SPECIAL TOPIC

Why Forensic Coaches Quit: A Replication and Extension

Mary Gill*

One frequently hears that the life expectancy of a forensic coach is six years. Even though coaches and directors are the individuals making this statement, the idea of such a limited time involvement should cause concern. Juxtaposed to this statement is the frequent mention of the nature of forensic education today. Many believe that time, travel, and competition demands cause coaches to burn out quickly.

While some would like to believe that the nature of forensics has dramatically changed, much literature suggests that the concerns of today have been the same concerns of yesterday. In 1974 the National Development Conference on Forensics, known as the Sedalia Conference, authored a document stating the goals and objectives of forensic education; in 1984, the second conference was held. At each of these conferences, directors of forensics, administrators, and concerned individuals gathered to discuss the nature of forensic education and to plan how to guarantee its success for the future (Ziegelmueller, 1984). Among the concerns addressed were the nature of the activities, competitive standards, judging issues, and ethical concerns.

While these works are familiar to most forensic coaches, few may realize that the debate over what forensic activities should provide for students and demand of coaches and students dates much earlier than the 1970s. For example, Lillywhite (1950) argued that the competitive standards emerging with forensic practices focused away from the educational value of the events and on the individual "star" performer. Quimby (1963) similarly questioned the value of considering directing forensics to be a profession, since a profession presumed a broad intellectual education and specialized training. He argued, however, that forensic practices had evolved into an elitist society and should not be considered a profession. Rives and Klopf (1965) later postulated a decline in positive regard for forensic activities and sought to discover why debate coaches quit.

Despite the earlier debates, individuals involved with forensic education today continue to consider its merits. Frequent grumblings are heard over the demands of the job, the nature of competition and its

---

*The National Forensic Journal, VIII (Fall, 1990), pp. 179-188.
MARY GILL is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Speech Communication at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68588-0329.

Given that questions remain, the present study, representing a partial replication and extension of Rives and Klopf's (1965) study, attempts to determine the concerns associated with the life of a forensic coach. Specifically, this paper addresses the leading issues in the life of a forensic coach, attempts to discover the major reasons why forensic coaches are not satisfied with the profession, and speculates on the areas of concern for the future.

Issues Facing Forensic Coaches

Despite focus differences among debate and individual events, both areas face similar concerns. McBath (1984) established that forensics is an educational activity concerned with examining problems and communicating with people. Clearly, whether one is a debate or individual events coach, consideration of the activity's educational merit remains constant.

Forensic coaches are concerned with several similar key issues regardless of the area of the country in which they coach. Numerous articles have appeared in such journals as The National Forensic Journal and have discussed various issues concerning coaches. For example, articles have appeared discussing the educational value of the activities (Ballinger & Brand, 1987; Aden & Kay, 1988). Apparently, educational value is important in considering the merit of forensics.

Closely related to the educational value of forensic education is the concern over ethical standards employed within forensics (Friedley, 1983; Thomas & Hart, 1983; Madsen, 1984; Ulrich, 1984). Madsen, for example, argues that several ethical approaches may be used. Coaches may see that a Quintillion approach—"a good man [sic] speaking well"—is most appropriate. Others may view the confines of the events offered or the program as the end unto itself. Finally, one may view participation in forensics as a training program for valuable skills applicable beyond the immediate competitive setting.

Competitive standards have also received substantial attention (Keefe, 1985; Rasmuson, 1985). For example, Rasmuson concluded that positive attributes are observable regarding competitiveness, but that more research needs to consider whether the effects of the current competitiveness is primarily positive or negative. Thus, competitiveness is not inherently evil; the threshold of when it becomes harmful, however, has not been investigated.
While the literature establishes several key issues concerning the forensic community, other factors are also important in considering the satisfaction experienced by coaches. For example, many coaches are heard lamenting the long hours spent coaching with little time for anything else, the tiresome travel, the lack of support by colleagues on their campuses, the lack of training or preparation to be a coach, and meager compensation for their efforts. While some may argue that these concerns are less weighty than concerns over ethics or competitiveness, the issues of time and travel demands, support and compensation, and preparation for the profession may likely be the concerns that are more fundamentally considered when one considers his or her satisfaction with coaching. Walsh (1983) concluded that these issues warrant serious attention if forensic programs are to survive and grow.

