

LEVERAGING SPORT AS A CONTEXT FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT The Benefits for Coaches

Samantha Bates and Dawn Anderson-Butcher

The Ohio State University, College of Social Work

Coach education and training on character development can improve young people's sport experiences. However, less well understood is the prevalence of coaches trained on character-building strategies and whether those that participate in and value training on these topics have higher self-efficacy and success as a coach (e.g., defined by their satisfaction, likelihood to continue coaching, and career win percentages). Our study gathered cross-sectional survey data from 3,669 coaches in the state of Ohio. We first examined descriptive statistics to assess coaches' prior training participation and current interests in two character-education training topics: (a) life-skill development through sport; and (b) morals and ethics. Next, we used MANOVA and follow-up post hoc analyses to examine associations among prior training participation and interests and coaches' self-efficacy and indicators of success as a coach. Coaches who reported they had participated in trainings on *life-skill development through sport* and *morals and ethics* reported significantly higher levels of self-efficacy, satisfaction, and career win percentages than coaches who did not report prior participation in these training topics. Furthermore, coaches expressing greater interest and a desire for more training in these character education-related topics reported higher satisfaction levels and a greater likelihood of continuing coaching than those with no interest. Our findings have several important implications regarding coach education and advance our understanding of how character development training that focuses on more than the Xs and Os can benefit coaches.

Keywords: character development, coach education, training, youth sport, life-skill development

Coaches are key social agents who profoundly influence youth sport experiences (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2021; Riley et al., 2017). Coaches play a critical role in promoting, fostering, and shaping positive, develop-

mentally appropriate sport experiences (Camiré, 2014; Gould et al., 2007; Jones, 2006). They also have opportunities to go beyond sport skill instruction and teach youth a broader set of positive youth development

• **Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to:** Samantha Bates, bates.485@osu.edu

(PYD) objectives (Baghurst & Benham, 2020; Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). PYD is a strength-based approach to child and adolescent development that assumes all youth have the potential for positive developmental change (Lerner et al., 2005). PYD through sport is a term many scholars use to frame how children and adolescents can accrue optimal developmental experiences through their involvement in organized activities (Holt & Neely, 2011). Given sports' broad reach, coaches trained to leverage sport as a context to teach character education, including life and social skills, have the potential to promote PYD and support youth in becoming healthy, successful, and productive young adults.

Several criteria frame what effective coaches do to support character development through sport. Specifically, effective coaches prioritize life and social skill development through sport by drawing upon past coaching experiences, engaging in formal coaching education (Gould et al., 2017), adopting holistic coaching philosophies (Camiré, 2014), and prioritizing continued learning (Pierce et al., 2018). They also support moral development through modeling, consistently enforcing ethical behavior, and creating prosocial norms to guide behavior (Boardley, 2008; Lyle, 2019). Scholars argue effective coach education programs help promote a balanced approach to coaching by focusing on sport performance outcomes and overall healthy development (Cushion et al., 2003), often resulting in long-term positive outcomes such as improved character beyond sport (Holt & Neely, 2011). However, access to effective coach education and training in the United States often varies based on sport, organizational affiliation, level of competition (e.g., travel or recreational), oversight mechanisms, geographical region, and school- or community-based setting.

Emerging research indicates coaches working in school and community settings often have no differing education and training requirements. Atkinson and colleagues (2022) recently explored education and training requirements for school-based coaches across

all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Researchers found that most states mandate trainings focused primarily on traditional sport practices, such as teaching tactics and techniques and addressing health and safety concerns (Atkinson et al., 2022). For example, The National Federation of High Schools' Fundamentals of Coaching (NFHS) training, required in 76% of states, focuses primarily on pedagogy-related topics such as developing a coaching philosophy, planning practices, and building tactical awareness (NFHS, 2022). In addition, two thirds of states (68%) required coaches to complete health-related training on injuries, heat-related illness, concussions, sudden cardiac arrest, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and automatic external defibrillators (Atkinson et al., 2022). Meanwhile, a mere 8% of states mandated character development or sportpersonship training, and only 39% required coaches to renew pedagogy-related trainings to maintain state-required coaching licenses.

Scholars also noted additional nuances related to coach education and training influencing youth sport. At the state level, Atkinson et al. (2022) also found only trainings designated for first-year school-based coaches focuses on curricular topics related to PYD and socioemotional health. Moreover, even when coaching in school-based settings, 65% of states allowed coaches employed in schools, hereafter referred to as coach-educators, to bypass basic coaching education and training requirements (Atkinson et al., 2022). Notably, training on mental health, socioemotional learning, and character education (i.e., "Character Counts!") is commonplace in many U.S. school districts (Character Counts, 2023). Yet one wonders whether these professional development activities provide coaches with transferable skills that extend beyond the classroom and into youth sport. Meanwhile, the landscape of coach education and training in community settings, whether within sport-specific organizations (e.g., U.S. Soccer) or recreational, developmental, or competitive leagues (e.g., Amateur Athletic Union, YMCA, etc.),

is less well understood. Studies comparing the array of coaching practices and training requirements for coaches in community settings would allow for a broader understanding of these complexities within youth sport. To date, we know little about whether trainings focused on character education are required for coaches in community settings.

