



## Assessment of High School Football Coaches in Tennessee

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### Abstract

Jason Smith is a current football, basketball and baseball coach in the middle Tennessee area and part of the Tennessee State Sports Athletic Association (TSSAA). He is also a tenured professor in at Tennessee State University and Cumberland University in Nashville, TN teaching in the Human Performance of Sports Science with a concentration on Physical Education and Sports Coaching. Building everlasting relationships with his student-athletes has given him the strength as well as empathy in many situations to create a successful path for others. His passion is teaching and coaching all ages and creating opportunities for success for future teachers, coaches, and mentors. His ability to provide leadership in developing coaches has been proven as many of the younger coaches in Tennessee has learned from his expertise in the field of coaching.

Sports coaching have been considered a traditional and doctrinal field that is often oriented with basic instructions of body movement, kinesiology, and motivational factors for success. There have been theories about the “best” offensive and defensive philosophies across the country also varying for age and geographical settings. The physical training of the body and mind is both and art and science that coaches search for to become successful. While the systems, methods, and philosophies have been improved and adapted to the game itself many coaching are searching for success for their program. Through my own experience as a coach, there really is not a “perfect system”, but there are some fundamental strategies, rules, and guidelines that will help any coach become successful. My intention is to provide a framework or coaching model to develop coaches at any stage of their career. Coaching is inquiry-based and extremely personal. The goal or aim of all coaches is to develop the athlete to their maximum potential creating growth and understanding, thus producing individual success, team success, and organizational success.

**Keywords:** Sports coaching; Football coaching philosophies; Coaching tools; Athletes; Development; Mission; Vision; Effective coaching traits

### Introduction

The purpose of this research is to present an overview of a project to develop the paths and activities of successful coaches. Coaching philosophies and strategies are dynamic in nature there will always be a need to explore ways to improve and modify coaching techniques. “Perceived self-efficacy helps to account for such diverse phenomena as changes in coping behavior produced by different modes of influence, level of physiological stress reactions, self-regulation of refractory behavior, resignation and despondency to failure experiences, self-debilitating effects of proxy control and illusory inefficaciousness, achievement strivings, growth of intrinsic interest, and career pursuits” [1]. The study of successful high school football coaching deserves further examination; as such inquiry the potential for cultivating and implementing better coaching methods and strategies. Studying a successful leader who is also a very successful coach has helped in positively shaping coaching styles and habits for future coaches across the country. Rather than consulting academics or scientists they relied on “organizational socialization”, having acquired knowledge and skills, as well as absorbing the nuances of coaching practice, through years of involvement and they entered coaching already provided with comprehensive “maps of meaning” from their own experiences [2,3]. This qualitative study was conducted using multiple coaches across middle Tennessee. Coaches were interviewed for this research through a series of questions. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed revealing major themes and characteristics of the subject coaches. The findings of this research presented a framework for how to successfully coach and lead a team with a dynamic yet unique leadership style. The field of coaching studies will

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benefit from further examination of this and other successful coaches who use similar styles of leadership in order to continue to develop positive and effective coaching traits.

## Methods

There are 160 high school football teams in the state of Tennessee. Six different classifications from 1A to 6A depending on school population and size; in conducting this research, data was gathered from different high school football coaches in Tennessee (N=47) that are members of the Tennessee Secondary Schools Athletic Association. IRB approval has been granted by Tennessee State University. Data was collected using a series of eleven questions developed for this project and administered by the research team. The coach's responses were audio recorded for accuracy and evaluation. Using a qualitative method an analysis was conducted for each coach's response.

It is believed that the impact coaches have on their players will positively or negatively impact the success of the team with this information presented we may draw conclusions in an effort to identify best practices that can inform more effective sports coaching.

### Aim 1

Describe and identify attributes of successful coaches (ex. win/loss record, graduating players, athletic scholarships awarded, physical activity, life skills and wellness).

### Aim 2

Describe the positive and negative outcomes of coaching high school football (ex. time management, mentoring, interpersonal skills).

## Participants

The participants for this research were coaches in the state of Tennessee that have either one of been to a state championship. The 47 coaches' ages ranged from 28 to 66 and the years of coaching experience ranged from 5 to 40 years. All participants were given the following:

**Statement of eligibility:** I state that I am a licensed football coach in the state of Tennessee. I will read the information below and ask questions about anything I do not understand, before deciding to take part in the study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to investigate the cause of successful coaches in Tennessee.

**Procedures:** I will complete a survey with questions about coaching high school football. The survey takes about 25 to 35 minutes to complete.

