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Athletic coaching, specifically high school football coaching, is a stressful profession (Frey, 2009). Coaches can improve their own and their athlete's performances by recognizing and coping effectively with specific stressors. These stressors include Organizational stressors such as administrative duties, teaching responsibilities, staff organization, and team logistics, and Performance-based stressors associated with outcomes within a practice or a competition. This study focuses on the specific stressors high school football coaches face and the strategies they use to cope with these stressors.

High school football coaches in North Carolina completed a survey (n=84) that included the PSS, Brief COPE, survey questions on stressors and coping strategies, and open-ended questions. Following the survey, coaches (n=5) completed a semi-structured interview on basic stressors and coping strategies. Coaches determined that coaching is a moderately to very stressful job. They identified the top stressors they face, between the survey, open-ended questions and interviews, to be their own performance as a coach, time demands, and stakeholders of the program. The main coping strategies that were identified were planning, hobbies, and socializing. These findings enable coaches to prepare for the most common stressors and help to provide stress coping strategies for coaches for when they encounter stressors in their profession.

STRESS AND COPING FOR HIGH SCHOOL HEAD FOOTBALL COACHES

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my wife, son, family, professors, and friends who have helped me along this journey of earning a doctoral degree. This has been a dream of mine for a long time and I have been able to share this journey with my wife, as we both pursued our degrees together. It has been a long and hard road with many ups and downs, but together we motivated, listened to each other, helped, and supported each other. And during this pursuit, we were able to have a wonderful, handsome son. Thank you to everyone for the needed help along this journey!

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I: PROJECT OVERVIEW

Athletic coaching is a stressful profession that involves managing multiple stressors (Frey, 2007; Levy et al, 2009). High school coaches experience stress in everyday life due to trying to meet expectations from administration, athletes, boosters, fans, media, and parents while balancing a full-time teaching job and family responsibilities. These stressors are unique to high school coaches compared to college and professional coaches. These stressors can have negative effects on a coach's health and their performance. College head coaches have seen a drop in their work standard due to stress that is accumulated (Olusoga et al., 2010). Coaches can use effective coping strategies to deal with the stress to promote better health and an overall better athletic performance for themselves and their athletes.

There is little research pertaining to high school coaches, particularly varsity football coaches, on the stressors they encounter and the coping strategies they utilize to handle these stressors. Given the documented stress coaches encounter within the profession, there is a need to identify specific stressors and effective coping strategies for head high school football coaches, which are not the same as elite and collegiate level coaches. Learning more about stressors and coping strategies of high school varsity football coaches can help to develop resources and recommendations to help them deal with stress effectively. More effective practices by head football coaches can lengthen their coaching careers and produce better performances by themselves and their players. These outcomes will contribute to improvements in the athletic coaching profession and specifically high school head football coaches.

Background Literature

Stress refers to an ongoing relationship between a person and the environment (Lazarus, 1990). This interaction should be viewed as an all-encompassing process incorporating stressors,

strains, appraisals, and coping responses that influence each other. The transactional stress model was developed to explain the interaction between stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the transactional stress model begins with a primary appraisal of an encounter. The primary appraisal is an evaluation of whether what is happening is irrelevant, positive, or stressful. If the event is determined to be stressful, an additional appraisal occurs to determine if the event is a threat, a challenge, or harmful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The secondary appraisal involves evaluating resources to cope with the stress. This transactional model determines whether the person has the ability to cope with the stressful situation.

Stress and Coping

Coping has to do with the way people manage stressful situations (Lazarus, 2000). Stress and coping are reciprocals of each other. When coping is ineffective, stress levels tend to be high; and when coping is effective, stress levels are seen to be lower (Lazarus, 2006). Coping strategies can be categorized under three higher-order coping dimensions, emotion-focused, problem-focused coping, and avoidance (Nicholls et al., 2007; Potts et al., 2019). Emotion-focused coping strategies manage negative emotions by using such techniques as relaxation, meditation, and seeking support from others. Problem-focused coping involves efforts that address the problem or stressor, such as managing risks/crisis and developing action plans (Gill et al., 2017; Weston et al., 2009). Avoidance is a third type of coping that means not dealing with the stressful situation, which can be accomplished by removing yourself from the situation or using drugs and alcohol (Nicholls et al., 2007). Multiple coping strategies can be implemented to help alleviate stress following the appraisal process.

Sports Coaching Stressors

Sport coaches encounter multiple stressors, which can be categorized as organizational-based and performance-based stressors. Thelwell et al. (2008), identified 182 different stressors coaches experienced that were an equal amount of both performance and organizational-based. In general, organizational stressors can involve leadership, facilities, personnel, assistant coaches, travel plans, administrative roles, and team issues (Frey, 2007; Levy et al., 2009; Thelwell et al., 2008). Performance-based stressors include athlete performance, failure to meet practice goals, scrutiny from parents and media, and maintaining elite standards during training and competition (Thelwell et al, 2008). Clearly, coaching is a very demanding profession.

Olusoga et al. (2010) determined that stress can affect a coach's own thoughts, behaviors, and emotions and cause them to lose or question their motivation to continue in the job. As stress increased in elite-level coaches, they reported that the quality of their work decreased, they lacked the ability to fully motivate their players, and the quality of communication between them and their players suffered (Olusoga et al., 2010). Players and coaches recognized that coaches' negative reactions to stress can affect the athlete's performance and can negatively affect a coaches' performance by impeding their focus and decision-making abilities (Frey, 2007 & Olusoga et al., 2010). Stressors can result in coaches leaving the profession due to increased time demands, decreased leisure time, and too much stress (Dixon & Warner, 2010). This prolonged exposure to stress can cause burnout in coaches (Maslach et al., 1996). Stress can decrease people's moods and overall physical health (DeLongis et al., 1988). Studies have also shown an increase in depression, decreased immune function, feeling physically sick, fatigue, and a decrease in overall health due to long-term stress exposure (Irwin et al., 1990; Olusoga et al., 2010).

Levy et al. (2009) researched the most reported organizational stressors an elite level coach faced over a 28-day period. The stressors with the highest frequency were administration (meetings), overload (tiredness, covering for other coaches), competition environment (rescheduling and practices), athletes (reacting to players concerns and accommodating new players), and team atmosphere (player discipline and players reaction to poor performance). These organization stressors were experienced multiple times during this study. Similar results were found by Taylor (1992). Taylor categorized stressors as personal (self-doubt and physical health), social (lack of support, team conflict, and pressure from fans, media, parents), and organizational (long hours, travel, overload, administrative difficulties).

According to Kelley and Baghurst (2009), many collegiate coaches believe stress to be a significant problem within the profession. Each level of coaching has different primary areas of perceived stress. Elite level coaches (i.e. Division I, semi-professional, and professional/elite) perceive more performance-based stress compared to high school coaches who feel more organizational stress (Fletcher & Scott, 2009). Collegiate level coaches have suggested the primary stressors are self-pressure to win, time constraints, role strain, recruiting, budget, media coverage, long work hours, heavy travel, and facility hassles (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Dixon & Warner, 2010; Frey, 2007; Kelley & Baghurst, 2009). Coaches experience over 50% of their performance stressors via their athlete's performances (Thelwell et al, 2008b). These specific areas have been identified as areas coaches cannot control but cause the most stress (Surujlal & Nguyen, 2010).

One of the most researched stressors in coaching has been the amount of time coaches dedicate to the coaching profession and travel. Dixon and Bruening (2007) found that collegiate level coaches spend on average 8-10 hours a day in the office before spending 1-3 hours on work

at home. Coaches explained that they would be traveling for in-season games during the week and recruiting on the weekends during the season and in the off-season during the recruiting periods. This created stress due to balancing coaching and family demands.

Coaches have been shown to have increases stress during the season (Kelley & Banghurst, 2009; Levy et al., 2009). Coaches' stress levels increase over a season and they expressed feeling emotionally drained and depleted towards the end of a season (Kelley, 1994). By using positive coping strategies, coaches can better handle stress, which may increase retention in coaching.

High School Teacher-Coaches

High school coaches deal with perceived stress from coaching and must also deal with specific stressors associated with the role of being a teacher and a coach. High school coaches do not receive large salaries and may take on multiple roles such as athletic director roles, organizing fundraisers, running camps, supervising athletes in the weight room, being an amateur sports psychologist, mentoring student-athletes, and teaching life skills (Westfall et al., 2018). Many high school coaches must coach multiple sports. High-school coaches have non-traditional work hours to meet practice and game requirements on school nights and on weekends (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Coaches who are teachers, also encounter stress due to academic demands from the administration (Drake & Herbert, 2002). The multiple roles of teaching and coaching, places extra demands on coaches and their families (Kelley, 1994). Specifically, physical education teachers felt added stress from inadequate facilities, unfeasible curriculum implementation due to lack of equipment/facilities, and a low sense of status (von Haaren-Mack et al., 2020).

