



**IT'S SUMMER!**

# **CIAC COACHES UPDATE**

## **CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE**

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**2014 Volume VI Issue II Dr. Bob Lehr, Editor**

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Greetings from the CIAC staff—we hope that the 2013-14 school year was a positive one for you. The off-season provides coaches with a wonderful time to reflect on their past coaching endeavors as well as to start the planning for their next season. It is also an ideal time to initiate your conditioning programs for the fall season.

This final edition of update for the 2013-14 year deals with coaching burnout, a phenomenon with which many coaches have struggled. Hopefully the article will prove beneficial to all of our state's interscholastic coaches.

As I have stated in previous editions of Update, please consider that your student-athletes often have you on a pedestal. We know that coaches often are respected more by student-athletes than are their teachers or even their parents or guardians. With that respect goes a responsibility to be the best mentor possible. Your task is seemingly impossible; however, it never unimportant.

Best wishes for a relaxing and rewarding summer!!!

Bob Lehr, Editor

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**May You Always Have A Shell In Your Pocket And Sand In Your Shoes**

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## Stress and Burnout in Coaching: Dr. Coach Rose's Seven Answers to, "What Can I do to Change the Things I Cannot Change?"

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America's fascination with sports has bridged the gap between people of all different types of socioeconomic backgrounds, races, genders, and ages. Individuals from various kinds of lifestyles can connect and share a unique bond over their love of a game. To ensure that our love of sports continues, we spend millions – even billions – of dollars on our favorite sports figures. We show our loyalty and our support through video games, apparel, sneakers, and even flags.

We love watching all types of athletes excel in their sports and we especially enjoy celebrating at the peak of an athlete's win if we know about their struggle to get to the top. It is not unusual for us to focus on certain athletes, especially if they have the ability to capture our imagination and inspire us through their creative athletic talents and personality. Despite our focus on the individual athlete, most Americans overlook the person at the cornerstone of the sport – the person who unites a team and encourages those special individuals. That person is the coach.

This is not to say that Americans are unaware of coaches. We see them on television during sporting events, and we can see their tension, excitement and hopes for their athletes. We take note of their range of emotions and quick-thinking during various plays. We hear their eloquent words during interviews, and we see their encouraging gestures that they freely give to their team players to reassure and boost their spirit. However, these observations are made in passing, as most of our attention is grabbed by the energy and excitement found in the overcrowded stadiums, the mascots, the overzealous alumni, and the proud parents of the athletes. As a result, many do not consider the hard work that comes with the coaching profession. Undoubtedly, this is a very high-stress career, and if an individual lacks a proper balance or stress-relieving outlet, then it can and will lead to an early burnout.

According to Weinberg and Gould (2011), burnout has been defined as an exhaustive psychophysiological response exhibited as a result of frequent, sometimes extreme, and generally ineffective efforts to meet excessive competitive demands. These scholars described several symptoms of burnout: physical and mental exhaustion, lack of caring, lack of desire, loss of interest, depression, and increased anxiety. Additionally, burnout can involve an emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical withdrawal from a previously enjoyable activity in response to excessive stress or dissatisfaction over time (Smith, 1986). Weinberg and Gould (2011) reiterated that finding when individuals reach burnout, they are more likely to withdraw from the stressful environment.

Stress in America's high schools, colleges, and professional sports are at an all-time high. Student athletes labor under the combined demands of academics and morning practices, evening practices, and study hall. On the other hand, coaches face extraordinary pressures from administration, alumni, and the public in regard to winning games. According to Weinberg and Gould (2011), new and young coaches are experiencing the greatest amount of stress. Stress has become such an epidemic that it is now being identified as a health risk factor. Researchers Weinberg and Gould (2011) noted that coaches and athletes face similar stressors in competitive sports: long hours of practice, great physical and mental energy expenditure, and performance pressures on game day.

Upon receiving my first college job, the most common thing I would hear from people was that they wished that they had my job. People perceived my job as being easy because they thought I threw a ball to my athletes when they were out on the court, and they thought I stood around while watching athletes demonstrate their athletic talent.

