



# NATIONAL COACH SURVEY: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PREPARED BY

Dawn Anderson-Butcher, Ph.D., LISW-S &  
Samantha Bates, Ph.D., LISW  
The Ohio State University *LiFEsports* Initiative



Anderson-Butcher, D. & Bates, S. (2022). National Coach Survey final report. The Ohio State University *LiFEsports* Initiative, Columbus, OH.

For more information about this report, please contact: Dawn Anderson-Butcher (anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu) or Samantha Bates (bates.485@osu.edu).

## National Coach Survey Executive Summary

In 2022, LiFEsports at The Ohio State University (OSU), the Aspen Institute's Project Play Initiative, the Susan Crown Exchange, and Nike partnered to conduct the first-ever youth sport coach survey of its kind in the United States (U.S.). The 2022 National Coach Survey aimed to examine youth sport coaches' backgrounds, experiences, philosophies, behaviors, and training histories and interests, and to explore whether coaches trained in different topic areas reported more effective coaching practices and, ultimately, greater perceived impact as a coach. This executive summary provides a high-level overview of the methods, key findings, and recommendations, which can be used to drive improvements in youth sport policy, practice, coach preparation, and training. The National Coach Survey final report can be found [here](#). To reference this report, please utilize the following citation:

**Anderson-Butcher, D. & Bates, S. (2022). *National Coach Survey final report*. The LiFEsports Initiative, Columbus, OH.**

For more information about this report, please contact Dr. Dawn Anderson-Butcher ([anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu](mailto:anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu)) or Dr. Samantha Bates ([bates.485@osu.edu](mailto:bates.485@osu.edu)). You may also find other relevant information on the LiFEsports website: [www.lifesports.osu.edu](http://www.lifesports.osu.edu)

### Method

The OSU Institutional Review Board approved all study procedures. Participants were recruited via posts on social media and emails distributed to contacts through a comprehensive list of coaches, school leaders, and sport administrators from for-profit and non-profit sectors. Online data collection using Qualtrics occurred between March and October of 2022. All participants provided informed consent before they participated in the study. For every 500 people who completed the survey and provided an email address, a random participant was awarded a \$50 electronic gift card.

The National Coach Survey built upon findings and psychometric analyses from a previous LiFEsports study that examined coaching practices in Ohio. Specific measurement constructs included: (a) demographic characteristics and backgrounds; (b) training and preparation; (c) coaching philosophies; (d) confidence in coaching practices; (e) motivations for coaching; (f) satisfaction, stress, likelihood to continue coaching, and wins during coaching career; (g) perceived impact on student-athletes; and (h) other factors (e.g., perceptions of parents/caregivers, support from peers and administrators, etc.). Descriptive statistics explored variables of interest across the sample and among different subgroups of coaches (i.e., competitiveness level, pay, etc.).

### Coach Demographics

In total, 10,661 coaches completed the 2022 National Coach Survey. There were 176 coaches included in the original sample who coached at the collegiate level. These coaches were removed from the sample, leaving a total of 10,485 youth sport coaches who were included in our analyses. Key demographics are reported below and are important to keep in mind when interpreting survey findings:

- The sample was predominantly male (74%) and White, Caucasian (79%). The average age of coaches in the sample was 45.62 years, with 36% of the sample identifying as over 50 years of age. Study participants coached for an average of 12.95 years.
- Coaches from every state completed the survey, with the largest representation from California (17%), Ohio (15%), and Washington (12%).
- 77% of coaches reported having a Bachelor's degree or a more advanced degree.
- 83% of coaches reported they were employed outside of coaching.
- 41% of the coaches were unpaid in their last season coaching their primary sport.
- Participants in the sample reported coaching 38 specific sports, with the greatest representation from sports such as soccer (24%), baseball (15%), basketball (12%), tackle football (6%), and softball (6%).
- 42% of the coaches in the sample coached in schools in their last season, and 50% of school-based coaches reported being educators at the school. Of the remaining sample, 29% of coaches coached in competitive settings (i.e., club sports), 20% coached in recreational settings, 6% coached in developmental settings (e.g., age eight and younger), and 3% coached in adapted or other settings.
- 40% of the participants coached male athletes, 27% coached female athletes, 19% coached male and female athletes, and 14% coached co-ed teams during their last season coaching their primary sport.
- Coaches reported that approximately 1 out of 5 or 20% of their athletes live in poverty.

