

**2025 NATIONAL REPORT**

# THE STATE OF COACHING

Measuring the impact of coaches on student-athlete lives

**EverRise**



EverRise in partnership with the FAIR Foundation



# Foreword

## What makes a coach “successful”?

The answer might seem simple: look at the win-loss record, the banners, the trophies. If the numbers are high, the coach must be successful. But does that tell the whole truth?

### Consider the odds:

- Football: 1 in 40 high school players are recruited to Division I, and only 1 in 5,000 make it to the NFL.
- Softball: 1 in 45 play Division I, and 1 in 30,000 make a pro league or national team.
- Women’s Basketball: 1 in 75 play Division I, and 1 in 5,000 go on to the WNBA.

It’s an extraordinary feat when athletes reach those levels. But here’s the harder question: What about the millions of student-athletes who will never play beyond high school? What does successful coaching look like for them?

Almost every student-athlete will “go pro” in something other than sports. To answer what makes a coach successful, we must first clarify what a coach truly does. Yes, coaches call plays and teach skills. But that’s only the beginning. Coaches are also teachers, mentors, counselors, bus drivers, role models, and, in many cases, the reason a young person shows up to school. To reduce their success to wins and losses is like measuring the quality of a car by the color of its paint — you’d miss the point entirely.

Here’s what I know: athletics is not extra. It’s one of the most powerful engines of growth and development available to young people. That’s why this report matters. It shows what every coach has known all along: few people have as much influence on the life of a young person as their coach. We must protect this profession and invest in it like the future depends on it. Because it does.

The data in this report is clear: when coaches excel in six essential themes, student-athletes thrive — not just in competition, but in life. These themes transform a season into a lifelong lesson. They turn players into leaders. Or to put it another way: Tomorrow’s leaders are built in today’s locker rooms.

This report is not just a snapshot of where we are in the state of coaching. It’s a call to take action for the sake of our future.

- A summons to every coach to take this data and turn it into action.
- A summons to every administrator and policymaker to prioritize coaching development as essential to education.
- A summons to parents and communities to champion the men and women who hold the sacred title of “Coach.”

So the real question is not, What makes a coach successful? The data here has already answered that. The real question is this: **Are we willing to invest in coaches so they have everything they need to prepare students for success on and off the field of competition?**

The time is now. Take these findings to heart. Commit to building a future where every coach is equipped to change lives.

**Stephen Mackey**

*Founder, 2Words Character Development*

# Learn about the Authors and Contributors:

**EverRise** – A Sports & Education Research & Data Company who partners with schools and school districts across the United States. EverRise led the data collection and theoretical framework efforts in this project.

**Dr. Joshua Childs**– Associate Professor at The University of Texas at Austin researches education policy, with an emphasis on school attendance, student engagement, and role of extra-curricular activities. Dr. Childs along with UT-Austin doctoral students, Brooke Fousek and Jacob Navarrete, led data analysis and generated findings for the report.

**Foundation for the Advancement of Interscholastic Resources (FAIR) Foundation**–A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to equip those who support students and student-athletes with the resources, training, and strategic support they need to make lasting impact—on and off the field.

## Preface:

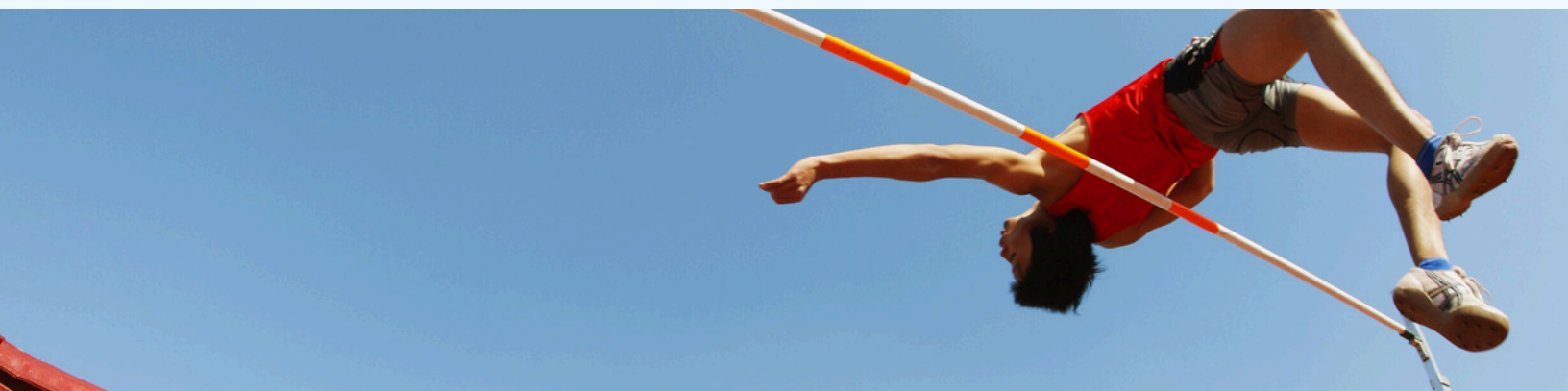
*This report marks the first installment in a multi-part series on The State of Coaching, produced in partnership by EverRise and the FAIR Foundation.*