Stressors specific to high school coaches have been identified as an intra-role conflict between being a teacher and coach, multiple head coaching roles, long work days, parental expectations, time demands to balance teaching, coaching, and families, coaching multiple sports, administration expectations on athletes, building relationships with athletes and coaches, and multiple teaching expectations from administrators (Didymus, 2017; Drake & Hebert, 2002; Frey, 2007; Potts et al., 2019; Thelwell et al., 2008). Unlike collegiate coaches, high school coaches do not have a flexible schedule (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Collegiate coaches can set practice times during a normal workday to spend time with family members at night. High school coaches must work non-traditional hours that lead to long nights and early mornings.

Job security was another stressor reported by coaches (Potts et al., 2019). According to a four-decade study by Scantling and Lackey (2005), the 21st century saw a turnover rate of approximately 56% of high school coaches of all sports in Nebraska; the primary sports affected being football, men's basketball, and women's basketball. This was the highest rate in the last four decades in that state. The leading reasons for turnover were poor coach-player relationships, lack of coaching skills, improper conduct, and failure to win. These stressors were felt by 70% of all coaches surveyed. Coaches feel stress from within the organization and from themselves to succeed, and this caused emotional and mental fatigue. This fatigue has led coaches to question their desire to coach (Olusoga et al., 2010). Stress has led many former coaches to stop coaching on the high school and collegiate levels.

Coping Strategies

Coping helps to shape emotions by influencing the person-environment relationship and how it is appraised (Lazarus, 1993). There has been a vast array of research on coping strategies, but most are encapsulated under two broad categories- problem-focused coping and emotion-

focused coping. According to Lazarus (2006), problem-focused coping actions are directed at changing the person-environment relationship and emotion-focused coping is aimed at regulating the emotions tied to the perceived stressful situation. Problem-focused strategies include time management, assertiveness training, and delegation of responsibilities. Emotion-focused coping strategies include visualization, maintaining a balanced lifestyle, escape to outside activities, and drawing on social support (Fletcher & Scott, 2009; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These strategies have been used by coaches from the elite to the high school level.

Coaches who are better able to cope with stress tend to focus on the process of coaching more than the outcomes (Fletcher & Scott, 2009). This suggests coaches should concentrate on the factors they can control such as organization, schedule, and healthy diets rather than the performances of athletes. Using coping strategies improved favorable outcomes with golfers who reported feeling happiness, hope, and relied, which helped lead to a favorable outcome (Nicholls et al., 2008). Coaches can use the same coping strategies that athletes use. According to Gould and Maynard (2009), coaches who are focused, organized, and stay calm under pressure have more positive coaching performances.

Coaches cope with stress by using multiple strategies (Didymus, 2017). Coaches have used specific coping strategies such as leading a healthy lifestyle, reserving energy for competitions; using psychological skills such as visualization, self-talk, and goal setting; organization, preparation, escaping/avoidance, exercising, listening to music, and support structures composed of mentors, friends, and families and reflection (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Didymus, F., 2017; Drake & Hebert, 2002; Olusoga et al., 2012; Potts et al., 2019; Thelwell et al., 2010; Zimmerman, 2018). Other forms of coping strategies include psychological skills such as imagery, relaxation techniques, and goal setting, (Olusoga et al., 2010; Thelwell et al., 2008a).

One strategy that has been used and researched is the use of support, which can come from family, friends, other coaches, and administration (Frey, 2007). Olusoga et al. (2010) found that 9 out of 12 Olympic coaches interviewed had a group of people they could keep honest and open communication to help them deal with stressors. These support people allowed coaches to talk about issues related to their sport or not related to their sport.

Organization within a coaching staff with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and clear performance plans, have led to a decrease in perceived stress (Olusoga et al., 2012). A cohesive, mutually supportive staff can create support for head coaches (Taylor, 1992). According to Zimmerman (2018), Division I head football coaches relied on assistant coaches to help them to make decisions pertaining to the team. By using assistant coaches' input, head coaches can create a support system to help manage perceived stress and alleviate organizational stressors.

Another strategy used by coaches to cope with stress is structuring and planning ahead. Olympic coaches, in interviews, cited planning ahead and organization as the most used strategy (Olusoga et al., 2010). In Bruening and Dixon's study (2007), coaches explained that they structure their day and plan in advance what they would do in practice. Most of the coaches also mentioned they needed to structure their time better to manage their professional and family lives. Head coaches have many tasks and organizing, prioritizing, and delegating specific tasks to assistant coaches can help to reduce stress (Zimmerman, 2018).

Psychological skills have been used to help prepare coaches and alleviate stress. In a study of 12 Olympic coaches, 10 had used some form of psychological skills, mainly self-talk, rationalization (not taking something too seriously), and relaxation techniques, such as visualization (Olusoga et al., 2010).

Avoidance is another coping strategy often seen with coaches (Drake & Hebert, 2002; Levy et al., 2009). Avoidance coping responses have increased as a season continues (Levy et al., 2009). Some examples of effective avoidance are going to church and going on a vacation (Bruening & Dixon, 2007). Coaches also cited participating in off-task activities such as golf or going for a walk and exercise as ways to distract themselves from the stress of coaching (Olusoga et al., 2007). Exercise has been one of the most utilized strategies for decreasing stress. In Bruening and Dixon's (2007) study on Division I female coaches, physical exercise was the most popular choice for daily reduction of stress.

Not all coping is successful or effective. Ineffective coping can lead to inappropriate behavior, decreased job performance, and interpersonal difficulties (Kelley & Gill, 1993). Potts et al., (2009) found that coaches consumed alcoholic beverages as a way to escape from the athletic environment.

Coaches respond individually to different events (Fletcher & Scott, 2009). Two coaches experiencing almost identical stressors may respond in different ways. Coaches will also react to similar situations differently at different times (Didymus, 2017). There is very little, if any information, on why different coaches respond to similar stressors in different ways or why coaches appraise similar situations as being benign one time and stressful another. Coaches will use different strategies to handle similarly appraised stressful situations. Each situation is different, each coach is an individual and the coach-environment interaction is always changing.

Purpose and Specific Aims

The purpose of this study is to identify stressors and coping strategies of high school varsity head football coaches in North Carolina. The findings may help develop resources for coaches.

Specific aims are as follows:

1. Identify the main stressors of varsity high school football head coaches in North Carolina.
2. Identify coping strategies high school football head coaches in North Carolina use to deal with the stress of coaching.
3. Explore coaches' views of effective/ineffective coping strategies.

Methods

This sequential mixed-methods study included surveys and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for survey and interview guide) to identify stressors and coping strategies in head varsity football coaches in North Carolina.

Participants

All participants were current head high school football coaches in the state of North Carolina. After acquiring IRB approval, approval was gained from the North Carolina Football Coaches Association (NCFCA) and the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA), which provided a list of all 376 head football coaches in North Carolina.

Participants were recruited via email and social media for the survey, which was administered online using Qualtrics survey software. Although 140 participants started the survey, only 84 coaches completed the initial survey. Five of those coaches also participated in semi-structured interviews.

All 84 participants who completed the survey were male; 61 of them identified as White/Caucasian and 20 as Black/African American, and most (65) were between 36-55 years old. Most had coached football for at least 6+ years, and 75 of them had been a head coach at their current school for at least 3+ years (see Appendix B for full demographics).

Data Sources/Measures

Prior to data collection five coaches piloted the survey and interview guides, which were revised slightly through further review, leading to the current survey and interview template.

Initial Survey. The initial survey, which was emailed to the head coaches in March 2022, included four sections - demographic questions (age, race/ethnicity, coaching experience, and other responsibilities within the school), the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Brief COPE, and questions specifically developed for this project to identify high school coaches' typical stressors and coping strategies (see Appendix A for complete survey).

The *Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS) is the most widely used measure of perceived stress levels (Cohen et al., 1983). The PSS contains 10 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0=never to 4=very often). Scores between 0-13 are considered low stress, 14-26 moderate stress, and 27-40 considered high stress.

The *Brief COPE* is an abbreviated version of the COPE inventory. It consists of 14 scales, with two items for each scale. These scales are self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance use, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, behavioral disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning, humor, acceptance, religion, and self-blame (Carver, 1997). The 28 questions are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1= I haven't been doing this at all to 4=I've been doing this a lot).

The last section included exploratory questions on coaches' stressors and coping strategies. Participants were asked to rate several common stressors, such as player performance, coaching performance, or administration demands, on a 5-point Likert scale from Not stressful to Extremely stressful. They also rated how often they use typical coping strategies on a 5-point scale from Never to Always. This section included open-ended questions to list any other

stressors and coping strategies they believe are effective. The answers to the open-ended questions in the survey were coded with the interview questions.

