

An Examination of the Cooperative and Competitive Mindset of High School Coaches

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	i
List of Charts	ii
Abstract	iii
I. Introduction	1
Overview	1
Statement of Problem	2
Hypothesis	3
Operational Definitions	3
II. Review of the Literature	5
Introduction	5
Athletic Department Identity	5
The Athlete-Faculty-Institution Relationship	7
Cooperation and Collaboration Lead to Department Cohesiveness	11
Conclusion	13
III. Methods	14
Design	14
Participants	14
Instruments	14
Procedure	15
IV. Results	17
V. Discussion	24
Implications of Results	24

Threats to Validity	25
Previous Studies	26
Implications for Future Research	27
Summary	28
References	30
Appendix	33

List of Tables

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and t-statistic for Cooperative and Competitive Scores | 18 |
| 2. Cooperative/Competitive Strategy Scale Survey Scores | 19 |

List of Charts

1. How many different sports do you coach during the academic year for your school?	18
2. Joint effort is the best way to achieve success	20
3. Success is best achieved through cooperation rather than competition	21
4. Success is only achieved through individual effort	21
5. Shared efforts can lead to both individual and group success	22
6. Individual success can be achieved while working with others	23

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of cooperation and competitiveness in high school coaches. Information was collected using a scale measurement survey that measured to what degree people viewed cooperation and competition as useful strategies to reach their goals. The Cooperative/Competitive Strategy Scale (CCSS) was originated by Simmons et al. in 1986 and then adapted by Tang (1998). The Simmons' survey had 24 items on a 5-point Likert Scale while the Tang survey consists of 19 questions measuring opinions about cooperation and competitiveness and their relationship with an unspecified Likert Scale. There are eight questions focused on cooperation and 11 questions focused on competition. These 19 questions are on a one to seven scale with one being "always" and seven being "never". The results are shown as a mean score for cooperation and competition, respectively. This researcher added four personal background questions and three follow up questions about their work environment. The mean cooperative score (mean = 6.25; standard deviation = .56) was significantly higher than the mean competitive score (mean = 5.36; standard deviation .42) [$t(5) = 2.51, p = .05$]. This indicates that the coaches that participated in the survey are very cooperative oriented.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Creating a cooperative and cohesive athletic department is an issue of increasing importance for collegiate institutions wishing to support both the academic and athletic progress of student-athletes. Such cooperation and cohesiveness relate to the primary resource of the student-athletes themselves and how coaches share these resources for the greater success of the athletic program rather than individual teams (Scales, 2016).

A study of this issue involves several considerations related to athletic department identity. These considerations include the motivating factors that influence the direction athletic departments take, why certain teams might be supported over others, and what guides the coaches in how they run their respective teams. Nixon (2014) describes how the influence of athletic success can steer the direction and decisions many educational institutions will take and how those decisions impact the student-athletes' consideration of their college experience. As these issues are explored, it is important to examine why a department culture of cooperation and cohesiveness should be promoted and cultivated. Further, consideration must be given to how an athletic department can develop and foster a culture of cooperation and cohesiveness to support and promote the success of all the teams.

The researcher became interested in pursuing the issues examined in this study in his role as a multi-sport and multi-level athletics coach when he learned more about the pervasive “specialization” focus that many youth and high school sports, athletes, and coaches were taking (Prettyman and Lampman, 2011). The “specialization” focus means that an athlete must play one particular sport often to the exclusion of all others. For example, soccer and ice hockey

programs offer out-of-season training, games, and even college recruiting services which can cost thousands of dollars per athlete. Because the nature of club programs is so lucrative, there has been a notable increase in the number of club programs across all sports (Prettyman et al., 2011). For example, according to US Club Lacrosse, Maryland is the home to 65 different lacrosse clubs state-wide while the other Mid-Atlantic states (New York – 79, Pennsylvania – 47, New Jersey – 50, Delaware – 3) have a total of 179 teams combined. New England states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Connecticut have a total of 69 teams (www.usclublax.com).

While athletic directors cannot control the influence generated by club program coaches, they do have the ability to help confront and diminish the focus that implies “my sport is the most important sport so you should only play mine” because there is a large cross-section of high school coaches who also coach for club programs. Dr. David Hoch (2011), a retired Baltimore County Public Schools, Maryland athletic director, discussed the need for a cooperative athletic department stating, “As an athletic director, you not only head the athletic department, which is an organization within a larger one – the school district, but you are also part of several others” (personal communication, 2011). This issue is the problem that is explored in this paper.

Statement of Problem

When there is competition for the student-athlete resource, there is an effect on the cooperative and cohesive nature of an athletic department. It is important to provide guidance to support the creation and maintenance of a cooperative and cohesive athletic department environment that is successful with athletic endeavors, while also being supportive amongst the individual team programs and offering student-athletes proper guidance through their athletic

careers during their high school years. Understanding cooperative and competitive characteristics of coaches can help guide interventions to improve cohesiveness.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that there will be no significant difference in Cooperation and Competitive scores of high school coaches. The study will also descriptively examine coaches' suggestions for improving cohesiveness.

Operational Definitions

This is a descriptive study that focuses on feedback from current coaches. The goal of the study is to define what is beneficial and what is considered a hinderance to creating a cooperative and cohesive environment in which all coaches believe they are given equal opportunity to address issues and offer solutions for the betterment of their individual programs and the athletic department as a whole. The goal is also to describe the cooperative and competitive mindsets of the coaches.

The focus of the study relates to the importance of establishing a cooperative and cohesive environment. The definition of "cooperative" provided by Merriam-Webster is "marked by a willingness and ability to work with others" while "cohesion" is defined as "the act of sticking together tightly" with "cohesive" meaning, "exhibiting or producing cohesion or coherence".

For this study, the focus is how coaches in an athletic department practice cooperative and competitive behaviors that benefit both their individual team sport and the athletic department. These variables will be measured by the 19-question version of the Cooperative/Competitive Scale Survey developed by Shengming Tang (1998) that measures the extent to which respondents' value cooperative and competitive strategies and beliefs. This is a

shortened version of the scale developed by Simmons, Wehner, Tucker, and King (1986). In addition to the survey questions, there were background questions establishing age, gender, what sport(s) is coached, how many different sports are coached and for roughly how long they have been coaching. Also included were three additional questions where participants were asked to provide their insights into what they perceive as cooperative and cohesive practices in an athletic department environment.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review explores issues and alternatives to building a cooperative and cohesive athletic department in small private schools. Part one describes the elements that help define the identity of the athletic department and its philosophies and practices. Part two discusses factors related to the integration of athletics into the larger school community, including how coaches can help foster that integration and why it is important. Part three explains how developing a cohesive and cooperative athletic department environment can help enhance the experiences of the student-athletes, and enrich the individual programs that will promote success for everyone in the athletic program.

