistant coaches and stated that “most kids only see the head coach and yeah you need to have a relationship with the head coach but I think I realized early that the assistants, they’re the ones also given the coach hey this persons this and that so maybe you should, they’re the ones given the hints to even get them to look at chu…” (women’s basketball). Informant 6 continued:

I think assistants play a big role too. I think people don’t see as big as a role as. They do all the dirty work too. Like they do all the gettin the kids here and sometimes when the head coach is busy with somethin else you gotta have assistants that can help a kid out or help your kids out so I think the head coach is important because of the fact that they bring in that help. And they bring in people that are similar to them but have different qualities that they may not possess or be good at different things they aren’t. Just so it can help them but also in a time of need it’s like talkin to the same person at the top. Like Coach [Assistant], reminds me of Coach B in a way and Coach [Assistant], just straight down the line but the coach, the head coach is, like that’s the person that people see all the time but I think…(Informant 6, women’s basketball)

When asked to elaborate on whether she thought the assistant coaches had a role as important as the head coach, or whether the head coach had the largest role, Informant 6 described the importance of the head coach/assistant coach relationship.

Definitely big just because they’re the ones that is really running the show, calling the shots, the assistants do a lot but at the end of the day it’s the coaches decision on who they want to play, who they want to bring in so that’s what I think was important in the process was finding a coach that I felt like I could not only play for but just learn from in four years because that’s like four important years of your life so you want to be led by somebody…(Informant 6, women’s basketball)

When Informant 3 discussed his thoughts on the importance of the head coach to the success of the program, he admitted that the position was important due to the authority to make decisions. “I still had the same decision and I liked the other coaches on the staff as well.” (Informant 3, men’s basketball)
The importance of a head coach to the program was described as a major emergent theme, as the informants became very animated and descriptive when asked their thoughts relative to the coach’s importance for the team success. Their responses, both verbal and non-verbal, highlighted this important perception, which is evident in the following quotes.

I think it was a big thing. Where I’m from, he was a pretty influential guy. A lot of people spoke highly of him. So, I obviously was interested from him at that point. (Informant 1, men’s basketball)

I think that it’s, if not the most important thing, then one of the…because all of the girls take the personality of the coach. And so, you know, which Coach B, very passionate and hardworking. We kind of took that kind of approach I guess. We just kind of took the underdog, no one believes in us approach and so I think it’s if not THE biggest thing, then definitely top two or three. (Informant 2, women’s basketball)

He’s [the head coach] very important. Um because you know whether we win or lose he’s the one that’s gonna take/pick up all the slack for it. He’s the one that’s gonna be blamed for it all so I feel like he has a very high level of importance to the team. Plus you know he’s the one that’s you know given us everything we need to be successful as far as on the football field…And you know he provides us with all that so you know if it wasn’t for the head coach, he’s the head hancho you know? (Informant 7, football)

Extremely important. I mean you’re [the coach] the one who sets the tone for the team and how things are going to be run from day one through the end of the season. (Informant 1, men’s basketball)

**Leadership/Motivation.** A very present sub-theme was the difference in leadership and personality styles of the old and the new head coaches. As Informant 1 explained, “Yeah, I mean they were both able to motivate me. I mean in different ways, but both were able to motivate me for sure.” (men’s basketball) The words of Informant 1 mirrored the thoughts of most of the informants. Most were quick to point out that they were individually very successful under the former coach, but they also were quick to admit that the former coach and the new coach had very different leadership and
motivational techniques. When asked the difference between the old coach and the new, Informant 6 described her experience.

Yeah I think she just saw the potential in us and expected that every night and didn’t allow us… I don’t know how to explain it. I think she just demanded so much of us that it made us that much better and us bein I mean the only what four from the previous, we had nothing but a chance because we had just freshman under us so I don’t know. (Informant 6, women’s basketball)

Informant 2, also on the women’s basketball team, described that “you can see her passion for it and it makes you want to give it your best,” when she spoke of ways in which the new head coach was able to motivate the team.

