

Putting It All Together

Throughout my Master of Arts in Education (MAED) journey, a number of assignments and courses have led me to think about my experiences in sport, coaching and interactions with students. This reflection has helped me revisit my reasons for starting down this path at Michigan State University in the first place. After working in athletics and campus recreation for several years after undergrad, I had finally realized that in order to move vertically in my career, I would need to expand my academic background in the fundamentals of education and coaching. As an aspiring athletic administrator, the MAED program through Michigan State caught my eye. The program allowed me to tackle my advanced education online while continuing my full time employment and coaching duties uninterrupted.

I can admit that upon entering my graduate program I did not have specific goals towards learning outcomes. I simply wanted to obtain a piece of paper that could prove I had obtained this unmarked checkbox on my resume. I had a lot going on in my life and going back to school was just another task that needed to be completed. As I have navigated through my program though, I have definitely learned more than I had expected too. Coming into the MAED without a background in education, I was able to learn a lot about the foundation of learning and teaching. Once I was able to connect these underlying concepts to coaching, my investment in my assignments rose. While online education certainly has its drawbacks, it also has its strengths. Working full time and coaching allowed me to transfer a lot of what I was learning in class immediately to the playing field in working with my players. While all of my courses have influenced me to a certain extent, several have impacted by day-to-day practices more than other have.

My time in *EAD 878: Education in the Digital World*, helped open me up to the benefits of technology in the learning process. As an older student, I am not as up to date with new technology as I was once. More importantly, the views I carried into this course regarding technology and the learning process were out of date and not accurate. I entered this course with the belief that technology in the classroom is a distraction and a tool that students use to shortcut traditional ways of learning. *Education in the Digital World* helped me see the benefits technology has provided today's learning society and just how far the Internet has progressed for educational purposes. The ability to interact with other people across the globe is certainly a boon to learning. Collecting outside opinions and critiques is important in forming a global perspective. More so, the realization that the Internet now serves as an online library with answers to every question a student could possibly have has changed the landscape of education. Highly respected universities have begun to provide their courses online through the utilization of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) to the general public. Technology is not going away. Rather than fight it, it is best to embrace it and utilize it for educational purposes. As an educator in sport, I have come to embrace technology in teaching skills. I have learned the importance of guiding learners to resources that can aid them in the discovery process. My instruction is still a great source of learning, but complementing it through technology can help my players bridge the gap as learners in the digital world. As a coach, I have begun to use this technology to involve my players in skill development. YouTube possesses an array of instructional videos featuring coaches, professional players and other baseball enthusiasts that help tackle skill instruction. Teaching face to face is great, but sometimes the

ability to replay or pause a video clip is just as helpful, if not more. In addition, YouTube has allowed me to upload videos of my players so that they can go back and watch *themselves* pitch and hear my commentary in the background. This type of feedback is instrumental to development as players can see their movements in hindsight rather than just feeling their movements in real time. The potential of technology has yet to be realized, but in comparing where we are as a society to just a couple decades ago, it would be safe to assume education will continue to evolve through online interaction.

KIN 854: Legal & Administrative Issues of Coaching is another course that has benefited me tremendously. I have a great background in athletics, and continue to develop my background in coaching both through this degree program and on the job experience. I do not have lengthy experience in administrative issues however. *Legal & Administrative Issues of Coaching* helped me see athletics through the lens of an administrator. The core focus of this course was based in the foundations of risk management issues. As an aspiring athletic administrator, I was made aware of issues generally unseen by those involved in playing or watching the game. The importance of developing policy that lays out the expectations of the program is essential to long-term success. Navigating negligence, risk, sexual harassment and care issues can all be better accomplished by creating and enforcing administrative policy. Throughout this course, I was also tasked with defending mock civil and criminal cases that could possibly arise from athletic settings. In *KIN 854*, I was made aware about the seriousness of hazing. I had always been aware that it existed, but had never been personally exposed to it. The effects of hazing can be detrimental to youth and their experience in sport. In this course, I designed a no tolerance hazing policy with the idea of applying it to my team. After completion, it was implemented at all levels of our baseball program and serves as a great real life document that I have created. The policy ensures that all participants are given the chance to benefit from athletics without fear of outdated team "rituals". *KIN 854* also helped me see my role as an athletic professional through the lens of liability. Every athletic event poses a risk to players, fans, referees and others. Being aware of the potential hazards to guests such as unlit exit signs, rickety bleachers or railings and even dangerous weather are all part of an athletic director's never ending duty to provide a safe environment for all stakeholders. This course as a whole has helped me develop my administrative eye, seeing the normally unseen risks and liabilities that are always lurk at sporting events.

Perhaps the most influential course from my program was *KIN 857: Promoting Positive Youth Development in Sport*. This class brought many issues of youth athletics to my attention that I had previously been unaware of. For starters, it made me rethink my coaching philosophy. Throughout the book *InSideOut Coaching* I developed a different outlook as my role as coach. *InSideOut Coaching* describes the two types of coaches, transactional and transformational. Transactional coaches, coach for themselves, they are interested in using the kids to get what they want. Transformational coaches are there for the betterment of the kids and the kids only. At times, I have shown occasional transactional tendencies as I have been consumed with having success on the field because I thought kids were interested in winning. This course has proved that kids do not care about winning and losing as much as they do having fun and playing with their friends. This realization has changed the way I think as a coach and how our baseball program operates. Despite players' best efforts, playing beyond high school in any sport is extremely difficult. The odds are incredibly stacked against the player, but yet, youth athletics are run nationwide like everyone is going pro. Rather than cater to the exception, why doesn't youth athletics cater to the rule? Why doesn't youth athletics focus on keeping kids engaged in sport through

high school, even if only in a recreational format? These questions really stuck with me throughout the course and made me realize that by eliminating kids who are deemed not competitive enough to play, we eliminate a whole outlet for them to make friends, stay healthy, and develop life skills that athletes can develop through sport. Instead of worrying about making kids professionals or scholarship bound players, why don't we spend the time working on the 99% of youth players that are not going to play in college or the pros? It almost makes too much sense. As a coach I have begun to subscribe to this method of thinking. This past year, our program has decided that we will not cut for baseball going forward. We are giving all players an outlet to play so long they are willing to do the work we ask them to do at practice. We are also trying to incorporate every player into each game in some capacity. This could be in a pinch running role, or as a reliever, but we try to get everyone into the game regardless of the score or situation. In *InsideOut Coaching*, Joe Ehrmann incorporated one of his senior linebackers as his "blitzing linebacker." This player wasn't very talented in defending pass routes or sitting in coverage, so Ehrmann decided that he would focus on what he does well, attacking the quarterback. Every time Ehrmann wanted to blitz he would sub this player into the game. This made the linebacker feel valuable as an important part of the team and added to his experience rather than just sit on the bench because he wasn't a better overall player than other members of the team. Player involvement in the game is essential for team cohesion and player happiness. In addition, receiving contributions from everyone boosts team morale, all players become engaged and are excited to come to the field and help the cause. When players are engaged and interested in coming to the ballpark everyday, success on the field comes naturally.

Looking back on my MAED experience, I have accumulated more than just a sheet of paper. This program has forever shaped my beliefs, attitudes and actions in regards to education and coaching. My time in the MAED program has flown by, but the Capstone Course has really given me the time to reflect on my development as an educator. I'm thankful for my decision to pursue graduate education and the life long effects this program will have on me going forward. After further developing my educational and administrative skills in athletics I am readily prepared to expand myself professionally and tackle the responsibilities I was once unprepared for.