**Over the coming months, the series will expand to include:**

- A state-specific report providing localized insights,
- A comprehensive research report examining national coaching trends and outcomes, and
- An in-depth exploration of the Pillars of Interscholastic Coaching.

*All publications will be released before the close of 2025.*

*While this report is designed to inform a broad audience interested in education-based athletics, its primary focus is on those who shape and guide the field: **athletic administrators, state-level leaders, national governing bodies, and—at its core—the coaches themselves.** Our purpose is both to equip decision-makers with actionable insight and to elevate the voices of coaches, whose work forms the foundation of interscholastic athletics.*



# Introduction

Lost among the debates on standardized testing, curriculum changes, and funding priorities stands an often celebrated but not fully understood component of education: interscholastic athletics. Interscholastic athletics refers to education-based sports, activities, and competitions that take place between schools and are governed by state and national organizations. At its core, interscholastic athletics is about the student-athlete experience. It is the student-athlete who is tasked with making the plays, leading their team to victory, navigating the duality of academics and athletics, and being an integral part of a school's culture. **However, there is another figure of unique and enduring influence, without whom there is no guidance for the student-athlete, no consistent adult presence within the school community, and no representation of the school's culture: the coach.**

Often serving as teachers by day and mentors by afternoon and evening, coaches occupy spaces in students' lives that are both powerful and profoundly underestimated. For millions of student-athletes navigating the tumultuous

waters of adolescence, the coach is more than just a dispenser of tactical knowledge or a strategist for competitions. Coaches are confidants, disciplinarians, sources of stability, and, in many cases, among the most significant adult figures in a student's life. The athletic arena, be it a dusty baseball diamond or a sprawling soccer pitch, becomes a laboratory for life, and the coach is the chief scientist. On these fields and courts of play, lessons of resilience, teamwork, accountability, and grace under pressure are not merely taught, but experienced. The elation of a hard-fought victory and the sting of a bitter defeat are powerful lessons, and it is the coach who guides student-athletes through these formative emotional experiences. **The words of a coach can echo in the mind of a student-athlete for decades, shaping their self-perception, work ethic, and approach to challenges long after the final whistle has blown.**

This report seeks to illuminate the challenges coaches face and champion a vision of coaching that rises to meet the complex needs of the 21st-century student-athlete. **The profound impact of interscholastic coaching on the holistic development of young people has been intuitively understood for generations. Now, however, this intuition is being substantiated by a growing body of research, with EverRise leading the research effort.**

We have moved past the era of viewing sports as a mere extracurricular diversion led by a coach who was the unquestioned authority, focused only on wins and losses, and led with a "my way or the highway" mentality. We now understand the athletic experience, when guided by a skilled and intentional coach, is a powerful engine for cognitive, social, and emotional growth. This approach is rooted in a deep respect for the athlete as a person, not just a performer. The coach is, in essence, a teacher of life skills. The demand for punctuality at a 6:00 AM practice instills a sense of discipline and time management that will serve a student-athlete in their future career.





**A well-coached team is a microcosm of a functioning society, a place where individual ambition is harnessed for the collective good.**

The coach's influence extends into the academic realm as well. The structure and discipline of a well-run athletic program can provide a framework for academic success. Coaches who prioritize academic achievement, who monitor their student-athletes' grades and provide support when needed, send a powerful message that excellence is expected in all facets of life. When coaches reinforce the importance of the "student" in "student-athlete," young adults learn that privileges of athletic participation are earned through diligence in the classroom.

**The coach is not just impacting a season; they are impacting a life.**

Collaborating with teammates from diverse backgrounds to achieve a common goal is a practical lesson in teamwork and conflict resolution that no textbook can replicate. The act of holding a teammate accountable for their effort, or being held accountable in turn, builds a foundation of responsibility and mutual respect. These are not byproducts of the athletic experience; they are, or at least should be, its central curriculum.

