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# Reducing Sport-related Injuries: Perspectives from NFL High School Coach of the Year Recipients

LaLisa Anthony  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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LaLisa Anthony

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Reducing Sport-related Injuries: Perspectives from NFL High School

Coach of the Year Recipients

by

LaLisa Anthony

MS, Case Western Reserve University, 2007

BA, Case Western Reserve University, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2018

## Abstract

American football sport-related injuries have negatively affected millions of high school students' quality of life. Although there are studies about types, conditions, and psychological effects of injuries, a gap remained in the literature that involved injury prevention from the head coach's perspective. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to fill this gap by exploring how head coaches perceive their role and responsibility in reducing sport-related injury occurrences. Sabatier and Weible's advocacy coalition, Diener and Dweck's achievement goal theory, and Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action framed this study. The research questions focused on the lived experiences from high school American football head coaches that will advance effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries. Criterion sampling was used to select 12 head coaches who received the NFL High School Coach of the Year award. Semi structured interviews were analyzed and interpreted according to Moustakas' data analysis methods. Key findings revealed there is an absence of national sport health and safety policy and support for high school American football head coaches as principal contributors and advocates for advancing effective policy to reduce sport-related injury occurrences. Recommendations from the research participants include implementation of standard policies by all state athletic associations to adopt minimum coach qualifications, injury and emergency protocols, and the presence of an athletic trainer/medical personnel at all sport activities. The implications for social change target advancing national policy focused on coach training, development, and monitoring processes for all high schools throughout the United States to support making American football safer.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family. My dissertation is especially dedicated to my father, Mr. Harold C. Anthony, who always believed in me becoming my greatest self. I would also like to dedicate my dissertation to my children, Ryan, Sean, and Erin, and my granddaughters, Ke'Aijah, Talaysha, Riyanna, Nahlia, and Kayla, who took this doctoral journey with me, every step, and always understood that this was a time of great sacrifice for our family. A special thank you to Summer Benham, Shauntia Earley Gibson, Kim Jennings, Jennifer Jones, and Phil Simmons, for also supporting our family and helping me to remain at peace when I was not present for our girls.

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Finally, I dedicate my dissertation to my American football family, with special reference to the NFL youth tackle football group and the Bahamas Youth Football program. Thank you to all the administrators, coaches, medical staffs, players, and parents. Together we will make the sport better and safer.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The continuous increase in sport-related injuries in high school American football programs throughout the United States has transitioned from a condition into a problem and policy change is an approach to lessen or eradicate such a problem (Badgeley, McIlvain, Yard, Fields, & Comstock, 2013; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2011; Nation, Nelson, Yard, Comstock, & McKenzie, 2011). To gain an understanding of the problem, it is most beneficial to have full cognizance of the content, concepts, and application of the tasks associated with high school American football. The findings of this study may serve as a rationale advance sport safety policy in youth and adolescent American football programs and targeting of head coach practices and procedures could enhance the current trend to implement initiatives to improve sport safety. The plausibility of the study's findings is primarily due to the head coach serving as the most influential person to provoke the necessary changes to ensure that the sport safety policy is effectively implemented (Gearity & Denison, 2012; Rathwell, Bloom, & Loughead, 2014). Although there is a need to apply policy at both youth and adolescent American football program levels, a trustworthy source to quantify the participation level younger than high school students has not been identified. As a result, this research focused on the high school American football programs throughout the United States due to their requirement to annually report participation information to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).



For this study, safety in high school American football sport programs was evaluated from the following standpoints: (a) coach training and development, (b) program structure, (c) player performance, and (d) the effect of specific rules and regulations. Each area was examined from the perspective of the high school American football head coach in relation to his or her ideology, influences, and motivations in the decision-making processes regarding player participation and safety. From the literature, the motivating factors that influence the head coach decision-making process are varied and arise from the multiple roles and responsibilities in relation to overseeing the sport program. For example, as an educator and mentor, the head coach focus is on the player's acquisition of social capital and education attainment; coaching American football as a career, the focus could shift toward achievement and economic gain; and as the sport policy advocate, the head coach focus is primarily on the rules, regulations, and policy advancement of the sport. The understanding gained of the phenomenon from this study could support the development and implementation of sport policy that will be effective in ensuring the health and safety of the athletes.

### **Background**

American football is the highest revenue-generating professional sport throughout the world (Oriard, 2014). The sport's stakeholders include players, parents, families, coaches, colleges and universities, National Football League (NFL), International Olympic Committee, media, and other professional and non-professional sport entities throughout the world. With this type of investment and stakeholder following, American football has also been the subject of many research studies. Primarily, the research has

focused on sport development, coach training, player social skill development, and safety. Even with the plethora of research and current literature, there remained a gap in sport safety research from a preventative perspective that examined the high school American football head coach's ideology, influences, and motivations relating to the decision-making processes in player health and safety.

### **Head Coach Leadership Role**

The head coach is a key person of influence in a high school sport program (Billings, Butterworth, & Turman, 2012; Falcão, Bloom, & Gilbert, 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). Rathwell et al. (2014) further shared that the head coach has the overall responsibility of the high school American football program and will make most, if not all, of the decisions pertaining to the program. In this position, the head coach's descriptions of the lived experiences may provide another piece to the puzzle to better understand sport-related injury occurrences. Additionally, the head coach could be instrumental in providing information to other sport stakeholders in relation to the advancement of sport safety policy since he or she is the primary person for the overall management and operation of the sport program (Billings et al, 2012). Given the head coach status, it was necessary to examine the head coach's experiences relative to his or her performance, judgment, and decision-making processes involving various aspects of the high school American football program.

### **Regulating Coaches and Sport Programs**

In the United States, there is not a national or federal sport ministry that funds, oversees, and regulates competitive or recreational sports at any level (Mitten, 2011).

Throughout the United States there are minimal regulations relating to player safety in high school American football programs (NFHS, 2014). Gearity and Denison (2012) argued that “a more prudent way forward for sport, at all levels, is through coach education and increased regulation. Curiously, the preparation and regulation of coaches has been a major omission from American society. To rectify these concerns, we conclude that now is the time to make the educator-coach the new norm” (p. 352). Further, it is critical that this study will effect positive social changes in the current youth and adolescent American football regulatory process, systems, and policies.

In the exploration of sport-related injury occurrences in high school American football programs throughout the United States, it is imperative to understand the head coach’s perspective of his or her role and responsibilities regarding player health and safety to develop effective policy that may reduce sport-related injuries. There are also studies relating to the training and development of coaches in relation to their roles as a key person of influence. Additionally, coach contributions to the sport have been examined in respect to coach-player relationships. There was limited focus on the high school American football head coach regarding coach effectiveness that could lead to effective health and safe sport policies.

There remained limited research on how American football is taught, practiced, and played from the high school head coach’s perspective. There was an even greater research void of the coach ideology, influences, and motivations in the decision-making process and general sport practices. Jones, Morgan, and Harris (2011) supported that there is a need for more research examining how coach engagement shapes athletic

performance and how theory shapes practice. They also posited that by expanding research into the area of coaching pedagogy, there will be opportunities for regulatory systems to be put into place that will present a more efficient means to monitor, evaluate, and understand coach experiences so that the information will be made available for future training and development programs (Jones et al., 2011). Villalobos (2012) said securing information from relative staff is a means that will support effective policy development that will not only satisfy the policy-maker but also any potential stakeholders that may be affected by the policy. The head coach inclusion in the policy-making process serves as a significant component in addressing sport-related injury occurrences in high school American football programs and the development of effective sport health and safety policy.

### **Problem Statement**

High school American football programs throughout the United States are plagued with sport-related injuries, and in recent years, the programs are also decreasing in participation (Mihoces, 2013). Because sport participation, specifically American football, plays a beneficial role in many youth and adolescent's overall development (Camiré & Trudel, 2013; Coakley, 2011; Geidne, Quennerstedt, & Eriksson, 2013; Hartmann & Kwuak, 2011; and Petitpas et al., 2005), it is imperative that sport health and safety issues be addressed from a preventative standpoint. An approach to decrease the risk of sport-related injury occurrences at the high school level is to develop and implement universal sport policy standards, guidelines, and monitoring systems to be enforced in high school programs. To effectively facilitate the policymaking process,

there must be an understanding of the reasons for the increase in sport-related injuries from the key leaders directly involved in the management and operation of the high school American football programs. There remained a gap in the literature that explored the reduction from the head coach's perspective as a key person of influence. This study aims to fill the gap by examining the lived experiences of head coaches from United States high school American football programs to assist in developing effective sport policy to reduce sport-related injuries.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of a purposively select group of high school American football head coaches that coached within the United States to understand their perspectives of judgment and decision-making processes regarding player participation and sport safety. The study was designed to afford opportunities for the head coaches to discuss the development of sport coach ideologies, influences, and motivations that advanced their decision-making processes pertaining to athlete health and safety assessments and determines the athlete's capacity to play after sustaining a sport-related injury. Additionally, it was the intent of this study to ascertain from the head coaches sharing their experiences what aspects of formal and informal trainings could be addressed that will allow for more effective coaching practices. The study gained understanding from the head coaches that was essential to delineate what may be necessary in drafting and implementing enhanced standards, guidelines, and monitoring systems for high school American football programs. Exploring high school American football head coaches' perceived roles,

responsibilities, and actions in relation to athlete sport-related injury occurrences provided insight that could be essential to the sport policy-making process. These contributions from the head coaches may lead to the development of effective sport policy that could reduce sport-related injuries in high school American football programs.