Growing evidence also points to demographic shifts in the coaching profession. Scholars examining the demographic profiles of coaches found that up to 50% to 70% of youth sport coaches are those not employed by schools and that do not have backgrounds in child development or education (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2021; Bates & Anderson-Butcher, 2022). As such, a majority of coaches come to the profession as community members, hereafter referred to as community-based coaches, who identify as unpaid volunteers, community members, parents/caregivers, former athletes, and businesspeople (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2021). With the demographic profiles of coaches shifting, there is a need to reexamine coaches' training needs and interests. Based on available demographic indicators and training requirements, we can infer most coaches today receive very little preparation in content areas such as child development, pedagogy, PYD, and character education (Atkinson et al., 2022). In fact, findings from the first-ever National Coach Survey in the United States found that community-based coaches report having less training and confidence in their coaching practices than coach-educators (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022).

On a promising note, coaches want more supports to improve their practices. Vella et al. (2011) found coaches believe their roles should include the explicit development of a wide range of outcomes (including life skills and character building) and are interested in receiving additional training in PYD. These findings have been supported elsewhere. A recent survey found that 70% to 80% of coaches were interested in training focused on child development, life skills, and sport psychology principles (see Anderson-Butcher et

al., 2021). However, coaches often have limited access to resources and training, in general, and especially on topics related to character development, teaching and instruction, and mentorship through sport (Falcão et al., 2012). When they do, trainings are often brief one-shot sessions that build awareness and buy-in instead of ones designed to develop specific PYD coaching skills. One training session on character development does not necessarily help coaches develop advanced skills or stay attuned to best practices in the field (Atkinson et al., 2022). In turn, coaches may benefit from additional sport-specific character development-related trainings and resources that help them advance their knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Coach Training on Character Development

Coach education and training can promote positive developmental and sport outcomes for student-athletes. Studies show that when coaches integrate the instruction of sport and life skills into the youth sport environment, coaches can positively influence student-athlete efficacy, leadership behaviors, life-skill development, and motivation for continued sport participation (Bean & Forneris, 2017; Beni et al., 2017). Additionally, Smith and Smoll (2002) found a mastery approach to coach training increased athletes' PYD outcomes, including their self-esteem, self-worth, scholastic competence, and communication skills. Moreover, Martel (2015) reported that integrating sport science and child development best practices into USA Hockey's coach training resulted in a 10% increase in retention rates and improved physical literacy regarding sport skills, fitness levels, and tactical awareness for athletes. Findings demonstrate how coach training improves participant experiences and promotes PYD and character.

Although coach education positively influences youths' developmental and sport outcomes, less well understood is whether coach training focused on character education benefits coaches (Camiré, 2014). Scant is the litera-

ture that explores how accessing trainings influences coach satisfaction, stress, and overall success as a coach. Furthermore, we need to understand whether training in character development helps coaches feel equipped to respond to and meet the socioemotional needs of their student-athletes. This may be especially relevant to the challenges coaches face due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) suggest a 40% increase in anxiety, depression, and thoughts of self-harm among youth over the past decade. Increasing stressors among youth today highlight the need for coaches to be knowledgeable about strategies that cultivate positive youth sport environments to prevent adverse psychological outcomes (i.e., burnout, negative self-talk, etc.). Coaches need to know how to connect youth sport participants to supports and resources in their schools, districts, and communities (Vella, 2019).

Not surprisingly, coaches also experience high levels of stress in their roles, often equated with pressures regarding job security, high expectations, and perceptions of their own and their athletes' performance (Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021). A recent study found that 88% of coaches reported their coaching experience was "moderately" or "extremely stressful" (Bates & Anderson-Butcher, 2022). In response, scholars argue high stress levels, matched with few training supports, contribute to high levels of coach turnover. Prior research noted approximately 35% of coaches leave the profession annually (Raedeke, 2004). Recent national data corroborate this statistic as 65% of coaches reported they were extremely likely to continue coaching, and 35% of coaches reported some ambivalence about returning to their current role (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022). Many contend that if youth sport programs focused more on fun, social activity, maximum participation, and skill development, and less on winning, coaches would remain involved and achieve greater success and satisfaction (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005;

Smith & Smoll, 2002). Others build upon these ideas and propose that if coaches perceive the benefits of their roles to be high and the burdens low, they will remain engaged in coaching regardless of their overall success (O'Connor & Bennie, 2006). Certainly, the privatization of sport, increased pressure, and unrealistic expectations among parents also may add additional stressors for coaches.

Thus, regarding coach training and education, one wonders whether coaches who participate in training on character education in sport feel more satisfied and perceive themselves as more likely to remain involved in youth sport (i.e., higher retention). The hope is that coaches who participate and value character-building strategies will have more positive experiences, remain involved, and perform well in their roles, including winning more games. Our study sought to advance our understanding of the relationships between participation and valuation of training on character development through sport, self-efficacy regarding character development through sport, and success as a coach by examining the following research questions:

1. What percent of coaches are trained on character development through sport topics, and do training participation rates and interests vary based on coaching role (e.g., coach-educators vs. community-based coaches)?
2. Among coaches who have participated in training on character development and those who have never participated in training, is there a difference in coaches' perceptions of their ability (i.e., self-efficacy) to use character-building strategies in sport and their overall success as a coach (i.e., satisfaction, likelihood to continue coaching, and win percentage throughout their careers)?
3. Among coaches who have an interest in additional training on character development and coaches with no interest in additional training, is there a difference in coaches' perceptions of their ability (i.e.,

self-efficacy) to use character-building strategies in sport and their overall success as a coach (i.e., satisfaction, likelihood to continue coaching, and win percentage throughout their careers)?