Athletic Department Identity

Athletic department identity refers to “the set of characteristics that members claim is central (that is, at the heart of), enduring (stable over time), and distinguishing (distinctive)” (Buer, 2009, p 110). The identity of the department is important because it defines who the department is as an organization. When discussing issues related to athletic department identity, Buer advises that a first step is to consider is if the athletic department acts as a separate entity, governed by the academic values of the university it is a part of or if the academic values of the institution are the core of the athletic department while understanding that there is a need to focus on the business aspects as well.

Misalignment of academic and athletic expectations is more prevalent at the Division 1 level of college athletics because it is within Division I institutions that the influence of financial gain is most evident. This influence is most prevalent with football and basketball programs at

these institutions (Sweitzer, 2009.) The sphere of financial influence in college athletics has increased as more college sports are broadcast on league and national networks. Men's lacrosse, baseball, softball, and gymnastics are experiencing more time which results in increased revenue (Nixon, 2014).

Although increasing amounts of financial influence and impact give student-athletes some sense of entitlement, it is the coaches who gain greater control over athletes on their teams with regard to scheduling practices, weight training, and film sessions as well as scheduling games that dictate the class schedule that athletes need (Nixon, 2014). This influence occurs primarily with college football and basketball because of the uncertainty of how long certain student-athletes stay in school before entering the professional league drafts. Basketball regularly experiences top players leaving college or university after only one or two years to pursue their professional careers. This leads to efforts to keep student-athletes academically eligible to participate so that they can succeed on the field or court when the student-athletes know they are going to be leaving school early.

Athletes tend to minimize class attendance in order to arrive at practices earlier because late arrival might cost them playing time. This tendency is most prevalent with football and men's basketball teams, and to a lesser degree, men's ice hockey and baseball teams. This misalignment can create high levels of stress between academic and athletic components of the institution (Nixon, 2014)

Buer (2009) asserts that "spectator sports within the most prominent athletics programs degrade admission standards and exploit athletes for their commercial value" (p 109). Buer maintains that there are academic institutions whose standards of admissions are for athletes who are perceived to have the potential to financially benefit the university's athletic department.

This situation can create resentment between the general student population and the student-athletes as well as harm the relationships between the faculty and the student-athletes if those student-athletes are not fully engaged in their academic pursuits.

Buer (2009) describes the necessity for universities in this position of potential conflict and misalignment between academic and athletic goals to have a Hybrid Identity to accommodate the concerns that there might be dual standards. This Hybrid Identity discussed by Buer embraces the fact that universities that have financially impactful athletic programs are also institutes of higher education; essentially, they are organizations that educate and entertain and have a segment of their student population that is there to do both – learn and entertain.

The Athlete-Faculty-Institution Relationship

Once it's been established that there is a Hybrid Identity of the organization (university), there is the next step of ensuring that the balance between the role of student and athlete is maintained, leading to developing a positive athlete-faculty relationship. Lawrence, Ott and Hendricks (2009) explore the academic faculty belief that athletics is disconnected from the academic mission of most universities and that disconnect ultimately weakens the academic reputation of the institution. Institutions such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the Coalition of Intercollegiate Athletics, (COIA), and the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) have addressed these issues and offered suggestions to ameliorate the misalignment and discord. Three main topics consistently are addressed by these institutions: academic oversight, faculty governance, and fiscal oversight.

Sweitzer (2009) explains that part of establishing the Hybrid Identity is recognizing the ambitions of the institution. Sweitzer states that one way to make that happen is through identifying the athletic conference with which the university wishes affiliation. For example,

Sweitzer states that Johns Hopkins University wanted to improve its men's lacrosse programs' identities so made a bid to join the Big Ten Conference after being an independent team.

Currently, the Hopkins men's and women's lacrosse programs are the only Division 1 athletic program at the university, while the others are Division 3. This move was made to financially bolster the program despite the years of success the program had enjoyed being unaffiliated with a conference (Sweitzer, 2009).

After establishing the characteristics of the relationships between the academic focus of the institution and athletics, the faculty and athletes, and the motivation of athletes, a next step can be taken to examine what makes a successful athletic program in conjunction with the educational values and expectations of the university. Glenn Potter (1981) breaks down the elements needed for a successful athletic program into four categories, discussed below.

According to Potter (1981), the first step in creating a successful athletic program is maximum participation: ensuring that those that want to participate can and do participate by creating an inclusive atmosphere. The greater the level of participation, the more successful the outcome.

The second step includes participative decision making, teamwork, and sportsmanship. It is essential that student athletes have input regarding the direction and identity of the team.

Concomitantly, it is important to stress that the direction and identity of the team will be shaped by how well the group members can work together, but never losing sight of the underlying respect and acknowledgement of the work others (both teammates and opponents) are offering.

Third, Potter emphasizes the importance of ensuring that there is positive progress in fitness and skill. Ultimately, athletics is a physical activity, so both an emphasis on improvement of the physical capabilities of student athletes and ensuring that attention is given to the sport-specific skills are essential. Lastly, evaluating the coach must be done. Coaches are the teachers of

athletic subjects; if they cannot articulate what is needed, it is unlikely that they can be effective coaches. Even if their coaching is effective, it is important to determine if the way they are going about that instruction promotes the values of teamwork, sportsmanship, and inclusivity.

To ensure that coaches approach their duties on the athletic field or court as if they were a teacher in the classroom, finding ways to ensure that coaches are connected to the rest of the school's community is imperative. Docheff (2018) argues that too often coaches focus on their individual sport and tend to consider their student-athletes as their players exclusively and not as the full, well-rounded individuals that their teachers have helped them to become. This attitude tends to lead to an "us versus them" mentality between teachers and coaches, especially if coaches are not actively supporting the academic responsibilities of their players.

