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Coaching High School Girls' Basketball

Danielle Ellison

Concordia University, Saint Paul

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Capstone Paper

MA in Sport Management

Internship: Coaching high school girls' basketball

Danielle Ellison

Concordia University, St. Paul

KHS560 AND KHS561 Cohort 605

Dr. Lana Huberty

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Dedication and Acknowledgement

I would like acknowledge my friends and family who have assisted and supported me on this journey. While the road was not easy and there were nights I complained about homework, you all were there to encourage me every step of the way. You all have helped me stay focus and have been an integral part in me finishing my degree.

My thanks and appreciation to Dr. Lana Huberty for being my advisor through the last portion of my program. I express my thanks and gratitude for taking the time to read all my drafts and give me suggestions on improving the quality of this paper. Without the feedback, I do not know that I would have been able to successfully complete this capstone paper.

Lastly, I am grateful for John Robinson and the coaching staff at Como Park High school. Thank you for allowing me to do my internship within this program. It has allowed me to gain great insight into the world of coaching. It has given me a chance to step away from being the student athlete and becoming the teacher. Being a coach is not an easy job, but it is well worth it when you know how many lives you can touch by doing it.

Abstract

“Schools in every city and state in America have their prized team and will make sacrifices in the classroom to have their students score on the field” (McMillen, 1991, p. 489). The purpose of this paper is to examine the grades of student athletes and find a way to maintain or make them better by use of study tables and progress reports. As a student athlete, athletes do not realize that they are students first and athletes second, not the other way around. Particularly the girls’ basketball team at Como Park High School. As a student athlete, it takes a lot to be able to juggle going to practice, games, and doing homework. Some students lose sight of this. There has to be more there than just playing a sport. This project looks at helping students understand the importance of getting good grades and an education and holding the students accountable. Making them aware that if they want to go to college, good grades start when you are a freshman.

Chapter One: Introduction

Often times as an athlete, it seems like more emphasis is placed on athletics and not so much on education. Athletes often forget why they are in school. It is not just to play a sport but also to gain an education for life after high school. The purpose of this paper is to examine the grades of the girls' basketball team at Como Park High School and find a way to maintain or make their grades better by use of study tables and progress reports. As a student athlete, athletes do not realize that they are students first and athletes second, not the other way around. Although not all athletes recognize this, they want to be athletes first and students second.

Many athletes become ineligible during the season because they do not focus enough on studying. Becoming ineligible during the season means the student cannot participate in any way in the sport until their grades improve to a 2.0 or better. The GPAs are set by Como Park High School in accordance with graduation requirements. To graduate, a student must complete 86 credits (Como Park Senior High, n.d). In order for this to be achieved, a student must have a 2.0 GPA. According to the Minnesota State High School League, "students are not required to be passing in their course work during the current marking period. However, they forfeit their eligibility for the next marking period in which they attend school if they are not making satisfactory progress towards the school's requirements for graduation at the end of the marking period" (MSHSL, 2013). Where this causes problems is that students are eligible to play even if their grades are not satisfactory. However, after Christmas break these students become ineligible because the next marking period has arrived.

It is important for students to receive good grades and graduate high school. "Academic performance plays as big of a role as athletic ability when it comes to most high school athletes moving onto the college level and receiving some sort of scholarship" (Wells, 2011). The job market is tough to get into without having a high school diploma. Most athletes want to continue

playing a sport in college. Without good grades, they have a hard time getting recruited by colleges and getting into college. It is important that they begin to recognize the importance of getting an education. There is also an emphasis on grades at the college level, so why not start early so they get the idea of it before hand. Athletes control their own destiny but sometimes they need a little guidance. It cannot be stressed enough how important getting good grades really is. Some athletes get it and some do not. The idea of tracking their grades, getting progress reports signed, and going to study tables will be the push kids need to want to continue getting good grades well after the season is over.

After talking with the head varsity coach, at least six girls from C squad and JV were ineligible to play basketball because of their grades last season (J. Robinson, personal communication, 2013). A lot of it had to do with them not turning in their work or asking for help when they needed it. Mainly the underclassmen were the ones having trouble. I believe this program can help students stay on the right track and learn better study habits. Although there were girls that were ineligible, the five seniors that were on the team, all graduated and went on to play college basketball. The goal of this program is to make sure everyone that comes through it graduates and goes to college, whether they go for basketball or just go to get a degree.

Chapter Two: Proposed Project and Justification

At all schooling levels, academics should come first over athletics. Kids are in school to learn and get an education that prepares them for the future. “Schools in every city and state in America have their prized team and will make sacrifices in the classroom to have their students score on the field” (McMillen, 1991, pg. 489). With all the focus going towards athletics and not

enough towards academics, I would like to implement a program that will help keep the Como High School girls basketball program academically eligible throughout the season.