METHOD

Recruitment and Sample

This study used cross-sectional online survey data from 3,669 coaches in the state of Ohio. The institutional review board of the lead author approved all study procedures. Data were collected as part of a statewide survey to assess coaches' backgrounds, training experiences, and perceptions. Researchers distributed the survey to the membership list of the Ohio High School Athletic Association and a comprehensive list of other state sport organizations (e.g., publicly available recreational, developmental, club, and travel sport organizations). Recipients of the email were encouraged to pass along the survey link to other coaches in their networks. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the survey.

Of the participants in the study, 87% identified as male and 13% as female. In total, 11% of participants were between the ages of 18 and 29, 22% were between the ages of 30 and 39, 32% were between the ages of 40 to 49, and 24% were between the ages of 50 to 59, and 10% were 60 or older. A majority of the participants identified as White (89%), followed by Black/African American (4%), Hispanic/Latino (2%), multiracial (1%), and 4% chose not to identify their race. Additionally, 17% of coaches reported having less than 5 years of experience, 19% had between 6 and 10 years of experience, 33% had between 11 to 20 years of experience, and 31% had 21 or more years of experience. Approximately one third (32%) of coaches reported they were employed by a school (i.e., coach-educators), and 68% reported they were community-based coaches not employed by a school. Furthermore, 65% reported *only* coaching in a school setting, 5%

reported *only* coaching in a competitive, developmental, or recreational setting, and 30% reported working in a school *and* another setting (i.e., competitive, developmental, recreational, other). Approximately 46% of coaches reported coaching high school-aged youth, whereas 54% reported coaching elementary and middle school-aged youth.

Measures

Survey Development. Our online survey assessed coaches' participation and interest in additional character education training. A broad list of potential training areas was generated in the development phase. Example items created to assess participation and interests in trainings included life-skill development, sport skills and techniques, and mental health. The list was purposefully broad, allowing coaches to decide whether they had participated in training focused on each topic area. The authors sent the survey to peer experts in the field to provide feedback on the language, length, and readability. After revising the survey items based on feedback, we piloted the survey with approximately 25 coaches. We also asked for their feedback regarding the survey's readability, content, length, and face validity. After another round of revisions, we distributed the online survey to coaches included in the Ohio High School Athletic Association's coach directory and a comprehensive list of sport organizations in Ohio.

Training Participation and Interests. Questions about coach training histories were broken down into two categories. First, coaches reported on whether they had or had not previously participated in trainings on two character education-related topics: (a) life-skill development through sport and (b) morals and ethics. Response options included "have participated" and "have not participated." Second, we asked coaches whether they had a future interest or no future interest in participating in these two training topics. Coaches were asked to respond by clicking "interested in additional training" and "not interested in additional training." Please note there was no specifica-

tion of who provided the training content, when they accessed the training, who organized the training, or who facilitated the sessions. We also did not gather information about the quality or effectiveness of the training. Coaches were asked to report generally whether they had or had not participated and whether they did or did not have interest in future training on each topic area.

Coaching Self-Efficacy. Five items from the life and leadership through sport subscale on the Coach Beyond Readiness Index (Bates et al., 2023) were used to assess self-efficacy for engaging in sport-based character-building strategies. The Coach Beyond Readiness Index is an 18-item, psychometrically sound tool designed to assess coaches' ability to support student-athletes on and off the field (Bates et al., 2023). Coaches were asked, "As a coach, I am confident in my ability to": (a) teach life skills through sport, (b) develop athletes into leaders, (d) foster character development, (d) promote good sportsmanship, and (e) instill an attitude of respect for others among athletes. Coaches responded to each question on a 5-point Likert ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The scale demonstrated good reliability among the sample ($\alpha = 0.85$). Items were averaged to create an overall mean score that served as the dependent variable for coaches' self-efficacy to support character development in our analyses.

Success as a coach. Three items assessed coaches' perceptions of their success, including their satisfaction, likelihood to continue coaching and win percentage throughout their career. Coaches were asked, "How satisfying is the coaching experience?" Coaches responded on a 5-point Likert ranging from 1 = *not satisfying at all* to 5 = *extremely satisfying*. Coaches also reported on their coaching intentions, responding on a scale from 1 = *extremely unlikely* to 5 = *extremely likely* to the question, "How likely are you to continue coaching?" Last, performance as a coach was measured by one item exploring their overall winning percentage throughout their career. Coaches used the survey's drag-and-drop function to indicate their

overall winning percentage throughout their entire coaching career on a scale from 0% to 100%.

Analytic Strategy

Preliminary statistical analyses were conducted using Version 28 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data were first cleaned and screened. In total, 4,005 respondents participated in the online survey and completed demographic indicators. Missingness ranged from 8% to 10% on key variables of interest. The results of Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) Test were significant ($p > 0.05$), disallowing data to be deemed missing completely at random (MCAR). However, additional univariate t tests examining subgroup differences did not demonstrate any systemic patterns of missingness in these data, suggesting data were MCAR (Ender, 2010). Because of our large sample size, a small percentage of missing data, and chosen analytic approach, we utilized listwise deletion to analyze our complex survey data (Bell et al., 2009). Next, the distributional characteristics of each variable were examined, including skewness and kurtosis values. An acceptable level of skewness and kurtosis defined by criteria set by Kline (2005), where values less than three and greater than -3 and values less than -10 and greater than 10 , respectively. We also examined scatterplots to explore whether the dataset included any outliers. No outliers were detected in our sample.