Faced with similar situations occurring in the 1960s, Rives and Klopf (1965) attempted to discover reasons why debate coaches quit. In their survey of college speech department chairs, forensic directors, and National Forensic League chapter sponsors, key reasons were established. While several areas were represented, the responses may be grouped into the following categories: time, workload, travel demands, levels of compensation, preparation for coaching, non-recognition and support, competitiveness, and ethical concerns. In an attempt to replicate and extend Rives and Klopf's (1965) study, this study was undertaken to determine if similar reasons account for why coaches quit or are dissatisfied with forensic education at the college level. As a result, the following research question was posed: What factors account for coaching satisfaction among individual events and debate coaches at the college level?

Methodology

Design

The experiment consisted of a correlational analysis of eight predictor variables (time, training, travel, workload, compensation, support, competition, and ethics) with the dependent measure being satisfaction. Based on the results of a Pearson correlation, a stepwise regression analysis was performed to determine the strength of the predictors.

Subjects

The membership of the American Forensic Association (AFA) was subdivided into members who were actively involved with forensic programs at the high school level and at the college level. Since the aim of the study was to examine coaches' satisfaction with coaching, current graduate student coaches were omitted from the list. It was postulated that beginning graduate student coaches would not have the experience
with which to assess adequately the reasons why coaches were or were not satisfied or why they might quit. The remaining members involved at the college level were assigned a number. From this designation, a stratified random sample of 100 college members was selected. Seventy-three usable surveys were returned, representing a 73% response rate.

Materials

A survey which asked coaches to respond to 36 statements about current forensic practices affecting coaches was designed. Subjects were asked to respond to each statement using a Likert-type scale ranging from "1," representing strong disagreement, to "5," representing strong agreement.

Statements for the survey were devised based on Rives and Klopf's (1965) findings of why coaches quit. Only those areas of relevance to the college coach were included in the survey. Areas of concern which have been modified from the time of Rives and Klopf's (1965) study were also taken into account. Categories that emerged as the leading areas of concern for why coaches quit were concerns over time, training, travel, workload, compensation, support other than pay, competitive standards, and ethical standards. Measures of these categories were applied to satisfaction as the dependent variable.

Scale Assessments

A Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each of the nine scales. Four scale items made up each of the variables. With the exception of the statements regarding training and workload, the items were collapsed across the four statements to arrive at a reliability coefficient. The following reliabilities were obtained: time = .75, training = .29, travel = .53, workload = .58, and satisfaction = .55.

Further investigation into possible reasons for the rather low reliabilities was conducted. The analysis performed on the scales representing training and workload revealed that for each category the statements did not correlate significantly to one another such that larger reliability coefficients did not emerge. Subjects did not view all of the statements in a similar manner. The scale items that did not correlate were eliminated from further analysis. Five items were eliminated in this process, and the remaining 31 items were grouped according to the nine categories outlined by Rives and Klopf's (1965) study.

Results

Demographic Analysis

Respondents were asked to identify certain demographic information. For example, respondents were asked to identify their sex, number
of years coaching, primary areas of coaching, type of school employed at, and tenure status. Of the 73 surveys returned, the majority of respondents were tenured males who were working in a public four-year institution, had been coaching for more than fifteen years, and coached either all individuals events or debate. The results of the demographic analysis are reported in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Coaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 16 years</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas Coached</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive events</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared public address</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal coaching all events</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not actively coach</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior college</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private four year</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public four year</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenured Position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number tenured</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number in tenure line</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlational Analysis**

The scale items for time demands, travel demands, competition, and workload were coded to reflect the appropriate negative relationship to the statements about satisfaction. For example, one statement about satisfaction read, "Coaching is the most rewarding profession." A response of 5, indicating strong agreement, meant coaching was regarded positively. On the other hand, statements about time demands, travel demands, competition, and workload were worded in such a way as to indicate that if subjects responded with a 5, they perceived these items to be a negative element associated with coaching. As a result, negative perception statements were recorded.

A Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was calculated for each scale item and group. As can be seen in Table 2, four categories signifi-
cantly correlated with satisfaction. The time coaching demands, travel concerns, training concerns, and competition were significantly correlated with satisfaction. Time demands, travel demands, and competition were negatively correlated while training was positively correlated. As the time and travel demands, and competitive standards increase, satisfaction decreases. With training, however, as it increases, so does satisfaction. Support, ethics, compensation, and workload did not significantly correlate with satisfaction.

Table 2

Zero-Order correlations Among Variables
Independent Measures  Satisfaction
Time          -.36**
Travel         -.28**
Training       .34**
Competition    -.26 *
Support        .09
Ethics         .14
Compensation   -.10
Workload       -.04

Note. Statements for time, travel, competition and workload were coded to reflect the negative relationship of these statements to the wording of the satisfaction statements.
*p < .05
**p < .01

Regression Analysis

The data was submitted to a stepwise regression analysis to identify predictors of coaching satisfaction. The order of entry into the equation was based on the results of the correlational analysis. Time as a variable of coaching was a significant predictor of satisfaction, accounting for 11 percent of the variance (Beta = -.28, t = -1.98, p < .05, r² adj. = .11). The time required to coach forensic activities was perceived as the variable which predicted satisfaction with coaching. As the time is viewed to be excessive, satisfaction decreases. Travel (Beta = -.04, t = -.46, n.s.), training (Beta = .22, t = 1.74, n.s.), competition (Beta = .14, t = 1.06, n.s.), support (Beta = -.07, t = -.50, n.s.), ethics (Beta = -.03, t = -.26, n.s.), compensation (Beta = -.09, t = -.79, n.s.), and workload (Beta = .13, t = 1.07, n.s.) were not significant predictors of a coach's satisfaction. Low scale reliabilities may have accounted for travel, training, and competition not emerging as significant predictors of satisfaction despite their significant correlation with satisfaction.
Discussion

This study investigated what factors affect satisfaction among forensic coaches. Overall, the time spent predicts satisfaction with coaching. In general, these findings suggest that time is the most important reason why coaches quit forensic education.

This finding is particularly interesting given the information published in forensic journals. As discussed earlier, much has been written about competitiveness, the educational value, and ethics. These variables, however, do not appear to be as important as the time required in determining whether a coach will remain a coach. Thus, greater attention should be devoted to ascertaining the threshold of what is an acceptable time demand. While this will certainly vary among individuals, identifying of a generalized zone of reasonable time demands may aid in establishing guidelines for several of the other variables addressed in this study. For example, time may have been viewed as the most significant predictor since it supercedes a discussion of competitive standards or the educational value of forensics. After one has determined the time that should reasonably be expected from a coach, these other issues may become a matter for concern.

Although not significant predictors for satisfaction, travel, training, and competition were significantly correlated with satisfaction. These results indicate several important considerations. First, considerations of travel demands, training needs, and competitiveness, are operationalized differently for individuals. Thus, while this study has determined that travel, training, and competition are significantly correlated to satisfaction, the level at which each of these variables is viewed as positive or negative remains a mystery. Further investigation should examine at which level the travel demands, concerns over the amount of training received, and competitiveness creates a negative environment. Through this discovery we would have a better understanding of our success in reaching the educational objectives of forensic education.