To help coaches balance the academic and athletic responsibilities of their players, coaches need to be willing to incorporate themselves more fully into the larger community. This need is especially important at this time as there is an increasing number of non-faculty coaches because the demands of teaching hinder many teacher-coaches from continuing to coach. Regardless of the sport and the athletic goals of every player, sports are an extracurricular activity. If coaches more readily acknowledge that athletics are an activity that can help enhance a student-athlete's academic resume, faculty will feel that the emphasis on academics is the priority if there is a conflict. This acknowledgement can help promote the willingness of athletes to seek academic help when needed. Athletes will understand that there will not be a stigma to seeking help. Additionally, it will signal to the faculty that the coach is willing to uphold the priority of the academic standards of the institution. Having coaches regularly attend faculty activities such as academic meetings and discussions will increase the likelihood that faculty will feel as if the coaches consider the players as student-athlete (Docheff, 2018).

According to Rubin (2017) it is recommended that in a college setting there would be an athletic advisor for student athletes to help more directly bridge the gap between athletics and academics. Unfortunately, at the high school level that connection is rarely there. When there is not an athletic advisor for student athletes, Scales (2016) states that a coach needs to step into that role or risk creating or widening the possible gap between athletics and academics. Such action stresses to the student-athletes that academics are linked to athletics and that the coaches are stressing that point. As an unofficial athletic adviser for student-athletes, coaches can help hold their athletes to higher standards while teaching them about finding the proper ways to manage their time to accommodate both their academic requirements and their athletic pursuits. The practice of using athletic advisers began in the early 1990's (Rubin, 2017) and has grown from just focusing on the revenue-making sports to all collegiate athletic programs. Research shows high school coaches should be building that foundation as much as possible as well.

According to Docheff (2018) high school administrations and athletic departments collectively need to help students balance athletic and academic responsibilities, especially given the trend in importance given to athletics. Public and private schools alike are investing in improved athletic facilities to follow the example set by their college counterparts. While private schools tend to be able to do this without hinderance to the academic support provided for students, public schools are in a more challenging situation. As discussed by Conn (2012), many public-school systems are struggling to provide adequate learning tools and support to both their students and their teachers, yet towns, counties, and states are willing to build a new stadium to support the football program. Without coaches working with the faculty to stress to student-athletes and others, such as parents, boosters, and town halls, that academics needs to be the

focus and sports the distraction, there will continue to be a disconnect between faculty and coaching staff.

The assumption that athletics are as essential as academic learning appears to begin with the relabeling of athletics from extracurricular to cocurricular. This relabeling or restructuring leads to practices in college in which scholarship athletes are taking accredited courses that are simply a film session or game-plan review. As a high school coach, if an individual coach is stressing the importance of one sport over another to a student-athlete or is holding it against that player for seeking extra help in a class, that coach is simply helping fortify the mindset that athletics is on the same level as academic achievement, hence the importance of finding ways to have coaches connect with faculty (Conn, 2012).

Cooperation and Collaboration Lead to Department Cohesiveness

Once there is evidence of cooperation and collaboration from coaches and faculty, steps must be taken to promote that cooperation and collaboration between coaches of different teams. Currently, at the collegiate level, there is rarely competition for an athlete between sports, meaning the athlete is being forced or asked to choose between competing teams (usually in the same season). However, this is more the case in smaller schools, private schools in particular, where most student-athletes are not yet specializing in one sport but are playing multiple sports (Prettyman and Lampman 2011). This situation relates to Glenn Potter's first principle of maximizing participation: get as many athletes playing as possible to create depth and competition (Potter, 1981).

Competition for an athlete between sports can lead to competition between or among coaches. For example, a college may accept a standout athlete at the high school level who has been playing two sports that are in the same season. Or, a three-sport athlete has a coach who

coaches associated sports in different seasons, but wants that player to participate in just the sports that coach leads. Steps must be taken to help foster a cooperative relationship that first takes into account the wants and needs of the athlete, then, the wants and needs of the individual coaches and teams, and finally, the wants and needs of the athletic program as a whole (Velez and Morelli, 2011).

Fathi et al., (2019) presents an academic model that could help provide a guide to an athletic department that is struggling with the types of issues described above. By focusing on the central goal of what would be teamwork determinants, one can branch out with necessary elements needed to be conducive to an environment in which the coaches were supporting one another, communicating team needs, determining the work load on the student athletes, discussing the goals of the student-athletes, and discussing the athletic program goals. The primary key for this to be effective would be to know the individual goals for each student-athlete for each sport in which he or she participates. The second most important key would be for individual coaches to put those goals above their own. Ultimately, the understanding that while coaches want their individual sports to succeed, this is the athletes' individual journey and what they hope to get out of the different sports may not coincide with what their coaches want. If coaches together can agree that the ultimate goal is to help the student-athletes in their journey and be less concerned with their own individual success, then hopefully inter-program conflicts will not be as prevalent. One of the ways that athletic departments can help promote this is through Character Education as discussed by Ettekal et al., (2018). Character Education is not limited to the student-athletes, but also the coaches to help adjust the mindset of what the ultimate goal is of sports, making sure that moral principles are not compromised by prioritizing performance goals.

Conclusion

The articles discussed above bring up questions of what is the balance between cooperation and competitiveness in coaches and administrations. Do coaches care more about the success of their individual programs than the overall success of the athletic department? In a high school setting where there are multi-sport athletes, how do those levels of cooperation and competitiveness affect the recruitment of players that are playing other sports outside of the one the coach is involved in? All of these studies point out the importance level of cooperation versus competitiveness that coaches, in particular, must pay attention to.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This study was a descriptive study conducted to determine the competitiveness and cooperative behaviors in an athletic department environment. The instrument used in this study was a survey that measured the competitive and cooperative nature and approaches of coaches in private high school athletic departments. The data was collected using a one to seven scale measure survey designed by Tang (1998) from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Western Illinois University. The one-time survey was conducted online with current high school coaches at a private school. The athletic director was also emailed the survey, but did not participate.

Participants

The participants in this study were six current high school athletic coaches and high school athletic department administrators from a private high school located in Brooklandville, Maryland with a total of thirty-one coaches and/or athletic administrators surveyed. Participants included three male and three female coaches who coached during the 2019-2020 academic year. The coaches ranged in age from 27 to 60 with coaching experience at their current school for less than five years, five to ten years, and ten or more years.