Informant 8 articulated to a greater degree the differences in leadership and motivation, explaining:

Well every coach is different. Coach A and Coach B might be good person, they both good person, but they got differences on the court. Coach B just motivated you more. When you were doing a mistake or something, he knew how to motivate you when you were down. Maybe he come right next to you and say and tell you that um just keep pushin, you know. Just keep pushin keep pushin. That important. Every college player some players might get down easier than the other players and you gotta be able to realize that. You gotta know who is weak mentally and who is strong. You know and you kind of react to that. Coach B would push you, he would obviously yell at you. He’s a coach and he will do that. He would yell at you and he would push you but at the same time, he knows how to motivate you. (men’s basketball)

Informant 3, a very popular men’s basketball player, noted that the head coach was “highly important.”

You can’t just put a team out there and say go play. Every game needs structure. You need to have some kind of structure in the game, but you also need to ability to break off from the play and make a play for yourself. So it’s kind of like a push and pull situation. The coach might say one thing, but when you’re doing that you see a different opportunity and you have to know to take the opportunity. You have to be a good basketball player. That’s what, if you ask any coach in America, they’ll tell you where the difference between good and great players are.
The women’s basketball players, who had experienced an unsuccessful season prior to the removal of Coach A appeared to be relieved in the way in which Coach B motivated them to succeed.

Like I said I think Coach A was too nice. Like she didn’t want to always get on you and just she wanted you to be great but she didn’t like demand it all the time and I feel like that’s as freshman you need somebody that’s gonna be like play. But also gets you motivated and instills confidence in you...so I feel like I think that’s the main think we lacked as freshman and that first year is the confidence and Coach B is so confident in herself that she wants you to be a mirror image of her. So she talks to you personally then gets on you on the court but gets you in the office and tries to build you up, build you up and make you just believe that you’re as good as she thinks you are …We started of with her winning we still just came off a losing season and we hadn’t proved to her what we could do or what she could do. Still, our confidence was, she built it up in the summer but we were still iffy at the beginnin and I think the whole confidence factor is the biggest part of the whole thing. I think People ask what did she change about peoples games and I don’t think, I think everything we did our sophomore, junior senior year we could of done our freshman year we just believed in it and worked at it more and just did it and didn’t think about it as much and stuff. (Informant 6, women’s basketball)

The seniors on the football team, who had experienced three head coaching changes while on the team, had a relatively different experience with the motivation and leadership factor. Coach B had a much more harsh style as compared to the player’s coach (Coach A) and the well-rounded coach (Coach C). Coach B was a nationally known and very successful coach, was described as having a very negative and degrading sense of leadership. The football players were very adamant that their levels of motivation were intrinsically inherent and not cultivated by Coach B. When asked to explain his thoughts on whether he was able to flourish under Coach B’s leadership, Informant 4 said:

I don’t think it worked…I think a lot of times, I mean I know for a fact that there were some times that it was where he would call a player up to his office and he would tell them how bad they are or you know, tell them they needed to transfer and go on and on and on, and then, then the team Chaplin was up there in the
room and then he would come talk to a player and be like yeah the only reason he does that is to try and motivate you and get you going…

Informant 7 continued,

I feel like it’s brought us even closer. Because at the end of the day, we can’t expect someone to come in here and stay. We’re here to work and get somewhere with our own lives. So we can’t depend on someone else to stay here and push us, we have to push ourselves. So now it’s kinda like we’re a pack and we push each other instead of depending on the coaches. Because you just never know when they’re going to walk out. (Informant 7, football)

When asked to explain what motivated him if not Coach B, Informant 4 responded, “Well, personally I can motivate myself I mean I don’t need the coaches to do it. (football)

Theme Three: Student-Athlete-Coach Relationship

At the core of the themes was the importance of the student-athlete-coach relationship. In each of the interviews, instances were identified in which the informants spent a significant portion of the time discussing the impact of the coaches on their overall experiences. In circumstances in which the programs experienced a lack of success on the court, the men’s and women’s basketball players were very expressive with the implied importance of the athlete-coach relationship with the head coach and the assistant coaches.