People would often make comments indicating jealousy or envy such as, "You get to travel all over the country," or "You get to exercise with your team since you can practice with your athletes," and "You get to be in the limelight." All of these comments can be true at times; however, they come at a great cost. There is no doubt that there are perks to being a coach, but there are an equal amount of negative aspects to my job, too. If I do not handle these aspects properly, the stress build-up can be extreme and unhealthy.

### **My Personal Story that Lead to Stress and Eventually Burnout**

In 1994, I started coaching an intramural basketball team. During that year, I transferred to another university to pursue my degree and basketball career. Because of a National Collegiate Athletic Association rule, I had to sit out a year before I could officially participate in my sport. In 1995, I had a college-ending injury, which led me into the field of coaching. As I sat on the bench watching my team practice and win championship games, I realized that I still wanted to be around basketball. I watched my coach, James Sweat (an NCAA top-100 basketball coach) make plays, develop tape, recruit, travel, talk with parents, and develop his players into great decision makers. I loved that aspect of coaching and developed a greater desire to coach basketball. As a result, after I graduated in 1997, I took my first official paid coaching job with a middle school. As a young coach, I was unaware of the immense amount of pressure that was associated with being a coach. While I eventually went on to coach middle school, high school and college, my middle school coaching experience was very unusual because my role as a coach was different. I was teaching full time as a health, physical education and family life teacher. At that time, my primary focus for coaching was to help adolescent girls in maturing for high school. My hope was that this could eventually lead them to an athletic scholarship. While I was juggling multiple different roles and responsibilities, I was young and full of energy. I was at the start of my professional coaching career and I was beginning to see my dream as a coach start to form. From the beginning, I was very passionate to see it to the finish line. I had some success that led to two out of three track championships and two out of three basketball play-offs. I loved what I was doing and did not experience the stress others may have – because coaching was my escape from the other stresses that came with being a new teacher.

In 2000, I was promoted to head coach of the junior varsity boys' basketball team and an assistant on the lead varsity team. The amazing part about this was that I was asked by the athletic director to coach this team. This was very exciting for me because I was a female coach who was coaching an all-boys' high school team. In honesty, this was my favorite coaching job. I had no problems with the male athletes and they treated me with dignity and respect. As a matter a fact, coaching the junior varsity boys' team earned me the National Basketball Association/Women's National Basketball Association and the National Federation of State High School Association's Coaching Sportsmanship Award. Just this past summer, a few of them reached out, and I had the honor to spend time with their families.

Unfortunately, the onset of stress slowly began while coaching in high school. I started to feel the pressure of winning from the administration and community. However, I was still passionate about my sport and the athletes, and I did not feel that it was time for me to move on to something different. In 2001, a wonderful opportunity came to be as a graduate assistant at a mid-major Division I institution. This is where the stress began to take a toll on me. I remember the long hours of juggling graduate school, teaching several undergraduate hours, 6 a.m. practices and workouts, summer camp planning, studying on the bus trips, taking stressful exams

conducting class presentations, grading papers, and getting little sleep or eating proper balanced meals. This went on for two years, and then I received an opportunity to take on a head-coaching job as an interim coach at a National Intercollegiate Athletic Association Division II college. The stress increased when I became a head coach. I remember the pressure that I felt to perform, recruit the right athletes for my program, work with other coaches and administrators, juggle being a senior women's administrator, and to deal with other job related tasks.

Thankfully, another opportunity presented itself to coach and teach one course at another midmajor institution. I took the job immediately! At first, this opportunity was great, however, stress began to kick in again as the job got more intense. I remember working on three to four scouting reports at one time, getting off the bus at 5:50 a.m. and getting back to the office at 8 a.m. to start my regular work hours. Again, I was getting little sleep and I was constantly either getting a cold or recovering from one. As a matter of fact, I had put on over 60 pounds from the time I originally started coaching. However, in 2005, the sport that I once loved brought on such an overwhelming amount of stress that I burned out, which led me to leave the field of coaching in 2007.