Instrument

Information was collected using a scale measurement survey that measured to what degree people viewed cooperation and competition as useful strategies to reach their goals. The Cooperative/Competitive Strategy Scale (CCSS) was developed by Tang (1998). The survey consists of 19 questions measuring opinions about cooperation and competitiveness and their

relationship. There are eight questions focused on cooperation and 11 questions focused on competition. These 19 questions are on a one to seven scale with one being “always” and seven being “never”. The results are shown as a mean score for cooperation and competition, respectively. This researcher added four personal background questions and three follow up questions about their work environment.

The validity of the CCSS was studied by Lu, Au, Jiang, Xie, and Yam (2012), finding that both cooperative and competitiveness were reliably measured (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .87$ and $.79$, respectively). They stated that the results indicated that the two-dimensional construct achieved a satisfactory fit and that the two-factor model was better than the one-factor model. The authors of the study also explained that cooperativeness and competitiveness are independent constructs, and advised that the [survey] offered considerable power in the prediction of individual’s cooperative behaviors in social dilemmas.

Procedure

The researcher communicated with the athletic director of a private school in suburban Maryland to obtain permission to distribute the survey to coaches who were active during the 2019-2020 academic year. Once permission was granted, the researcher emailed the coaches of every high school-aged team including head coaches and assistant coaches at any level, totaling thirty-one coaches surveyed. There was no face-to-face interaction between the researcher and the participants for the administration of the survey.

Coaches and the athletic director were emailed the survey with instructions of how to fill in the responses. The athletic director did not participate in the survey. The coaches were advised that participation was voluntary and that results would not be shared with their peers.

Instructions of how to respond were provided on the survey. Responses were gathered through the survey via google forms.

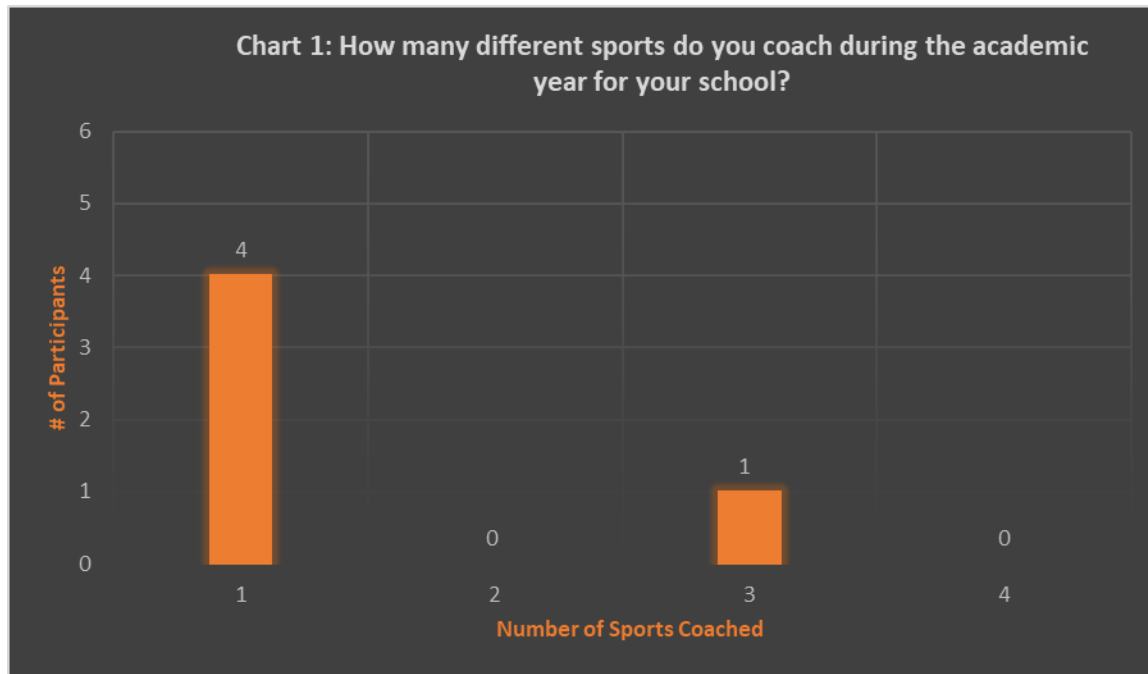
Once results from the survey were gathered, the surveys were scored to determine the level of cooperation and competitiveness in the approaches and mindsets of coaches. The Cooperative and Competitive scores were compared by non-independent sample t-tests. Descriptive statistics were also reported for individual items. The responses to the open-ended follow-up questions, which focused on the perceptions of what contributes to or hinders the cooperative environment of an athletic department, were considered in the context of Cooperative/Competitive survey scores.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study examined competitive and cooperative mindsets of high school coaches and also considered their recommendations for improving cohesiveness among sports programs. These were followed up by three open-ended opinion questions that asked the coaches, first, what they thought were options to improve inter-program relationships, second, what they thought most hinders the success of inter-program relationships, and, lastly, what would they do to help cultivate a cohesive, cooperative environment in an athletic department. The open-ended questions helped clarify how an athletic department can cultivate the necessary elements to foster a cooperative atmosphere. A common theme among eleven of the eighteen responses from these three questions was communication and the importance of developing methods to help promote, maintain, and encourage open lines of communication between coaches and programs so that cooperation can be maintained.

The beginning of the survey establishes how many sports each instructor coaches and of the coaches that participated only one coach is involved in multiple sports while all the other coaches are single-sport coaches or an athletic trainer. With more individual-based event sports, the sports are geared towards more individual accomplishments which may influence a coach's perspective on the cooperation/competition dynamic.



The mean cooperative score (mean = 6.25; standard deviation = .56) was significantly higher than the mean competitive score (mean = 5.36; standard deviation .42) [$t(5) = 2.51$, $p = .05$]. Please see Table 1. This indicates that the coaches that participated in the survey are more cooperative oriented than competitive oriented. Consequently, the null hypothesis that there will be no significant difference in Cooperation and Competitive scores of high school coaches was rejected. However, both scores were high, suggesting that the coaches are both cooperative and competitive. The cooperative score was markedly high.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-statistic for Cooperative and Competitive Scores

Scale	Mean	SD	t-statistic
Cooperative	6.25	.56	2.51*
Competitive	5.36	.42	

* Significant at $p \leq .05$

N = 6

The descriptive statistics for each of the questions are in Table 2. Items of particular interest are discussed in the following paragraphs.