Yeah, I think more so when I would go in the office, about anything with Coach A, I’d go to Coach [Assistant] and just talk. I’d sit in her office for hours and talk to her about anything, and I mean if something was going on with school, family, I mean it just felt more comfortable to talk to Coach [Assistant] and yeah probably Coach [Assistant] because she was the only one there for my recruitment. And then with Coach B, I could go after awhile she could get me to come in and just talk the same way. But with Coach A I don’t think we ever sat in the office and talked much like that off the court. (Informant 6, women’s basketball)
Informant 8 expressed the importance of coaches who believed in his ability. Although he was injured for most of his intercollegiate career, he continuously spoke about the extent to which his relationship with the coaches meant. He spoke of faith in his ability and being thankful for opportunities. As Informant 8 did not play in his home country, he pointed out that he had done considerable research about the program and the coaches prior to deciding to commit to the institution.

At first, I didn’t know too much. I was kind of researching with my friends from [State]. I was asking them what kind of a coach is he. I don’t know him and I want to be close to him. And he explained how kind he is, he’ll push you hard, you know, in practices, he’ll be like friends with you off the court. And that’s what I was looking for with a coach. And same with Coach B…Umm it was nothing less that Coach A. I love Coach B as much as I did Coach A. So Coach B was the same way. He was friends with you off the court, but when we hit the lines, it was business. He would push you to the limit… loved me. And I loved him too. I loved him and we kinda still talk. Once a month a probably. I ask him how is he doing, how is his wife doing and all that. We keep in touch still. That’s important to me and that shows me he cared about me when I was there… You see them every day. You talk to them every day. You know what kind of person they are, you know what they do. You know where they at all the time. You’re around them all the time… First of all to be in a good relationship with their players and like they were probably looking for that the coach actually cared about his players. And uhh I think that’s the most important. You coach has to care about you. If he doesn’t, you lose all your faith, all your respect, all your passion you have for basketball. I think that was the most important. (men’s basketball)

Informant 1 also discussed the importance of that relationship.

I think coaches [have] different philosophies. And I fit Coach A’s philosophy, and I mean different players are going to mold to different coach’s schemes. So obviously I did think about that… He’s [Coach B] just a great role model for the program, and for us as players and humans. He’s a good guy. He’s very business-like, and I think that’s good for a lot of us kind of getting you ready for the real world. (Informant 1, men’s basketball)

Subsequent to experiencing an unsuccessful year, the women’s basketball players were very open that a stronger relationship with the head coach could have made a difference in the success of the program. Informant 2, who played for Coach A for two
seasons, discussed the impact of the initial relationship with Coach A and that the relationship may have prevented her from reaching her full playing potential, although the relationship was positive. In the transition from Coach A to Coach B, Informant 2 experienced a growth in her team functionality and ultimately experienced a positive relationship change upon Coach B’s arrival.

Knowing that she was from a church background and had a family, I thought that was cool. So I mean, I think it has a big…If I did it all over again I would probably see different things as a bigger deal. But when you’re going through, you have no idea what to really look for… Every coach has a person that they connect to in the recruiting process. It’s probably different. Who Coach B connects to, is probably really different than who Coach A connects to. For many obvious reasons. (Informant 2, women’s basketball)

When discussing transitioning to Coach B, Informant 5 stated:

She has high expectations of me and for the team, everybody. So like, and I’m scared of her [laughs]… It’s very important. Her and the coaching staff they’ve done an unbelievable job. You know comin in you know with the record that we had and then doing pretty much a 360 with it so … Yeah, to be honest I probably wouldn’t of ever thought that…we would have been as successful as we was these past two years. (Informant 5, women’s basketball)

Informant 2 attributed the team’s success to the leadership of Coach B and the relationships and expectations she had formed with the team. Informant 2 was a returning player and discussed the need to prove herself to Coach B and to the team.

It’s one of those things when you’re the returner, the other coach recruited you, she has no idea anything about you. And she’s never seen you play. So you constantly feel like you have to prove yourself. I don’t know. It’s hard. She [Coach B] made us feel really good about our role, and each of us had different roles. You know what I’m saying? So that was really good. And the fact that she really wanted to get to know us. She had an open door policy. And everybody, she really made an effort to bring you in the office if you weren’t going in the office. Cause I don’t go in the office, I’m not going in there unless somebody tells me to. So it made the transition a lot easier than it probably could have been. (Informant 2, women’s basketball)
As Informants 4 and 7 experienced two head coaching changes while in the program, their connection to the coaches appeared weaker than that of the basketball players. The football players were sad when Coach A left, but they were happy when Coach B left. Coach C was an assistant coach under Coach B; therefore, the team knew what to expect for the most part. As such, and perhaps due to of the size of the team, the football players had a relationship with the coaches, although it did not appear to be a meaningful factor for success.