### **Research Questions**

The central phenomenon of this study encapsulated the shared lived experiences of the National Football League High School Coach of the Year award recipients.

The overarching question and sub-questions for the study are:

*RQ1:* What are the lived experiences from high school American football head coaches that will advance effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries?

*Sub question 1:* What areas of high school level coach training and development need to be concentrated on to perform as an effective head coach?

*Sub question 2:* What areas of high school level coaching practices need to be explored to reduce player sport-related injuries?

*Sub question 3:* How do high school American football head coaches perceive their roles and responsibilities in reducing player sport-related injury?

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

#### **Theoretical Foundation**

The principal focus for this study was to explore the mounting issue of sport-related injury occurrences in high school American football programs from the head coach's perspective. To successfully capture the essence of the head coaches' shared lived experiences relating to their coach leadership and practices, it was important to be

able to gain intimate entry into each of their lives and foster an atmosphere that lead to their authentic sharing. To accomplish capturing the essence of the phenomenon, achievement goal theory and the theory of reasoned action were identified to assist with framing the study. The primary assumptions for achievement goal theory are the emphasis is placed on the factors that influence how the person approaches, engages and responds to the circumstances of achieving the goal, and goals create motivational systems and investigate motivation, attitude and behavior in judgment and decision-making processes (Maehr & Zusho, 2009; Ntoumanis & Taylor, 2012; Pintrich, 2000; Senko, Hulleman, & Harackiewicz, 2011). Additionally, the primary assumptions for the theory of reasoned action are that individuals are rational and make use of the resources available to them and they consider the implications of their actions prior to making decisions to act or participate in an action (Ajzen, 2012; Kilduff, 2014; Yzer, 2012). Along with incorporating the theories that undergird this study, the principles of the positive youth development through sport framework added support based upon its compelling tenet that people are grounded in a self-control/deficit reducing developmental paradigm (Coakley, 2011).

To fully answer the study's research question of what lived experiences from the head coaches will advance sport safety policy, the advocacy coalition framework was also used. Advocacy coalition framework was developed to handle perceived conflicts among multiple actors while drafting policy (Sabatier and Weible, 2014) . The primary assumptions for advocacy coalition framework are that participants in the policy-making process share a set of normative and causal beliefs, they are very knowledgeable about

relationships and happenings within their systems and subsystems, and they will act in concert to effect policy change (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). Therefore, the policy-making advocacy coalition framework substantiated empowering the head coach as a primary source of information in the policy development process that may lead to sport safety policy. Further, with the combination of these theories, which are more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2, high school American football head coaches expounded on the aspects of their sport program practices that are vulnerable to sport-related injury occurrences and provided insight into sport management and operation areas to focus on that may lead to implementing effective sport safety policy to make high school American football programs safer.

### **Nature of the Study**

A qualitative phenomenological research design was most appropriate to understand and describe the high school head coaches' experiences and perspectives of their roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injuries. Moustakas (1994) posited that phenomenological research should focus on the wholeness of shared experiences and behaviors of the individual or group to describe the essence of the phenomenon. Additionally, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) discussed the qualitative researcher as an observer situated within the activity who is ready to make known the meanings given to them by the study's participants. A qualitative phenomenological research strategy of inquiry was most appropriate to explore, capture, and gain understanding of the shared lived experiences of the high school American football head coaches. What is more, given that individuals are the experts on themselves, the



phenomenological research approach was best to understand the meaning of the totality of the experiences of the purposively selected head coaches. The head coach participants each share the pragmatic experiences of the sport-related injury occurrences and these shared experiences were observed, recorded, analyzed, and discussed to provide an understanding of the phenomenon.

CDC (2011) and Saffary, et al. (2012) discussed sport-related injury occurrences in high school American football programs from primarily quantitative research methodologies and focus on non-fatal head trauma and other injuries. Focusing on the developmental phase of the policymaking process, it was beneficial to gain understanding from the head coach to draft effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries in high school American football programs. Villalobos (2012) said that an “agency’s input, among other factors, serves as a key component to increased policy success, both with respect to policy outputs and outcomes” (p. 838). Essentially, policy derived from the head coach knowledge and experiences is more effective to be enforced because it allows for an empowered position of involvement in the change process. This qualitative study gained understanding of the phenomenon from a preventative perspective by exploring and capturing the shared experiences of high school American football head coaches.

### **Definitions**

*Effective Head Coach:* For this study, effective coaching includes attributes that includes, but is not limited to: Coaching philosophies that align with educational, athletic, and school goals, sharing decision-making processes with athletes, maintaining strong

coach-player relationships, knowledgeable and good instructors, and implementing coaching philosophies while fostering positive youth development (Gould, 2016).

*Effective Policy:* For purposes of this study, effective policy refers to measurable performance and enforcement of guidelines and regulations (Grillich, Kien, Takuya, Weber, & Gartlehner, 2016).

*Expert:* In this study, expert refers to an individual in a specific field that views a situation more readily and distinctly than an untrained person. They are also well-known for who they are and what they do (Becker, 2009).

*Lived Experiences:* For purposes of this study, lived experiences are defined as the nonacademic encounters of an individual that may include, but are not limited to social relationships, personal feelings or observations, emotional growth, cultural adjustments, and more specifically, the act of volunteering (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

*Policy Entrepreneur:* For this study, policy entrepreneur refers to people who are willing to invest resources of various kinds in hopes of a future return in the form of regulations that they favor (Kingdon, 1995).

*Sport:* In this study, sport is referenced as a tool, resource, and vehicle toward the achievement of objectives and goals (Petitpas et al., 2005).

*Sport-related Injury:* For this study, sport-related injury is defined as physical harm that has occurred during all sport activities, such as weight-training, conditioning, practices, and competitions (Mueller & Cantu, 2015).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are not controlled, but are determined to be contributing factors to the quality and trustworthiness of the study. The first assumption was that the occurrences of sport-related injuries exists and continues to increase. The second assumption was that the high school American football head coach is the primary decision-maker for the sport program. The third assumption was that the purposively selected group of head coaches are trained and knowledgeable in matters relating to the operation of a high school American football program and are effective coaches. The final assumption was that the research results will lead to the advancement of effective sport safety policy at the high school American football level.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study was an attempt to explore the purposively selected participants' shared lived experiences of coaching high school American football programs within the United States. Specific attention was given to the influences, motivations, and decision-making processes involved in coaching practices that could lead to understanding sport-related injury occurrence and the prevention thereof. American football athlete safety has been an area of concern for many years (Kucera, Klossner, Colgate, & Cantu, 2014; Mueller & Cantu, 2015). Each level of American football has reported sport-related injuries; however, the focus for this study was at the high school level. The delimitation of selecting the high school level was for three reasons: First, high school is the youngest level that maintains records of the number of participants and coaches. Second, high school American football programs have a large influence on the younger age levels.

Third, there are no universal sport safety policy at the high school level. Through the exploration of American football at the high school level, this study aims to assimilate results that may support implementation of sport safety policies to lessen the occurrence of player sport-related injuries.

To gain an understanding of the phenomenon, the study was designed to query high school American football head coaches. The potential number of high school American football head coaches in the United States is approximately 15,300 annually (NFHS, 2012). To establish trustworthiness of the study, the research participant selection was narrowed to a purposively selected group of high school American football coaches that have received the National Football League High School Coach of the Year award. The delimitation to only involve these award recipients was based upon them receiving national recognition that was peer and sport stakeholder reviewed and selected annually, which enhanced the credibility level of the results. The involvement of this group of purposively selected participants was very important to have transferability of the study's results to further assist with American football safety policy advancement at the younger age levels.

Equally important as the transferability of the study's results was to have the research participants perform as sport safety advocates. Coupled with the achievement goal theory and the theory of reasoned action serving as the theoretical foundation for this study, the policy-making advocacy coalition framework was utilized to empower the head coaches to share information and encourage them to become actors in the policy-making process. The addition of this framework supported the head coaches becoming

wholly engaged and actively involved in sharing information relating to high school sport coach training and development that offered insight toward improving coach practices. These practices will also aid in the development of high quality relationships between the head coach and other sport program stakeholders, including the assistant coaches and medical staff, which in turn may lead to more effective coaching and player health and safety assessment (Rezania & Gurney, 2014). Moreover, it was the aim of the study that the research participants will remain active in all measures toward the prevention of sport-related injuries through the implementation of effective sport safety policy.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations in research designs and studies because it is not possible to control the variables. Although the limitations may be out of the researcher's control, attention must be given to their existence. For this study, a major limitation was that the focus was only at the high school level and there may be compelling limitations to the study's transferability to other levels of American football, especially the younger age groups. Although the goal of this phenomenological study was to gain understanding of the shared lived experiences of purposively selected high school American football head coaches, there remains the possibility that the study's findings may not be acknowledged by the high school American football head coach peer group and the other stakeholders that it intends to address. Further, even with provisions in place, the study had additional limitations throughout due to researcher bias, sampling size, dependability, and transferability.

**Researcher bias.** An additional limitation that could influence the study's outcome was researcher bias. Researcher bias is derived from the researcher's interpretive framework, or "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p, 31). For this study, researcher bias was acknowledged based upon being a long time American football supporter who has served in multiple roles. Specifically, the researcher supports the need for regulated coach training and development criteria, regulatory systems for athlete injury assessments, and injury related return to play criteria. Bracketing researcher bias was imperative to complete a quality study. To be successful at bracketing bias, the researcher maintained a reflective journal to reduce researcher bias limitation.