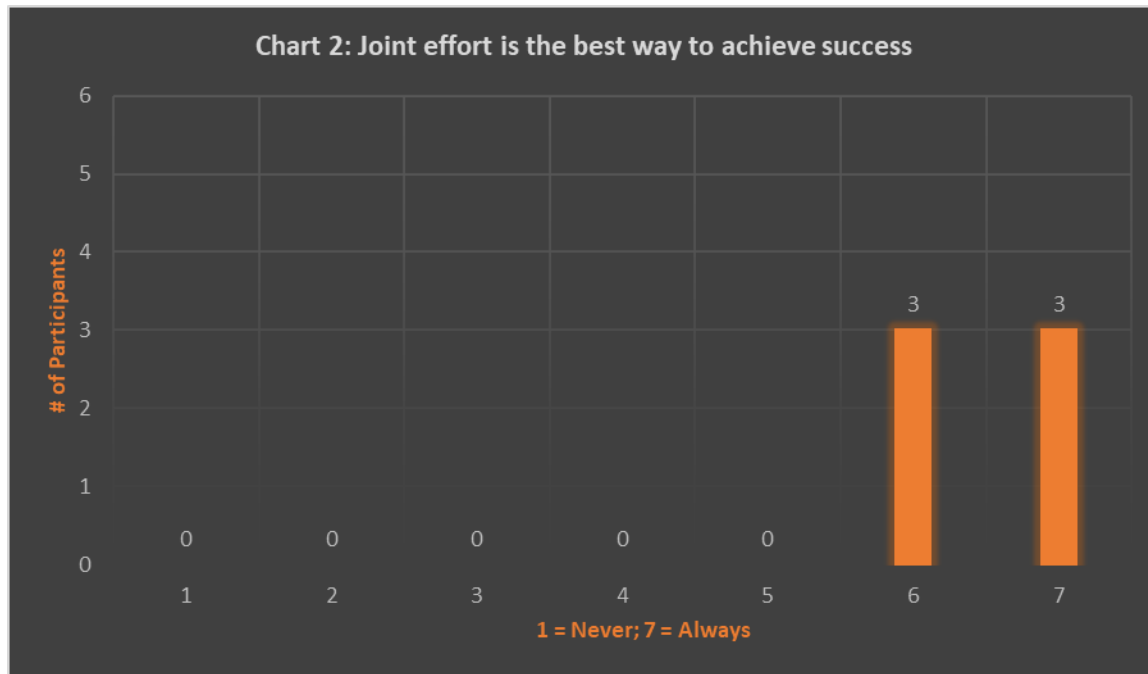
Table 2

Cooperative/Competitive Strategy Scale Survey Scores

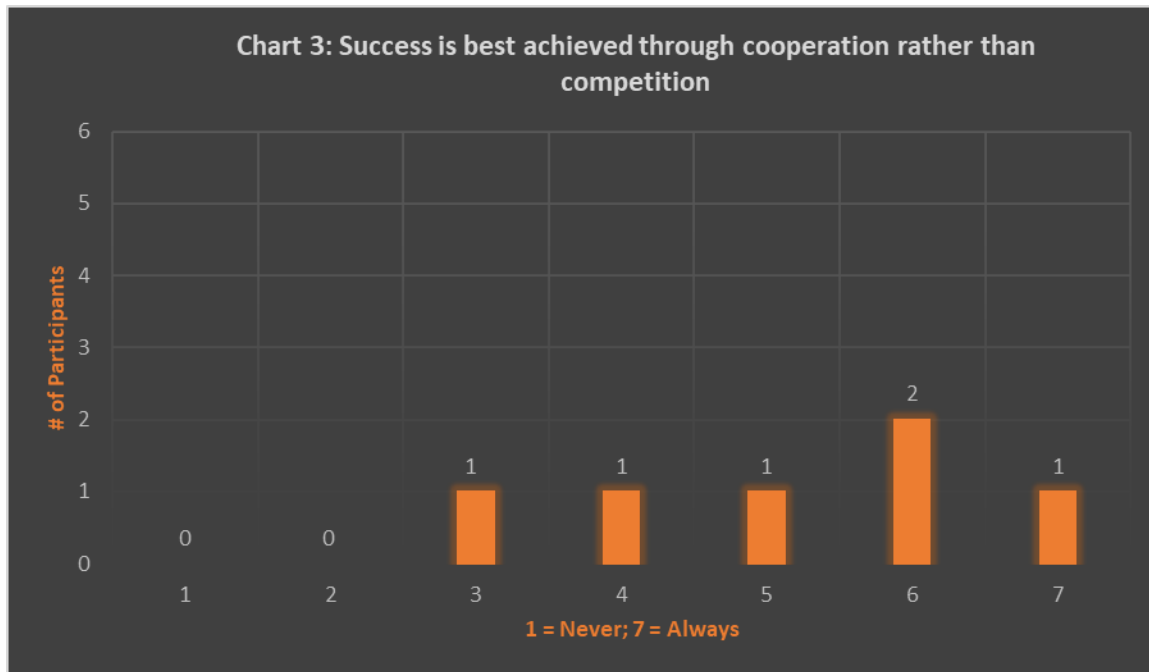
Questions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
coop1	6	5.00	7.00	6.67	.82
coop2	6	6.00	7.00	6.50	.55
coop3	6	6.00	7.00	6.50	.55
coop4	6	3.00	7.00	5.33	1.37
coop5	6	3.00	7.00	5.17	1.47
coop6	6	4.00	7.00	5.00	1.10
coop7	6	6.00	7.00	6.67	.52
coop8	6	5.00	7.00	6.67	.75
comp1	6	1.00	6.00	4.00	1.90
comp2	6	4.00	7.00	5.67	1.03
comp3	6	4.00	7.00	5.33	1.21
comp4	6	3.00	6.00	4.00	1.10
comp5	6	3.00	6.00	4.00	1.10
comp6	6	3.00	7.00	4.83	1.33
comp7	6	6.00	7.00	6.83	.41
comp8	6	5.00	7.00	6.33	.82
comp9	5	5.00	7.00	5.60	.89
comp10	6	4.00	7.00	6.17	1.17