Next, frequencies and descriptive statistics were utilized to explore the means and standard deviations of each item on the measure. A t test was used to examine whether participation rates varied among coach-educators and community-based coaches. Then, MANOVA analyses were used to examine the mean differences between levels of the independent variables (i.e., participation and interest) on the dependent variables. MANOVAs protected the inflation of Type I error and allowed the researchers to examine

group differences and interactions for each dependent variable. When the MANOVA results indicated a significant difference among groups or interaction, follow-up *t* tests and one-way ANOVAs with Tukey post hoc tests were conducted to examine group differences. Statistical significance was set at the $p < 0.05$ level.

RESULTS

Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table 1, 58% of the coaches reported they had participated in a training on

life-skill development through sport. Further, 60% of coaches in our sample had participated previously in training on morals and ethics. Most of the coaches in this study reported an interest in additional training on life-skill development through sport (73%) and morals and ethics (67%). When comparing participation and interest levels among coach-educators and community-based coaches, trends varied only slightly, and differences were nonsignificant ($p > 0.05$). Overwhelmingly, descriptive statistics indicated that most coaches, irrespective of their role as coach-educators or community-based coaches, were interested in more character education training (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics

	Overall Sample (<i>N</i> = 3,669)		Coach- Educators (<i>n</i> = 1,153)		Community-Based Coaches (<i>n</i> = 2,516)		
<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Training Participation and Interests							
<i>Life-Skill Development Through Sport</i>							
Never participated	1,534	42%	481	42%	1,053	40%	
Have participated	2,185	58%	672	58%	1,463	60%	
Not interested in more	1,003	27%	323	28%	680	27%	
Interested in more	2,666	73%	830	72%	1,836	73%	
<i>Morals and Ethics</i>							
Never participated	1,484	40%	481	42%	1,003	40%	
Have participated	2,185	60%	672	58%	1,513	60%	
Not interested in more	1,221	33%	388	34%	833	33%	
Interested in more	2,448	67%	765	66%	1,683	67%	
<i>Dependent Variables</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Self-efficacy	4.59	0.43	4.57	0.45	4.60	0.42	1–5
Satisfaction	4.65	0.58	4.60	0.60	4.67	0.57	1–5
Likelihood to continue coaching	4.39	1.01	4.38	1.02	4.40	1.01	1–5
Win percentage	62.15%	17.30%	61.33%	17.5%	62.52%	17.17%	1%–100%

Note: No significant differences at the $p < 0.05$ level among participation rates and interests by coaching role. Coach-educators are defined as coaches employed by a school, whereas community-based coaches are those not employed by a school.

TABLE 2
Training Participation and Interests and Coach Self-efficacy and Success (*N* = 3,669)

<i>MANOVA Tests</i>	<i>Pillai's Trace</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p Value</i>
Life-Skill Development Through Sport			
Participation in training	0.03	30.96	< 0.01*
Interested in more training	0.01	9.59	< 0.01*
Participation in training*interested in more	0.003	2.48	0.04*
Morals and Ethics			
Participation in training	0.04	42.53	< 0.01*
Interested in more training	0.01	6.72	< 0.01*
Participation in training*interested in more	0.003	2.76	0.03*
<i>Posthoc Analyses</i>			
	<i>Never Participated Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Have Participated Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Not Interested in More Mean (SD)</i>
	<i>p Value</i>	<i>Interested in More Mean (SD)</i>	<i>p Value</i>
Life-Skill Development Through Sport			
Self-efficacy	4.49 (0.45)	4.66 (0.40)	4.58 (0.44)
Satisfaction	4.60 (0.59)	4.68 (0.57)	4.60 (0.60)
Likelihood to continue coaching	4.39 (1.01)	4.39 (1.02)	4.22 (1.15)
Win percentage	59.17 (19.05)	64.23 (15.58)	63.11 (17.43)
Morals and Ethics			
Self-efficacy	4.48 (0.45)	4.67 (0.40)	4.60 (0.43)
Satisfaction	4.59 (0.58)	4.68 (0.57)	4.61 (0.59)
Likelihood to continue coaching	4.40 (1.00)	4.39 (1.03)	4.26 (1.12)
Win percentage	59.12 (18.74)	64.20 (15.93)	62.97 (17.02)

Note: *Indicates *p* < 0.05.

Training on Life-Skill Development Through Sport

MANOVA. The results of the MANOVA showed a significant difference between coaches that had participated in a life-skill development through sport training and those who had not on coaches' self-efficacy and all three indicators of coaching success (e.g., satisfaction, likelihood to continue, and win percentage over career; Pillai's Trace = 0.03, $F(4, 3662) = 30.96$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta = 0.03$). Furthermore, significant differences existed between coaches interested in more training and those who were not interested in more (Pillai's Trace = 0.01, $F(4, 3662) = 9.58$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta = 0.01$).

Main Effects. Follow-up t tests revealed coaches trained in life-skill development reported higher levels of self-efficacy, satisfaction, and win percentages during their coaching careers than their peers who had never participated in this type of training ($p < 0.05$; see Table 2). There were no significant differences in training participation and coaches' likelihood to continue coaching ($p > 0.05$). In addition, coaches interested in more training on life-skill development reported higher levels of satisfaction and a greater likelihood to continue coaching compared to their peers not interested in more training ($p < 0.05$). No significant differences existed between coaches' interests and their self-efficacy or win percentages.