## Top 10 Key Findings

### Coach Training Matters and Demonstrates Impact

Results demonstrate that coaches who participated in formative trainings in the past were significantly more confident in their coaching behaviors than those who had not participated in trainings in the past. Findings were particularly strong for coaches trained in youth development strategies such as teaching life skills and supporting athletes' mental health. For instance, coaches that reported they had been trained in areas of youth development reported making a significantly greater impact on helping their athletes become role models in their communities (91%) compared to those with no history of participation in this type of training (77%).. Increasing opportunities for coaches at all levels and backgrounds to improve their coaching competencies through quality trainings are needed. Our findings suggest trainings in traditional sport practices and strategies that help coaches move beyond the X's and O's may lead to better coaching practices that positively impact youth sport participants.



**Coach training matters as trained coaches reported greater impacts on their athletes' development beyond the court, field, mat, etc.**

## Teaching Life Skills Makes a Difference for Teams and Athletes

Coaches in this sample overwhelmingly believed they were having strong impact on the athletes they coached. In total, 80% of coaches believed they had a significant impact on their athletes becoming role models in their communities, 90% on their athletes developing a continued desire to play sports, 81% on their athletes acquiring leadership skills, 93% on their athletes developing sport skills, and 84% on their athletes developing life skills. Additionally, 73% reported they helped their athletes persist in educational settings. Coaches who were trained in key areas of youth development, those who identified as educators, and those coaching in more competitive settings reported significantly higher levels of overall impact compared to untrained coaches, non-educators, and those coaching in recreational/developmental settings, respectively.



### Coaches who value teaching life skills through sport reported higher winning percentages and greater impacts on their athletes throughout their career

Of significance, coaches focused on leveraging sport as a context for positive youth development reported better outcomes regarding their career win percentages and the impact of their coaching practices on their athletes. For example, coaches who reported teaching life skills through sport as one of their top 5 coaching philosophies reported significantly higher career win percentages (66%) than those not as focused on this philosophy (63%). In addition, coaches that valued teaching life skills reported significantly higher levels of overall impact on their athletes (e.g., 71% vs. 66% on items assessing coaches' perceived impact on their athletes' academic, developmental, and sport-related outcomes), as well as greater impact on their athletes' developmental outcomes (77% vs. 67% on items assessing coaches perceived impact on their athletes' life and social skills) as compared to coaches less focused on this philosophy. These data demonstrate that when coaches value sport as a place to teach and reach young people, teams perform better, and coaches report having a more positive impact on their athletes.

### Opportunities to Increase Coaches' Competencies Beyond the X's and O's

Coaches were asked about their confidence levels when engaging in numerous coaching behaviors focused on health and safety, coaching the X's and O's (e.g., techniques and tactics), teaching life and leadership skills through sport, creating a positive team environment, and supporting mental wellness. Coaches reported varying levels of confidence in relation to their coaching practices and behaviors. About 2/3 of the sample felt confident in their ability to engage in traditional coaching practices (such as teaching basic techniques and tactics). Coaches were less confident in behaviors focused on their athletes' holistic health and development (i.e., identifying off-field stressors among athletes, referring athletes to supports, etc.). For instance, only 29% were highly confident in their ability to develop athletes into leaders, and only 18% reported feeling highly confident in their ability to address mental health concerns. Clearly, there are ample opportunities for coaches to access trainings and supports to enhance their coaching and become more effective. The table below summarizes responses on items assessing coach confidence in various practices, denoting areas where coaches reported their most and least confident behaviors.



## Coaches were fairly confident engaging in traditional coaching practices, yet reported limited skills related to behaviors that support mental wellness and positive youth development

5 Most Confident Coaching Behaviors	% Strongly agree	5 Least Confident Coaching Behaviors	% Strongly agree
1. Promote good sportsmanship	66%	1. Help athletes navigate the pressures of social media	17%
2. Make athletes feel welcome on a team	65%	2. Link athletes to mental health resources	18%
3. Teach basic techniques/skills	63%	3. Refer athletes to supports for unmet basic needs	18%
4. Report child abuse and neglect	57%	4. Identify off-the-field stressors among athletes	19%
5. Create an inclusive environment	55%	5. Reduce performance anxiety among athletes	20%

### Need to Decrease Barriers to Coach Education and Training

Different subgroups of coaches reported varying levels of confidence in relation to several key coaching practices and behaviors. Those who identified as educators reported higher confidence levels across all coaching behaviors than non-educators. Paid coaches also consistently reported more confidence in their coaching behaviors as compared to unpaid coaches, both in relation to traditional coach practices (46% vs. 29% on ability to teach tactics and techniques) and in areas focused on mental health (29% vs. 18% on ability to address mental health concerns) and positive youth development (53% vs. 37% on ability to teach life skills through sport). Similarly, coaches working in school settings reported higher levels of coaching confidence than community-based coaches.