**Sampling size.** Currently in the United States, there are approximately 15,300 high schools American football programs with approximately 1.1 million student-athletes in each year (NFHS, 2012). Given the number of high school American football programs, there are approximately 15,300 potential research participants for this study. It is presumed that a large sample of the potential participants would allow for an accurate representation of the population. Contrary to the position regarding a large sample, when engaging in a qualitative phenomenological research approach, as has been determined to be the best approach for this study, it was acceptable to have a smaller group of research participants (Moustakas, 1994). A sample size of 12-15 participants was acceptable for this study to provide rich, in-depth data that may serve to advance effective sport safety policy.

**Dependability and transferability.** Qualitative research is subject to the researcher's approach, focus, intent, and experiences and it may be challenging to achieve dependability (Bazeley, 2012). What is more, transferability affords the reader an opportunity to see themselves and their lived experiences through the overlap of the research story with their own lived experiences (Tracy, 2010). The limitations of dependability and transferability stem from the restricted span of information that can be gathered from a small sample size. The participation of a small purposively selected sample group compared to the actual annual number of high school head coaches in the United States was a prominent limitation of this study. The research participants are well-known, nationally recognized, and are a respected group of high school American football head coaches. Given this study's sample group, both dependability and transferability may be achieved because the research participants' peers and this study's audience will be more accepting of the study's results with the involvement of the NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients.

### **Significance**

This research is significant to coach training and development as well as making high school American football programs safer for athletes. First, this study filled the gap in literature regarding how high school American football head coaches acquire their foundational principles of practice as the primary persons of influence, instruction, and managing high school sport programs. Additionally, with over 1 million youth and adolescents annually participating in American football (NFHS, 2012), there was an urgent need to study the increasing tendency of injury occurrences and initiate policies to

reverse the current trend. The literature has been focused on injury prevention from the viewpoint of improving equipment and researchers are specifically reporting on head trauma injuries. With the increasing concern for player safety in American football programs, including the high school level, it was appropriate to include high school head coach's perspectives. Given the current literature, this study also provides insight from high school head coaches that could lead to preventative measures to support drafting effective sport safety policies to make American football at the high school level safer.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Sport for many individuals is a source of recreation and entertainment, especially if the individual does not compete or has minimal involvement; for others, sport serves as a means toward the improvement of their quality of life. High school American football athletes generally seek to save hundreds of thousands of dollars in college costs by securing either full or partial athletic scholarships (Haskell, 2012; Jonker, Elferink-Gemser, & Visscher, 2009; and Petitpas et al., 2005). Nation, et al. (2011) reported that children between the ages of 12-17 accounted for 77.8% of all injuries in American football and were two times more likely to sustain a concussion. Given this data, an implication for social change involves improving the way high school American football programs are monitored and regulated. This study also contributes information that could improve coach training and development opportunities that will assist with enhancing coach effectiveness and potentially reverse the current trend of decreasing participation in high school American football programs. Further, this study could stimulate the



implementation of effective universal sport health and safety policies and serve to aid in improving the American football system.

### **Summary**

The chapter began with a full overview of participation and the state of high school American football injuries throughout the United States. Chapter 1 introduced the phenomenon of high school American football head coaches' perceived roles, responsibilities, and actions in relation to sport-related injury occurrences and how their shared lived experiences may provide insight toward understanding effective health and safety sport policies. The background, purpose for the study, and problem statement sections detailed the influence of the head coach and the importance of his or her role in the development of effective athlete health and safety policies. The two underpinning theories, achievement goal theory and the theory of reasoned action, were introduced as the framework for this phenomenological study to guide the research direction toward understanding the high school American football head coach's perspectives regarding coach training and development, sport program structure, player performance, and the effect of specific rules and regulations on sport-related injury occurrences. Chapter 1 also said that limiting the research participants to a purposively selected group of the National Football League High School Coach of the Year award recipients gave strength to the study and supported the potential for transferability. In sum, this phenomenon was necessary to explore and understand from the high school head coach's perspective and will be further delineated throughout the literature review discussed in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The American football athlete's safety has been an incessant focus since early competitions in the late 1800s and documented since the early 1900s (Kucera et al., 2014; Mueller & Cantu, 2015). Each level of American football experiences sport-related injuries; however, the focus for this study was on high school programs throughout the United States. Annually, approximately 15,300 high schools throughout the United States have just over 1 million American football players participating (NFHS, 2012). American football high school athletes have a high rate of reported sport-related injuries compared to other sports (Kucera et al., 2014; Mueller & Cantu, 2015). In comparison to the professional and collegiate levels, the high school level has the largest group of active participants with the least regulation by sport safety policy (Broglia, Martini, Kasper, Eckner, & Kutcher, 2013; CDC, 2015; NFL Players Association [NFLPA], 2011; National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2014; Washington State Traumatic Brain Injury Council, 2011). Thus, high school American football needs national safety policy implementation and the head coaches may provide information from their shared lived experiences that could lead to this.

Coach-player relationships are discussed regarding coach roles and player outcomes (Cranmer, 2016; Cranmer & Myers, 2015; Cranmer & Sollitto, 2015; Cranmer et al., 2016; Lyle & Cushion, 2010; Pedersen, 2013; Sagar & Jowett, 2012); but, not as much on coach ideologies, influences, and motivations in their decision-making processes involving sport practices and player health and safety. Additionally, sport-

related injury occurrences have been examined regarding sport played and injury, and not as much on preventing and reducing sport-related injuries (Badgeley et al., 2013; CDC, 2011; Grindstaff et al., 2010; Nation, et al., 2011). Specific to American football, there is little known about the coach's perspectives of sport-related injury occurrences at any level of the sport. The purpose of this study was to describe American football high school head coaches' perspectives of their experiences in relationship to sport-related injury occurrence. It is the intent of this study to fill a gap in the literature by providing a study that offers clarity regarding how high school head coaches view their role and responsibility in reducing sport-related injuries. The understanding gained from these coaching perspectives could support the development and implementation of sport policies that will be effective in ensuring the safety of the athletes.

### **Chapter Overview**

The discussion in chapter 2 includes the literature review strategy, including the databases and search engines utilized as well as the terms relevant and current literature. Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the ideologies, influences, and motivations surrounding head coach decision-making processes as they relate to player sport-related injury occurrences. To support the examination of the head coach in these areas, a literature review involving current research detailing coach-player relationships as well as coach philosophy and motivation was completed. To further clarify the entire scope of the phenomenon, a brief literature synopsis of sport policy development, the role of sport, and sport-related injury occurrences is provided. Additionally, Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the study that involves both achievement

goal theory and the theory of reasoned action, including the supporting positive youth development through sport framework. The chapter ends with a discussion regarding why the advocacy coalition framework was an appropriate policy-making theoretical framework to support the contributions of American football high school head coaches in the advancement of effective sport policy to reduce sport-related injury occurrence and make the sport safer for the athletes.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

**Databases and search engines used.** The search for literature began with the Walden University library database. As the literature search progressed, it expanded to include library databases from Case Western Reserve University, University of Akron and the Ohio State University. Multiple databases were also searched, including: EBSCOHost, ProQuest, SAGE Publications, and Academic Search Premier. Google Scholar was also utilized. There are also books and dissertations that have relative information that falls within the scope of this study.

**Search terms used.** The general search terms and combinations of terms used for the literature review included: *Sport coach ideology, Sport coach philosophy, Sport coach motivation, Sport coach influence, Sport coach behaviors, High school American football coach roles, High school American football coach training, Role of sport, Role of high school sport participation, Sociology of sport, Sport and social development, Sport and social capital, Sport and education attainment, Sport and economic gain, Sport psychology influence in American Football, History of American football, High school American football first games, American football sport-related injuries, Athlete*

*perspectives of sport-related injuries, Reducing sport-related injuries, Achievement goal theory, Theory of reasoned action, Positive youth development through sport, Effective policy development, Sport injury prevention policy, American football injury policy, and Advocacy coalition framework.*

The research that considers reducing and preventing sport-related injuries in high school American football has been minimal. There was research with specific attention to the type, occurrences, and frequency of sport-related injuries in high school American football as well as literature regarding the perspectives of the athlete relative to their injuries. Literature and dissertations with a focus on high school American football coach training practices and efficacy as well as coach-player relationships and positive youth development sport programs were also reviewed. There was also literature that detailed the development of sport policy with selected literature focused on sport injury policies. An examination of the dissertation literature review chapters and references revealed that most of the resources were the same as had been utilized in this study's literature review.

The focus of this study is the sport of American football, specifically at the high school level. Currently, American football has gained a level of interest from sport stakeholders due to the impact of sport-related injuries (Badgeley et al., 2013; Grindstaff et al., 2010; Nation et al., 2011). CDC (2011) revealed that sport-related injury occurrences at the high school level have been consistently increasing over the past 10 years. Additionally, literature supports that there are former athletes who have sustained sport-related injuries with residual effects as well as an increase in interest for current and future athletes that appear to be in harm's way (Kerr, Collins, Fields, & Comstock, 2013;

Jayanthi, Pinkham, Dugas, Patrick, & LaBella, 2012; Taylor & Sanner, 2015). Exploring the phenomenon of high school American football head coach ideologies, influences and motivations coupled with their perceived responsibilities in relation to sport-related injury occurrences will lead to an understanding of what policies are necessary to effectively reduce the current level of sport-related injuries and make the sport safer.