Interview. At the end of the initial survey, coaches were invited to participate in an interview. Participants wishing to participate were directed to a Google form to collect their contact information, then contacted via email to schedule the interviews on Zoom. Virtual interviews were conducted with 5 participants, over a 4-week periods from March to April 2022 using a semi-structured interview guide. These interviews, which lasted between 30-45 minutes, asked about the main stressors they encounter and coping strategies they use (see interview guide in Appendix A). Participants were encouraged to elaborate on their answers to go along with the natural flow of the conversation and to explore their answers more in depth.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequencies) were calculated for the closed-ended survey questions. Survey data were uploaded and analyzed in SPSS. Open-ended questions were exported to a Google document and uploaded to Atlas.ti 22 for coding. Interviews were recorded and transcribed on Zoom. The transcribed files were sent to participants for verification and member checking. All members responded indicating their acceptance of the transcript or did not respond. Upon verification, the interviews were uploaded to Atlas.ti 22.

In-vivo coding was used to determine raw data themes to characterize coaches' responses and formulate higher-order and lower-order themes. Interviews and open-ended responses were read several times and reviewed repeatedly. Next, the responses were highlighted to identify words and short phrases from the participants' own words to be used as codes (Saldana, 2021). The final step included axial coding to determine themes from the responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In the axial coding, codes were read in a process of making connections

between different codes.

During the in vivo coding, sixty-two codes were formed for stressors. Upon critically reflecting on all the data sources, these codes were categorized into twelve code groups for stressors and then three main themes for stressors. The twenty-two codes for stress coping strategies were organized into seven code groups upon further evaluation. These code groups were then themed into three main themes for coping strategies. (see Appendix C for all codes).

Member checking and clarification of researcher bias were completed as evidence of trustworthiness. Interview participants were emailed a copy of the interview transcription and encouraged to review their comments for accuracy. It was important for the researcher to understand the influence of his own experiences as a head football coach that could influence the interpretation of the participants' statements. It was necessary for the researcher to step out of his present roles, and to approach the transcripts with the attitude of a researcher and not as a head football coach.

Positionality Statement

The researcher is a current member of the coaching group in this case study. I have coached on the collegiate level for eight years prior to becoming a high school coach. I have coached at the high school level for seven years. I have been a head high school football coach for five years. I played football in high school at a parochial school and at the Division I level in college. Along with being the head football coach, I currently am the head indoor track and outdoor track coach. These experiences have caused me to experience stressors and determine coping mechanisms that I currently utilize to help alleviate the negative effects of stress.

My current position has given me insights into specific stressors faced by head football coaches. I am familiar with the context of this study due to my experiences. My current position

has allowed me to better communicate with current head coaches about stressors and coping strategies they have used and about this research study. My personal connections with coaches in this project and my previous experience with stressors they have faced facilitated access and communications, but may also introduce some biases, such as my expectation of certain stressors I have encountered as a head football coach. I believe the demands of balancing work, family, and coaching create a very stressful environment. I have often encountered increased stress when dealing with administration. I have also found ways that have helped me deal with stress and this creates biases. For example, prior to this research I have talked with other coaches and asked their beliefs on stressors and coping strategies, and this can bring biases.

I must be conscious of and counter my biases in this study. I understand that this study is not about my experiences as a coach but rather I must guide and facilitate the study. Statements from the coaches will help to inform others on the common stressors and coping strategies of high school coaches in North Carolina. I will use relevant literature to help guide the results in the study.

Results and Discussion

This project investigated the common stressors and coping strategies for head high school football coaches from North Carolina using a survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey results are presented first, followed by the open-ended responses and interview results.

Survey Results

Coaches perceived coaching high school football to be stressful. Both the PSS and exploratory questions placed coaches in the middle range on stress. Most coaches viewed coaching as Moderately to Very Stressful. Their PSS scores ($M=16.2$, $SD=6.88$) reflect moderate stress levels. Coaches felt they dealt with stress Fairly to Good ($M=2.41$, $SD=0.95$). Table 1

shows the ratings of specific stressors that were ranked by coaches ($n=83$). Time demands/non-traditional schedule and their own performance as a coach were the highest rated stressors and were rated as Very to Extremely stressful by most coaches. This is similar to research that showed collegiate level coaches working 9-13 hours a day (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). The non-traditional schedule of coaches and the demands of balancing multiple roles place extra demands on coaches and their families (Kelley, 1994). These time demands have been present in the literature for high school, collegiate, and elite level coaches. Most other stressors were rated Very to Extremely Stressful. The lowest rated stressors, booster club, coach-teacher balance, and administration demands, were rated moderately to very stressful.

Table 1. Stressor Rating Results

Frequency	Not at All Stressful	Slightly Stressful	Moderately Stressful	Very Stressful	Extremely Stressful	M	SD
Parent Expectations	1	19	24	26	13	3.37	1.04
My Performance as a Coach	3	7	23	29	21	3.70	1.06
Ath. Performance	3	13	24	29	14	3.46	1.06
Admin Demands	14	28	22	10	9	2.66	1.21
Time Demands/Schedule	3	12	17	23	28	3.73	1.18
Monitor Stud-Ath	2	15	24	24	18	3.49	1.10
Mentor Stud-Ath	10	20	33	11	9	3.49	1.14
Other roles	6	21	21	18	17	3.23	1.24
Budget/Fundraising	6	12	19	26	20	3.51	1.21
Booster Club	19	27	24	6	7	2.46	1.17
Coach-Fam. Balance	7	10	19	21	26	3.59	1.28
Coach-Teach Balance	12	21	19	19	12	2.98	1.29
Monitoring Staff	7	20	22	18	16	3.19	1.24

The Brief COPE assesses the use of specific coping strategies in response to stress (Carver, 1997). The coaches ($n=85$) highest scores were for Active Coping, Religion, and

Planning (Table 2). These strategies all reflect positive coping strategies. The lower rated strategies such as Denial, Substance Use, and Behavioral Disengagement, all reflect negative coping strategies. While it is good that they are rated lower, it is still not good that coaches rely on some of these strategies. Most of these negative strategies used by coaches are used “a little bit.”

Table 2. Brief COPE Results

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-Distraction	4.68	1.58
Active Coping	6.08	1.71
Denial	3.02	1.48
Substance Use	2.81	1.38
Emotional Support	4.15	1.76
Instrumental Support	4.58	1.68
Behavioral Disengagement	2.66	1.23
Venting	4.13	1.44
Positive Reframing	5.41	1.55
Planning	5.69	1.71
Humor	3.99	1.61
Acceptance	5.28	1.62
Religion	5.82	1.97
Self-Blame	4.09	1.68

n=85, Scores for each are 2-8; (2 items each 1-4 ratings)

For the exploratory ratings of specific coping strategies, planning, socializing with friends/family, exercising, and talking to a friend/family member had the highest ratings (Table 3). Coaches rated these top strategies as being performed Sometimes to Often. The lower rated strategies, avoiding the situation and alcohol/drug use, are negative strategies and occurred Rarely to Sometimes. Coaches used psychological skills Sometimes from this survey. These would include visualization, breathing exercises, and mental imagery. As with the Brief COPE, positive coping strategies, socializing and talking with family/friends, are rated higher than the negative strategies, avoidance and alcohol/substance use, but these negative strategies are still

used by some coaches. Some new strategies, such as exercise and hobbies, appeared that were not in the Brief COPE but were rated high.

Table 3. Stress Coping Strategies Results

Frequencies	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	M	SD
Avoiding the Situation	24	35	19	4	1	2.07	0.91
Alcohol/Drug Use	51	15	13	3	1	1.65	0.96
Talking to a Mentor	9	13	32	24	5	3.04	1.06
Talk to Fam/Friends	5	11	26	28	13	3.40	1.09
Exercising	1	14	33	20	15	3.41	1.01
Planning/Time Mgmt	0	3	16	38	26	4.05	0.81
Psychological Skills	11	19	24	22	7	2.94	1.17
Hobbies/Activities	10	14	29	20	10	3.07	1.18
Socializing	3	14	26	28	12	3.39	1.05
Meditation/Mindfulness	15	26	19	15	8	2.70	1.23

Open-ended responses were coded and the frequencies can be found in table 4. From these codes, they were grouped into themes (i.e., assistant coaches, family time, religion, etc...). The most common themes for stressors were time, own performance as a coach, and others. The most common coping strategy themes were talking with others/socializing, planning, and physical activity.

Table 4. Open-Ended Survey Stressors and Coping Strategies Results

Stressors	Open-Ended Resp.	Stress-Coping Strat.	Open-Ended Resp.
Admin	17	Religion	21
Asst. Coaches	18	Drinking/Sub. Abuse	10
Recruiting	5	Exercise	19
Mentoring Stu-Ath.	34	Talking to Fam./Friends	35
Other Duties	20	Hobby	25
Pandemic/Covid	4	Talking to a Mentor	19
Parents	37	Planning	19
Athl. Participation	4	Psychological Skills	10
Expectations	16	Watching TV	9
Balancing Time	20	Avoidance	12

Stressors

The stressors that appeared at the highest frequency from the surveys and interviews were grouped into the themes of time demands, own performance/self-expectations, and stakeholders. There were many similarities from the open-ended responses and the survey responses. These themes were rated high in the survey questions, along with the frequency in the open-ended aspects of this study.