**In a 2024 study of 1,200 student-athletes, we found that playing for a coach scoring high in *Connection and Communication* (see *Pillars* section) increased grade point averages by an astounding 0.61 on a 4.0 scale.**

The mental health of student-athletes has also, rightfully, come to the forefront of the conversation about coaching. The pressures of competition, the demands of balancing athletics and academics, and the ever-present scrutiny of social media can take a significant toll on the well-being of young people. The coach is often the first line of defense in identifying and addressing these pressures. A coach who creates an environment of open communication, who destigmatizes conversations about mental health, and who knows where to turn for professional resources can be a lifeline for a student-athlete. As mental health needs have risen post COVID-19, the need for coaches to be equipped to address the various concerns of their student-athletes has become increasingly important. The weight of this responsibility is immense, and it underscores the need for coaches to be equipped with the training and support necessary to meet this critical demand. The lessons learned on the field of play, when taught by a caring and competent coach, become ingrained in the fabric of an individual's being, shaping their choices about physical and mental health for years to come. This is the profound and sacred trust that is placed in the hands of every interscholastic coach in America.



It is within the context of interscholastic athletics that we undertake this comprehensive analysis of the current state of coaching in the United States. The purpose of this report is to move beyond anecdote and assumption, and to provide a data-driven and deeply researched examination of the men and women who are on the front lines of youth development.

To guide our analysis, EverRise has identified six fundamental pillars that serve as a framework for defining high-quality coaching practice in the 21st century. These research-based pillars encompass the coach's role as a teacher, mentor, leader, communicator, continuous learner, and guardian of the game's integrity.

Drawing on assessment data of 34,844 student-athletes nationwide, in this report we will present a detailed analysis of the current landscape on each of the pillars. Additionally, we will identify the key competencies associated with each theme along with practical, evidence-based strategies that coaches can use to improve their practice.

## The Six Pillars of Effective Coaching



### Connection

Building trust-based relationships that foster meaningful connections.



### Psychological Safety

Creating environments where students and athletes feel safe to take risks, voice concerns, and thrive without fear of consequences.



### Structure

Establishing consistent routines, expectations, and support systems that enable students and athletes to focus on growth.



### Communication

Sharing clear, constructive, and effective information to build understanding and alignment.



### Challenge

Encouraging students and athletes to stretch beyond their comfort zones, unlocking new levels of performance and resilience.



### Skill Development

Focusing on advancing students' and athletes' competencies, ensuring they continually improve and excel—on the field, in the classroom, and beyond.

## The Six Pillars of Effective Interscholastic Coaching

Effective interscholastic coaching goes beyond simply teaching sport-specific skills. Oftentimes, the success of an interscholastic coach is measured in wins and losses, but this metric fails to capture the full impact a coach has on their student-athletes. Successful coaching is rooted in building relationships, fostering a positive environment, and nurturing the complete student-athletes—mind, body, and spirit. EverRise has created a structural foundation to guide this holistic approach to coaching: **The Six Pillars of Effective Interscholastic Coaching**. These pillars—**Connection, Psychological Safety, Structure, Communication, Challenge, and Skill Development**—are not independent elements but a deeply *interdependent* framework that form the basis for a positive, supportive, and growth-oriented athletic environment. Each pillar supports and strengthens the others, creating a cohesive and powerful system for fostering positive student-athlete experiences and optimal development. A coach who excels in one area while neglecting another will find their efforts undermined. When these pillars are built together, they create a supportive environment where student-athletes can thrive in their sport and beyond.

The data in the subsequent Pillars was gathered by EverRise during the 2024–25 school year and consists of over 34,000 high school student-athlete assessments over the fall, winter, and spring sports seasons. Student-athletes provided answers about their perceived relationship with their coach on a 1–5 Likert scale survey (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree) that were then analyzed across each of the Pillars. Recommendations for coaches, athletic administrators, and stakeholders will connect data to actionable items that can influence student-athlete outcomes on and off the field.

“As a current athlete, I have personally experienced the tangible difference that coaches make in my life. Their support, mentorship, and teaching, both on and off the court, have shaped me in ways that are difficult to fully express. That is why I deeply value the work EverRise and the FAIR Foundation are doing.”

**Steven Ashworth**

Professional Basketball Player,  
Former Creighton Basketball Player



## Pillar 1: Connection

At its core, coaching is a relationship. The pillar of **Connection** is the bedrock upon which all other coaching efforts are built. It is the ability of a coach to move beyond a superficial relationship—where the coach gives instructions and the student-athlete performs tasks—to a relational one built on trust, empathy, and mutual respect. This involves a genuine interest in each student-athlete as an individual, beyond their role on the team. Data from the student-athlete assessment indicated an average or mean score of 4.1 out of 5 when it comes to the coach-athlete **Connection**. Seventy-seven percent of student-athletes agreed or strongly agreed that they have a high level of **Connection** with their coach, suggesting a strong majority felt a positive bond with their coach. Overall, data revealed that coaches are successfully fostering rapport and belonging, which helps in building **Connection** and is a critical foundation for building positive outcomes. However, with only 61% of student-athletes either agreeing or strongly agreeing that their coach takes an interest in their life outside the sport they play, coaches should continuously work to build a sense of loyalty and belonging that can extend beyond the playing field or court.