### **History of American Football**

The first American football game was a contest between Princeton, formerly named the College of New Jersey until 1896 (Princeton University, 2015), and Rutgers in 1869 (Oriard, 2014). Around the same time, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania and other boarding schools began to form American football teams with Native Americans players. Young Native Americans were introduced to Euro-American athletics like baseball, basketball and football (Strong & Posner, 2010). A primary focus of the boarding school administrators was to educate and teach the Native American youth how to play the sport to instill a sense of competition which was void in the tribal culture (Strong & Posner, 2010). Through the years, American football evolved to include multiple age groups and levels: youth, middle school, high school, college, semi-professional, and professional.

American football continues to thrive in participation, spectator attendance/viewing, and revenue even though it is viewed as a high collision and violent sport (Anderson & Kian, 2012; McLeod, Lovich, Newman, & Shields, 2014; Oriard, 2014). At the American football professional level, the National Football League (NFL) is the highest revenue-generating sport of all the professional sports and currently grosses

\$9 billion in annual revenue (Oriard, 2014). American football collegiate level is also maintaining its participation, spectator attendance/viewership, and high revenue base (Clotfelter, 2011; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). Although American football is experiencing high levels of revenue, game attendance, and television viewing, there remains a dark cloud and threat to continued participation and support. The dark cloud stems from the negative impact of the prolonged incidents of sport-related injuries at each of the levels, especially at the high school level.

### **High School American Football Programs**

From a modest start, high school American football grew in both athlete and spectator interest throughout the United States. The first organized high school American football club was located in Boston (Abrams, 1995; Holmes, 2012). Oneida Football Club, a team comprised of sixteen high school students from two high schools, began playing American football in 1862 for four short years (Holmes, 2012). The first reference to an American football sport-related injury was recorded during the early games. Lovett's description of a play from the November 7, 1863 game:

“Like a flash, [Edward Lincoln] Arnold shot one heel into the turf, came to a dead stop, ducked, and crouching low, covered his head just as the fellow came on, struck something, catapulted and landed 6 feet further on. Whether, if submitted to modern tests, he could then have given his correct name or age, is open to doubt.” (Holmes, 2012, para. 54).

Through the years, the football, helmet, uniform, and other aspects of the game have changed, and American football has remained a favorite sport for high school students, even with the probability of injury associated with the sport.

Currently in the United States, there are approximately 15,300 high schools with approximately 1.1 million student-athletes participating in American football each year (NFHS, 2012). With this number of participating high schools, we can presume that there are approximately 15,300 active head coaches. High school American football programs represented in this study have been narrowed to reflect comparable information and results. Specifically, data or information detailing non-traditional American football high school tackle programs, i.e., 6-man and flag football, has not been included. The scope of this study was limited to literature involving 11-man tackle programs.

### **Sport-related Injuries**

The sheer scheme of American football positions it as a high collision and violent sport (Anderson & Kian, 2012 and McLeod et al., 2014). This perspective is particularly true since the primary objective of the sport is to maneuver through a wall of opponents utilizing your whole body. There is a high probability of becoming injured while playing American football. These sport-related injuries range from various levels of severity: simple sprains, pulled muscles, severe trauma, and fatalities. For this study, sport-related injury is defined as an injury that has occurred during any activity directly associated with sport, specifically, weight-training, conditioning, practices, camps/workouts, and sport competitions.



Sport-related injury research has mostly been quantitative and focused on tracking the injury occurrences and not so much the ‘why’ and ‘how’ associated with the injury (Badgeley et al., 2013; CDC, 2011; Nation et al., 2011; Schroeder et al., 2015). There are major reporting entities, like hospitals, that make compiling the data a relatively straightforward process. There are also studies that focused on the athlete’s perspective of sustaining injuries and the psychological factors associated with the aftermath of the injury (Kerr et al., 2013; Kucera et al., 2014; O’Brien & Meehan, 2014; Schiff, Caine, & O’Halloron, 2010). Sport-related injury research provided information to support the need to look further into other areas of the sport that may be contributing factors to injury occurrence. Further, information from the sport-related injury occurrence portion of the literature aided in supporting the need to examine the head coach’s perspectives on reducing sport-related injury occurrences in high school American football.

### **Sport-related Injury Occurrences**

There was an abundance of research on sport-related injuries in high school American football programs across the United States. A large portion of the research examining sport-related injuries has been focused on concussions. For this study, there was not a focus on any specific sport-related injury. The literature review focused on injury occurrence in American football high school programs throughout the United States. Referenced in the conclusions was the need for additional research in the areas of preventative measures to make American football, particularly at the high school level, a safer sport.

The literature review revealed data and discussions that compare multiple high school sports, American football, basketball, soccer, wrestling, etc., and the rate of sport-related injury occurrences. The analysis of the multiple high school sports revealed that American football has the highest rate of sport-related injury occurrence (Badgeley et al., 2013; Darrow, Collins, Yard & Comstock, 2009; Kerr et al., 2011; Monroe, Thrash, Sorrentino, & King, 2011; Mueller & Cantu, 2013; Nation et al., 2010; Rechel, 2008; Schroeder et al., 2015; Tolbert, 2009). Additional discussion by Badgeley, et al. (2013) and King, et al. (2014) said that although there is an annual average of 1.1 million high school American football players, there are over 2 million sport-related injuries reported by athletic trainers and hospital emergency rooms throughout the United States. Similarly, the rate of sport-related injuries indicated that high school American football has proportionately the highest rate of injuries of all the sports investigated (Darrow et al., 2009; Monroe et al., 2011; Rechel, 2008; Schroeder et al., 2015). There are also fatalities for various reasons associated with American football at the high school level (Boden, Breit, Beachler, Williams, & Mueller, 2013; Kucera et al., 2014).

Sport-related injuries have consistently increased and injuries are most common in player-player contact sports (Kerr et al., 2011; King et al., 2014). There was also further investigation of sport-related injury occurrences during practice and competition. In these studies, even though both researchers found that more injuries were sustained during competitions than practices, there was not that much of a difference in the injury occurrence numbers (Tolbert, 2009; Rechel, 2008). Specifically, Rechel (2008) reported a difference of only 130 sport-related injuries of the 4,350 reported injuries (p. 198). In

Tolbert's (2009) study, he concluded that the frequency, duration, and week of competition were all factors in the player's probability of sustaining an injury.

Information regarding when the injuries occur is noteworthy to the development of future policies relating to making the American football safer at the high school level.

### **Sport-related Injury Risk Factors**

Critical to the decision to participate in American football are the parent and athlete views that the risks associated with playing American football may lead to long-term injuries and possibly death (O'Brien & Meehan, 2014). Sport-related injury risk factors in high school American football have been discussed and evaluated from a variety of perspectives. Consequently, researchers have examined social, environmental, intrinsic and extrinsic factors that may contribute to the sport-related injuries suffered by high school American football players (Knowles et al., 2009; Cuff, Loud, & O'Riordan, 2010; Schiff et al., 2010; Kerr et al., 2013; O'Brien & Meehan, 2014). There were multiple risk factors (i.e., equipment, weather, weightlifting/conditioning, length of practices and season, teammates, spectators, media) that possibly contributed to the increasing rate of sport-related injuries in high school American football programs throughout the United States. Additionally, King, et al. (2014) evaluated the rate of sport-related injuries in high school American football programs in terms of the size of the school enrollment.

The coach experience, qualifications, and training (Coach EQT) risk factor examined by Knowles, et al. (2009) was of interest in this study. Along with the 3,323 players, Knowles, et al. (2009) included 100 high school coaches in their evaluation of

sport-related injury incidence and severity study. It was determined that the coach skill level did not reduce the rate of sport-related injury (Knowles et al., 2009). With the literature not exhausting whether the coach training, development, and skill level are a risk factor, there was a need to further investigate this perspective. Moreover, a rigorous review of the high school American football coach's perspectives of sport-related injury occurrences could lead to effective sport policies that may reduce the sport-related injury occurrence and make high school American football a safer sport.

### **Sport Policy Development**

In the United States, there is not a national or federal sport ministry that funds, oversees, and regulates competitive or recreational sports at any level (Mitten, 2011). What is more, there are no sport-specific provisions in the U.S. Constitution (Mitten, 2011). There are situations where an athlete, sport entity, and representative(s) have relied upon the U.S. government to ensure the health and safety, fair treatment, and gender equity regarding the athlete's and team's sport participation. The reliance upon existing policy has produced some federal and state sport-related statutes that require compliance by various competitive and recreational sport entities (Mitten, 2011, p. 20). Hence, sport policies and legislation in the United States has been birthed out of existing laws that have been interpreted from overlapping meanings and purposes and applied to be relevant to govern sport, its members, and stakeholders.

National sport policy has been implemented in the United States as an amendment to existing education policies wherein equality and fair treatment are the primary focuses (Antunovic, 2015; Losinski, Katsiyannis, & Yell, 2014; U.S. Department of Labor, 2016a

and 2016b). One of the most notable sport policy is Title IX of the U.S. Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX). The primary thrust of this policy is to provide equal participation opportunity to anyone seeking to take part in any activity facilitated by a school receiving federal financial assistance (Antunovic, 2015; U.S. Department of Labor, 2016b). Additionally, as an extension and in cooperation with Title IX, students with disabilities are to be provided opportunities to participate in athletic activities through their schools as discussed in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 (Losinski et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Labor, 2016a). Thus, sport policy development in the United States, especially involving rules, regulations, health, and safety issues, has been left to the specific sport 's sanctioning body.