Time Demands, which is composed of non-traditional schedule (working nights and weekends), other duties, roles outside of coaching, and balancing time between work and family, were high in all aspects of this study. Coaches were asked to perform other job responsibilities such as cutting grass, painting the fields, balancing teaching and coaching, balancing coaching and family, doing laundry, meet with administration, and perform duties of athletic trainers/first responders and athletic directors. Time demands were rated as very to extremely stressful in the survey.

The time demands of coaching led to coaches being away from their families. Coaches have identified trying to balance coaching, family, and teaching as a common stressor. The time demands of high school coaches require coaches to meet practice and game requirements during school nights and on weekends (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Coaches identified these issues with the following statements.

“Time sacrificed with family and the feeling of letting loved ones down when things/events are missed.”

“Managing time of job and time with my family- wife is a volleyball coach and we have four kids.”

Coaches take on many duties that are outside of the actual coaching. These jobs include painting fields, mowing, laundry, driving buses, and other duties assigned by the administration.

Coaches described coaching multiple sports such as track and field, baseball, and wrestling. These extra duties were seen in the literature. Westfall et al. (2018) researched other duties coaches must perform, and many of these duties referred to athletic director roles, fundraising, and camps. The coaches in this study cited the duties of field maintenance and laundry duties. Following are some statements by coaches on their other duties assigned by the administration.

“The other stuff that takes away from actual coaching and preparation-laundry, mowing/painting, driving the bus, etc.”

“Doing the laundry after games. You know we’re generally at the school till probably 1:30am or 2:00am on a Friday night after the game.”

“It might be Saturday or Sunday and you go over there and you’re over there, for three to four hours mowing fields. And then weed eating or you are painting the practice field.”

Coaches believe the time demands do not decrease in the off-season. Coaches referred to the number of hours spent in the off-season as a demand. One coach said:

“The off season gets busier. To be honest, between weightlifting and tracking grades and attendance and trying to do workouts when you can fit them in with other kids who do other sports, it seems like it’s become more and more.”

The responses to open-ended questions and interviews show many similarities with the survey responses and indicate how stressful this can be for a coach.

Own Performance encompasses a coaches’ own performance during contests and their expectations to win. They apply self-pressure to succeed on the field and feel pressure from outside influences such as administration, community, and parents. The literature mainly described how elite level coaches felt more performance-related stress (Thelwell et al., 2008). The coaches in this study described how their own performance was a main theme stressor. This common stressor was identified in the survey as coaches rated their own performance as a coach

as being very to extremely stressful. Coaches responses further indicated the pressure coaches apply to themselves and feel from outside influences.

“I think a lot depends on the expectations that you set for yourself. I think you know our administration expects us to win, but I don’t think they expect you to win at all costs.”

“It’s like when you lose a football game, you really feel like you let a whole lot of people down, I mean it’s just that. And I don’t like that feeling. I don’t like letting my coaches down because they work so hard for me and you just don’t sleep well.”

One coached explained how the pressure to win has changed from when he took over a program to where his program is now. Winning does apply more stress to coaches.

“There was stress just trying to get this program to where I wanted it to be. We have played for 10 state championships, so the stress level is different now because now everybody expects us to win.”

Stakeholders is a theme that is composed of other people outside of the program who have an interest in the program, including parents, student-athletes, and administration. Parents were cited as a stressor in all three aspects of this study. Parents negatively affect coaches due to scrutiny of the program, recruitment of their children, and multiple aspects of the program. These codes are displayed in the following responses by coaches.

“Parents come in and their kid was an all-star and literally their kid was the all-star in middle school level. Then they get to high school and now, instead of you know they’re not the all star anymore. They are just average, but the parents still see the all-star and all are D1 players.”

“Dealing with parents that take littler interest in their kids” education, and place blame or cause disruption amongst the team because their kid is not the star.”

“Dealing with parents who think their kid is at a high collegiate level, when they aren’t.”

Mentoring student-athletes involves specific codes of eligibility, attendance at school, behavior issues in school, association with negative groups outside of school, and decision making in school. This code was explained by coaches from the interviews.

“The other thing I noticed is the attendance part. They have a 2.0 rule, but when you look at other counties, we play in conference, they don’t have the same 2.0 rule. So a kid gets 3 D’s and an F and is on the football field in another county, yet my kids get three decent grades and he’s marked ineligible.”

“It shouldn’t be my responsibility to leave work to go pick a kid up but also know if I don’t go to pick that kid up that’s another day missed, and now what if you get sick for a week. Or what if there’s a death in the family, you know when we start looking at eligibility unless it’s coded right in the system that kid might wind up ineligible.”

“Worried about whether your kids are going to get in trouble in school or you know whether they’re going to come to school high. What you got to watch for after school sometimes in the field house kids sliding off to the bathroom.”

“Keeping balance between what’s learned for life vs society thoughts on success.”

There were lowwe frequencies from the open-ended questions for athletic participation (4), recruiting (5), Pandemic/Covid (4), and assistant coaches (18). Several head coaches referred to hiring assistant coaches or monitoring them as a stressor. The pandemic/Covid are unique to the past couple of years.

Coping Strategies

Coaches demonstrated the use of coping strategies to overcome the effects of stress. Most coaches positively cope with stressors, as identified from the survey and open-ended questions. Active coping was rated high in the Brief COPE and coaches actively look for ways to make the situation better. The themes that were identified from the open-ended questions were talking with others/socializing, planning, and physical activity. These are all positive coping strategies demonstrated by coaches.

Socializing was identified as the most common coping strategy theme from the open-ended questions of this study. This theme encompasses the codes of socializing with friends and family, talking with friends and family, religion, and talking to a mentor. Socializing with family, friends, and other coaches was seen in the literature as a common coping strategy (Frey, 2007). These themes were similar to the survey questions and were used often to always.

Socializing, talking to friends/family members, and talking to mentors was identified through the entire study. Most coaches elaborated in the interviews on how they talked to their family members (i.e., wife, kids) on a regular basis.

“Spending time with my wife and children.”

“I sound on my wife a lot. I got to her a lot, you know, like she grew up in a coaching family. Her dad was a successful basketball coach, so um I rely on her a lot and my children, and my adult children. Several played for me and a couple coached with me so they understand my situation.”

Talking to a mentor is a form of active coping by searching for answers from others with insight into the situation. These codes were displayed in the open-ended survey responses.

“Talking things through with some of my more trusted coaches.”

“Talking to mentors/peers.”

Religion was a code that involved prayer, Bible reading, and attending services in the open-ended responses and interviews. Religion was not seen in the literature as a very common coping strategy for high school coaches. Coaches in this study expressed their religious beliefs and experiences in the open-ended responses. Here are two coaches who referenced religion in their coping strategies.

“I’m a religious man, so that helps me keep a whole lot of things in perspective. It’s amazing how many times I’ve been to church on Sunday and you feel like that message was just for you, if you’re going through a tough time or if you lost a tough game, or if you’re struggling.”

“Number one is faith, I mean, I know God’s got my back.”

Religion was a code that was rated higher compared to other coping strategies from the survey. This could be rated often due to the unique location in the United States.

Planning involved specific codes of organization, practice planning, routines, and yearly calendars. Coaches explained how they would plan out in-season practices and off-season weightlifting sessions/skill development periods. Elite level coaches cited planning and organization as the most used strategy (Olusoga et al., 2010). Most coaches cited their in-season practice plans and the detailed schedule. Coaches explained how they have a plan for their meetings and practices. Coaches will use specific practice schedules for each day of the week. This will keep the coaches on a routine for the year. One coach explained his weekly meeting and practice schedule.

“I think that’s important to have a routine and if you’re prepared you really don’t have to sit at home and worry about much. I mean, if you put in a great game plan, because you put the time in. Then you’re like okay well you know we’re going to lift on certain days. You know we’re going live on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. We are on the football field at 3:00pm and I tell my coaches at 5:15pm we’re done. We have our practice schedule, where everything’s in five minute (periods).”

Coaches tried to plan out schedules “avoid potential stressful situations.” One coach said:

“I plan out a yearly calendar around the beginning of the calendar year. The schedule runs to the end of the season. It details practice times through the entire year and what days we have off.”

Another coach explained how he made sure his assistant coaches knew exactly was expected of them. He detailed a schedule for what to do before and after a game, before and after a practice, and for meetings. He would have a meeting once a year with his staff to go over all expectations for practice, games, and in the off-season.

Another coach said he wanted to “get the parents and assistant coaches’ calendars as early as possible for when they are planning trips and vacations.” He wanted to allow them to plan family trips around the practice schedule.

Hobbies was a coping theme identified from the open-ended questions of this study. Coaches listed taking part in a hobby such as golf, fishing, yard work, or exercising as ways to take their minds off coaching. These codes were rated often to always in the survey too. Exercising was rated very high in the survey. Coaches described specific schedules of working out “4-5 times per week” and “exercising every morning.” Exercising as coping is described in the following statements:

“One would be to exercise, because I can get away and not have energy, a lot of times, if I got upset about something I will still exercise, or I’d go walk.”