After speaking with the head varsity coach it seems the past couple seasons there has been some concern that the girls are too focused on being on the team and not focused enough in the classroom (J. Robinson, personal communication, 2013). Most of the concern comes with the underclassman (freshman/sophomores). While some of them played sports in junior high, the academic work was not as time consuming as it is in most high schools. The girls are coming into a new environment and a new playing field, where sports can be a powerhouse. Sports get you recognition in school; everyone knows who you are in school when you play on a sports team. It gives a person some sort of pride or feeling of belonging where sometimes students forget that they are students then athletes.

The goal of this project is make the athletes accountable for themselves and each other. Once a month the athletes are to turn in a progress report signed by each of their teachers, along with the grade they are currently receiving in the course. It is the athlete's responsibility to remind themselves that this needs to be done and handed in. They will also be required to go to study tables at least five hours a week after school. Practice does not start until after 4:00pm, so they have plenty of time to get this accomplished. While at study tables, they are to work on homework or get help with homework or a class they are having trouble with. They will have to sign in so that the coaching staff can keep track of those attending and not attending. As a coaching staff, we are requiring the girls to have a 2.5 GPA or better in order to participate in games and practices. The school only requires a 2.0 GPA, but as a coaching staff we would like to hold them at a higher standard. There will be a Saturday session available with the coaches for those who want additional tutoring as well. For those that are do not adhere to turning in progress

reports or going to study tables will either sit out of practice/games, cause the team to run, or have other consequence of the coaching staff's choice. These consequences also help with holding their teammates responsible for each other's actions.

We not only want these girls to be successful on the court, we want them to be successful off the court. "While athletics are important, the reason students are at school is to learn. Minimum pass to play standards should be applied to all students to ensure that they understand the importance of getting an education" (Mcmillen, 1991, pg. 490). I have always lived by the standard of having a backup plan in case athletics is not always there and this is something the girls should learn as well. Just because someone plays a sport in high school does not guarantee they will get into college on an athletic scholarship or play professionally.

They have to be mindful that in order to get into college, regardless of having a scholarship, they have to have the academic background that the school requires of them also. I want to help produce student athletes who have the ability to make it in the sports world or business world. When one fails, they always have another option. "When we sacrifice our educational principles on the altar of competitive sports, we do more than ruin the life of a young man or woman; we send a signal to all young people that thinking skills are less important than athletic skills" (Mcmillen, 1991, pg. 490).

Chapter Three: Process for Implementation

Although the season has not officially started, the project of having the girls' turn in grade sheets has. I have developed a grade evaluation sheet that the students take to each of their classes. We held an informational meeting in the beginning of September for those girls interested in playing basketball. At this meeting, we introduced ourselves as coaches and what

we expect of the girls in the coming months. I also introduced the idea of having them bring grade sheets in, signed by their teacher, so that we can monitor their grades. I explained to them that in order to be a part of this program, their GPA's have to be above a 2.0.

I have stressed that the opportunity to be a part of this program is a privilege and it can be taken away at any moment. This project helps the girls understand that grades are just as important as or more important than sports. If you want to go somewhere with sports, your grades have to be up to par. The girls have been informed that they will need to attend study tables at least 5 hours a week after school as well.

To implement this project, the girls have been given grade sheets that they have their teachers fill out, as shown in the appendix. There is a slot for grades, any unexcused absences, comments the teachers would like to leave, and a signature. I have been giving these sheets to the girls once a month to turn in. The teachers have a lot of students to deal with and grades to do, so I try not to overwhelm them by having this sheet filled out only once a month or the end of the quarters. Extra copies were also given to the varsity captains in case anyone lost theirs or needs an extra one.

So far, the only problem with the project is the girls consistently turning their sheets in. It gets to be hard to keep track of who has been at open gym and who has received sheets. Once the season officially gets underway, I will be printing up contracts for the girls. The contracts will state that they acknowledge that they are expected to turn their grade sheets in when advised to and that they will keep a 2.5 GPA during the season in order to be eligible. If they do not turn in their grade sheets or keep a 2.5 GPA there will be consequences that could result in extra conditioning for the team, extended hours of after school study hall, sitting out games or practices, or other consequences the coaching staff deems suitable. Although the minimum GPA

for participation is a 2.0, we would like to hold our girls to a higher standard. We want to make sure they are putting forth an effort to better them and not just settling for the minimum requirements. We will be having a parent meeting coming up in November where the parents will become aware of the students having their grades monitored as well.

Chapter 4: Project Evaluation

Thus far, the academic improvement project for athletes has had its difficulties. When the project was introduced, the girls were wondering why they need to fill out these sheets every month. Their grades are available to them online and they wanted to just print them off and turn them in. They were informed that it is too easy for them to just go in and print them off. I want them to interact with their teachers. It shows their teachers that they are interested in their grades and knowing what they can do better if their grades are not what they want them to be. By having the teachers fill these grade reports out, it gives them a chance to also leave comments for the coaching staff. These comments tell us how the athletes are really doing in the class, if they are missing work, or being disruptive.