### **American Football Injury Prevention Policy Development**

Donaldson, Leggett, and Finch (2011) said that sport policy was usually developed, organized, and implemented hierarchically within a top down system that entails a long and uneasy process. Injury prevention policy associated with American football in the United States has not excluded from the top down system. In the examination of the three levels of American football, professional, collegiate, and high school, there are sport safety policy, regulation, and rule advances at all three levels with the most development at the professional level, followed by the collegiate level, with the high school level trailing in third place. Albeit variations in American football sport safety policies, there was one injury that has garnered a consensus in its management: concussions (McCroory et al., 2013). Nonetheless, regarding most other American football sport-related injuries, the highest competitive level in the United States, the NFL, has

determined the sport safety policy agenda and the other levels follow, in turn, by doing the same. Currently, the top down policy-making and implementation process has not effectively reached the high school level.

**NFL professional level.** The NFL is the major professional level of American football competition in the United States and has 1,696 participating athletes each year (NFLPA, 2011). Through the years, the NFL has implemented policies to universally make the sport safer within their organization (National Football League [NFL], 2014b). To reduce harm to players, improve workplace environment, and protect the NFL brand, the NFL enacted a substance abuse policy in 2009 (Bennett, 2012; NFL, 2009). To further promote player health and safety and in agreement with the findings from the 4th International Concussion in Sport Conference (McCrory et al., 2013), the NFL revised its concussion policy (NFL, 2014a). What is more, coupled with the NFL internal policy-making, the NFLPA, as the union for the NFL players, has also included player health and safety policies in its Collective Bargaining Agreement (NFLPA, 2011). The health and safety policies at the NFL professional level exhibit their intent to make the sport safer and stand as a model for the other American football levels.

**National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I collegiate level.** The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was formed out of concern for sport-related injuries (Mitten, 2011) and those concerns continue today. Annually, there are 66,000 American football players participating at the NCAA Division I institutions (NCAA, 2014). Comparable to the NFL, the NCAA has implemented internal sport safety policies to strengthen medical care protocols and manage athlete health and safety

universally throughout the organization (NCAA, 2014). Additionally, due to NCAA member institutions receiving federal funds and the influx of sport-related injury lawsuits, the NCAA and its members are the subject matter of state and federal legislation policies that regulate sport-related injury management (Smith, 2014). For example, currently under consideration by the U.S. Congress is the National Collegiate Athletics Accountability Act that will hold the NCAA and its members accountable to protect student-athletes with concussion injuries in contact and limited-contact sports (Smith, 2014). The NCAA recognizes the sport-related injury dilemma and is more assertive in its management of the student-athlete well-being.

**High school level.** High school interscholastic sports are regulated by individual state athletic associations. The regulatory measures involve all persons and activities associated with sports, inclusive of coaches, medical staff, athletic trainers, and officials. The policies and rules are voted on and ratified by the respective member schools, usually all public and private high schools in the state. For example, in Ohio, there are 820 schools that vote on each of the constitution, bylaw, and referendum that affect high school athletics (Ohio High School Athletic Association [OHSAA], n.d.). Each member high school is mandated to follow the sport policies and rules implemented, monitored, and governed by their respective state athletic association. Within the current process, it is probable that each state will have variations of the same policies and regulations in an attempt to manage similar sport-related issues.

Each of the state athletic associations is coordinated by the NFHS to support and promulgate uniform rules, but the NFHS does not have any direct regulatory authority

over the state athletic associations or interscholastic sports throughout the United States (Mitten, 2011). Additional discussion from Mitten (2011) explained that although there is encouragement of physical activity through the President's Council on Fitness, Sport & Nutrition there are no direct federal funds or regulations of sport activities at the high school interscholastic level. The laws and policies are generally regulated on a state-by-state basis except for Title IX, which is a federal policy that requires gender equity in education and sports; primarily at the collegiate level, but also applicable at the high school interscholastic level. Although this study was not focused on a specific type or form of injury, there was an example of a movement toward implementing sport safety policies at the high school level in the recent adoption of concussion state laws (Sun, 2014). For the 1.1 million players participating annually, the best example of high school American football sport health and safety policy rest in the concussion laws recently passed in all fifty states.

An examination of the concussion laws adopted by each of the fifty states and Washington, D.C. provided a good example of how sport health and safety policy that should be universally implemented has been drafted with different criteria. Each state's concussion law has the same intent: "protect the student-athlete from returning to play too soon after suffering the effects of a concussion" (Cook, King, & Polikandriotis, 2014; Sun, 2014). Although the concussion laws have similar intent, each state law was drafted and passed on its own merit and monitored according to each state athletic association's guidelines (Mitten, 2011). For example, Alabama and Florida require a medical professional to examine and clear an athlete prior to returning to play, Maine requires



clearance from a licensed neurologist or athletic trainer, and New York requires clearance from a physician trained in the evaluation and treatment of mild traumatic brain injuries (Ballantyne, Clegg, Sankar, & Dean ,2012). In sum, the current high school health and safety sport policy development process does not involve a national organization to guide the advancement of standardized health and safety protocols as found with the NFL and NCAA (See Table 1). What is more, because nationally mandated health and safety sport policies do not exist, each state athletic association, by way of its member high schools, is permitted to adopt or ratify its own sport health and safety policies.

Table 1

*Summary of the State of American Football*

<b>Level</b>	<b>Participation (players)</b>	<b>Key decision-making and safety staff</b>	<b>Policy Source</b>
<b>National Football League</b>	1,696	Head Coach Player Engagement Director Medical staff	NFL internal policy governance and the NFL Players Association Collective Bargaining Agreement
<b>College NCAA Division I</b>	66,000	Head Coach Player Personnel Director Medical staff	NCAA Division I Manual
<b>High School</b>	1.1 million	Head Coach (possibility of input from: school administration, athletic trainer, parent/guardian and doctor)	Varies state to state  GAP: uniform policy for every high school American football program)

**Overview of the Role of Sport**

A tacit assumption is that sport's primary thrust is competition and its chief purpose is to scrutinize athletic prowess and reward the victor. Throughout the history of

sports, success is generally evaluated based upon who is the fastest, strongest, and scores the most points; a win-at-all-costs philosophy (Farrey, 2009). Sports are challenged as a means toward cultivating chaos, unfair treatment, and exploitation of athletes (Beamon, 2010; Coalter, 2010; VanRheenen, 2012). Sports are also viewed as providing opportunities to improve the athlete's quality of life and the lives of others (Camiré & Trudel, 2013; Coakley, 2011; Geidne et al., 2013; Hartmann & Kwak, 2011; Morris, 2015; Petitpas et al., 2005). In purposefully focused situations, sports serve as a vehicle for addressing human rights issues (Bose, 2012). Further examples of reasons why persons participate in sports include improved social capital, higher educational attainment, and economic gain. It is within this paradoxical continuum of competition and opportunity that the purposes and outcomes of sport's participation become muddled.

**Key concept of the study.** There are 2 very distinct sides of whether sports are a benefit or hindrance to an individual's overall development (Beamon, 2010; Camiré & Trudel, 2013; Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2010; Geidne et al., 2013; Hartmann & Kwak, 2011; Petitpas et al., 2005; VanRheenen, 2012). For this study, the literature review was narrowed to include studies that examined athlete's progression through sport, benefits of sport participation, and the sport coach. In the quantitative studies that analyzed existing data, the findings ranged from supporting specific benefits (Kniffin, Wansink, & Shimizu, 2015; Morris, 2015; Pope & Pope, 2014); not supporting benefits (Hwang, Feltz, Kietzmann, & Diemer, 2016; Schultz, 2015); and neither advancing or hindering the athlete's expectations of participating in sports (Harris, 2014 and Shifrer, Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2015). Through the qualitative studies, an illustration emerged of

the common driving forces and outcomes associated with participating in sport (Clotfelter, 2011; Genovese, 2013; Howie & Campbell, 2015; Haskell, 2012; Jonker et al., 2009; Numerato & Baglioni, 2011; Okada & Young, 2011; Razavi, 2014; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). It was apparent that qualitative inquiry with open-ended questions may be a more appropriate research approach to clearly delineate whether sport participation experiences meet the athletes' expectations. Whether research has been completed in a quantitative or qualitative approach, longitudinal study or case study, there are reports supporting sport as a benefit toward positive youth development and achievement.

### **Sport and Public Policy**

Sport serves as a vehicle for affecting positive social change through social movements that lead to public policy-making (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). The definition of public policy from Jenkins (1978: 15) as shared from Houlihan (2014):

a "set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of these actors to achieve" (5).

Athletes, through their sport platforms, act as activists on social issues that have led to the advancement of public policy. Social issues that have been the focus of public policy include gender and race equality, social welfare and health, education and employment opportunities, economic development, and sport governance (Greer, 2014; Hartmann,

2012; Numerato & Baglioni, 2011; Rosentraub & Swindell, 2009). Sport is an effective vehicle in policy-making due to its universal level of involvement.

Globally, coupled with the sport professionals, organized sport programs have large numbers of volunteers (Groeneveld, 2009). Sport volunteers are usually athletes, former athletes, and individuals associated with sports (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011; Svensson, Huml, & Hancock, 2014). Within the group of individuals associated with sport organizational activities, there are influences to policy-making, especially policy involving sports (Groeneveld, 2009; Harris, Mori, & Collins, 2009; Houlihan, 2014). Sport policies, particularly from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), international sport federations, sport governing bodies, national governments, and other sporting entities, have focused on sport governance and competitions, general treatment of athletes, health concerns, and gender and race equity. Specific to this research, Green (2013) and Greer (2014) discussed that there are definitive terms and examples that warrant government involvement toward policy-making involving American football sport safety at the professional and collegiate levels.