Interaction Effects. The interaction between training participation and interests was statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (Pillai's Trace = 0.00, $F(4, 3662) = 2.48$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta = 0.00$). Between-subjects analyses indicated these differences were based on the relationships among coaches' training participation, interests, and win percentages throughout their coaching careers ($p = 0.03$). Findings from follow-up one-way ANOVA analyses and Tukey posthoc tests indicated coaches who had participated and were interested in additional training on life-skill development ($M = 64.34$) and coaches who had participated and were not interested in additional training

($M = 64.14$) had significantly higher performance outcomes (i.e., win percentages throughout their career) as compared to coaches who had never participated and were not interested in more training ($M = 58.58$) and those who never participated and were interested in more training ($M = 61.17$). Of note, the effect size indicates the interaction among variables was practically meaningless. Figure 1 demonstrates differences in reported win percentages reported by coaches based on their training participation and interest.

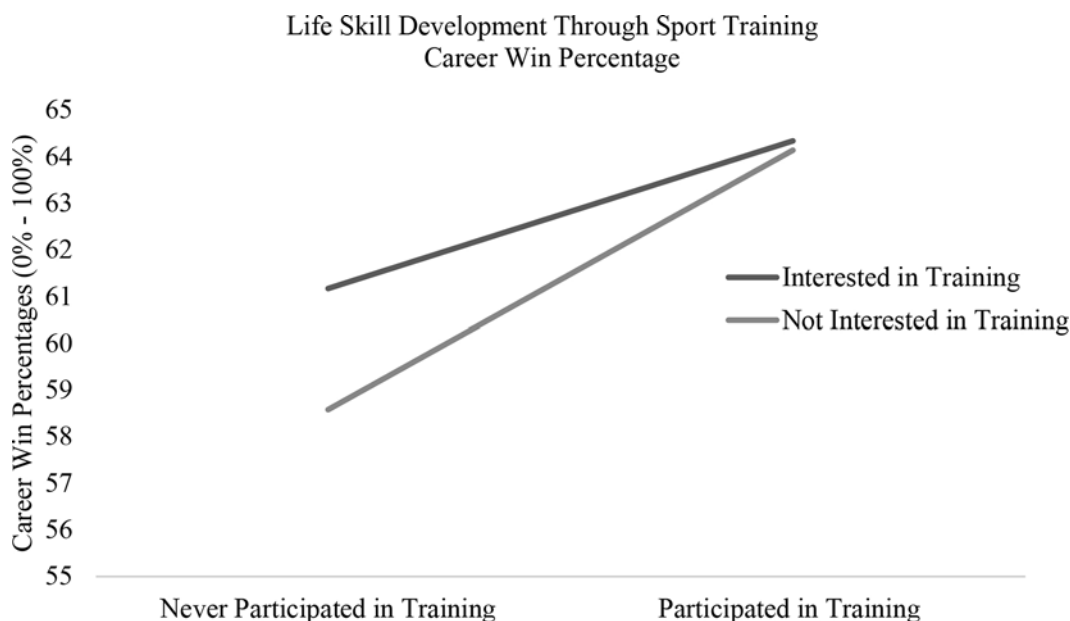
Training on Morals and Ethics

MANOVA. Our second MANOVA showed a significant difference between coaches who had and had not participated in a training on morals and ethics and coaches' self-efficacy and all three indicators of coaching success (Pillai's Trace = 0.04, $F(4, 3662) = 42.53$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta = 0.04$). Regarding interests, significant differences also existed among coaches interested in more training and those with no interest in additional training (Pillai's Trace = 0.01, $F(4, 3662) = 6.72$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta = 0.01$).

Main Effects. Follow-up t tests indicated coaches who had participated in training on morals and ethics reported higher levels of self-efficacy, satisfaction, and win percentages than their peers who reported no interest in additional training ($p < 0.05$; see Table 2). There were no significant differences in training participation and coaches' likelihood to continue coaching. We also found that coaches interested in more training on morals and ethics reported higher satisfaction levels and a greater likelihood of continuing coaching ($p < 0.05$). No significant differences existed between coaches' interests in morals and ethics training and their self-efficacy or win percentages over their careers.

Interaction Effects. The interaction among participation and interests for morals and ethics training was statistically significant (Pillai's Trace = 0.00, $F(4, 3662) = 2.76$, $p = 0.03$, $\eta = 0.00$), specifically the relationship

FIGURE 1
Participation and Interests: Life Skill Development through Sport Training