### **Dr. Coach Rose's Seven Answers to "What Can I do to Change the Things I Cannot Change?"**

I shared my story because I want to help coaches, especially younger coaches become aware of the stress associated with the profession. Furthermore, I would like to see young and more seasoned coaches to be more proactive in avoiding the dangerous traps of stress that can lead to burnout in coaching. As coaches at all levels, and especially college coaching, we have to recruit, work long hours, fight to get proper sleep, exercise when we can, hire and supervise workers, be responsible for the young adults we are coaching, and juggle personal life. As a result, I want to share the seven components I have learned and wish I would have done while coaching. I did incorporate several of these items while coaching. I am now able to advise coaches about coaches about aspects I wish I would have done differently when I was coaching. Several coaches have put these suggestions into practice and are getting better results. Remember, it is not good to just listen to the things we need to change, but it is great to apply the things we can change – even when the job requires the things we cannot change as coaches.

#### **1. Recruiting: They are not the only athlete in the world**

It is a fact that if you are at the middle school, high school and/or the college level of coaching, you will have to do some form of recruiting. It is inevitable. Recruiting can be stressful because it usually involves several other programs that all desire to attract the same athletes. Recruiting has its high and lows. There are times when you will feel that you just won a particular athlete to only find out that they decided to transfer to another school district, university, or professional team. When this happens, it is important for the coach to realize one key element: they are not the only athlete in the world. As I am out of coaching now, I remember the times we would receive the call that the student-athlete committed to another university. It seemed as soon as I stopped focusing on the fact we lost that recruit and began to put my focus on other athletes, we would end up signing another recruit who was equally talented.

#### **2. Long work hours: Prioritize and work toward maintaining balance**

Dr. John Maxwell stated in one of his leadership trainings, "Take care of yourself more than you take care of others." As a young coach, I did not hear this quote until 2003 and it was in a sport management graduate course. As a teacher and a coach, I was busy making everyone else better except myself. I spent long hours training, perfecting, and conditioning my athletes instead of working on myself as well. In coaching, the coach has to be careful because he or she may be the first person in the gym and the last person to leave.

The list continues on what he or she will have to do during those long hours. We all know that coaching does come with long days. There are days that you can leave the office early and other days that you have to be there late into the night. This is where the coach has to prioritize and work toward maintaining balance. For instance, the coach knows that in the midst of a season, things are going to be pretty busy and monochrome. Therefore, when the coach has down time, it is important to maximize those moments. This is the time to take a trip to a nice getaway where you cut your cell phone off and spend time alone or with people who will refresh and recharge you. It is important to have a calendar of planned rest times during your season and even throughout your day.

### **3. Lack of sleep: Look at sleep as a win and not a loss**

I have found that most coaches are used to long work hours which can result in difficulty sleeping when there is an opportunity to do so. During this time, it is important to cut your mind off of work and begin to develop a "quiet time." The coach can use music, reading or watching a fun movie to wind down from the stresses that can cause a lack of sleep. Some coaches have adopted the mindset that if they are resting or sleeping, they are not working. To be honest, in order for the coach to have a more productive day, he or she will need to focus on getting the required seven to eight hours that is necessary for our bodies to properly function. Therefore, it is imperative for the coach to look at sleep as a win and not a loss. Remember, when you are more rested you are likely to make better decisions that can lead to a better outcome!

### **4. Lack of physical health maintenance: Good health produces a better you**

As mentioned previously, I gained over 60 pounds before I decided to leave the coaching profession. To be honest, with all the stressors that were associated with the job, I found myself handling everything else before I got a handle on my health. I woke up one day and looked in the mirror and finally took a close look at how depressed and overweight I had become. As a result, I began to slowly lose the level of motivation that I had in my earlier years of coaching. In a study by Hoogestraat, Rosemond, and Phillips (2011), motivation was said to be one topic of interest that coaches wish they would have known more about before they started coaching. I was constantly sick with either a cold of some sort or a headache. As a result, during one of my regular checkups, the doctor informed me that my cholesterol was way too high. He also explained that it was imperative that I lose weight, exercise and de-stress as much as possible. This was quite embarrassing because I used to be the coach that was primarily responsible for the strengthening and conditioning team. I understood what I needed to do, but my focus was on my team and not my own personal health. Toward the end of my coaching career, I began to exercise and eat healthier. As a result, my cholesterol levels went back to normal and I dropped a few pounds, which made me more aware that good health produces a better you!