I mean there is other factors, umm but that matters a great deal because I mean some of the games, a lot of the games we lost with Coach B, it was because people weren’t motivated people didn’t want to play, people at the end of the day didn’t care if we won or lost that much. And which he kinda changed at the end of the season, he kinda saw that and we kinda went on a winnin streak. But I mean if you don’t have players that want to play for you as a head coach, then you’re not gonna, even if you have the best team in the country, you’re not gonna win that many games. And that is probably 90% of it. (Informant 4, football)

When I came out of high school I expected to have the same coach for four years. So being that I’ve been here two years and this is my third coach. You know, I wouldn’t say it’s a bad thing because I’ve gained a lot of resources out there, but it’s still different. You have to meet different people and become accustomed to different people. So it’s just a different process. (Informant 7, football)

Summary

The themes that emerged from the individual case studies were relatively uniform and similar. An analysis of the interviews revealed three major themes: (1) Student-athletes appear to accept head coaching changes, (2) Head coaches are essential to team success, and (3) The student-athlete-coach relationship is the core factor of the intercollegiate experience. Although each of the three themes, and corresponding sub-themes, represented the thoughts and experiences of individual informants, they were interconnected and relevant to the phenomenon of a head coaching change.
CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of this investigation was to provide a rich description of the impact of a head coaching change on intercollegiate student-athletes. This study utilized a qualitative case study approach to achieve a rich description of the phenomenon of the impact of a head coaching change. Through the use of a case study design, the researcher was able to describe the impact of such a phenomenon on the student-athletes. The eight individual case studies were achieved by conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Using inductive analysis methods, or the process of “discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (Patton, 2002, p. 453), as well as the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), each case study was analyzed and themes began to emerge.

This chapter briefly summarizes the purpose of the study, the research question, and the methodology. The remainder of the chapter is divided into five sections: (a) summary of themes, (b) discussion of themes, (c) study limitations, (d) implications for practice, and (e) recommendations for further research.

Summary of Themes

Using the inductive analysis and constant comparative methods described in Chapter III, three themes emerged in response to the research question. The themes addressed the impact of the phenomenon of a head coaching change across three NCAA Division 1 intercollegiate athletic programs at a single mid-major institution in the Southeast.
**Research Question**

What is the impact of a head coaching change on intercollegiate student-athletes?

- **Theme 1: Student-athletes appear to accept head coaching changes.**
  - Sub-theme: Anxiety
  - Sub-theme: Transferring
  - Sub-theme: Loyalty and Trust
  - Sub-theme: Athletics as a business
- **Theme 2: Head coaches are essential to team success.**
  - Sub-theme: Leadership/Motivation
- **Theme 3: The student-athlete-coach relationship is the core factor of the intercollegiate experience.**

**Discussion of Themes**

Although all themes and related sub-themes represented individual experiences, when combined, they created a broader description of the experience of a head coaching change. From a larger perspective, one can infer that the emergent themes outlined the process of experiencing a head coaching change at the intercollegiate level. All informants articulated a metamorphic shift in thinking that began with the shock and anxiety of losing a head coach, followed by a discussion of the coach’s importance to the success of the program, thus legitimizing the need for the change. This concluded with comments regarding the importance of a good relationship with the coach, which appeared to be strengthened in times of success. From the researcher’s perspective, understanding the experience process of the informants had serious implications for athletic administrators, support staff, and the university as a whole.
Theme One: Student-Athletes Appear to Accept Head Coaching Changes

In their study on the stressors experienced by student-athletes, Lu et al., (2012) concluded that many factors can be a source of stress for student-athletes. Among these stressors are factors such as relationships with coaches, performance demand, and academic performance. In conversations regarding the general stresses of a student-athlete, the informants did not indicate a level of stress in any aspect of their lives, as related to playing their respective sport. Surprisingly, they did not have stress or anxiety about the head coaching change. However, the informants made it clear that, although they were “shocked” and slightly stressed about the individual would be their eventual head coach, they were not stressed about the change itself.