In 87% of male sports, 82% of female sports, and 89% of co-ed sports, student-athletes reported that their coach made them feel like they are an important part of the team. Data analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between a student-athlete's perceived **Connection** with their coach and their overall satisfaction and enjoyment of their athletic experience. When analyzing student-athlete assessment results, EverRise uses correlation coefficients and p-values to measure how closely two variables in a data set are related. A high correlation coefficient reflects two variables that are strongly correlated, while a low correlation coefficient reflects a weaker connection. Furthermore, the lower the "p-value," the less likely the relationship between the two variables is due to random chance. For example, our research indicates the correlation coefficient between 1) a coach's belief in their student-athlete and 2) a coach making a student-athlete feel like an important member of the team was .71, a notably high correlation coefficient.

This finding suggests that when student-athletes feel valued, they are also more likely to connect with their coach. With a p-value less than 0.05 (i.e., less than 5% chance of being random), the correlation between the two variables was statistically significant and unlikely to be due to chance.

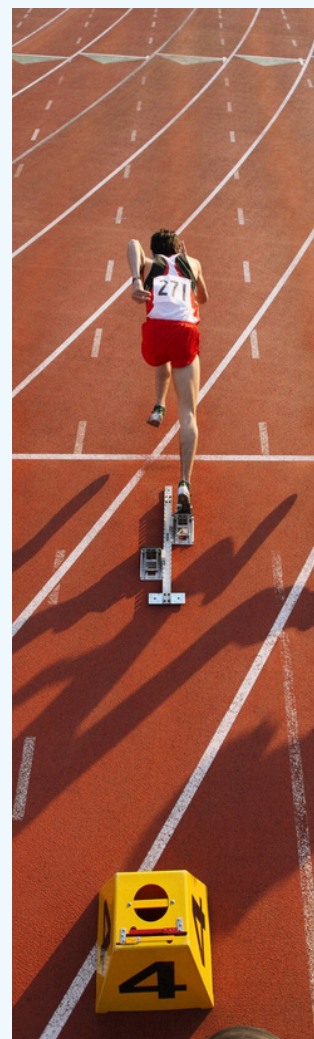
This highlights that as a student-athlete's sense of **Connection** to their coach increases, so too does their overall enjoyment and satisfaction with the program. This finding underscores the importance of the coach-athlete bond in creating a positive and fulfilling environment for student-athletes.

**When student-athletes feel genuinely seen and valued by their coach, they are far more likely to be receptive to feedback, trust the coach's decisions, and feel a sense of loyalty and belonging.**

## Pillar 2: Psychological Safety

The Pillar of **Psychological Safety** is the unspoken agreement that it's okay to make mistakes, ask questions, and express oneself authentically without fear of ridicule or judgement. In sports, this means a student-athlete can attempt a new, difficult move and fail without being shamed. The assessment data provides insight into student-athletes' perceptions of **Psychological Safety** within their team environment. Eighty-one percent of student-athletes agreed or strongly agreed with statements indicating they feel safe to make mistakes, ask questions, or voice concerns to their coach. This high level of agreement suggests that coaches are largely successful in creating an environment free from the fear of judgment. The mean score for these statements was 4.2, which is a positive indication that student-athletes feel comfortable being vulnerable, an essential element for both learning and personal growth.

A clear and significant relationship exists between a student-athlete's sense of **Psychological Safety** and their *self-reported confidence and willingness to take risks*. The correlation coefficient between **Psychological Safety** scores and athlete confidence was .60, which is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This finding shows that the more psychologically safe a student-athlete feels, the more confident they are in their abilities. Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between **Psychological Safety** and the willingness to take risks during practices and competitions, with a correlation coefficient of .705. This suggests that when coaches foster a psychologically safe environment, student-athletes are more likely to push their boundaries and experiment with new skills, leading to greater development. A coach fosters **Psychological Safety** by modeling it themselves—admitting when they make a mistake, treating all student-athletes with respect, and creating an environment where vulnerability is seen as a strength, not a weakness.