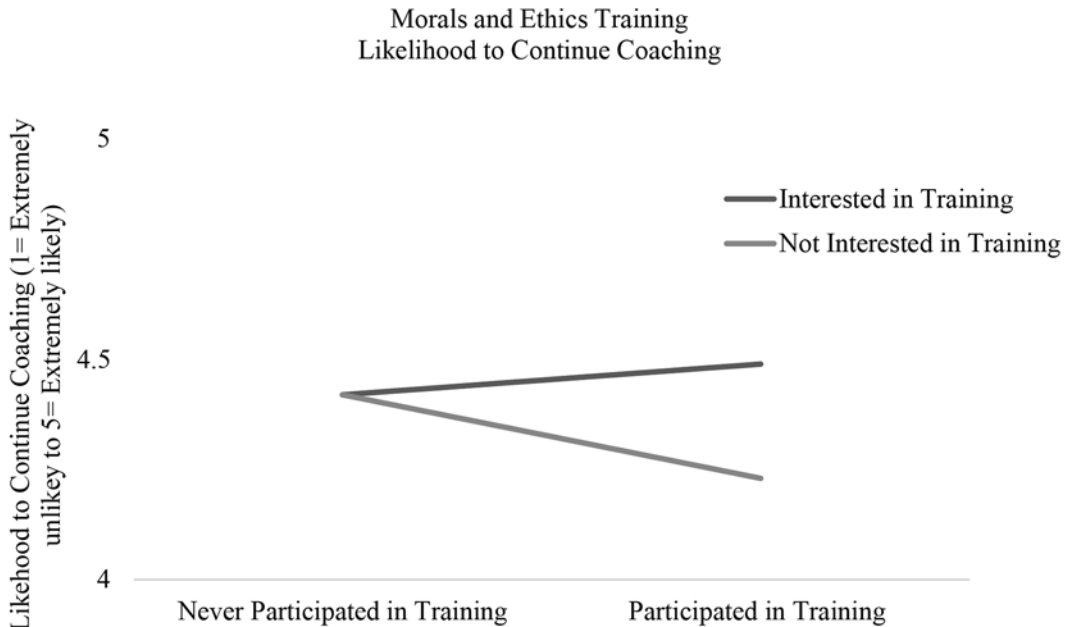
among coaches' training participation, interests, and likelihood to continue coaching ($p = 0.02$). Findings from the follow-up one-way ANOVA analyses and Tukey posthoc tests indicated coaches who had participated and were not interested in additional training ($M = 4.23$) reported significantly lower likelihoods of continuing to coach as compared to coaches that had never participated in training on this topic and were interested in more ($M = 4.42$) and coaches that had participated and were interested in more training ($M = 4.49$). Comparable to findings on training on life-skill development, the effect size indicates the interaction among variables was practically meaningless, whereas the main effects were more meaningful in when examining relationships among variables. Figure 2 overviews differences in coaches' likelihood

to continue coaching based on their training participation and interest.

DISCUSSION

There is growing evidence to suggest that coach training is important for improving the quality of the sport experience for youth sport participants, but less well understood is whether participation and valuation of training on character development benefits coaches. Our study sought to examine differences among coaches' levels of participation and interests in character education and their self-efficacy and success. Importantly, our study found 42% of coaches had never participated in life-skill development training, and only 40% had received training on morals and ethics. Of note, 67% to 72% of the coaches

FIGURE 2
Participation and Interests: Morals and Ethics Training



reported being interested in receiving more character education-related training on these topics. Study findings confirm that training in character education-related topics is often limited, yet the desire for more training among coaches is strong. Furthermore, both sets of indicators confirm the growing demand among coaches, whether coach-educators or those from the community, to receive training in these areas (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2021; Bates & Anderson-Butcher, 2022; Falcão, 2012; Ferris, 2015). Given youth's growing mental health needs today (CDC, 2022) and the time youth spend playing sports, equipping coaches with character development knowledge, skills, and competencies are increasingly important to the profession.

As expected, we also found coaches who reported receiving training in life-skill devel-

opment and morals and ethics were more confident in their ability to teach character-building skills. Findings are promising and demonstrate how education and training may benefit coaches and give them the tools to leverage sport as a context for PYD and other related outcomes. Beyond the potential ways coaches can support youth sport participants, coaches who participated in training on life-skill development and morals and ethics also had higher satisfaction levels and were more successful as coaches compared to their peers. Findings align with the notions of Smith and Smoll (2002) who argued that coaches who make sport fun and focus on development have greater success both interpersonally and professionally. Our results also reinforce arguments made by O'Connor and Bennie (2006). O'Connor and Bennie (2006) found that

coaches trained to use sport to teach life and social skills may perceive higher benefits and lower stakes in their roles and, in turn, feel more satisfied and enjoy greater success.

Coaches with a high interest or valuation of learning additional character development strategies also reported greater satisfaction and a greater likelihood of continuing coaching than their peers who did not want to engage in additional training. In that case, our findings suggest that coaches who orient themselves toward wanting to leverage sport as a context that contributes to youths' holistic development generally have a more positive coaching experience and want to continue in their coaching roles. The first step in rebalancing sport and retaining coaches might be a focus on promoting the value of character education in sport and helping coaches recognize that they will benefit when they have this orientation. In other words, if coaches see the importance of leveraging sport for broader character development and PYD, as opposed to a sole focus on winning, more coaches will have positive experiences and greater satisfaction in their roles. The shift toward improving the youth sport experience through greater valuation on character development will require support from sport leaders, school administrators, and parents/caregivers. Understanding how to bring these stakeholders together to engage more coaches in trainings and supports around character education through sport is a promising area of future research.