comp11	6	4.00	7.00	6.00	1.10
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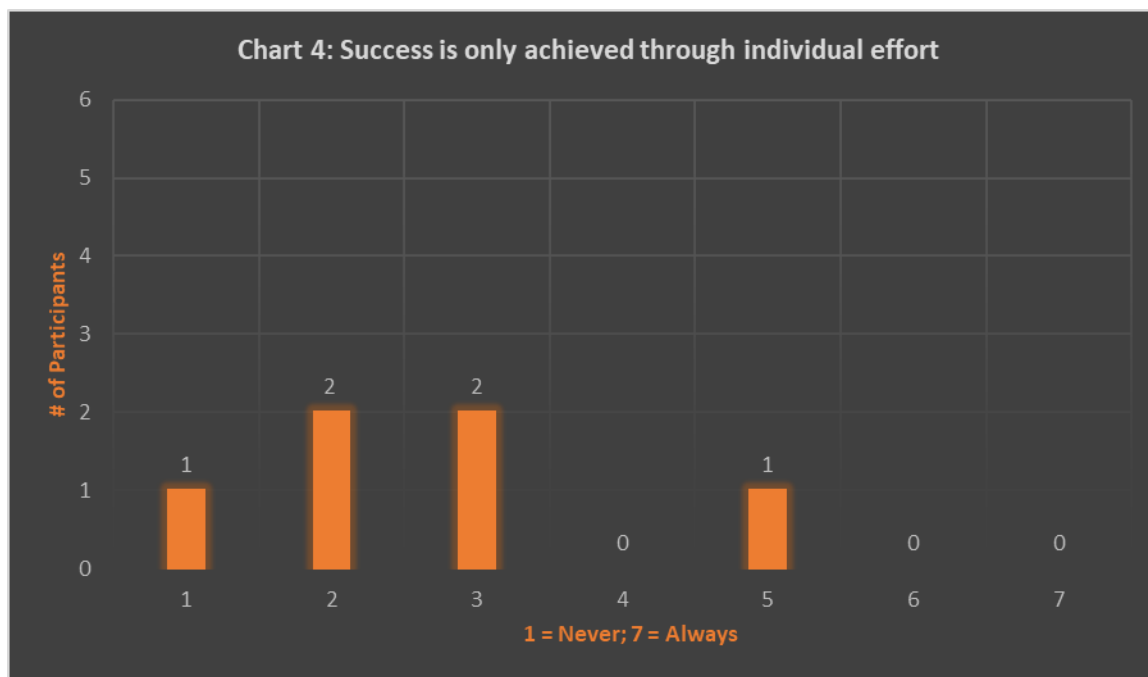
All six coaches responded strongly that joint effort is the best way to achieve success. This mentality is not as surprising from coaches that are involved in team-based sports, but is slightly surprising from individual-based sports because of the focus on individual achievement.



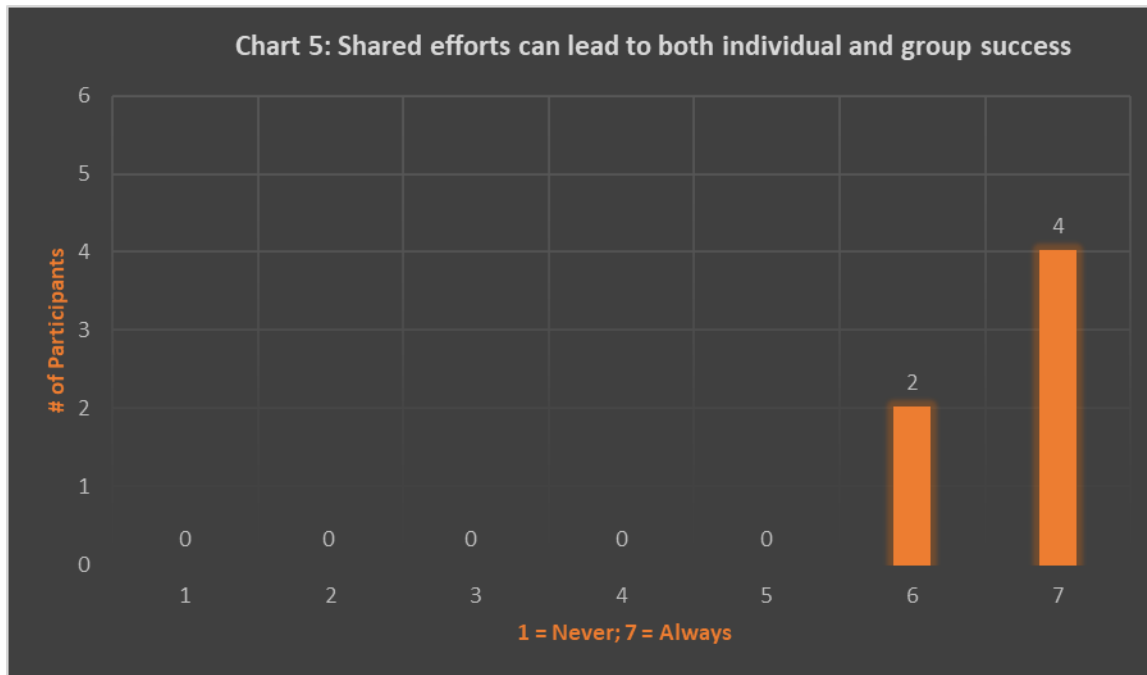
The question of if success is best achieved through cooperation rather than competition produced the widest range of responses. A coach involved with a sport that is based on individual player events came down with competition being more conducive to success over cooperation. A majority of the coaches strongly believe that cooperation is more important than competition in order to succeed. With the dynamics of each sport, it is easy to see why a team-based sport coach would value cooperation higher than a coach that deals with more individual accomplishments.