### Pillar 3: Structure

**Structure** provides the framework for consistency and support that student-athletes crave. It is about creating clear expectations, predictable routines, and well-defined boundaries. The assessment data indicates that student-athletes perceived a strong sense of **Structure** and organization within their programs. The average or mean score for ratings on clear expectations and well-organized practice routines was 4.2. A high percentage of student-athletes, specifically 82%, gave their coaches a rating of 4 or 5 in this area.

This finding suggests that coaches are effectively communicating expectations and providing a consistent environment, which allows student-athletes to focus on skill development and performance without the distraction of uncertainty which can lead to stress and anxiety. While it may seem rigid, **Structure** actually creates a sense of security and stability for student-athletes. It eliminates ambiguity and reduces the cognitive load of having to guess what's expected of them. When student-athletes know the rules and can rely on the coach's consistent application of them, they are free to focus their energy on skill development and performance. Furthermore, when coaches are highly rated in **Structure** and **Connection**, their student-athletes apply lessons learned on the team to relevant areas beyond the sport, such as in the classroom.

The accessibility and helpfulness of coach-provided support systems can positively influence student-athletes. Eighty-six percent of student-athletes agreed or strongly agreed that their coaches follow through on their commitments and hold them (student-athletes) accountable. This high rating indicates that coaches are not only prioritizing on-field performance but are also focusing on the holistic well-being of their student-athletes, creating a comprehensive and supportive environment.

**For example, we found that student-athletes who played for a Connected and Structured coach attended school 12 more days in a single school year when compared to non-athletes at their same school. That's more than 2 weeks of instruction time!**



## Pillar 4: Communication

**Communication** serves as the conduit for understanding, alignment, and connection.

**Communication** is about fostering a dynamic, two-way dialogue. Effective communication involves not only speaking with clarity and precision but also listening with empathy and an open mind. A coach must be able to articulate their vision for the team, provide clear and constructive feedback, and explain the "why" behind their decisions. On average, student-athletes rated the clarity of instruction and quality of feedback from their coaches as 4.3. Additionally, 87% of student-athletes gave a rating of 4 or 5, suggesting that a strong majority understand what's expected of them and find the feedback they receive helpful. Furthermore, student-athletes' ratings on their opportunities for input—the extent to which they feel their voices are heard—was also strong, with a mean score of 4.2. This indicates a healthy, bidirectional flow of **Communication** between coaches and student-athletes.



Data also highlights how student-athletes perceive receiving information and the role of team members. The average rating for this area was 4.4, with 90% of student-athletes reporting that their coach shares necessary information with team members. This suggests coaches are effectively articulating the team's vision and helping student-athletes grasp how their specific contributions fit into the larger strategy. A strong sense of clarity here is crucial for building a cohesive and focused team that is able to execute effectively.



## Pillar 5: Challenge

**Challenge** is the catalyst for genuine growth and resilience. It is a coach's responsibility to create opportunities for their student-athletes to overcome adversity and expand their capabilities. This involves setting ambitious but attainable goals, introducing new and difficult skills, and putting student-athletes in competitive situations that push their limits. The key to effective **Challenge** is to pair it with ample support: a coach should provide resources, guidance, and the encouragement necessary for a student-athlete to meet challenges head-on. Overall, student-athletes felt they were appropriately challenged by their coach, pushed to improve, and encouraged to overcome obstacles. The mean rating for statements about **Challenge** was 4.1, with 80% of student-athletes giving a score of 4 or 5. This rating suggests coaches were successfully balancing the need to push student-athletes outside their comfort zones with providing the necessary support. The findings show that a majority of student-athletes feel the challenges set by their coaches were conducive to their growth, rather than a source of undue stress. However, only 64% of student-athletes reported that their coach understood when they were feeling overwhelmed, demonstrating that coaches still need additional support to recognize the mental and physical health barriers of their student-athletes. Analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between a student-athlete's perceived level of **Challenge** and their resiliency. The correlation coefficient was .62, revealing that as student-athletes felt more appropriately challenged and supported through the process of overcoming obstacles, their ability to bounce back from setbacks and adapt to adversity also increases. This finding underscores the importance of a coach's role in building mental toughness by providing a challenging yet supportive environment. Without **Challenge**, a student-athlete's development stagnates, and they never learn their true potential. When balanced with the other pillars—particularly **Psychological Safety** and **Structure—Challenge** becomes a powerful tool for building not only better student-athletes but also stronger, more confident individuals.