“I like to lift weights. I’ll do it during my planning. I don’t have a class in there. Sometimes, I will lift with the kids.”

From this study, coaches use specific hobbies to distract them from coaching for periods of time but need to stay active. Many outdoor activities were cited to distract them from the stressors of coaching.

In the interviews, coaches discussed the effectiveness of specific coping strategies they used to overcome their stressors. The coaches explained how they have changed their coping strategies over their time as a head coach. One coach said:

“I learned that drinking alcohol solves no problem. I would just love to hit the bottle a little bit too much, and I found that now I’m still trying to wake up early in the morning. And I’m waking up with a hangover so that didn’t help my film study.”

While their strategies have adapted over time, coaches said their coping strategies all work in unison. There was no one strategy used for all specific stressors. They all work in together to mitigate the effects of stress. One coach said:

“They all kind of work cohesively. I’m not gonna say there’s one is better than the other.”

Conclusion

High school football coaching is a stressful profession. The coaches in this study claimed high school football coaching to be moderately to very stressful. High school coaching is different from the collegiate level and professional levels. It encounters a unique sub-set of stressors and coaches cope differently. The findings confirmed high stress levels and identified specific stressors and coping strategies for high school head football coaches in North Carolina.

The main stressors identified were time demands, own performance as a coach, and others. Specific coping strategies used by coaches were socializing/talking to someone, planning, and hobbies. It should be noted that the findings are limited to North Carolina football coaches who completed the survey in the off-season. Their responses might have been more accurate during the season, and they might have identified specific stressors or coping strategies they were facing and using during this time. A comparison of in-season and off-season stress levels and specific stressors might identify specific stressors at different times of the year.

Identifying common stressors and planning in advance for by head coaches can help to retain coaches in the profession longer. The findings from this study, particularly common coping strategies that have worked for current head coaches, can help other coaches find ways to deal with the stress of coaching.

CHAPTER II: DISSEMINATION

The research findings will be disseminated to coaches and administrators that participated and supported the study. The presentation will be emailed to all football coaches in North Carolina. It is my goal to share the main stressors and coping strategies coaches in North Carolina faced and cited in this study. The presentation will be short and concise to save time for the coaches, athletic directors, administrators, and anyone that finds the information pertinent. The full presentation can be found in Appendix D. The handout for the coaches can be found in Appendix E.

PowerPoint Presentation Script

Slide 1

Hello. My name is Kevin Wallace. I currently am a head football coach in North Carolina and a doctoral graduate of the Department of Kinesiology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. My research has been on determining specific stressors and coping strategies of head high school football coaches in North Carolina.

Slide 2

In this study, I collected data from head high school football coaches in the State of North Carolina. These coaches provided information pertaining to the main stressors they face as a head football coach and specific stress coping strategies they use to combat the effects of stress. As was reconfirmed in this study, coaching is a stressful profession. Coaches in this study said coaching was moderately to very stressful. Stressors for high school coaches are different from the collegiate and elite level coaches. This micro-population identified specific stressors associated with high school football coaches from this area. The coaches who participated in this

study also explained specific coping strategies they used to mitigate the effects of stress. Both were identified in this study in order to better help head football coaches in this state.

Slide 3

The survey was emailed to 376 head football coaches in North Carolina; 140 coaches started the survey, but only 84 completed the initial survey. The survey included demographic questions, PSS, which is a widely used measure of perceived stress levels, Brief COPE, which determines the use of specific coping strategies, and exploratory open-ended questions.

Following the initial survey, coaches were invited to participate in a virtual interview. Five coaches participated in these interviews. They were semi-structured that allowed participants to elaborate on their answers about specific stressors and coping strategies.

Slide 4

Common themes were identified from the survey, open-ended responses, and interviews. The most common stressors were time demands, a coach's own performance, and others.

Coaches said that balancing a family with coaching and teaching was stressful. One coach said, "Time sacrificed with family and the feeling of letting loved ones down." Many coaches talked about the other duties they must perform, such as painting fields, mowing the grass, driving buses, and doing laundry. One coach said he was "at the school until 1:30-2am on Friday nights after the game." He would be back in the next day to finish laundry and cut the grass. Coaches also identified the off-season as a busy time. "The off-season gets busier. Between weightlifting and tracking grades and trying to do workouts when you can fit them in with other kids who do other sports." The time demands were a common theme from all aspects of this study.

The coaches own performance was another common theme. Coaches want to win. They apply pressure on themselves to be successful on the field. They also have pressure to win from

administration, community, and alumni. One coach in the survey said when he lost “it was letting a lot of people down.” He did not want to let down his coaches because they worked so hard for him. This same coach said he would not sleep well when they lost.

The last main theme was stakeholders. This includes people outside of the program who have an interest in the program, mainly parents and student-athletes. Parents can negatively affect coaches due to scrutiny of the program, recruitment, and other aspects of the program. A coach said:

“Parents coming and their kid was an all-star in middle school. They get to high school and now they’re not the star anymore. They are just average, but the parents still see the all-start and all are D1 players.”

Monitoring and mentoring student-athletes has been shown to be a stressor. Coaches expressed the issues of monitoring eligibility how eligibility requirements are not the same in the entire state. Coaches also worry about the student-athletes in school and outside of school. The “negative influences” that affect them. One coach explained this by saying:

“Worried about whether your kids are going to get in trouble in school or come to school high. You have to watch the kids after school to make sure they are not sliding off into the bathroom.”

There are many other stressors coaches listed but these were the most prevalent.

Slide 5

There were three main themes for coping strategies. The strategies that were identified are all positive ways of dealing with stress. Socializing was the first theme identified from this study. Interacting with family, friends, and mentors are examples of this. By talking with these different groups, coaches are allowed to vent and seek out ways to deal with certain situations. Coaches also identified religion as a key code. Many coaches use prayer or attending services to cope with their stress. One coach said:

“I’m a religious man, so that helps me keep a whole lot of things in perspective. It’s amazing how many times I’ve been to church on Sunday and you feel like that message was just for you, if you’re going through a tough time or if you lost a tough game, or if you’re struggling.”

The use of religion could be unique to this part of the United States.

Planning in advance is a positive coping strategy. Coaches planned out yearly calendars, practice schedules, and meetings for coaches. Coaches want to have a routine with their schedules. One coach explained his weekly meeting and practice schedule below:

“I think that’s important to have a routine and if you’re prepared you really don’t have to sit at home and worry about much. I mean, if you put in a great game plan, because you put the time in. Then you’re like okay well you know we’re going to lift on certain days. You know we’re going live on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. We are on the football field at 3:00pm and I tell my coaches at 5:15pm we’re done. We have our practice schedule, where everything’s in five minute (periods).”

Coaches also use hobbies as ways to distract them from the stressors of coaching. Included in this theme were exercising, yardwork, and activities not associated with football. Many coaches referred to having a weekly exercise schedule. Coaches sometimes lifted with their teams during weightlifting class. Some specific examples of hobbies were golfing, fishing, reading, and yardwork. These are all positive coping strategies.

Slide 6

This information can help current and future head coaches. There are specific applications that reduce stress and enhance the ability to concentrate more on coaching than other responsibilities that take time away from coaching. Coaches must truly understand the main stressors they will face. By knowing these and planning for them, coaches can help to prepare themselves.

Coaches should have plans for how they are going to interact with parents. This should include how they will handle interactions about playing time (do you talk about it or not), play

calling (do you have parents who want to put their opinions in), recruiting (how are you going to get their kid recruited? What level can they play at? How are you going to handle when the parents do not agree with your evaluation?), and how coaches will develop players (what is your overall process for their child? Off-season, in-season, grades, mentoring, etc.). Coaches should plan for how to monitor student-athletes and mentor them into respectable young adults. Coaches should have a plan on who is going to check grades and eligibility. Some coaches have done it themselves or had assistant coaches be in charge checking of grades.

Plan out as much in advance. Plan out a yearly calendar once the school calendar is released for next year. Have a plan for different periods of the year (off-season, spring ball, summer workouts, and the season). Communicate these as early as possible with parents and players. Have plans for coaches, parent, and player meetings. Know what the goal is and clearly define it to everyone involved. Plan for roles/jobs of assistant coaches and clearly explain it to them. Have plans for practices. Plan them in advance and make sure there are different practices for that time of the year. Schedule in time away for players, coaches, and yourself.

Slide 7

Find ways to get away from the office and coaching. Some examples would be exercising or finding a hobby. Find ways to be active and physically release stress. Have a plan for these. Are you going to workout 3 days a week? 5 days? Every morning? During lifting sessions with players? Some examples of hobbies are golf, fishing, lawn work, exercising, or religion. Find balance between coaching, teaching, and family. Plan out nights you will leave right away and see your family. Invite the families around practices. Plan events to get families together in-season and off-season. Also, understand you cannot do everything. Use your assistant coaches. Put them in positions to succeed. Allow coaches who want to be head coaches to take on more

roles that will prepare them for the future. Find and hire quality assistant coaches to help take items off you. Your strategies should reflect your personality as a coach and plan out as many aspects of the program as you can in advance.