Sub-theme: Anxiety. Throughout the interviews, a general lack of anxiety was observed for all informants. Although they were between the ages of 19 and 22, their maturity and acceptance of circumstances were quite surprising. Anxiety was an important sub-theme; although the informants indicated comparatively low anxiety, they conceded that they imagined “other people” probably would have anxiety about such a change. Though the informants did not specifically identify those as stressors, the researcher was able to recognize that the informants experienced the stress of the unknown through the analysis of the in-depth interviews. In comparison to the 2012 Lu et al. study, the emergence of anxiety as a non-issue for the student-athletes was contradictory.

Supporting the findings of this study, Beck (2002) conducted research on cognitive anxiety of student-athletes who experienced a head coaching change. Beck discovered that, on a cognitive level, very low levels of anxiety were seen. The Beck
study, similar to the current study, supported the concept that a head coaching change may only slightly impact student-athlete well being and organizational success.

**Sub-theme: Transferring.** Retention in intercollegiate athletics as it relates to transferring during a coaching transition was not anticipated to emerge as a theme. As the informants currently were on the teams, the assumption was made that they most likely did not have thoughts of transferring. Most indicated they planned to transfer prior to the coaching transition due to disappointment with the performance of the team, which they believed was tied to the performance of the head coach. In comparing intercollegiate athletic programs to businesses, when employees (student-athletes) are unhappy with their working situation, they likely will quit. Upon further probing and questioning of the informants, their loyalty to their teammates and to the institution clearly played a major role in their experience with a head coaching change.

**Sub-theme: Loyalty and trust.** During the dialogue with informants, a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to the institution and to the teammates was observed. When asked the reason they chose not to transfer prior to or during the head coach transition, most discussed their commitment to the program and the promises between teammates. The women’s basketball players indicated they wished to transfer, but they attributed the reason they stayed was due to the promise they made to one another and, in some cases, putting the welfare of the program ahead of their own. The men’s basketball players discussed their commitment to the university and the role they continued to play for the team to be successful.

The literature on organizational turnover has discussed the importance of trust within the organization. The Psychological Contract Theory (Morrison & Robinson,
1997) implied an understanding of obligation between the employer (the institution) and the employee (the student-athlete). Morrison and Robinson (1997) suggested that breaking “contract” results in a lack of trust and loyalty of the employee, causing the employees to “reduce their contributions.” The informants, all of whom experienced a breech in the psychological contract when they were recruited under the promises made by the first coach, appeared to continue their trust and loyalty to the institution and to their teammates. The act of informants reducing their contributions was not evident in this study.

**Sub-theme: Athletics as a business.** Much of the literature on the “arms race” in intercollegiate athletics has centered upon the concept that college sports are a big business and institutions need to spend outrageous amounts of money to lure the most successful coaches to their programs (Tsitos & Nixon, 2012). In addition to the post-season domino effect of coaching changes, institutions as a whole rely heavily on the “distinct financial enterprise” (Carson & Rinehart, 2010, p. 2) of the athletic programs as a means to bring notoriety and support to the university.

The informants in this study appeared to be aware of their role as “employees” of the programs. When asked about how their feelings regarding the head coaching change, many shrugged it off as a non-issue and a part of the larger picture of the mega-business of intercollegiate athletics. Many were able to separate their personal feelings and to declare that the institution “had to do what it had to do” in order to make money and be successful. Additionally, the informants were not upset that the first head coaches left to pursue better opportunities, citing it that was the “nature of the business.”
Theme Two: Head Coaches are Essential to Team Success

In McQueary’s 1997 study on turnover and team performance in NCAA Division I football programs from 1978-1995, the relationship was found to be significant but negative; a significant relationship was seen between a head coaching change and team performance. The results of this study indicated that, across the three programs in this study, the period subsequent to the head coach turnover yielded a more successful season. The informants expressed some relief that a coaching change occurred, as well as a trust and hope that the program would improve. Contrary to the research conducted by McQueary, the informants appeared to feel that a change in head coach was ultimately better for their programs. In the seasons following the head coaching changes, all three programs experienced increased success.