One of the most interesting findings from this study is related to the group of coaches who reported the highest winning percentages throughout their careers, a value often seen as a deterrent to holistic coaching practices. Those coaches who had participated in life-skill development through sport training (whether interested or not interested in more) reported higher winning percentages throughout their careers. Furthermore, coaches with a high interest in learning more about morals and ethics (i.e., whether previously trained or not) also reported they were more likely to continue coaching compared to their peers

with no interest who had been trained on this topic. Results suggest that coaches can still be successful in the traditional ways in which coach success is measured (i.e., satisfaction, wins and losses, and retention) even as they prioritize character education-related practices in sport. Stated another way, coaches may win games by teaching the Xs and Os *and* focusing on character development. Sharing these results with coaches can increase buy-in and aid in recalibrating the youth sport environment to focus more holistically on children's overall health, development, and well-being. Alternatively, highly satisfied, confident, and successful coaches may pursue more training and educational opportunities than their unsatisfied peers. For sport leaders and administrators, our findings point toward a need to focus on interpersonal, training, and organizational support to increase coaches' job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Other implications of our findings can inform coach education and training programs nationally. Coaches want and need training on character development, which is true for coach-educators and community-based coaches in our study. Policy changes related to coach education and licensure are needed to increase access to training on these topics. Character education must be required and accessed by coaches beyond their first year in the profession. State leaders have opportunities to reengineer their licensure processes to reduce redundancy in coach training and increase knowledge, skills, and competencies related to character education (Atkinson et al., 2022). The NFHS also can take our findings into account and embed more quality content on character education into their training to reach a significant number of coaches in the U.S. This notion seems imperative as most coaches are trained in sport tactics and techniques and health and safety practices but not on character development despite high interest and valuation of these topics. Finally, we argue a national youth sport governing body overseeing school-based sports can establish character development standards and expectations for

coaches across the United States. In doing so, coaches will be able to access quality training that emphasizes how character education benefits both coaches and student-athletes.

Limitations and Future Research

This research study has several limitations and opportunities to inform future research. First, the research team constructed several of the measurement tools used to gather these data specifically for this study. While the researchers could check for face and content validity and internal reliability, additional information about the validity of the tools remains unknown. Further, coaches self-reported whether they had participated in varying types of trainings in the past, many of which were broadly termed (such as morals and ethics). We only examined coaches' participation and interests in training and did not assess coaches' perceptions of the quality of this training. Participants may also have benefited from other types of professional development opportunities beyond trainings that were not measured (i.e., seminars, reading books). Future research should explore participation in specific character education curricula more intentionally, as well as distill whether trainings were effective and high quality.

Notably, our sample was largely biased toward coaches of school-based sports, White males, those with many years of experience, and those coaching in the state of Ohio. In the future, researchers can examine coaches from different backgrounds to understand more about how training benefits diverse coaches. Furthermore, using listwise deletion to handle missing data decreased our statistical power, increasing our likelihood of incorrectly finding a statistically significant result. Although our cross-sectional sample size was large, especially compared to other coaching studies, our responses may have been influenced by selection bias or other factors (e.g., access to technology to take the survey). Results should also be interpreted with caution and devoid of interpretations of causality. One might argue that

more confident, successful, and satisfied coaches may pursue more learning opportunities and are interested in becoming better compared to their peers. Comparably, coaches in our sample also could be those with greater self-efficacy that are already more satisfied, committed, and successful than most. As evidenced by small effect sizes in this study, many other factors that were not measured likely influence performance, satisfaction, and retention outcomes. Further, our interaction effect sizes were likely influenced by our large sample size. Future studies can utilize longitudinal designs to examine whether training in character education-related topics builds skills and improves coaching practices.

Conclusion

In closing, coaches trained to leverage sport as a context for character development have the potential to help youth be successful on the field and in life. Our finding advances our understanding of how training and valuation of character development through sport benefits coaches. Findings presented in the study suggest when coaches are trained in character education, they report higher levels of self-efficacy, satisfaction, and more success (e.g., win percentages) as a coach than those who are not. Our results can inform the future landscape of coach education to focus more on character development, given coaches in our study benefited when they focused on whole child development and not just the Xs and Os.

AUTHOR NOTE

Samantha Bates: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0915-5709>. I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

REFERENCES

- Atkinson, O., Bates, S., Anderson-Butcher, D., Mack, S., & Goodway, J. (2022). Mapping school-based coach education requirements in