### **Sport and Social Capital**

Research in social development through sport has findings supporting and not supporting that sport may be utilized as a vehicle to enhance social capital (Morris, 2015; Numerato & Baglioni, 2011; Okada & Young, 2011; Petipas et al., 2005; Spaaij, 2009; Widdop, Cutts, & Jarvie, 2014). In general, sports both enhance and taint the athlete's opportunities to develop basic social skills and leadership characteristics, specifically skills involving trust, goal achievement, and networking (Kniffin et al., 2015; Numerato

& Baglioni, 2011). The role of sport in social development has both individual and societal implications. It is possible to guide the athlete's development toward positive social development outcomes when the person(s) of influence operate within the proper framework (Petitpas et al., 2005). By maintaining focus on positive social skills acquisition, an athlete may develop appropriate skill set to maximize his/her sport's performance and non-sport outcomes.

Sports serve as a vehicle to facilitate positive developmental outcomes for an individual or group who have shown to have social development deficits (Okada & Young, 2011; Petitpas et al., 2005; Spaaij, 2009). Sports also enhance positive developmental outcomes for an individual or group who is flourishing by strengthening their leadership characteristics (Petitpas et al., 2005). The provision of sport-based intervention and developmental opportunities, especially those offered in team-oriented sports, supports constructive efforts to effect change in the athlete's social outlook and actions (Spaaij, 2009). Athletes, parents, communities, and society in general have embraced the idea that sport participation is a viable option to fill social development gaps, especially for impoverished individuals and groups (Okada & Young, 2011; Petitpas et al., 2005). When sport's participation is centered on its benefits and positive social development, it acts as a means to build the athlete's social capital.

Multiple authors have defined social capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000). For this study, borrowing from Numerato and Baglioni (2011), "social capital is a relational individual or collective resource that is more or less intentionally built and created and is used to achieve defined goals" (p. 595). From a

strength-based perspective, an athlete will improve his/her social capital capacity while he/she gains social acceptance and popularity from peers and others. What is more, the athlete utilizes sport to promote and foster positive network affiliations that propel him/her into positions that promote social interventions, active citizenship, policy-making, and social change (Adams, 2014; Coalter, 2012; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Widdop et al., 2014). From these points, an athlete's enhanced social capital in sports are a bridge to eradicate individual, group and societal disparities.

### **Sport and Educational Attainment**

Research supported that sport's participation is a driving factor for improved academic performance, post-secondary education enrollment, and college degree completion (Haskell, 2012; Jonker et al., 2009; Petitpas et al., 2005). Literature also referenced a lack of parity among the social classes regarding sport's participation that negatively influences education attainment outcomes among working and lower-class level athletes (Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012; Harris, 2014; Snellman, Silva, Frederick, & Putnam, 2015). The growing divide within the social classes and increasing proposals that mandate pay to play sport programs are primary factors that limit sport participation based upon socio-economic demographics (Snellman et al., 2015). Nonetheless, when athletes are afforded the opportunity to participate in sports, there are patterns of higher educational attainment (Haskell, 2012; Jonker et al., 2009; Petitpas et al., 2005). Some salient elements for the athlete's compelling efforts to do well in school include maintaining athletic eligibility, increased visibility to obtain sport scholarship, expected professional sport career, and transitioning to a coaching career.

**Maintaining athletic eligibility.** Athletic eligibility is a primary focus for athletes attending school. While the athlete is a student, education progress and athletic participation is monitored throughout the entire education process (NFHS, 2014; NCAA, 2014). Eligibility criteria varies depending on the age and grade level, institution, and governing entity. At the high school level in the United States, there are state governing entities, often referred to as state athletic associations, responsible for establishing and monitoring policies regarding academic and athletic eligibility. Student-athletes are usually made aware of the eligibility standards for their respective level of competition. Consequently, for sports to be utilized as a vehicle for educational attainment, the student-athletes must remain academically and athletically eligible.

**Increased visibility to obtain sport's scholarship.** An athletically eligible athlete is more likely to be noticed and selected by college recruiters and coaches because he/she is actively participating in his/her sport's events and competitions. Often in high school sport's programs, the conditioning/workouts, practices, and competitions are filmed and made available to various colleges, universities, and recruiting services. Limiting this study's scope to NCAA Division 1 sport's programs, once an athlete is participating in his/her sport's activities, able to demonstrate his/her athletic skill and performance, or shares film demonstrating the same, a college recruiter and coach may select that athlete to receive a scholarship to play sport(s) at their respective college (Pitts & Rezek, 2012). The athletic scholarship usually includes full or partial payment for tuition, fees, books, room, board, and possibly an opportunity for campus employment (NCAA, 2014). Remaining academically and athletically eligible while playing sports in

college is equally important as the athlete continues to move forward in his/her sport's career.

**Expected professional sport's career.** Most athletes may transition to professional status during any time of their sport career. There are some limitations, like those mandated by the NFL that state that an athlete must be removed from high school for three sport's seasons (NFLPA, 2011), but after the required wait time for the specific sport, the athlete may select to become a professional. Participation in professional sports, especially the high revenue generating sports like baseball, basketball and American football, is a highly sought-after career track for college athletes. Although there are approximately two percent of college athletes that have an opportunity to continue their athletic careers in the professional ranks, the majority have aspirations to become professional athletes (Bimper et al., 2012; Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015). Statistically, there are approximately 48% of college athletes in basketball and American football that desire to continue onto the next level (Cummins & O'Boyle, 2015). With the limited number of professional athletic opportunities, there are a significant number of college athletes that transition into retirement and another career track.

**Transitioning to sport's coach career.** College athletes have a finite number of years to play sports (NCAA, 2014). The professional athlete does not have a certain number of years to play sports, like the college athlete, but each athlete is aware that the time will arrive when he/she will no longer participate in sport's competitions. As the college and professional athletes prepare for athletic retirement, he/she often looks at coaching as a practical career choice (Gilbert et al., 2009; Nash & Sproule, 2009). As a



coach, the former athlete believes that he/she is better suited to teach and provide direction in their respective sport as opposed to a coach that had never played the sport and the literature supported this position (Gilbert et al., 2009; Nash & Sproule, 2009). Gilbert, et al. (2009) also discussed that sport's coaches achieve expertise primarily based upon their experiences as an athlete. In these cases, the athlete brings to the coaching profession all his/her experiences, including those associated with how his/her coach(es) made decisions regarding the athlete's ability and capacity to prepare, practice, and compete.

### **Sport and Economic Gain**

Sports are an extremely lucrative entity. As a multi-billion-dollar industry, both actual and fantasy, sports are more than sources of entertainment; they are a source of economic gain (Clotfelter, 2011; Genovese, 2013; Howie & Campbell, 2015; Razavi, 2014; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). Consumers often discuss professional athlete's salaries and the benefits of playing sports without consideration to how much revenue has been generated. Regarding salaries, the professional sport team owners, colleges, IOC, Local Olympic Committees (LOC), high schools, governments, media outlets, apparel companies, and other business entities must have revenue to support paying the professional athletes' salaries and providing amateur athletes with services and resources. For example, college Division I revenue generating sports like basketball and football have an average coach salary rate of \$2.4 million annually (Clotfelter, 2011; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). To pay coach salaries at this amount, the revenue from tickets sales, apparel sales, media/marketing promotions, etc. must be able to sustain it.

## **Sport at the High School Level**

Participation in high school sports is overwhelmingly due to the athlete's expectations of benefits that could lead to achieving local notoriety, securing college scholarships, gaining a skillset leading to advancing a career, and the possibility of playing at the professional level. Research relating to the benefits of sport's participation at the high school level supported the benefit expectations of many athletes (Knifflin et al., 2015; Morris, 2015; Shifrer et al., 2015). Kendellen and Camiré (2015) conducted a qualitative study that provided direct and comprehensive information of the experiences of high school athletes. In their study, it was discussed that the high school athletes had both positive experiences in acquiring life skills from their sport participation and negative experiences associated with the aggressive subcultures associated with sport participation (Kendellen & Camiré, 2015). In both instances, Kendellen and Camiré, (2015) supported that coaches influence the athlete's experiences and outcomes at the high school level. Coaches are a significant element of the support system for athletes and very instrumental in helping athletes achieve their plans (Cramner et al., 2016; Cranmer & Myers, 2015).

### **Coach-Player Relationships**

The coach, as a key person of influence in sport programs, is very instrumental in guiding and supporting high school athletes in realizing their expectations and plans (Billings et al., 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). Additionally, with educators believing that sports in school provides what the academic coursework lacks, the coach serves as the primary instructor in the athletic arena (Pruter, 2013). Effective coach-player

communications and decision-making practices are at the pinnacle of importance in sport programs for the player's desired outcomes to be accomplished. Most of the research focused on coach-player relationships involved the coach role as an instructor and the player's learning outcomes and limited in the coach ideologies, influences, and motivations of their coaching practices (Cranmer et al., 2016; Kendellen & Camiré, 2015; Mazer et al., 2013; Nicholls et al., 2016; Pruter, 2013). However, there have been research studies attempting to better understand the coach-player relationships focusing on coach management and training approaches in sport's programs from organizational theory and business theory approaches. (Billings et al., 2012; Cranmer & Myers, 2015; O'Boyle, 2014; Vella, Crowe, & Oades, 2013a; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013b). The research relating to coaches as organization managers with regards to their training development may be applicable to gain an understanding of the coach's perceived roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injury occurrences.