Sub-theme: Leadership/Motivation. Sullivan and Strode (2010) conducted a study in which they determined that coaches play a crucial role in a student-athlete’s motivation, and the goals set by a head coach promote an environment in which student-athletes can be successful. For the most part, this study supported those findings. Relative to the informants in both men’s and women’s basketball, the head coach set the motivational tone and presented clear and expected steps for success. Additionally, following the head coaching transitions, the coaches displayed more democratic tendencies that led to increased intrinsic motivation among the informants. Thus, the concept of increased intrinsic motivation that was present in this study supported the work of Hollembeak and Amorose (2005) and Greer (2002) as it related to creating an environment in which student-athletes can succeed.
The two football players expressed a level of amotivation, or the absence of motivation, during the year that Coach B was with the program. One of the football players shared stories about the continual put-downs and negative vocabulary that Coach B exhibited. The work of Turman (2006) supported the lower levels of motivation felt by the football players and further solidified the possibility that a greater impact would have occurred if Coach B had remained at the institution for longer than one year.

**Theme Three: The Student-Athlete-Coach Relationship**

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the importance of the student-athlete-coach relationship. Each informant attributed any post-head coaching change success to their relationships with the new head coach. The work of Robbins and Stanley (2012) supported these findings as they related to effort and performance of student-athletes. In a study by Gilson et al. (2013), the researchers investigated the social pressures, academic stresses, and self-regulation process used by student-athletes who experienced a head coaching change. The study indicated the importance of coaches and student-athletes knowing one another on a personal level.

The informants spoke at length about the importance of the head coach believing in them. Two of the men’s basketball players were hurt during the transition of head coaches and attributed their longevity and commitment to the program to the solid relationship with their head coach. The women’s basketball players had experienced several disappointing seasons prior to the transition of head coaches and considered transferring during the transition but chose to give Coach B a try. Had it not been for the passion and commitment of Coach B, the informants admitted they would have left the
program. They expressed that the high expectations, clear goals, and personal commitment of the new coaches were impactful factors.

The two football players experienced two head coaching changes during their time with the program. Their connection to, and relationship with, the head coach was not as impactful as the athlete-coach relationships of the basketball players. Wells and Peachey (2011) asserted that voluntary turnover in an organization can be detrimental and can cause dysfunction. Both Coach A and Coach B voluntarily left the football program. Essentially, the two football informants experienced a voluntary head coaching change every year they were with the program. In contrast, both the men’s and women’s basketball teams experienced an involuntary head coach turnover when coaches were dismissed from the program due to underperformance. The athlete-coach relationship of the men’s and women’s basketball had a significant impact on the overall experience of the informants.

**Study Limitations**

This research consisted of eight individual case studies at one institution. A phenomenological approach was employed for data collection, whereby the goal was to explore the reality of a head coaching change through conversations with informants (Tuohy et al., 2013; Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The product of the analysis was important and added to the body of existing literature on the phenomenon of a head coaching change, but the findings were not generalizable for all athletic programs. The study provided valuable information on the impacts of a head coaching change, and the emergent themes reflected very individual circumstances between teammates and other student-athletes at a single university with the same athletic administration. Based
on other studies outlined in Chapter II, some transferability may be possible; however, as Merriam (1997) stated, using a thick description of the phenomenon can help others to decide whether the findings were relevant and transferable to their situations.

At the time of this case study, the men’s basketball players had played for Coach B for two-and-a-half seasons, and the women’s basketball players had played for Coach B for three seasons. One of the football players, Informant 7, had not yet played a season with Coach C, while Informant 4 had completed a full season with Coach C. Therefore, most of the informants experienced life with the new coach for a significant amount of time. Additionally, each of the three programs experienced success prior to the interviews. Therefore, the informants may have had very different thoughts about their experience, had the researcher interviewed them at the time of the transition rather than later.

As a means of distancing her personal thoughts from the writing, the researcher used a third person writing approach. According to Upright (2009), writing in third person is commonly used and accepted in sport literature. As the researcher had previously worked very closely with the athletic programs and was the primary instrument for the study, the use of reflexive journaling and peer debriefing was crucial in order to fully hear and see the purpose of the data, a personal account of information from the informants. Writing in the less personal third person was utilized in order that the researcher remain as neutral as possible.

A final limitation involved the data collection. Although the informants were promised anonymity, they may not have spoken as freely as possible. The researcher conducted five of the interviews in fall of 2014 and the remaining three in spring of 2015.
As the five individuals who were interviewed in the fall were currently playing on their respective teams, they may possibly have held back on their true thoughts out of fear of the coaches hearing their comments. The data relied solely on the stories from the informants; therefore, this was seen as a limitation.