### **5. Hire and supervise: Look for trust and a good fit**

I have heard many coaches share that hiring assistant coaches and support staff was one of their greatest challenges. One of the recurring words heard were trust and a good fit. Trust does not happen overnight, and it takes time for most of us to trust individuals. This could have to do with our past, our upbringing and/or the betrayal of a close friend or loved one. Trust is a choice. Do not be scared to hire the wrong fit. Sometimes, you have to be willing to take a risk on certain people until they show you something different. I have found out in coaching, it is important to center yourself around like-minded people in the area of good ethics. This does not mean that you have to think and coach the same it simply means that your psychological core needs to be similar. Weinberg and Gould (2007) define psychological core as your most intimate you, or the real you. A person's psychological core can come from a person's family, religious beliefs, or teachings. When the coach is looking to hire, it is important that they examine the interviewee's psychological core. Examining the psychological core will provide a good indication if you can look for trust, which can lead to a good fit.

## 6. Caring: Being responsible for those we coach

Another huge stressor associated with coaching is being responsible for those under your tutelage. When I think back on when I was a head college coach, I remember how stressed and worried I was when I would ruminate in the middle of the night about one of my players or about one of their relatives. I would sometimes worry about how they were conducting themselves out in the public, and I worked very hard at trying to make them responsible in their decision-making with hopes that they would make the correct, healthy choice. I realized that the more I showed my players that I genuinely cared about them, the more they would think before they reacted. I know that as a coach this may not always be true, however, it is important to show your players that you care for them. I truly believe that caring produces better teams, which can lead to less stress and more victories.

## 7. Juggle your personal life: Family or those we love should always come before coaching

In 2000 – in the middle of head coaching one of my high school teams – my mother passed away. I will never forget the day that the doctor told me not to leave because he was not expecting my mother to live long. In my mind, I never thought my mom would pass away at only 47. I knew that she was not doing well, but I just did not want to believe that that it would be the last time I would see her alive. I was under an immense amount of stress and I had no siblings to lean on for support. As a result, I missed one month of work to finalize all of her affairs. While I was still in hot pursuit of my coaching dream, I had to let my assistant take over the team while I settled matters at home. In addition to the stress of my mother passing, I was also very stressed that my athletic director and high school principal would get tired of waiting for me to return. So, not only was I out of a coaching job, but I was also in a poor position in regard to my teaching positions in health, physical education and drivers education.

I will never forget leaving the hospital and telling my mom that I had to get back to work. She asked me to stay a little longer with her, but all I kept thinking about was all the work I had to do with the team I left behind. I got on the highway to drive back to Virginia, only to arrive at 3:30 a.m. and get a call at 5:24 a.m. that my mom had passed away – I had to get right back into my car and drive eight hours back to Pennsylvania. I learned this the hard way, but family or those we love should always come before coaching. At that time in my life, I was in my late twenties and focusing on my coaching career. I often wish that I would have given my mom just a few more hours, as she requested. I know that I could not change anything about her passing, but I wish that my mind would have been “family first” at that time. You may be married, have children or have other relatives that are very valuable to you. Please take and make time for them – coaching will always be there for you or someone else when you return.

## Final Thoughts

It is my desire that you continue to coach the sport you love. My seven points on “What can I do to change the things I cannot change” is designed to assist you in making a mind-altering change concerning coaching as it relates to stress. Remember – stress has a lot to do with how we view a particular situation and not the situation itself.

I wish that I would have known about the dangers of stress and burnout in my earlier years of coaching. If I had information like this before and during my coaching tenure, I would have been more proactive in the way I handled the stressors that eventually led to my burnout. However, I am grateful that I have the opportunity to help those involved or interested in coaching learn from my experiences and lessons. As always, love the sport you coach! Please feel free to contact me if you would like further information.

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AND  
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