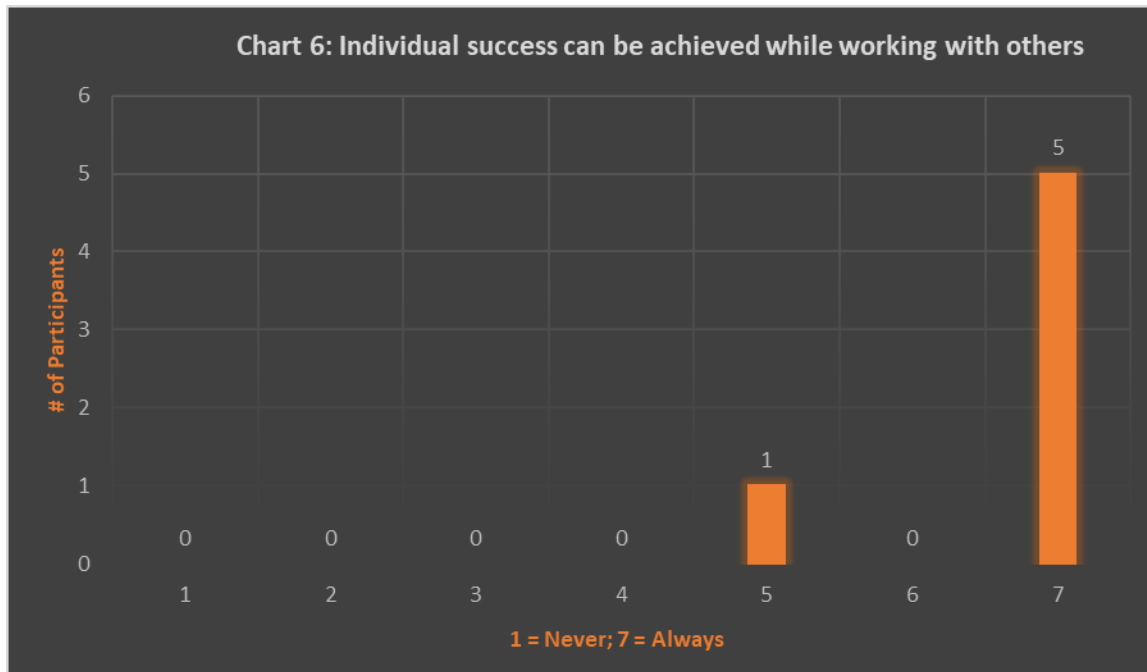
Interestingly, when the participants responded to the statement, “Success is only achieved through individual effort”, five of the six coaches answered further on the negative side of the scale. Only one coach (one involved with a team-based sport) agreed with that statement on the slightly positive side of the scale.



The coaches surveyed all believe there must be a level of cooperation with others in order to achieve success, but the responses are varied on whether it is necessary to compete against others in order to be successful.



While all the coaches surveyed enjoy working with others to achieve joint success to varying degrees, there is a wide range of answers on how important it is for coaches to do better than others. A majority of the coaches do believe that one must compete against others in order to be successful.



The results indicated that coaches believe that there needs to be a balance between competition and cooperation in order to achieve success. What is not determined is what that balance needs to be as some responses indicated that there is a level of enjoyment in competing against others and that in order to succeed, one must compete against others.

The survey established the coaches that participated have a strong cooperative nature, but also bring a competitive edge. The follow up questions probed the coaches' understanding of what helped cultivate a cooperative environment, what hindered it, and what they would implement to help ensure the former. As stated above, communication was the most common answers in all three questions. Communication was seen as necessary to promote cooperation and cohesiveness. A lack of communication and/or opportunities to communicate end up harming the willingness to cooperate with other programs and coaches. Developing options and opportunities to have open dialogue amongst the coaches and between the programs was the most put forth idea for improving the cooperation and cohesiveness in an athletic department.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

From the results of the survey, there does appear to be a pattern of cooperativeness and competitiveness ratings with high school coaches and athletic directors. Results indicated that while the coaches are high in both attributes, they are higher in cooperation than competition. This study was focused on the broad approach to coaches' competitiveness and cooperativeness in the most general sense, establishing the basic mind-set of coaches at the high school level.

Implications of Results

Implications of these results could lead to more cooperative athletic department environments where student-athletes are the most sought-after commodities. When the student-athletes are multi-sport athletes and there are multi-sport coaches, conflicts may arise about which program gets the services of which student-athlete. This can also extend to those coaches that are involved with programs outside of the school and are also competing for these student-athletes. Athletic directors could try to promote the coaches' underlying cooperative mindsets. If coaches are more apt to cooperate instead of compete with their peers, it increases the possibility of an over-all improvement to a school's athletic department and all the team programs associated with it.

According to the responses in the follow-up, open-ended questions, coaches stress the need for strong communication throughout the department and consider a lack of communication to be one of the biggest hindrances to being able to cultivate a cooperative and cohesive working department. How that communication is facilitated varied from having a coaches-only group chat to monthly department meetings to simple social gatherings for coaches.

Given that the coaches surveyed all scored high on the cooperative side of the scale, this desire for greater communication channels could only be a by-product of their more cooperative nature. There is the possibility that coaches with a stronger leaning towards competitiveness would not be as interested in strengthening communication with others outside their program. If an athletic director wanted to bring in and keep coaches that had a stronger affinity to cooperation than competitiveness, this could be a survey that helped an athletic director find and retain these types of coaches.

Threats to Validity

A factor that could challenge the validity of this study is the participants coming from only one school. The members of one athletic community will most likely have similar values to one another as the hiring agent in the department would be looking for similar qualities in coaches and be more prone to retain those that matched the pre-existing values of the department.

A second factor that poses a challenge to the validity of the study is that this survey did not establish whether the coaches are also club coaches, as the focus was the relationships inside an athletic department between coaches in different programs and, thus, unable to generalize about club coaches and how they may score on the Cooperative/Competitive Strategy Scale.

A third factor that challenges the validity of the study is that the survey does not determine whether that competition is internal (within the athletic department) or simply external (against other programs/teams). The vagueness of the scope, of where the line is drawn in relation to who is being cooperated with or competed against may affect the participants' responses to the questions.

The fourth challenge to the validity of the study is the low participation in the survey. Only six of the thirty-one coaches surveyed participated, making it difficult to attribute this mentality to the other coaches at the school, let alone coaches in general. It is possible that the individuals who responded tend to be more cooperative than those who did not respond.

Previous Studies

The current results cannot be directly compared to those from Tang (1999) or Simmons et al. (1986) because of variations in the scale. Simmons' scale had 24 items and used a 5-point Likert scale. Simmons was a broader study of North Americans' motivations for cooperation or competitiveness to achieve success in life. In their study they found evidence that, "suggests the need to separate motivation to compete or to cooperate from the motivation to achieve successful outcomes (p. 204)." They went on to say that research suggested a connection between competition and success is not as strong as the connection between cooperation and success.