After explaining to the girls why this is necessary and telling them my story of how I had to do the same thing when I was in college, it has gotten easier and there have been fewer questions. They are starting to realize the importance of maintaining good grades, not just for basketball but also for life after basketball. The problem that I am running into right now is the season does not officially start for another week and the girls come through open gym in waves. Different girls show up to open gym different days. Open gym is not mandatory so it is not always the same people attending. It gets hard keeping track of who have gotten a sheet, who has turned in sheets, and disciplining them when sheets are not turned in on time. Once the season

starts it will be easier to track who has gotten sheets and who has turned them in. It will also be easier to discipline them when they are not turned in on time.

I believe this project will be good for the girls in the end. “Being sought after or your athletic skills is an honor, to be sure, but having colleges clamor for your brain power is even more rewarding, psychologically and financially” (Sanford, 2011). The ones who have consistently turned in grade sheets are excited about it. They have a big smile on their face and are proud to turn their sheets in. They brag to me how good they are doing in their classes. These girls have been improving their grades and are excited to show their progress. I encourage them to keep up the good work. It is only going to get harder because now they have to balance doing homework and coming to practice/games every day. Before they just had to come to open gym twice a week and it was voluntary.

They will continually be reminded that study tables are available after school and they need to be a going a minimum of five hours a week. This is a place they can get their homework done, since many of them will not be going home until close to 8pm, sometimes later on game days. As coaches, we will make ourselves available before practice for homework help as well as on Saturdays after practice. We will also utilize the upperclassman so they can help the underclassman in classes they may have already taken.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this internship experience has been a valuable learning experience for me. It has given me the understanding of what being a head coach entails. It is more than just getting these girls in the gym, working them out, and coaching basketball games. These girls look at us coaches as mentors, leaders, and teachers. It takes a lot to run a basketball organization and

though this internship I have seen this. There is a lot of behind the scenes work that needs to be done. Such as fundraising ideas, uniform ordering, gear for the girls like warm-ups and sweats. Someone has to do all of this extra work and I was the one that participated and organized most of it.

This internship allowed me to stress the importance of education as well. I am big on school and grades, especially for athletes. Through my years of being in athlete, I have seen fellow athletes who just do the minimum to get by and be eligible for sports. Sports are all they know and they truly believe that they will be professional athletes. That is all well and great but you cannot be an athlete all your life. At some point an injury might take place, or you are cut from a team and never picked up again. What do you have to fall back on? Some athletes never realize that this dream does not last forever. This is why I stress to my girls that, although you have a dream to play professional basketball, always have a backup plan. Women in the WNBA do not make as much as men, so make sure you have a degree or something to fall back on during the off season. Get a good education and learn about finances and saving while having that first job in high school. While they might think that some of the things they learn in high school or through athletics will not benefit them much, they are wrong.

As I implemented the grades program, I hoped that the girls realize how important getting good grades really are. While some just think it is a joke, others work hard at making sure they stay on top of their homework and earn good grades. In the beginning, I had a lot of sighs and groans when the project was introduced. However, now that the girls are getting use to the system and we are together more frequently, they are happy and eager to show off their good grades. They often come and brag about how many A's and B's they are getting. It warms my heart to know that the students understand that they have to set up a life after basketball. They

understand the importance of being a student-athlete, a student first. “Great athletic talent will open doors for you, yes, but great grades will avail you of far more opportunities. It’s a simple matter of making you more academically valuable to as many colleges as possible” (Sanford, 2011).

A couple things that I recommend when putting a grade program in place is making sure you hold the students accountable. Some students will feel that their grades being monitored are not important and will try not to do it. Hold them accountable for their actions and put in place a disciplinary plan for when directions are not followed. You will also want to give them praise or support when they turn their grades in and are good. Another recommendation is to make sure they know if they ever need help that you are there for them. Have a tutoring system in place in case any grades come back that are unsatisfactory. When grades are turned in briefly talk with the students about their grades and if they are missing any work and how you can help them improve their grades. I would also recommend making sure the students understand the importance of good grades and putting a contract in place that helps them stay above a certain GPA. Setting an attainable goal for the students also helps with holding them accountable and if the goal is not met, consequences can be enforced. “Examine your academic standings and take the steps necessary to improve” (Sanford, 2011)

Overall, this internship has been a positive learning experience. I have built a great relationship so far with the students and the other coaches. I enjoy being able to go to practice and teach the girls the sport I love and mentor them as they go through high school. A couple of the girls turn to me for advice on things outside of basketball. It is rewarding to know that they trust me enough to help them with life experiences. It has been great being able to implement a program that will help the students in the short and long run. I definitely recommend

implementing a program like this within the high school level, especially if you are dealing with a program where the students are frequently ineligible or lacking on their grades.

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