Researcher Reflection

Although the researcher carefully monitored her personal biases by maintaining a reflexive journal, her personal reflections, biases, thoughts, and feelings were certainly present prior to and during the data collection process. As the researcher was the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7), and due to the methodological use of the constant comparative method and inductive analysis, the researcher internalized the interviews, thus strengthening the description of the phenomenon.

Prior to the data collection process, the assumption was made that immense stress and anxiety would be related to the phenomenon. Much to the surprise of the researcher, the informants indicated they experienced very little stress as it related to a head coaching change. In some cases the informants expressed relief. Additionally, the informants articulated a mature acceptance of the circumstances and an understanding that the organization made decisions that would ultimately lead to success. Based the literature concerning head coaching changes, the informants’ calmness and seemingly un-phased demeanors was unexpected.

Implications for Practice

This study provided an in-depth examination of the impact of a head coaching change on eight NCAA Division I student-athletes at one university. Although the results
were not generalizable to other programs across the country, they were relevant to similar institutions that were experiencing the phenomenon of a head coaching change. Administrators, coaches, and support staff certainly can use this information to provide improved programming for student-athletes who experience such a change. As Kennedy (2007) stated, the athletic departments, along with the NCAA, are continue to develop programs to help student-athletes become successful in many areas.

The informants in this study indicated that, at the time of the coaching transition, the athletic administration excluded them in discussions regarding a new head coach. Perhaps in the future, student-athletes can aid the athletic programs by providing information about team dynamics, the current climate of the locker room, and other variables that could help with the selection of a head coach. As the new coach would be joining an already established team with understood social norms and behaviors, input from the student-athletes may be beneficial.

The focus of this study was to examine the impacts of a head coaching change, but implications of such a change are applicable in all organizations. When a turnover occurs in an organization, a need exists for support programming and mentoring in order to develop or maintain a productive environment. Perhaps information in this study could be used to develop programming at all levels of an organization, not solely athletic programs, to aid in the transition of leadership.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study focused on the perspective of the student-athlete. Future studies examining the perspective of the new head coach could yield valuable information regarding the transition from the leadership point of view. New head coaches join an
already established social environment with understood norms and behaviors. As examination of the transition from that perspective, in conjunction with the data from this study, could provide richer description of the phenomenon.

To address the phenomenon of a head coaching change, as it relates to specific sports and genders, would be of interest. The informants in this study were three females and five males in three major sports. The data was not analyzed with gender in mind, but the concept is plausible that different feelings, emotions, and impacts may be present.

Finally, adding a quantitative piece to this study regarding factors of motivation and self-efficacy could provide more meaningful description of the phenomenon of a head coaching change. Intrinsic factors, such as motivation and self-efficacy, were addressed to a lesser extent in this study and may have been factors that possibly make a difference in the way in which a head coaching change impacts student-athletes.

Summary

Organizational change has been widely researched as it related to the impact on leadership and stakeholder interests. At the intercollegiate level, understanding the impact of such a significant change has many implications on program success, support services, and hiring practices (Schoppmeyer, 2004). This study investigated the impacts of a head coaching change by utilizing a phenomenological nested case study approach. This qualitative observance of the phenomenon of a coaching change provided valuable results that could be utilized by athletic administrators, coaches, and support staff to ease the transition of such an impactful change.

The findings revealed that the informants experienced many feelings that were meaningful, but these feelings did no appear to affect their motivation and perception of
the program. Three emergent themes surfaced: (1) Student-athletes appear to accept head coaching changes, (2) Head coaches are essential to team success, and (3) The student-athlete-coach relationship is the core factor of the intercollegiate experience. These themes indicated a need for additional research to determine the ways in which to better support student-athletes and the new head coach to achieve a positive environment. In the evolving business of intercollegiate athletics, an expeditious and efficient coaching transition is necessary. These findings may be useful for other programs experiencing a head coaching change. Additionally, this study identified other considerations for future research in athletics.
REFERENCES


Ridpath, B. (2002). *NCAA Division I student athlete characteristics as indicators of academic achievement and graduation from college* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). West Virginia University, WV.