Slide 8

Administrators can help to alleviate stress by acknowledging the main stressors and providing changes for their head coaches. Administrators can mandate yearly calendars for each sport. This will help coaches to plan out in advance their practices. Athletic directors can help to be a buffer between the head coach and stakeholders. AD's can intervene with such people as parents and school administrators. Also, implementing a "24-hour rule" for when parents can talk to coaches after contests or putting limits on what parents can talk to coaches about can help remove some stress brought on by these issues.

Administrators can help to balance out work, coach, and family schedules. Athletic directors can help with field responsibilities or assign to assistant AD's or recruit a group of parents to help with mowing or painting the fields. School administrators can provide an extra planning period during the season to help the head coach finish all work at school and not at home. Helping to educate your own head coaches and prepare for possible stressors can help them stay in their position for longer periods of time and provide the best results on the field.

Slide 9

Thank you and I hope some of these suggestions will help you in the future. If you have any questions, please contact me at the email listed.

CHAPTER III: ACTION PLAN

My first task will be to share my presentation to all coaches in North Carolina. I hope to encourage them to implement specific coping strategies to decrease the effects of stress. I plan to send this presentation to local athletic directors and the administration at the North Carolina High School Athletic Association. This presentation will include a handout that explains the main stressors and coping strategies coaches have encountered and used. Providing this to administrators can help prepare head coaches. Athletic directors can help to alleviate some stress from the head football coach and prepare in advance for common stressors. Sharing this information will hopefully educate the administrators on the stressors head coaches in North Carolina are facing and demonstrate ways to help these coaches deal with these stressors.

Next, I will provide the handout to high school head football coaches in North Carolina. My goal is to provide ways to help reduce stress and provide resources for head coaches to use to deal with stress. This handout will list ways to deal with stress and common stressors they will face. The purpose is to educate head coaches, and potential head coaches, on possible ways to deal with common stressors.

There are two opportunities to present the findings to broader populations. The North Carolina High School Athletic Association hosts a coaches' clinic in July of 2023. I plan to submit to present at the coaches' clinic in Greensboro, NC. I will apply to be a clinician or general presenter to present my findings from this study. This clinic is for all high school coaches and can provide an avenue to disseminate the information from this study to coaches on the middle school and high school levels. Another possible opportunity is at regional clinics in the beginning of 2023 at the Glazier Clinics. Glazier Clinics occur nationally and are held each year in the Southeastern region of the United States. The Glazier Clinic is a professional

development platform for multiple sports, but they do in-person clinics for football coaches between the months of January and May. They allow for multiple 45 minutes sessions during the weekend. They also offer e-clinics virtually during the year. I plan to propose to be a presenter, either virtually or in-person, at one of the clinics in the region.

The ultimate goal of these action plans is to help educate coaches and potential head coaches on the common stressors and coping strategies used by coaches to help alleviate the negative stress coaches face and allow head coaches to maintain their positions for extended amounts of time.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY MEASURES

Perceived Stress Scale

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during a football season. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by circling *how often* you felt or thought a certain way.

0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often

1.	In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly	0	1	2	3	4
2.	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life	0	1	2	3	4
3.	In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”	0	1	2	3	4
4.	In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems	0	1	2	3	4
5.	In the last month, how often have you felt that you that things were going your way	0	1	2	3	4
6.	In the last month, how often have you felt that you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do	0	1	2	3	4
7.	In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life	0	1	2	3	4
8.	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things	0	1	2	3	4
9.	In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control	0	1	2	3	4
10.	In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them	0	1	2	3	4

Brief COPE

Answer the statement based on how much or how frequently you perform these activities in the past year. Do not answer on the basis of whether it seems to be working or not. Rate each item separately on the following scale:

1- I have not been doing this at all

2- I have been doing this a little bit

3- I have been doing this a medium amount

4- I have been doing this a lot

1	I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things	1 2 3 4
2	I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I am in.	1 2 3 4
3	I've been saying to myself " this isn't real."	1 2 3 4
4	I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better.	1 2 3 4
5	I've been getting emotional support from others.	1 2 3 4
6	I've been giving up trying to deal with it.	1 2 3 4
7	I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.	1 2 3 4
8	I've been refusing to believe that it has happened	1 2 3 4
9	I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.	1 2 3 4
10	I've been getting help and advice from other people.	1 2 3 4
11	I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it.	1 2 3 4
12	I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.	1 2 3 4
13	I've been criticizing myself.	1 2 3 4
14	I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do.	1 2 3 4
15	I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.	1 2 3 4
16	I've been giving up the attempt to cope.	1 2 3 4
17	I've been looking for something good in what is happening.	1 2 3 4
18	I've been making jokes about it.	1 2 3 4

19	I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to the movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.	1 2 3 4
20	I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.	1 2 3 4
21	I've been expressing my negative feelings.	1 2 3 4
22	I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.	1 2 3 4
23	I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.	1 2 3 4
24	I've been learning to live with it.	1 2 3 4
25	I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.	1 2 3 4
26	I've been blaming myself for things that happened	1 2 3 4
27	I've been praying or meditating.	1 2 3 4
28	I've been making fun of the situation.	1 2 3 4

Survey Questions

Demographic Questions

- What is your gender?
 1. Male
 2. Female
 3. Other/ self describe
- What is your age?
 1. 18-25
 2. 26-35
 3. 36-45
 4. 46-55
 5. 56-65
 6. 66+
- What is your Race/Ethnicity?
 1. White/Caucasian
 2. Black or African American
 3. Asian
 4. Hispanic
 5. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 6. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 7. Other/self describe
- How many years have you been a head football coach at your current school?
 1. 1-2 years
 2. 3-5 years
 3. 6-10 years
 4. 11+ years
- How many total years have you been a head football coach?
 1. 1-2 years
 2. 3-5 years
 3. 6-10 years
 4. 11+ years
- How many total years have you coached football at any level?
 1. 1-5 years
 2. 5-10 years
 3. 11-15 years
 4. 16-20 years
 5. 21+ years
- What levels have you coached football on? (Select all that apply)
 1. Youth league
 2. High School
 3. Collegiate
 4. Professional
- Have you been a head coach for any other sports? If you answered “yes”, please answer which sport(s).

1. No
 2. Yes
 - a. Text Box to expand
- Do you work full-time in the school?
 1. No
 2. Yes
 - What are other roles you perform in the school? (Select all that apply)
 1. Teaching PE/Health
 2. Teaching Science/Math
 3. Teaching English/History
 4. Teaching another content area (e.g. CTE, Foreign Language, Cultural Arts)
 5. Administrative Roles
 6. Athletic Director/Assistant Athletic Director
 7. Athletic Trainer
 8. Coaching other sports (e.g. track and field, basketball, wrestling, baseball)
 9. Other
 - a. Text box to list
 - During the season, how many hours a week do you commit to coaching football? This includes all duties such as practices, game planning, staff meetings, watching film, painting fields, etc...)
 1. 1-5
 2. 6-10
 3. 11-15
 4. 16+

Exploratory Questions (5-point Likert Scale)

Stressors:

- How stressful is high school football coaching?
 1. Not at all Stressful
 2. Slightly Stressful
 3. Moderately Stressful
 4. Very Stressful
 5. Extremely Stressful

- What is the most stressful thing about being a head football coach? List the top 3.

Rate each of the following on a scale of 1-5 (1-not at all stressful at all; 5-extremely stressful) to indicate how stressful each is for you as a head football coach. Answer the following questions using this scale below (1-5):

1=Not at all Stressful 2=Slightly Stressful 3=Moderately Stressful 4=Very Stressful 5=Extremely Stressful

1.	Parents/Parental Expectations	1	2	3	4	5
2.	My Performance as a Coach	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Athletes' Performances	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Administration Demands	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Time Demands/Non-Traditional Schedule (e.g. evenings, weekends)	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Monitoring Student-Athletes	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Mentoring Student-Athletes	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Other roles outside of Coaching Football (e.g. field maintenance, eligibility)	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Budget Concerns/Fundraising	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Booster Club	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Balancing Coaching-Family Demands	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Balancing Coaching-Teaching Demands	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Monitoring Staff	1	2	3	4	5

Open-Ended Question

- List any other stressors you encounter in coaching football.

Overall, how well do you deal with stress in coaching.	1-Not well at all 2-Fair 3-Good 4-Very Good 5-Extremely Well
--	--

Stress Coping Strategies:

Rate how often you use each of the following coping strategies to deal with stress on a scale of 1-5 (1-never to 5-always):

1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Always

1.	Avoiding the Situation	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Alcohol/Drug use	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Talking to a Mentor	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Talking to a Friend/Family Member	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Exercising	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Planning ahead/Time Management	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Using psychological skills such as imagery, self-talk, and goal setting	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Hobbies/Activities (e.g. fishing, golf, woodworking)	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Socializing with friends/family	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Meditation/Mindfulness	1	2	3	4	5

Open-Ended Question

- List any other coping strategies that you use.
- List the top 3 coping strategies that you use.