**Voluntary participation:** I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. I am volunteering to be part of this study.

**Confidentiality:** I understand that all information collected for this study is confidential and that the consent form and the survey will not contain any identifying information such as name, date of birth, and address. Study IDs will be assigned to each survey, but it will not be linked to any consent form. This will protect coaches' confidential information and will maintain anonymity. This consent form which contains signatures of participants and the survey will be kept separated in two locked file cabinets in the Principal Investigator's office and only accessible to those researchers directly involved in conducting this study. If this study results in publications, I will not be able to be identified and my name will not be included

in documents. Researchers will not make any voluntary individual disclosures of my information.

**Risks:** I understand that there is little to no risk associated with participating in this study. The survey asks questions about certain coaching dissensions and philosophies for success. Therefore, I understand that researchers will secure documents in a safe location, not easily accessed by those who are not associated with this study.

**Benefits:** I understand that this research is intended to benefit future coaches across America.

**Freedom to withdraw from and ask questions:** I understand that I am free to ask questions and to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

**Conclusion:** You are making a decision whether or not you will participate in this study. If you sign the consent form, you are agreeing to participate based on your reading and understanding of this form. If you have questions regarding the study, please ask Dr. Jason Smith at 615-963-5581/2114.

**Name of principal investigator:** Dr. Jason Smith in the Department of Human Performance and Sport Sciences at TSU.

**Address:** 3500 John A Merritt Boulevard, Nashville, TN 37209.

**Signature of research participant:** I have read the information in this consent form. I have been given a chance to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I freely agree to take part in this study.

**Signature of investigator:** I have explained the study to the participant, and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that the volunteer understands the information described in this document and freely consents to participate.

**Measurements/Procedures:** A research team conducted the research questions across the state of Tennessee. Coaches were audio recorded for clarity and later the recording was transcribed and the data reviewed and analyzed. The following questions ask about various aspects of your coaching strategies. When answering questions; speak clearly for the audio recorder to capture all the answers accurately.

### Coach interview questions

1. What interested you and ultimately motivated you to become a football coach?
2. What about coaching, specifically football coaching, do you enjoy the most/least?
3. Describe your coaching style.
4. How would you define your leadership style?
5. What is your mission?
6. Do you create a vision for your team? If so, what is it?
7. How do you get a unified vision and motivate all involved to work together towards that vision?
8. What would you want other people to know about your coaching philosophies (academic achievement, classroom conduct, and athletic scholarships)?
9. What do you feel is important about your teaching and coaching philosophies?

10. What do you feel you give back to the game of football?
11. How has football changed your life?

## Results

After completing the set of questions, participants showed higher than average ACT scores and graduation rates for student-athletes involved in their programs. The retention rates were well below the school's student body and county averages. Student athletes receiving athletic scholarships have a 35% higher efficiency rate for successful football coaches in Tennessee in the TSSAA verses non-winning programs. The student-athletes received exposure from more colleges because of the coaches extra attention for higher academic standards and athletic scholarship opportunities. Successful coaches win more games than they lose on a regular basis. There may be a year, but not more than one or two with consecutive losing records. Successful coaches find ways to win by either changing offensive and defensive philosophies or training the players to fit their own offensive and defensive philosophy. Successful coaches develop relationships with each coach and player and determine the best motivational tool or strategy to impose for maximum effort. This was proven to be a difficult task initially for coaches, but the unwavering methods and models for success played a significant role in the decisions of the coaches each day. Analyzing the qualitative data was interesting to note the similarities and differences in each coach's answers. In relationship to coaches that had multiple state championships their willingness to continue growing and learning was extraordinary.

## Discussion

The study of successful high school football coaching was examined; as such inquiry the potential for cultivating and implementing better coaching methods and strategies was discovered in this research. The 47 coaches that were interviewed for this research project provided

external and internal validity in the field of athletic coaching. The outcomes of this research can be applied in the real world for future coaches. Studying a successful leader who is also a very successful coach has helped in positively shaping coaching styles and habits for future coaches across the country. After further examination of successful coaches in Tennessee (TSSAA) the leadership styles were similar for each coach. Identifying attributes of successful coaches and describing positive and negative outcomes of coaching in high school football were discovered. The five components developed from this research are the following:

1. Develop a mission, vision, and set short term and long term goals.
2. Design an organized action plan with rules and regulations for success following policies and procedures.
3. Set universal expectations and corrective punishments for not following the rules.
4. Develop Relationships (coaches, players, parents, teachers, community, and state).
5. Create a winning environment that will be expected.

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