## Pillar 6: Skill Development

While all the other pillars are essential for creating a supportive environment, **Skill Development** remains the core objective of any athletic program. It is the process of teaching, refining, and mastering the technical and tactical abilities required for success in a sport. This pillar is the most tangible and visible aspect of coaching. It involves everything from the design of practice drills to in-game strategy. A coach with a strong foundation in this pillar possesses a deep knowledge of their sport and the ability to break down complex skills into manageable, teachable components. They also have the expertise to provide timely, specific, and actionable feedback that helps student-athletes understand how to improve. The six pillars are deeply intertwined in this process. The assessment data indicated that student-athletes perceive significant improvement in their sport-specific skills, tactical understanding, and overall athletic competence under their coach's guidance. The mean rating for these statements was 4.3, with 86% of student-athletes scoring a 4 or 5. This high rating



suggests that coaches were effective in their teaching methods and were successfully facilitating athlete development. A strong positive correlation existed between student-athletes' perceived **Skill Development** and confidence in their abilities. The correlation coefficient between perceived improvement and confidence was .61, which was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This finding highlights that when student-athletes feel they are consistently growing, their enjoyment of the sport and their team experience increases.

A student-athlete's willingness to practice a difficult skill is dependent on the Psychological Safety they feel to fail.

**Thus, Skill Development is not a standalone pillar; it is the ultimate outcome that is optimized when a coach successfully implements all five of the other pillars.**

The pillars provide the fertile ground for student-athletes to absorb new information, take risks in practice, and ultimately improve their performance.

"I believe school activities are the number one motivator for academics, behavior, and attendance in our schools. While schools rightly invest heavily in training classroom staff, we often fail to provide the same investment in the coaches and advisors who run these programs—yet their impact on student growth, resilience, and lifelong success is profound."

**Billy Strickland**  
Executive Director at ASAA



# Recommendations

## For Coaches

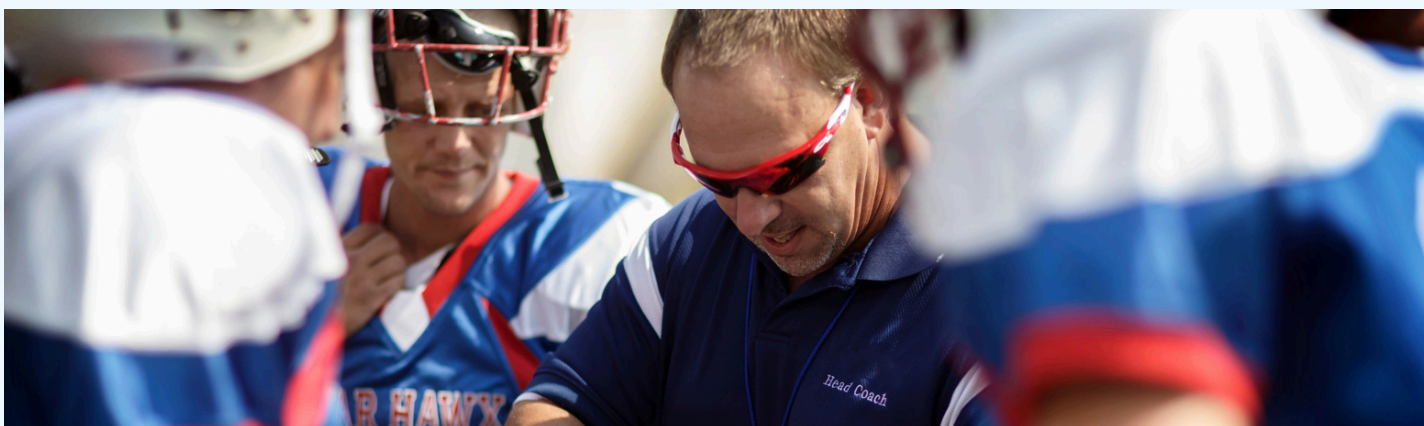
### Quick Takeaways

1. **Role model** integrity and consistency.
2. **Prioritize** personal **well-being**.
3. **Empower** your **athletes** as leaders.
4. Be an **active listener**.
5. **Implement** team **bonding** opportunities.

The findings of this report highlight the critical need for understanding how coaches evolve and sustain their coaching practices to meet the developmental needs of student-athletes. The recommendations below are data-informed strategies designed to be immediately actionable in order to foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Role modeling is important to student-athletes as they view their coaches as figures of authority and examples of how to conduct themselves. Coaches should be mindful of their behavior both on and off the field, and professional development on role modeling should focus on emotional regulation and stress management. Coaches should be trained to react professionally to setbacks, modeling resilience and sportsmanship. Professional development should equip coaches with the tools to address bullying, harassment, or other negative behaviors among their student-athletes. Coaches should also model healthy habits such as prioritizing their own well-being and building strong support systems.