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
Continuing Review Report

Name of Project: [579225-1] Effects of a Head Coaching Change
Name of Researcher: Stacey Forsythe, M.S.
Department: Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

How many total subjects have participated in the study since its inception? # 6

How many subjects have participated in the project since the last review? # 0

Is your data collection with human subjects complete? ☐ Yes ☒ No

1. Has there been any change in the level of risks to human subjects? (If “Yes”, please explain changes on a separate sheet). ☐ Yes ☒ No

2. Have informed consent procedures changed so as to put subjects above minimal risk? (If “Yes”, please describe on a separate sheet). ☐ Yes ☒ No

3. Have any subjects withdrawn from the research due to adverse events or any unanticipated risks/problems? (If “Yes”, please describe on a separate sheet). ☐ Yes ☒ No

4. Have there been any changes to the source(s) of subjects and the Selection criteria? (If “Yes”, please describe on a separate sheet). ☐ Yes ☒ No

5. Have there been any changes to your research design that were not specified in your application, including the frequency, duration and location of each procedure. (If “Yes”, please describe on a separate sheet). ☐ Yes ☒ No

6. Has there been any change to the way in which confidentiality of the Data is maintained? (If “Yes”, please describe on a separate sheet). ☐ Yes ☒ No

On what date do you anticipate data collection with human subjects to be completed? May 31, 2015

☐ Yes ☒ No

Institutional Review Board
WKU IRB# 14-304
Approval - 9/3/2014
End Date - 5/31/2015
Expeditied
Original - 2/28/2014

94
APPENDIX B: WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: The Effects of a Head Coaching Change on Student-Athletes

Investigators: Stacey A. Fonyeke, M.S. and Paula Upright, Ph.D.
Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport
270-745-3004

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this study.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project: The purpose of this study is to examine the effects on a student-athlete after a head coaching change.

2. Explanation of Procedures: Current student-athletes who have gone through a head coaching change will be interviewed. All information will be confidential and the student-athletes should feel free to speak openly to the researchers about their experiences during the coaching change. The researchers will also gather data related to other effects of a coaching change.

3. Discomfort and Risks: There is no perceived discomfort or risk associated with this research study.

4. Benefits: While there are no direct perceived benefits to the participants in this study, the researchers hope to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of a head coaching change on student athletes. The results of this study could have a significant impact on student-athlete support services, recruitment practices, coaching leadership behaviors, overall student-athlete performance, as well as implications for future research.

5. Confidentiality: Any identifying information from the interviews will be kept confidential at all times.

6. Refusal/Withdrawal: Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Signature of Participant

Date

Witness

Date

*I agree to the interview being audio/video recorded. (Initial here) _

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD. Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator

TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129

WKU IRB# 14-304

Approval - 9/3/2014
End Date - 5/31/2015
Expedited
Original - 2/28/2014
APPENDIX C: WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Tell me about your experience of going through a head coaching change.
   
   a. How did you feel?

About the Former Head Coach

2. How important was the head coach in your decision to play your sport?

3. Were you recruited to play by the former head coach?
   
   a. Explain your relationship with the former head coach.

4. Can you describe how you felt when the former head coach left?

5. When the former coach left, how did that make you feel about your program?
   
   b. How did it make you feel about the university?

6. How would you explain the way you felt about your team before the former head coach left?
   
   c. And how do you feel with the new coach?

7. When your former head coach left, did you consider transferring to play elsewhere?
   
   d. Why?/Why not?

About the New Head Coach

8. When the new head coach was hired, did the athletic administration ask for your opinion?
   
   a. How did that make you feel?

   b. Were you happy with the individual that was hired?

9. How would you explain the way you feel about your current head coach?
10. Do you feel like the new head coach treats you fairly based on your playing ability?

11. Do you feel like the new head coach treats you the same way he or she treats the players he or she recruited?
   a. If no, why?
   b. If so, how?

12. Do you feel like the new head coach can motivate you as well as the former head coach?
   c. How/why?

**The Impacts of a Coaching Change**

13. Can you describe your level of confidence in yourself before the coaching change?
   e. After?

14. Can you explain how the coaching change was stressful?
   f. Can you describe your level of stress when you played for the former head coach and your level of stress now?

15. In your opinion, how important is a head coach to the overall success of the team?

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

Age?

Year in School?