For the Tang study, it was unspecified as to the range of the Likert scale. However, general comparisons can be made between the study. In the Tang study, the survey was used to gauge the cooperative/competitive nature of United States and Chinese college students and compare the two against each other. Tang found that the scores for the competition scale came in slightly higher than those for the cooperation scale for both U.S. and Chinese students surveyed with both groups having no significant differences in the scores when compared to one another. This differs from current results in that competitiveness was higher than cooperativeness in the students. This may reflect that academic tasks are more individual than athletic activities.

Implications for Future Research

Implications for future research from this study reveals the need for further understanding of the motivations of high school (private and public) athletic departments, the motivations of the coaches inside the departments, the connections to outside sports programs that may influence how they conduct themselves with athletes and other coaches, and the influence of athletic programs that are not associated with schools and how they affect coaches, athletes, and athletic departments.

The need to broaden the scope of those that are surveyed should be a prospect for future research. That research should look to increase participation of coaches in the survey at one school to greater numbers, possibly including other small private schools as well as expanding to include larger private schools that also struggle with student-athletes as a shared resource between sports.

The comparison between private schools and public schools in county, state or region offers another, broader scale in which to explore this type of study in. Comparing the level of cooperation and competitiveness between states in an athletics setting could begin to give insight into which areas of the country produces the most college and professional athletes. Expanding this study to include comparing non-school associated club program coaches and high school coaches also adds a different avenue to explore. This idea could be looked at from the position of coaches that only coach with club programs compared to coaches that only coach in a high school environment.

Another option for future research would be the study of comparing by sport (i.e.- football compared to ice hockey compared to soccer compared to tennis, etc.). This could give

insight into the types of athletes that gravitate towards specific sports in regards to their level of cooperative or competitive nature.

More specifically related to this study, there were three open-ended questions posed to the participants. A response involving either improving communication or increasing communication was the most common given. A future study of the changing mindset on cooperation and competitiveness over an academic year could be done that involved different approaches to the use of communication throughout the year, with follow up surveys given that included questions about the changes to the communication styles. For example, during the fall season, department communication could be done solely through emails and texts with no larger department gathering. The winter season communication could be done with texts and in-person communication with two department meetings (one at the beginning of the season, one at the end). The spring season communication could be texts, in-person communication, weekly department social gatherings and department meetings to start and finish the season. Surveys could be conducted at the beginning and end of each season to gauge if there is a difference in cooperative/competitive score.

Summary

The findings of this summary indicated that coaches have a mindset of cooperation over competitiveness. This was seen in the mean cooperative score (mean = 6.25; standard deviation = .56) being significantly higher than the mean competitive score (mean = 5.36; standard deviation .42). With this sample, cooperation was valued higher than competitiveness.

While the limited number of participants in this study prohibits making a generalization about all coaches and their approach to cooperation and competitiveness, if athletic departments are populated with similar-minded coaches that value cooperation as highly as the participants in

this study did, then the department has a strong foundation to build an environment that values communication between and among programs as well as support for the success of all, not just the self.

In the follow up questions for the survey, participants were asked three questions. The first was, “What are options to improve inter-program relationships?”; the second was, “What hinders the success of inter-program relationships in an athletic program?”; the third question was, “In general, what would be the first thing you would do to help cultivate a cohesive, cooperative environment?” Of the eighteen responses, eleven of them centered on building communication between the coaches and/or more gatherings for coaches to create better relationships through social events or department meetings. There is a recognition expressed in the answers that coaches will stay focused on the development of their sport program and that there is a need to combat that mindset.

With the continued growth of youth athletics outside of the traditional school-associated programs and the specialization of coaches and players becoming more the norm than the exception, there has come about an attitude of more competitiveness than cooperation in athletic departments. Athletic directors need to monitor their coaches’ motivations as well as promote the well-being of the department as a whole instead of one or two individual programs. Gaining a better understanding of the motivations of all members of an athletic department and gauging the competitive versus cooperative mindset can help an athletic department, especially at the youth level (middle school and high school levels, in particular), develop and maintain an environment that can most benefit the department, programs, coaches, and, most importantly, the student-athletes.

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APPENDIX

Survey

* Required

Email address *

Your email

Personal Information & Coaching Information

Select Gender

☐ Female

☐ Male

Age

Your answer _____

How long have you been coaching at your current school?

- ☐ Less than 5 years
- ☐ 5 to 10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

Select Ethnicity

- ☐ Asian American
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Native American or Alaska Native
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White American, European American, Middle Eastern American
- ☐ Other: _____

What season(s) is/are your sport(s) associated with during the academic school year? (Select all applicable seasons that you coach in)

- ☐ Fall
- ☐ Winter
- ☐ Spring

How many different sports do you coach during the academic year for your school?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4

What sports do you currently coach at your school? List all sports that you currently coach at your school.

Your answer _____

Please respond to the statements below on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 being "Always" and 7 being "Never"

Individual success can be achieved while working with others

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

Joint effort is the best way to achieve success

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

To succeed, one must cooperate with others

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

Success is only achieved through individual effort

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

Success is best achieved through cooperation rather than through competition

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

In the end, cooperation with others is not compatible with success

	1	2	3	4	5	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

Shared efforts can lead to both individual and group success

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

I enjoy working with others to achieve joint success

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

It is important to me to do better than others

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

Success is not very important to me

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

By achieving success I also get other things which are important to me

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

To succeed, one must compete against others

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

People who succeed are more likely to have satisfying lives

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

Success is something I am willing to work hard for

	1	2	3	4	5	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

I enjoy the challenge of competing against others to succeed

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

The rewards of success outweigh the costs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

Success is my major goal in life

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

I am happier when I am not striving to succeed

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

I feel better about myself when I am working toward success

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Never

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

Please provide a brief answer to the questions below.

What are options to improve inter-program relationships (i.e. - cooperation & support between individual sport programs to help all programs succeed)?

Your answer _____

What most hinders the success of inter-program relationships in an athletic department?

Your answer _____

In general, what would be the first thing you would do to help cultivate a cohesive, cooperative environment?

Your answer _____