Coaching leadership is not just about designing plays; it's about empowering student-athletes. Coaches should adopt a servant-leadership model, focusing on the growth and well-being of their student-athletes. Empowering student-athletes as leaders involves delegating responsibilities and allowing student-athletes to take ownership within their team. To nurture this style of leadership, coaches should participate in leadership training programs that emphasize situational leadership, helping them understand when to be a guide, a motivator, or a disciplinarian based on the specific needs of the moment. By empowering their student-athletes, coaches not only develop future leaders but also increase a sense of shared purpose and responsibility within a team.



**Connection** is paramount to building a resilient and cohesive team. Student-athletes want to feel a personal connection with their coach. Coaches should be encouraged to implement specific trust-building exercises. Coaches can dedicate time each week to a "get to know you" session, where they share a personal story or value, and encourage their student-athletes to do the same. Such practices humanize the coach and strengthen the bond between coach and student-athlete. A deeper connection can also be forged through one-on-one meetings with each student-athlete at the beginning of the season or at key points throughout the year, focusing on their personal and academic goals, not just their athletic performance.

To address the critical area of **Psychological Safety** and trust, coaches must demonstrate integrity and consistency. Athlete feedback consistently points to a lack of trust when actions don't align with words.



Coaches can build trust by establishing clear team rules and consistently enforcing them for all student-athletes, regardless of their skill level. Workshops on ethical decision-making and professional conduct can help coaches navigate difficult situations—such as managing conflicts of interest or dealing with sensitive student-athlete issues—in a way that maintains trust. A formal process for anonymous feedback can provide an outlet for student-athletes to voice concerns without fear of reprisal, further solidifying the coach's commitment to creating an environment of trust and honesty.

To improve **Communication**, coaches should move from one-way instruction to active listening. Coaches should learn practical active listening techniques that will help them hear and understand student-athlete concerns, feedback, and ideas. Additionally, a simple yet powerful practice is the implementation of a "check-in" at the start of each practice or team meeting.

"check-in" at the start of each practice or team meeting. This is where student-athletes get a brief, uninterrupted moment to share their mental and physical state. This not only builds rapport but also provides valuable insights into the team's overall well-being

Finally, while technical knowledge is a baseline requirement, the report highlights the need for coaches to expand their understanding beyond the X's and O's. This includes knowledge of sports psychology, nutrition, strength and conditioning, injury prevention, and adolescent development. Professional development programs should offer specialized modules on these topics, providing coaches with the tools to support the holistic well-being of their student-athletes.



## Recommendations

# For Athletic Directors and School Administrations

Athletic directors and school administrations play a pivotal role in shaping the culture of interscholastic athletics. To truly serve student-athletes, administrations must integrate the six pillars into every facet of the coaching professional development process. This will require a strategic shift in how resources are allocated and success is measured.

Athletic directors and school administrators should prioritize training and support that directly target areas of growth identified by student-athletes for their coaches. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, professional development budgets should be directed toward specialized workshops and programs. For example, if student-athletes' feedback indicates low satisfaction with coach-athlete **Communication**, allocating targeted resources towards communication workshops, conflict resolution training, and seminars on active listening could be beneficial. Data-informed resource allocation ensures that investments are impactful and address the most pressing needs identified by the student-athletes themselves. This also signals to coaches that the administration values their professional growth and is committed to fostering a positive athletic environment.



## Quick Takeaways

1. **Create opportunities for student-athlete feedback.**
2. **Implement professional development on adolescent psychology.**
3. **Create peer to peer learning opportunities across all sports and seasons**



**Also, mechanisms should be created to support ongoing student-athlete feedback that leads to continuous improvement.** A one-time, end-of-season assessment is often insufficient. Instead, administrations should implement a regular feedback loop. This can take the form of anonymous digital assessments administered mid-season and at the conclusion of the season, in-person feedback sessions with student-athlete advisory councils, or a designated third party or staff member to whom student-athletes can confidentially report concerns. The feedback should be aggregated and shared with the relevant coaches and athletic directors in a constructive, growth-centered manner. This ongoing dialogue creates a culture of accountability and continuous improvement, catalyzing growth and showing both coaches and student-athletes their voices are valued.

Additionally, administrators should integrate the six pillars into coaches' professional development. This would begin at the hiring stage, where interview questions go beyond coaching philosophy, technical knowledge, or appropriate accreditation to assess a candidate's understanding of and commitment to these pillars. For existing coaches, these pillars should be the foundation of all professional development. This could include annual workshops on topics such as positive coaching, adolescent psychology, or building team culture, led by administrators, outside professional development experts, or high-performing coaches already on staff. **By making these pillars a central part of coaching goals, administrators can reinforce their importance and incentivize coaches to focus on these areas of personal and professional growth.**

A final recommendation would call for the facilitation of peer-to-peer learning networks among coaches within a school or district. Coaches often operate in silos, but creating opportunities for them to share best practices, discuss challenges, and support one another can be incredibly valuable. **This could involve regular "coaching roundtables" where coaches from different sports discuss best practices in specific pillars, such as how to build trusting relationships with student-athletes (Connection).** Again, leaning on experts within the school or district can be a great way to build up leaders and help all coaches rise.