## Coaches who are educators reported higher levels of confidence than non-educators, whereas unpaid and community-based coaches were among those with the lowest levels of confidence in their coaching practices

Providing additional training and support to unpaid coaches (also described as those volunteering their time) and/or ones that receive little to no pay is an increasing priority when considering ways to improve the youth sport environment. Strategies also are needed to mitigate barriers to access to coach education and training (i.e., costs, travel, etc.). These efforts may, in turn, also improve developmental/recreational sport experiences and perhaps help retain youth participation in sports at more elevated rates. Notably, female coaches reported higher

confidence levels on items assessing their confidence in teaching life and leadership skills through sport, supporting student-athletes' mental wellness, and fostering a positive team environment compared to male coaches. Male coaches reported higher confidence levels on items assessing their confidence in engaging in traditional coaching techniques (i.e., the X's and O's) compared to female coaches. Further, coaches who identified as Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) reported higher confidence levels on items assessing their ability to support student-athlete mental wellness than coaches who identified as White, Caucasian. Findings point toward opportunities to individualize coach training to meet the needs of coaches in varying settings and those of different backgrounds.

### **All Coaches Want and Need More Training**

Our findings highlight important areas where all coaches could benefit from additional training and support. Coaches in this study were highly interested in receiving additional training in multiple areas. In addition to wanting training on traditional coaching practices (i.e., the X's and O's), coaches also identified interest in receiving coach training in areas focused on mental wellness, life skill development, and youth development practices. Coach training in these areas has the potential to leverage sport as a context to promote mental and physical health. At a time when young people are reporting heightened challenges in these areas, providing additional resources, trainings, and supports to coaches can serve as one national intervention strategy that can help reach millions of youth in the U.S. participating in sport.



### **Coaches desire more training and professional development, both in traditional coaching practices and in areas such as promoting youth development, supporting mental wellness, and teaching life and leadership skills**

<b>Top 10 Trainings Coaches are Interested In</b>	<b>% Interested in More</b>
1. Coaching Tactics and Strategy	75%
2. Sport Skills and Techniques	74%
3. Relationship Building	70%
4. Performance Anxiety	70%
5. Motivational Techniques	70%
6. Leadership Development	69%
7. Team Dynamics	67%
8. Mental Health	67%
9. Effective Communication	66%
10. Life Skill Development Through Sport	66%

### **Coach Preparation is Essential to Addressing Issues of Inclusivity**

Our results demonstrate that coaches do not necessarily feel prepared to work with specific populations of socially vulnerable youth, especially those experiencing disabilities or challenging circumstances. For instance, 43% of coaches felt unprepared to work with athletes with behavioral challenges or ADD/ADHD, whereas 55% felt unprepared to work with those with

intellectual, developmental, or physical disabilities. Gaps in training specific to working with athletes with individualized needs will only continue to marginalize different youth populations and hinder their ability to access quality sport experiences.



## **Many coaches feel unprepared to work with athletes with disabilities and other individualized needs**

### **Insight on Potential Ways to Recruit More Quality Coaches**

Information about coaches' motivations and philosophies provided further insights concerning the mindset of coaches. The top coaching philosophies reported by coaches included helping athletes learn new life skills (35% rated in the top 3) and ensuring all athletes have fun (35% rated in the top 3). Only 6% of coaches reported that winning games or competitions were a top priority driving their coaching philosophies. Coaches in this sample also were highly motivated to coach because of their love of teaching sport (83% reported this was very or extremely influential) and their desire to develop young people in their community (82% reported this was very or extremely influential).



## **Coaches value helping athletes learn new life skills and are highly motivated by their love of teaching sport and their desire to develop young people in their communities**

Differences in coaches' motivations varied based on pay and their coaching roles. Coaches paid over \$5,000 were more highly motivated by their love of teaching sport (64%) compared to unpaid coaches (41%). Coaches at more competitive levels (i.e., school and competitive club settings) reported greater motivations to coach across all factors except for feeling motivated by their status as a parent/caregiver of an athlete; 43% compared to 60%. Coaches at the developmental/ recreational level were highly motivated by being a parent/caregiver of an athlete (60%), because they love teaching sport (40%), and because they played sports as a child (46%). Ultimately, our findings suggest pipelines that develop youth sport participants into coaches may be increasingly successful in recruiting new coaches into the field and retaining involvement.

Further, identifying adults looking for ways to give back to their communities may be necessary for coach recruitment, along with strategies designed to tailor messages to those with time, resources, and a love of sport. Only 19% of coaches reported someone approached them to coach, and this served as a motivator that influenced their participation. Individualizing asks of former athletes and community members, as well as reframing coaching as a way to give back to one's community, may be effective strategies for recruiting great coaches. Additionally, parents/caregivers are motivated to coach their children. Finding ways to make coaching roles more

conducive to family lifestyles may help engage more of them in their child's sport experience through coaching.