- the United States. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 10(2), 276–288. <https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2022-0032>
- Anderson-Butcher, D., & Bates, S. (2021). Social work and youth sport. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 38(4), 359–365. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-021-00777-6>
- Anderson-Butcher, D., & Bates, S. (2022). *National coach survey final report*. The Ohio State University LiFEsports Initiative, Columbus, OH. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/national-coach-survey-report-preliminary-analysis.pdf>
- Anderson-Butcher, D., Wade-Mdivanian, R., Atkinson, O., Scheadler, T., & Davis, J. (2021). *Youth sport coaches in Central Ohio: Current trends, behaviors, and needs*. LiFEsports at The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.
- Baghurst, T., & Benham, R. H. (2020). Quality sport coaching in action: The application of the national standards for sport coaches in the inter-scholastic sport context. *Strategies*, 33(6), 21–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08924562.2020.1812340>
- Bates, S., & Anderson-Butcher, D. (2022). *State-wide survey of Ohio sport coaches: Summary report*. LiFEsports at The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. <https://acrobatis.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Aascds%3AUS%3A34c81665-6070-3669-8d71-258e8a42893b&viewer%21megaVerb=group-discover>
- Bates, S., Anderson-Butcher, D., & Amorose, A. J. (2023). *Coach Beyond Readiness Index*. LiFEsports at The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. <https://lifesports.osu.edu/cdn/5.30.2023-BRI-Technical-Report.pdf>
- Bean, C., & Forneris, T. (2017). Is life skill development a by-product of sport participation? Perceptions of youth sport coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 29(2), 234–250.
- Bell, B. A., Kromrey, J. D., & Ferron, J. M. (2009). Missing data and complex samples: The impact of listwise deletion vs. subpopulation analysis on statistical bias and hypothesis test results when data are MCAR and MAR. *Proceedings of the Joint Statistical Meetings, Survey Research Methods Section*, 26, 4759–4770.
- Beni, S., Fletcher, T., & Ní Chróinín, D. (2017). Meaningful experiences in physical education and youth sport: A review of the literature. *Quest*, 69(3), 291–312.
- Boardley, I. D. (2008). Moral behavior in sport: Reviewing the past and envisioning the future. In G. Tenenbaum & R.C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology* (4th ed., 391–409). Human Kinetics.
- Camiré, M. (2014). Youth development in North American high school sport: Review and recommendations. *Quest*, 66, 495–511. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2014.952448>
- Camiré, M., Forneris, T., Trudel, P., & Bernard, D. (2011). Strategies for helping coaches facilitate positive youth development through sport. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 2, 92–99.
- Character Counts. (2023, May 10). Character Counts! History. Drake University and the Robert D. and Billie Ray Center. <https://charactercounts.org/history/>
- Cushion, C. J., Armour, K. M., & Jones, R. L. (2003). Coach education and continuing professional development: Experience and learning to coach. *Quest*, 55(3), 215–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2003.10491800>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021). *Youth risk behavior survey: Data summary & trends report 2009–2019*. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBSDataSummaryTrendsReport2019-508.pdf>
- Falcão, W. R., Bloom, G. A., & Gilbert, W. D. (2012). Coaches' perceptions of a coach training program designed to promote youth developmental outcomes. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 24(4), 429–444.
- Ferris, K. A., Ettekal, A. V., Agans, J. P., & Burkhart, B. M. (2015). Character development through youth sport: High school coaches' perspectives about a character-based education program. *Journal of Youth Development*, 10(3), 127–140.
- Fraser-Thomas, J. L., Côté, J., & Deakin, J. (2005). Youth sport programs: An avenue to foster positive youth development. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 10(1), 19–40.
- Gilbert, W. D., & Trudel, P. (2004). Analysis of coaching science research public from 1970–2001. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 75(4), 388–399. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2004.10609172>
- Gould, D., Collins, K., Lauer, L., & Chung, Y. (2007). Coaching life skills through football: A study of award-winning high school coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 19(1), 16–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200601113786>

- Gould, D., Pierce, S., Cowburn, I., & Driska, A. (2017). How coaching philosophy drives coaching action: A case study of renowned wrestling coach J Robinson. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 4(1), 13–37. <https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2016-0052>
- Holt, N. L., & Neely, K. C. (2011). Positive youth development through sport: A review. *Revista de Iberoamericana de Psicología del Ejercicio y el Deporte (English version)*, 6, 299–316.
- Jones, R. L. (2006). *The sports coach as educator: Re-conceptualizing sports coaching*. Routledge.
- Lerner, R. M., Brown, J. D., & Kier, C. (2005). *Adolescence: Development, diversity, context, and application* (Canadian Ed). Pearson.
- Lyle, J. (2019). What is ethical coaching? *International Journal of Coaching Science*, 13(1), 3–15.
- Martel, K. (2015). USA Hockey's American development model: Changing the coaching and player development program. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 2(1), 39–49.
- National Federation of State High Schools Associations. (2021). *Courses*. <https://nfhslearn.com/courses>
- Norris, L. A., Didymus, F. F., & Kaiseler, M. (2017). Stressors, coping, and well-being among sports coaches: A systematic review. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 33, 93–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.08.005>
- O'Connor, D., & Bennie, A. (2006). The retention of youth sport coaches. *Change (Sydney, NSW)*, 9(1), 27–38. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/aeipt.165748>
- Pierce, S., Erickson, K., & Dinu, R. (2018). Teacher-coaches' perceptions of life skills transfer from high school sport to the classroom. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 451–473.
- Potts, A. J., Didymus, F. F., & Kaiseler, M. (2021). Psychological stress and psychological well-being among sports coaches: A meta-synthesis of the qualitative research evidence. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 16(1), 554–583. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2021.1907853>
- Raedeke, T. D. (2004). Coach commitment and burnout: A one-year follow-up. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 16(4), 333–349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200490517995>
- Riley, A., Anderson-Butcher, D., Logan, J., Newman, T. J., & Davis, J. (2017). Staff practices and social skill outcomes in a sport-based youth program. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 29(1), 59–74.
- Smith, R. E., & Smoll, F. L. (2002). *Way to go coach: A scientifically-proven approach to youth sport coaching effectiveness* (2nd ed.). Waroc.
- Trudel, P., Gilbert, W., & Werthner, P. (2010). Coach education effectiveness. In J. Lyle & C. Cushion (Eds.), *Sports coaching: Professionalization and practice* (pp. 135–152). Elsevier.
- Vella, S., Oades, L., & Crowe, T. (2011). The role of the coach in facilitating positive youth development: Moving from theory to practice. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 23(1), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2010.511423>
- Vella, S. A. (2019). Mental health and organized youth sport. *Kinesiology Review*, 8(3), 229–236.