## Recommendations

# For Policymakers and Governing Bodies

Interscholastic coaching has an impact beyond individual schools and communities. Policymakers and governing bodies have a responsibility to create a framework that promotes the development of effective, student-athlete-centered coaching. The findings of this report call for a paradigm shift in how coaching is regulated and supported, moving from a model with an isolated focus on certification and rules to a model that embraces a holistic approach to student-athlete well-being.

A key recommendation is to advocate for state/national guidelines that emphasize and support coaching practices aligned with the six pillars identified in this report. **Policymakers can create opportunities for additional professional development hours for coaching certification(s) or renewal(s) focused on topics like sports psychology, motivational techniques, and building team culture.** This would help reinforce the idea that the coach's role is not just about winning, but about fostering the growth and well-being of the student-athlete. This holistic approach ensures a consistent standard of care and development across all schools and states.



## Quick Takeaways

1. **Utilize professional development** on sports psychology, motivational techniques, and team building.
2. **Gather research** directly from student-athletes.
3. **Create a shared space** for coaches and athletic leaders to access **best practices** and **resources**.





Furthermore, governing bodies should prioritize the promotion of research derived directly from student-athlete insights. Currently, much of the research on coaching is conducted from the perspective of coaches or administrators. **By funding and supporting studies that center the student-athlete's experience, policymakers can generate a rich body of knowledge that is directly applicable to improving coaching practices.** This research should be qualitative and quantitative, seeking to understand not just what student-athletes think, but why they feel the way they do. The findings from this research should then be compiled into easily accessible resources, such as online toolkits, webinars, professional development experiences, and conferences that are shared widely with coaches, athletic directors, and school administrations.

Another critical recommendation is to establish a centralized repository of best practices that is easily accessible to all stakeholders. This repository would contain case studies, successful program models, and training materials that are all rooted in student-athlete feedback. For example, if a specific school district has found success in using a student-athlete advisory council to improve Communication with coaches, their model could be shared with others, effectively creating a continuous cycle of improvement replicated across the country.

Finally, policymakers and governing bodies should support the creation of awards or recognition programs that celebrate coaches who excel in the six pillars of Connection, Psychological Safety, Communication, Structure, Skill Development, and Challenge. Rather than just recognizing coaches for their win-loss records, these awards would honor those who have built strong, trusting relationships with their student-athletes, fostered a positive team culture, and demonstrated a commitment to continuous professional development. This would not only provide a powerful incentive for coaches to focus on these areas but also send a clear message to the entire interscholastic sports community about all the dimensions of a great coach.

"NWCA **applauds the relentless efforts** of EverRise to demonstrate the unique benefits of the education-based athletic model for countless young high school and college athletes across the nation. This research is long overdue and we believe presents an extremely compelling case of why high school and university administrators should prioritize a financial commitment to this model."

**Mike Moyer**

*Executive Director at NWCA*



# Conclusion



Interscholastic athletics has long been celebrated as an integral component of American K-12 education, yet the true magnitude of the coach's role in student-athletes' lives is only beginning to be fully understood. Coaches are far more than strategists or disciplinarians; they are mentors, educators, and steady adult figures guiding young people through some of the most formative years of their lives. The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that high-quality coaching has a measurable impact not only on athletic performance, but also on academic achievement, mental health, and the development of critical life skills such as resilience, teamwork, accountability, and leadership.

**The findings reinforce that the interscholastic athletic experience is not merely extracurricular—it is a lived curriculum that shapes students into responsible, capable citizens.** A coach who embraces this responsibility contributes to the holistic growth of student-athletes, fostering habits and values that extend well beyond the field of play. In a society facing complex challenges for youth, the interscholastic coach emerges as one of the most powerful and influential leaders in education.

As the data reveals, equipping coaches with the training, resources, and support they need is not an optional investment, but a necessary one. By prioritizing **The Six Pillars of Effective Interscholastic Coaching**, schools and communities can ensure that coaches are prepared to meet the changing needs of student-athletes. EverRise's research confirms what generations of athletes have long known intuitively but have rarely been able to quantify through data: the lessons of sport, when guided by intentional and caring coaches, last a lifetime.

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