Second, as discussed earlier, much of the literature has focused on concerns over ethics. While this is certainly an important issue, ethics emerged as a lesser concern than the time demands associated with coaching. Ethics, for example, debated frequently and at length first by the American Forensic Association and in later years by the Cross Examination Debate Association, does not seem to be a significant concern among coaches when considering satisfaction with coaching. Thus, while ethics may be an important issue to the forensic community, it has little impact on coaching satisfaction. Apparently, sufficient discussion over ethics has occurred, resulting in a lesser need to
focus on ethics and a greater need to address the more pragmatic elements of coaching. This standard is exemplified in the importance of time demands, travel concerns, training issues, and competitiveness. Whether for the individual responding or for what is observed around him or her, training was significantly correlated to coaching satisfaction. Thus, it appears that lack of adequate training will result in a shorter time spent coaching. As with a number of variables affecting the life of a coach, training may manifest itself in other variables. For example, lack of training may significantly impact on the time required to coach, since the coach may spend a substantial portion of time developing skills and knowledge of the events.

Competitiveness is perhaps the most interesting finding of this study. While the data does not support that competitive standards predict a coach's satisfaction, competitiveness is significantly correlated with a coach's satisfaction. When considering the plethora of information printed in the journals offering new and better ways to become more competitive (Geisler, 1985; Dreibelbis & Redman, 1987; Reynolds & Fay, 1987; Swarts, 1988), the finding that competitiveness is significantly correlated with, although not a predictor of, satisfaction would suggest that much of this discussion may not aid the struggling coach. Indeed, coaches find competitiveness to be a reason to question their involvement in forensic education, as Attaway (1977) and Quimby (1963) have suggested, then a continuation of journals devoting portions of their space to how to be more competitive or achieve a higher standard of competition seems self-defeating.

While workload, support, competition, and ethics were not significantly correlated with satisfaction, they warrant mentioning. Surprisingly, although time demands were significantly correlated with satisfaction, workload was not. The statements identifying workload specifically addressed the teaching demands in addition to coaching, paperwork involved, and exhaustion which may occur. Apparently, the work is not viewed as excessive or as decreasing satisfaction. Further investigation to explore the relationship between time demands and workload may help determine the appropriate threshold of time involvement in coaching.

Encouraging for every coach are the results examining support and satisfaction. Support addressed the cooperation and appreciation from colleagues both inside and outside of departments. Although important for morale, subjects did not perceive a general lack of support from departmental and campus colleagues.

Similar to support is the issue of compensation. One statement specifically addressed whether subjects believed they were sufficiently compensated for the work they do. This item did not significantly corre-
late with satisfaction. The remaining items addressed the issue of whether forensic coaches should be treated similarly to athletic coaches. Subjects' responses indicated that they do not believe forensic coaches should be compensated in the same manner as athletic coaches.

Ethics was the final variable which did not significantly correlate with satisfaction. The statements reflecting ethics were direct statements regarding ethical practices. Respondents did not indicate a statistically significant concern over ethical conditions. This finding is surprising given the time devoted to discussions on ethics. Given that the Cross Examination Debate Association has been most recently engaged in numerous discussions on ethics, a sample drawn from this population may yield different results.

Although none would argue that the nine categories are important to coaches, time demands was the only variable found to be a significant predictor of a coach's satisfaction. Further investigation into the level at which this variable and other variables impact on coaching should be conducted. It appears that the pragmatic concerns of coaching are more immediately important to coaches.

**Conclusion**

This study represents an attempt to determine why coaches quit in the 1980s by examining what contributes to their satisfaction. From its findings, those most involved in forensics should be more concerned with the pragmatic practices of day-to-day living as a coach and less concerned with variables such as ethics and competitiveness. Further investigation should focus on the level of acceptable time and travel demands. Additional investigation into the lifestyle of a forensic coach should also be sought, such as an investigation which focuses on ways by which this lifestyle can be made more sustaining than the anticipated six-year maximum.

**NOTES**

1Further analysis was performed on all scale items. With the exception of the five items deleted representing training and workload, no other items were deleted. Eliminating other items did not significantly alter the reliability coefficients emerging during the original analysis. In many cases, two of four scale items significantly correlated with each other. This result may indicate that today's coach makes finer distinctions among items regarding support, for example, than the coaches studied by Rives and Klopf. Further investigation and refinement of these items should be done to develop more reliable scales for future studies.
References