Thank you for completing this Survey on stressors and stress coping strategies for high school head football coaches. As a follow-up, I will be conducting brief interviews with a few coaches about their experiences with specific stressors and strategies. If you are interested in participating in these interviews, please go to the link below to enter your contact information. I will contact you to set up a time to conduct the interview.

Google Form:

<https://forms.gle/31bmp6gq2ywCtEsp7>

Semi-Structured Interview

Coaches will be asked if they want to participate in semi-structured interviews following the survey questions. These interviews will be recorded on Zoom. They will explore stressors and coping strategies. Each part of the interview will have main questions and allow for the natural flow of the interview to depict possible follow-up questions. The interview will begin by asking the coach to explain what they feel are the top 3 stressors of their job and what makes them so stressful. Possible follow-up questions will be asked to expand on these topics. Coaches will then be asked about specific coping strategies they utilize.

Interview Script

My Introduction

- Hello, my name is Kevin Wallace and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am a head football coach at a high school in Greensboro. I have coached college and high school football over my career.
- I want to first thank you for participating in the original survey and choosing to participate in these interviews.
- The purpose of this interview is to follow up the survey and gather more information into stressors you face as a head football coach and specific coping strategies you utilize. The findings from this research may be used to develop resources for coaches to help cope with common stressors.
- Read the consent documents and display them on the screen in Zoom for the participant. Ask if he/she has any questions.
- Just a few ground rules to help the process go smoothly.
 - Participation in the interview is voluntary
 - It is all right to abstain from answering any questions if you are not comfortable.

- All responses are valid--- there are no right or wrong answers
- Speak as openly as you feel comfortable
- Everything said in the interview is confidential.
- Please do not use any names during the interview to protect privacy.
- The session will be recorded and transcribed. Names will be removed to preserve confidentiality. You will be sent a transcript for review later.

Topic 1: Stressors of Coaching High School Football

Coaching is a stressful position. Head coaches take on many responsibilities that cause stress. Each coach interprets situations to be stressful differently.

Question 1: In your opinion, how stressful is being a head high school football coach?

Follow Up Question: What are your top 3 stressors you face as a head football coach in North Carolina?

Follow Up Question: Why are these stressors on the top of your list?

Follow Up Question: When you encounter these stressors, how do they make you feel? How do you react? What happens to you?

Question 2: Have your stressors changed over your career as a head coach?

Follow Up Question: How have stressors changed over a season or from year to year?

Topic 2: Coping Strategies of High School Head Football Coaches

Coping strategies allow for coaches to handle stressful situations and mitigate the negative effects that can be caused by stress. These strategies vary from each coach. They can be used to cover multiple stressors or just one particular stressor.

Question 1: How do you deal with stress?

Follow Up Question: What are your top 3 stress coping strategies?

Follow Up Question: What coping strategies do you currently use to deal with stress?

Follow Up Question: When do you use these strategies? How do you use these strategies?

Question 2: How well do these strategies work?

Follow Up Question: Do some strategies work better for certain stressors or situations?

Follow Up Question: Explain why you felt these strategies worked or did not work.

Question 3: Is there anything else you would like to say about stress and coping strategies?

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Age of Survey Participants

Age	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66+
Coaches	12	36	29	4	3

Race/Ethnicity of Survey Participants

Race	White/ Caucasian	Black/African American	Hispanic	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Hispanic/ African American
Coaches	61	20	1	1	1

Years Coaching Football of Survey Participants

Years	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+
Coaches	1	5	14	21	43

Years as a Head Football Coach of Survey Participants

Years	1-2	3-5	6-10	11+
Coaches	8	21	21	34

Years as Head Football Coach at Current School of Survey Participants

Years	1-2	3-5	6-10	11+
Coaches	9	31	19	25

Levels Coached of Survey Participants

Levels	Youth	High School	College	Professional
Coaches	14	56	28	3

Number of Coaches who have been a Head Coach of Another Sport

Yes	No
61	21

Full Time Employment in the School of Survey Participants

Yes	No
81	3

Other Roles Performed in the School of Survey Participants

Jobs	Teach PE/Health	Teach Science/Math	Teach English/History	Teach Other Content Area	Admin. Roles	AD/Asst AD	Athletic Trainer	Other
Coaches	57	5	12	8	3	12	1	10

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

Survey and Interview Open-Ended Questions

Theme	Source	Sample Responses for Stressors
Administration	Survey & Interview	<p><i>You may have a staff of three at department meetings or school meetings, sometimes with administrators who are not as academic as athletically understanding.</i></p> <p><i>The principal was really big on wanted me to do community service.</i></p> <p><i>Administrators not on same page as winning.</i></p> <p><i>Lack of communication by athletic/school admin - lacking ability to share a vision.</i></p> <p><i>Dealing with unsupported admin.</i></p>
Assistant Coaches	Survey & Interview	<p><i>Early on, I think the number one stressor is trying to get a staff together.</i></p> <p><i>Management of others.</i></p> <p><i>Committed Asst Coaching staff.</i></p> <p><i>Managing my staff.</i></p> <p><i>Ensuring you have the best assistant coaches.</i></p>
Community	Survey & Interview	<p><i>One of the biggest stressors is the connection with the community.</i></p> <p><i>A disproportionately poverty-stricken population and the things that go on in those players lives that affect how we structure and do things as a staff.</i></p> <p><i>Negative peer groups okay that. have an influence on players who are torn between that period acceptance and being a part of the team.</i></p> <p><i>Unrealistic expectations from fans and Community.</i></p> <p><i>But yes it that's community, we were down now to 955 kids and when you're used to playing with 13 1400 students. That's when you lose 300 students or 400 students you look and half of them are male athletes and then maybe 20 football players yeah and 20 football players to me what makes a world of difference, as you know</i></p>

Other Duties	Survey & Interview	<p><i>An immortal nightmare, I mean, especially when the county pulls your busing situation and makes kids ride, a city bus. I had a kid call me and say, "Coach I can't get the school bus never showed up." So what did I do I got in my car went picked him up you know it's that's the stressful stuff out of season.</i></p> <p><i>We have to do all the field maintenance all the moving the weeding the lining all that stuff.</i></p> <p><i>Doing the laundry after the Games, you know we're generally at the school till probably 130 or two on a on a Friday night after the game. You know, so that that's a pretty big one turn around go back Saturday morning and do some do some laundry to mowing is seems like sometimes it's a never ending job you know you're always hear their mobile phone or you're throwing sand or and I have helped doing that I'm not saying that it's all on me but. You know, it might be a Saturday or Sunday you go over there and you're over there, for you know, three to four hours mow fields.</i></p> <p><i>I had to do everything I mean I had very few people on board I didn't have a trainer, so I was you know getting the water, I was doing the taping. I called the offense. I call the Defense. I ran the special teams.</i></p> <p><i>But the whole social media thing I don't like it, I don't like having to put everything you're doing for your kids out there</i></p> <p><i>It's the things of community service, you know principal was really big on wanted me to do community service wanted me to do mentor ships in elementary schools. Organizing camp.</i></p> <p><i>Fundraising.</i></p> <p><i>Field maintenance/painting (during the season).</i></p> <p><i>The "other" stuff, that takes away from actual coaching and preparation-laundry, mowing/painting, driving the bus, etc ...</i></p>

<p>Player Monitoring</p>	<p>Survey & Interview</p>	<p><i>we're the only people who. base their livelihood off of 14 to 18-year old choosing to do the right thing. You know so that's the biggest battle is getting these kids and we got a kind of motto here; you know it's show up shut up and turn your work in.</i></p> <p><i>I'm going to be very frank worried about whether your kids are going to get in trouble in school or you know whether they're going to be called baby, you know whether they're gonna come to school high. You know what you got to watch for after school sometimes you know, in the field House you know kids sliding off to the bathroom you know those types of little stressors.</i></p> <p><i>Negative influences of the world (drug, vapes, negative music and alcohol).</i></p> <p><i>Making sure the kids are eligible</i></p> <p><i>The other thing I've noticed is the attendance part you know in the county.</i></p> <p><i>They have a 2.0 (cumulative GPA) rule, but when you look at other counties and teams, we play in our own conference. They don't have the same 2.0 role so again it gets three days and an F is on the football field for another school, yet my kid gets three decent enough and he's marked ineligible.</i></p> <p><i>Keeping up with the kids that daily grind of you know grade checking.</i></p> <p><i>Grade checks</i></p>
<p>Pandemic/Covid</p>	<p>Survey & Interview</p>	<p><i>I got hired during the pandemic during the shutdown and I didn't meet my kids until two weeks before we played our first game.</i></p> <p><i>But we still have kids that we have to chase in terms of Rates attendance, you know behavior from time to time.</i></p> <p><i>One in particular well you know Covid has affected everyone. Many of my kids my players took almost full-time jobs</i></p>