There are benefits to applying organization and business performance theories to gain understanding of sport's coaches and their environments. O'Boyle (2014), supporting that sports continue to play an increasingly important role in economic, political, cultural, and social arenas, discussed that regular performance assessments utilizing business environment models should enhance the sustainability of long-term sport's success. In coach-player relationships, the incorporation of leader-member exchange and 360-degree feedback theoretical frameworks could assist with understanding coach-player relationships, inclusive of communication, influences, motivations, satisfaction, and performance (Cranmer & Myers, 2015; O'Boyle, 2014).

Leader-member exchange, in the context of sports, refers to communication in vertical, dyadic coach-athlete relationships, as well as horizontal, dyadic athlete-athlete relationships (Cranmer & Myers, 2015). 360-degree feedback, when applied to coach's assessments, allows for responses from multiple groups and affords the opportunity for the possibility of negative feedback that could result in the demotivation of the coach's performance (O'Boyle, 2014). Cranmer and Myers (2015) shared that there is a need for future research that will explore the complexities of the relationships that may influence coach and player experiences, especially at the high school level.

Continuing within the business environment, sport's coaches have been identified as transformational leaders (role modelling, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and acceptance of group goals), transactional leaders ('contingent reward'), and 'full range' leaders (addition of transactional behaviors to transformational leadership behaviors) (Vella et al., 2013b). Vella, et al. (2013b) discussed that coaches that have received formal coach trainings are more likely to practice transformational leadership style, which is more closely associated with positive youth development. The source of using transformational leadership style is unclear, as in both the quantitative and qualitative research studies, it was discussed that coach trainings have very little direct accounts of presenting information relating to positive youth development (Vella et al., 2013a, 2013b). Additionally, Vella, et al. (2013a) discussed the need for additional research to understand coach's interpersonal practices, especially where coaches receive very little formal training outside of the technical and tactical realms specific to the sport. In sum, Vella, et al. (2013a) supported that

qualitative research approaches are needed to have comprehensive understanding of the coaching structures and practices to assess the coach's knowledge and effectiveness.

### **Role of the High School American Football Head Coach**

The research focus was to examine high school American football head coach's perspectives of sport-related injury occurrences. An examination of high school American football head coach's perspectives of his roles and responsibilities in the management of American football programs provided information that should lead to effective sport health and safety policies to address player sport-related injury issues. Because the head coach is responsible for determining the program's schedule for the off-season, pre-season, and season, including weight-training/conditioning sessions, practices, and player line-ups for the games, he is the most appropriate individual to provide insight into the high school American football program's operation and management (Billings et al., 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). Consequently, the head coach is the significant individual to focus on because of his position in the program's overall operation and decision-making processes (Billings et al., 2014). High school American football head coaches serve in multiple roles in the management of their respective sport's programs. For this study, literature was reviewed regarding the head coach as the primary person of influence, sport program leader, sport expert, and policy advocate.

**Key phenomena of the study.** To gain an understanding of head coaches, literature relating sport's coaches, head coaches, and coaches at various levels in various sports was reviewed. The literature revealed various roles that head coaches typically functions in and delineated 'who' the head coach is and his/her common responsibilities.

A common theme in the literature was the head coaches being viewed as the highest ranked person in the coaching ranks (Billings et al., 2012; Cranmer, 2014; Rathwell et al., 2014). Most of the literature reviewed utilized qualitative methodology and involved surveys, questionnaires, and interviews with the coaches. The current study used a similar technique by directly interviewing a purposively selected group of high school American football head coaches.

### **Primary Person of Influence**

Very rarely will athletes make decisions without the approval of the head coach (Gearity & Denison, 2012). Head coaches of American football high school teams are the principal individual responsible for the overall management and operation of the sport programs (Billings et al., 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). Head coaches are also accountable to school administrators, parents, and other program stakeholders for all aspects of the sport programs, including the health and safety of the athletes. Further, head coaches' behaviors, motivation strategies, professional relationships, and general practices determine the moral atmosphere, athlete behavior and performance, and influences the sport programs' outcomes (Camiré & Trudel, 2013; Gillet et al., 2010; Kassing & Anderson, 2014; Occhino et al., 2014; Rezania & Gurney, 2014; Steinfeldt, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2012). In this all-encompassing capacity, head coaches have a fundamental responsibility to create and maintain trust-based relationships with all the programs' stakeholders, especially the assistant coaches, medical support staff and athletes. In sum, head coaches wield significant influences that determines the social

norms, including players' health and safety assessment, while participating in high school American football.

### **Sport Program Leader**

High school American football sport programs and basic business organizations operate in similar contexts because both have hierarchical structure and coordination, are goal-oriented, and maintain deliberative groups of individuals with common goals (Cranmer, 2014; Kassing & Anderson, 2014; O'Boyle, 2014). For example, the high school program structure is comprised of a formal leader: the head coach; subordinate staff: the assistant coaches, athletic trainers, and other medical professionals; support personnel: school administrators, teachers, counselors, parents and community stakeholders; and workforce: athletes. In sum, head coaches, analogous to business organization top executives, are entrusted with positively leading all persons affiliated and associated with the programs (Vella et al., 2013b). To effectively perform the head coach's leadership role, it is imperative that head coaches manage everyone's performance levels, engage in positive leader-member exchanges, and execute the program goals (Cranmer, 2014; O'Boyle, 2014; Rezanian & Gurney, 2014). In the capacity of head coach leaders, they emerge as supervisors, mentors, educators, and decision-makers.

**Supervisor.** Mirroring the similarities of organization leadership qualities, head coaches, as the supervisors for the sport programs, commonly possesses skills that include knowledge of the sport, strong organizational skills, effective communication, ability to motivate others, and a drive to succeed (Brunnemer, 1980). Although

Brunnemer (1980) discussed collegiate level coaches, these leadership qualities may also be effectively applied to high school head coaches. As supervisors of high school American football programs, head coaches are charged with multiple tasks relating to overseeing the programs (Billings et al., 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). These tasks include education/certification processes, remaining compliant with all rules and regulations, organizing the weightlifting/conditioning, managing practice and competition schedules, and maintaining the records for the football players. With an average of 50-75 players per high school team, the head coaches are responsible to direct the coaching staffs and other program stakeholders, including the athletes (NFHS, 2014). High school head coaches are most effective as supervisors when they manage and oversee the full operation of the programs with the assistance of the other coaches and staff.

**Mentor.** Key to the success of sport programs are the head coaches' abilities to maintain positive relationships with all the programs' stakeholders. Head coaches are encouraged and expected to mentor their subordinate staffs (Rathwell et al., 2014). Serving as mentors to the assistant coaches strengthens the coaches' development process and supports quality sport teaching and program operations. Head coaches positively affect change and advance the sport programs by encouraging the assistant coaches to attend clinics, sport camps, conferences, and other team practices/competitions to stimulate learning processes and develop coaching skillsets (Rathwell et al., 2014). Additionally, effective head coaches promote coaching autonomy within the assistant coaching ranks to allow for further coach development and freeing up the head coaches to focus on other aspects of the program (Rathwell et al., 2014). Each of these learning



opportunities is a form of mentoring, either directly from the head coaches or indirectly from interacting with other American football coaches while attending sport-related development events.

**Educator.** In American football, head coaches are gauged on their knowledge of the sport based upon previous playing experience, interaction with experienced coaches, athlete performance, and win-loss records (Ford, Coughlan, & Williams, 2009; Gearity & Denison, 2012; Lyle & Cushion, 2010; Wilson, Bloom, & Harvey, 2010). As the formal leaders and primary persons of influence, head coaches are usually the principal educator for the coaching staffs and athletes (Jacobs, Claringbould, & Knoppers, 2014). For American football to be properly played, head coaches must remain consistent in their teachings and making available American football learning opportunities for the assistant coaches and athletes (Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, 2010). Attendance and participation is a factor at the high school level where formal coach education clinics, conferences, and camps are dependent upon high school financial resources. For high school coaches, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) governs interscholastic coaches' training requirements and reported that the coach education training acquisition remains relatively low and does not include specific sport contextualized knowledge (Gearity & Denison, 2012). With these circumstances, the head coaches play a crucial role in the areas of coach education and sport outcomes while serving as the catalyst to ensure athletes' health and safety.

**Decision-maker.** Although it may appear that head coaches act autonomously, this is not true; they are a primary decision-maker in a network of power stakeholders

(Jacobs et al., 2014). The power network includes the sport program administrators, communities of parents, athletes and coaches, national and international sport associations, etc. (Jacobs et al., 2014). Within this network, it is presumed that head coaches are the key decision-makers. Given a situation, head coaches may yield to others for advice or input, but the final decision will be made or confirmed by the head coaches. Additionally, head coaches, no matter the situation or outcome, are held responsible for all decisions made relative to the overall management and operation of the sport programs, including the health and safety of the athletes.

### **Sport Expert**

Although there was minimal literature regarding assessing sport coach's expertise, a suitable position is to afford the individual an opportunity to be the expert on what they have experienced (Petitpas et al., 2005). Coaching is a complex and context-rich activity, especially in the sport of American football where there are twenty-two persons simultaneously on the playing field with multiple formations possible for each play. In general, head coaches presume that they develop their coaching skills through their experiences (Jacobs et al., 2014). In the literature, Ford, et al. (2009) discussed that there are activities and qualities that are monitored to measure the coach's expertise level: (a) things coaches do; (b) things coaches know; (c) things coaches are; (d) things coaches believe; and (e) things coaches use. It is expected that head coaches, prior to their appointment, likely have mastered these activities and qualities and is further presumed an expert. Therefore, American football head coaches are deemed expert coaches and the

optimal choice to include in the process to positively effect changes in sport development, training, and advancing policies to make the sport safer.