## **Diversify Coaching**

Demographics collected from participants shed light on the importance of continuing to diversify the coaching profession. To our knowledge, no national coach surveys can explicitly confirm the demographics of U.S. coaches, yet our survey demographics are corroborated with data collected by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (2022). Ultimately, sport is still dominated by men, and our study sample is reflective of this disproportionality. Specifically, men still own the coaching space. In our study, men were twice as likely as women to coach the opposite gender and report more coaching experiences throughout their lifetime. Men were more likely to report a desire to continue coaching than female coaches. Both men and women reported equal rates of pay, with 12% paid \$10,000 or more to coach in their last season.



### **There is a need to diversify the coaching profession and to recruit and retain female youth sport coaches**

Interestingly, more women (44%) served as paid coaches making \$5,000 or less compared to men (32%). Given that our sample was predominantly male, drawing conclusions about pay inequities and disparities in youth sport based on coach gender remains difficult. As noted in prior research and advocacy efforts across the country, substantive efforts are needed to make coaching more inclusive by recruiting and retaining female youth sport coaches.

## **Coaches Do Not Have Enough Resources or Support**

Overwhelmingly findings suggest coaches do not have all the resources they need to be successful. The majority of coaches in our sample reported not having tangible resources needed to support their teams (including equipment, safe practice facilities, and enough pay to coach last season). With this lens in mind, it is admirable the incredible impact coaches in this sample are having on their athletes given their current resource disparities. Oversight of and support to youth sport coaches also were limited, with nearly half of all coaches surveyed reporting they had never been evaluated. Even in the case when coaches were evaluated, only about half reported the evaluation helped them be a better coach.



### **Coaches reported not having all of the resources they need to feel supported and for youth on their teams to have quality youth sport experiences**

Moreover, less than half of the coaches in our sample reported their supervisor gave them constructive and frequent feedback and helped them evaluate their opportunities for growth. One wonders if coaches feel isolated in their roles and unsure of how to continue growing and developing their skills. Perhaps further investments in the administrative functions of youth sport organizations would strengthen access to supervisory supports, hands-on teaching opportunities, and consultation/evaluation mechanisms. Strengthening administrators' competencies within



sport organizations, many of which are non-profits, may help to improve the youth sport ecosystem.

### **Intervene to Address Stressors in the Youth Sport Environment**

Nearly all coaches in this sample were satisfied with their coaching experiences and reported a high likelihood that they would continue to coach. However, the majority of coaches (69%) reported their coaching experiences were stressful, with 6 out of 10 expressing interest in receiving training on stress management in coaching. Parents/caregivers often were sources of stress. In fact, 1 out of every 3 coaches reported parents often criticized their coaching, and two-thirds said parents/caregivers criticize their child's teammates or opposing players. Nearly half reported parents/caregivers do not model good sportpersonship when interacting with the opposing team's parents. Of note, more negative parenting behaviors were noted by participants coaching in club and school settings (e.g., those characterized by more structure and competitiveness). Addressing stressors such as inappropriate parent-spectator behaviors and building the capacity of coaches to set up clear expectations related to culture and climate might help mitigate stressors in the youth sport environment.



**Coaches reported feeling satisfied and having a high likelihood of continuing to coach, yet experience high levels of stress and negative interactions with parents/caregivers**

### **Conclusion**

In the end, findings should be interpreted with caution, especially given the sample characteristics, cross-sectional nature of the design, and descriptive nature. These and other factors should be taken into consideration when exploring lessons learned and making recommendations. Nonetheless, this study can help guide the next steps in improving youth sport experiences and coaching preparation. Important priorities are identified such as the need for more sports (especially in urban areas), as well as for those for certain groups (i.e., children with disabilities). Findings also point to several implications for future coaching training. Training for coaches at developmental/recreational levels may be important, as well as further training designed to promote positive youth development and mental wellness. LiFEsports at The Ohio State University, The Aspen Institute, the Susan Crown Exchange, and Nike look forward to our continued work to elevate the findings synthesized in this report to put forth recommendations that inform the national coaching landscape.

#### **Contact Information**

Dawn Anderson-Butcher, PhD, LISW-S ([anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu](mailto:anderson-butcher.1@osu.edu))

Samantha Bates, PhD, LISW ([bates.485@osu.edu](mailto:bates.485@osu.edu))

**LiFEsports**

at The Ohio State University