<p>Parents</p>	<p>Survey & Interview</p>	<p><i>Parents with unrealistic expectations.</i></p> <p><i>Dealing with parents.</i></p> <p><i>Lack of parental support for the student athletes.</i></p> <p><i>Dealing with parents that think their kid is at a high collegiate level, when they aren't. Dealing with parents that take little interest in their kids' education, and place blame or cause disruption amongst the team because their kid is not the star.</i></p>
<p>Athlete Participation</p>	<p>Interview</p>	<p><i>You know it's never, never not been a year-round job, but it seems like it's more now we got we got too many kids are specializing in one sport.</i></p> <p><i>Yeah and on the JV we only had 18 players like we had to stop our final game with like seven minutes to go, because we had no more skilled players on the sideline to play.</i></p> <p><i>Getting numbers up (participation).</i></p> <p><i>Not getting enough players</i></p>
<p>Pressure to Win</p>	<p>Survey & Interview</p>	<p><i>I think a lot depends on the expectations that you set for yourself.</i></p> <p><i>Administration expects us to win, but I don't think they expect you to win at all costs, so I would say my expectations and there's are probably in line, together with each other.</i></p> <p><i>You know the pressure to the pressure to win that might be the one that the biggest one</i></p> <p><i>But I would say at the beginning, especially in a school like mine, where the expectation is so high that I would put it like an eight or a nine.</i></p> <p><i>Self-imposed unrealistic expectations.</i></p> <p><i>Wins & Losses.</i></p> <p><i>High expectations of our football program (maintaining the standard)</i></p>

<p>Recruiting</p>	<p>Survey & Interview</p>	<p><i>Parents still sees the all Star and all they're going D1 My kid not being recruited</i></p> <p><i>You know, having those realistic conversations with parents have little Johnny yet best is a D3 kid sorry to burst your bubble.</i></p> <p><i>Helping to get kids recruited.</i></p>
<p>Balancing Time</p>	<p>Survey & Interview</p>	<p><i>The fact that you're taking away from your family.</i></p> <p><i>I think that the part of trying to balance your time between a husband and husband Daddy and coach you know that's the toughest thing to figure out.</i></p> <p><i>Balancing my time effectively.</i></p> <p><i>Time sacrificed with family, and the feeling of letting my loved ones down when things/events are missed.</i></p> <p><i>Balancing family time and coaching</i></p>
<p>Teaching Requirements</p>	<p>Survey & Interview</p>	<p><i>That balancing the academic side of it, you know teaching a full load of an academic subject can be stressful, particularly with the testing protocols and things that come in place.</i></p>

Theme	Source	Sample Responses for Coping Strategies
Talking to Family and Friends	Survey & Interview	<p><i>Call me my wife discussed this at length, today.</i></p> <p><i>My wife has definitely helped me.</i></p> <p><i>...my wife who's actually get ready it's called a nail. I sound a lot on her I go to her a lot, you know, like says she grew up in a coaching household a successful battles successful basketball coach so um I rely on her a lot, and my children and my adult children.</i></p> <p><i>Spending time with my children.</i></p> <p><i>Venting to peers</i></p> <p><i>Talking to mentors / peers.</i></p> <p><i>Talking things through with my wife and some of my more trusted coaches.</i></p> <p><i>Discussions with other coaches dealing with similar circumstances.</i></p>
Exercise	Survey & Interview	<p><i>I like to lift weights I'll do it during my planning period.</i></p> <p><i>I'd exercise that would be my best one.</i></p> <p><i>I tried to go every morning before school that was my gig was to do it before school to kind of get me some energy to get me going, and you know, to have some time to think about the day prepare myself, while I'm lifting for the day.</i></p> <p><i>Running</i></p> <p><i>Weight lifting.</i></p>

<p>Alcohol/Drugs</p>	<p>Survey</p>	<p><i>I still enjoy a good beer.</i></p> <p><i>You know I will lie to you we're gonna sit back we're going to have a couple beers.</i></p> <p><i>Enjoying an alcoholic beverage</i></p> <p><i>Alcohol</i></p>
<p>Planning/ Organization/ Routine</p>	<p>Survey & Interview</p>	<p><i>So, I typically leave the House at about eight o'clock. that's about a 20-minute drive to get to work, you know and I'll jam out and listen to music just kind of be in a good mindset going to work and then. You know, go through my classes and was classes over I'll use my planning period is like my time to decompress before I go to practice or games, or whatever. And that's when I'll mow the field, or I'll go out and you know walk the track or you know. Whatever it is my use my planning period is my time, even if it's sitting and watching a funny YouTube video like who knows um I just kind of mark that time is this is for me.</i></p> <p><i>And I'll you know, try to make a list for some my coaches that want to do the things that they want to do to help out.</i></p> <p><i>If you have a routine and if you're prepared you really don't have to sit at home and worry about much I mean if you put in a great game plan, because you put the time in.</i></p> <p><i>You know Wednesday's a little bit different practice than Monday or Tuesday and Thursdays are walkthrough so. You know, Friday we have a game day routine Saturday morning the kids come in at 10 and we watched last night's failed, and we do all the corrections and but once again I tell my guys my coaches at noon on Saturday I don't care how good or how bad everybody's gone. So we try to do is I'm usually up here around 6:00 or 630am, and so I got about three and a half hours of work in before the kids come in. And then we're done and then of course you'll get up early Sunday morning usually around 6:00 or 630am. I'm usually up here till 10am. And then you know all a hammer films that out, but yeah definitely got to have a routine I mean. And if you</i></p>

		<i>believe in your system, then that should alleviate some stress too.</i>
Hobbies	Survey & Interview	<p><i>I'll work on the field, I'll paint the field.</i></p> <p><i>I try to read books.</i></p> <p><i>Fishing</i></p> <p><i>Golf</i></p> <p><i>Other activities outside of Coaching like yard work and building things.</i></p> <p><i>Working outside</i></p>
Separation/Alone	Survey & Interview	<p><i>Time to myself collect my thoughts, think about what I need to do.</i></p> <p><i>Self Talk</i></p> <p><i>Reflection</i></p> <p><i>Meditation</i></p> <p><i>Finding time for myself.</i></p> <p><i>Sit alone and think.</i></p>
Religion	Survey & Interview	<p><i>It seems that God always leaves me the jobs. I really struggle and I need that number one is my faith, I mean I know gods got my back is number one.</i></p> <p><i>Spiritual</i></p> <p><i>Praying each day.</i></p> <p><i>My Faith (praying and attending services).</i></p> <p><i>Bible reading/prayer in the morning Exercise (4-5 times per week).</i></p>

APPENDIX D: POWERPOINT SLIDES



Find your way here



Stress and Coping for High School Head Football Coaches

By: Kevin Wallace, Ed. D.

Slide 1



Find your way here

Introduction

- Coaching is a Stressful profession
- High School vs College/Elite Level
- Identify main stressors and coping strategies



Slide 2



Methods

- Emailed Survey
- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Brief COPE, and Open-Ended Responses
- Semi-Structured Interviews



Slide 3



Results

Stressors:

- Time Demands
 - Coaching
 - Family
 - Teaching
 - Other Duties
- Own Performance
- Stakeholders
 - Parents
 - Student-Athletes



Slide 4



Results

Stress Coping Strategies

- Socialization
 - Family and Friends
 - Mentors
 - Religion
- Planning
 - Practices, Yearly Calendar, Meetings
- Hobbies
 - Exercising
 - Yardwork
 - Activities



Slide 5



Application

- Understand the stressors
 - Plans for parents, monitoring student-athletes, mentoring student-athletes
- Plan
 - Yearly, Monthly, Weekly



Slide 6



Application

- Time Away
 - Hobbies
 - Exercise
 - Family and Friends
- Balance
 - Family-Coaching-Teaching
 - Use Assistant Coaches



Slide 7



Administrators

- Yearly Calendars
- Delegate Other Duties
- Act as Middle Man to Stakeholders
 - 24 Hour Rule
 - Possible Topics Allowed to Talk About
- Possible Revised Teaching Schedules

Slide 8



Find your way here



Questions?

Contact Kevin Wallace at krwallac@uncg.edu

Slide 9

STRESSORS AND COPING STRATEGIES



HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL COACHES

STRESSORS

- **Time Demands**
 - Family-Coaching-Teaching
 - Other Duties
 - Painting, Mowing, Laundry
- **Own Performance**
 - Pressure to Win
- **Stakeholders**
 - Parents
 - Recruiting, Playing Time
 - Student Athletes-Mentoring/Monitoring

COPING STRATEGIES

- **Socializing**
 - Socializing with Family/Friends
 - Mentor
 - Religion
- **Planning**
 - Schedules
- **Hobbies**
 - Golf, Fishing
 - Exercising

APPLICATION

- **Plan**
 - **Parents**
 - **Monitoring Student-Athletes**
 - **Mentoring Student-Athletes**
- **Yearly Calendar**
- **Describe Roles for Assistant Coaches**
- **Routine**
- **Hobbies**
- **Family and Friends**

FOR MORE INFO EMAIL:

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