### **Policy Advocate**

Policy advocacy relating to sport-related injuries discussed that sports medicine professionals should be the group to advocate for policy to effect changes in sport programs that will engender safer environments for sports (Kerr et al., 2013). With head coaches serving as the person with most influence in the sport programs, it is necessary to include them in the policy advocacy process. A further review of the literature revealed that effective policy implementation in high schools should include school administration and its personnel to establish clear goals, strategic plans, and support professional development opportunities (Dyson, Wright, Amis, Ferry, & Vardaman, 2011; Petitpas et al., 2005). The administration and personnel in all matters involving high school American football should include head coaches. As the primary person of influence, leader, and expert, high school American football head coaches are the most appropriate individuals to share information that raise awareness of health and safety issues and serve as policy advocates for the sport.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Previous sport-related research involving high school coaches and athletes focused on the role of coaches, leader-member communication exchange, coach as source of instruction and motivation, coach influencing athlete performance, coach-player interpersonal relationship, and coach-player social support (Cranmer, 2016; Cranmer & Myers, 2015; Cranmer & Sollitto, 2015; Cranmer et al., 2016; Lyle & Cushion, 2010;

Pedersen, 2013; Sagar & Jowett, 2012). There was minimal discussion examining high school head coaches' ideologies and influences on their motivations, decision-making processes, and practices. Given the lack of discussion, an examination of high school American football head coaches' behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and norms was pertinent in discussing their perceived roles, responsibilities, and actions in relation to sport-related injury occurrences. With the intent to delve into the lives of head coaches, it was feasible to be directed by a theoretical framework that affords careful attention to the parties' views and actions. What is more, the incorporation of what Kingdon (1995) terms as policy entrepreneurs as an approach toward effective policy change should meet with the least resistance from similar stakeholders. Accordingly, the application of the achievement goal theory and the theory of reasoned action with additional guidance from positive youth development through sport and advocacy coalition frameworks supported answering the research questions and may lead to the development effective sport health and safety policies.

### **Achievement Goal Theory**

Achievement goal theory (AGT) (Maehr & Zusho, 2009; Ntoumanis & Taylor, 2012; Pintrich, 2000; Senko et al., 2011) was the overarching theory for this study. Utilizing AGT provided a clear path to examine the purposes or reasons that individuals pursue to achieve specific tasks or goals (Maehr & Zusho, 2009; Pintrich, 2000). Although the application of AGT has primarily been in educational context, it has also been applied to athletic settings (Pintrich, 2000). AGT primary assumptions are: First, in the learning process, emphasis is placed on the factors that influence how the person

approaches, engages, and responds to the circumstances of achieving the goal. Second, goals create motivational systems and investigate motivation, attitude and behavior in judgment and decision-making processes (Maehr & Zusho, 2009). Framed with AGT, American football high school coaches expounded on aspects of their sport programs that were vulnerable to sport-related injuries and supported understanding the ideologies, progression of decisions, and actions toward the achievement of head coaches' goals, inclusive of on and off the field activities. From their sharing, key areas that should be addressed in the advancement of sport health and safety policies were identified in the data collection and analysis processes of the study.

### **Theory of Reasoned Action**

To support understanding head coach judgments and decision-making processes, this study also applied the theory of reasoned action (TRA) with additional attention to behaviors, motivations, and competitions (Ajzen, 2012; Kilduff, 2014; Yzer, 2012). TRA primary assumptions are: First, individuals are rational and make use of the resources available to them. Second, individuals consider the implications of their actions prior to deciding to act or participate in an action (Ajzen, 2012). Specifically, Ajzen (2012) posited that individual beliefs are formed from what is inferred as important that others want us to do as well as what is socially important. Further, TRA contends that performance and the intent to perform is based upon behaviors and motivations subjected to norms and beliefs relegating from perceived norms and beliefs of peers with similar performances (Ajzen, 2012). In this context, our attention to the determinants of actions was helpful to understand head coach behaviors and attitudes. Discerning the ideologies,

influences, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors construct supported this research to gain understanding of head coach judgments and decision-making processes relating to sport programs and intended goals.

### **Positive Youth Development Through Sport Framework**

To gain understanding of head coaches' knowledge and experiences of coaching high school American football, this study further drew upon the positive youth development through sport (PYD) framework (Coakley, 2011; Geidne et al., 2013; Hartmann & Kwak, 2011; Petitpas et al., 2005; Vierimaa, Erickson, Coté, & Gilbert, 2012). There is a dual assumption that participation in sport has influence to render positive outcomes and effect positive social change (Coakley, 2011). PYD encompasses participation in developmental exercises and activities with specific focus on skill acquisitions, intervention initiatives to reduce and stop negative behaviors and activities, and prevention measures to replace and replenish previous negative behaviors and activities (Petitpas et al., 2005). Although PYD has been applied to athlete development and practices to encourage making positive choices and taking positive actions, it is also applicable to gain understanding of head coaches' ideologies, judgments and decision-making processes (Vierimaa et al., 2012). Subsequently, head coaches, positioned as a caring adult mentors and advocates with primary influence and leadership of the sport programs, are in position to have the most knowledge relating to this phenomenon. Further, head coaches, as the experts on themselves, are the best individuals to share their lived experiences and gain understanding of the current problems with sport-related injury occurrences (Petitpas et al., 2005).

### **Advocacy Coalition Framework**

This study also applied the policy-making advocacy coalition framework (ACF) and a basic knowledge of the same was vital to understanding its relevance in the policy change processes. From its early creation and contributions, Sabatier and Weible (2014) shared that the logic of ACF is summarized by the bringing together relative structures (for example, head coach, assistant coaches, and medical professionals) and endogenous pathways (for example, the awareness of the increase of sport-related injuries in high school American football programs) to effect policy changes. Over the years, there have been notable modifications and revisions to ACF policy change structures that included the addition of multiple subcomponents and this has allowed for ACF to be applied in specialized concentrations: coalitions, learning, and policy changes (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). ACF contends that the knowledge from the relative structures is critical in the policy-making processes because they are the most appropriate parities to reflect upon the ideas, concepts, values, and areas of interest relative to policy issues (Almog-Bar, Weiss-Gal, & Gal, 2014). In sum, ACF supports utilizing experienced, knowledgeable actors/organizations as instruments to understand what is necessary to draft effective policy changes (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

ACF has been applied in recreation, school physical education, and sport policy development and change processes (Houlihan & Green, 2006; Sabatier & Weible, 2014; Skille, 2008). In sport policy development, ACF affords the policy-makers to apply the best practices from other theories and structures the processes to be both top-down and bottom-up perspectives (Skille, 2008, p. 183). Therefore, it is beneficial to incorporate

persons with high school American football knowledge into the sport's health and safety policy-making processes. Applying ACF to gain understanding of public health concerns and issues from head coach's perspectives could prove to be useful to reversing the current escalating trend in sport-related injuries. Moreover, forming a coalition of high school American football head coaches to directly influence the health and safety policy processes could provide necessary knowledgeable means to address the sport-related injury problem. As the principal public policy theory for this study, ACF will empower head coaches to assist in making high school American football a safer sport and effect positive social change.

### **Summary**

Chapter 2 introduced an in-depth literature review that began with discussions relating to the history of American football, sport-related injury occurrences, sport policy development, and the roles of sport detailing the reasons that athletes participate in sport and in some instances, continue into careers as coaches in their respective sport. The chapter continued with information on coach-player relationships and the roles of high school American football head coaches, giving attention to previous research methodologies that supported the choice of the research approach for this study. The final section focused on the theoretical framework to be applied to this study. Through the literature review, Chapter 2 also said that there is not only a significant problem with sport-related injury occurrences at the high school level, but also that there is a need to expand the scope of research in the areas of coach ideologies, influences, and motivations as they relate to their decision-making processes involving player sport-related injuries



(Badgeley et al., 2013; King et al., 2014).. Further, in recognizing that high school American football has a health and safety problems, Chapter 2 outlined that head coaches, as primary persons of influence, leaders, experts, and policy advocates, should be included in the sport's health and safety policy-making processes (Billings et al., 2012; Dyson et al., 2011; Gearity & Denison, 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). The final section of Chapter 2 discussed the theoretical framework used in this study to capture high school American football head coaches shared lived experiences that served as sources of data to be collected and analyzed in accordance with the procedures discussed in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the shared lived experiences of American football high school head coaches that may contribute to the development of effective sport safety policies to reduce injury occurrences. From this study, the following research question was answered: What are the lived experiences from high school American football head coaches that will advance effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries? Moustakas (1994) explained that gaining an understanding of shared lived experiences through iterative reflective processes affords for the phenomena to become understood. Moustakas (1994) further offered that a phenomenological research approach provides the appropriate procedures and methods to answer research questions and construct meanings of what occurred. In sum, the researcher should: (a) ascertain if a phenomenological approach is best; (b) identify/acknowledge the phenomenon; (c) specify philosophical assumptions of phenomenology; (d) collect data; and (e) analyze data (Moustakas, 1994). Table 2 details the phenomenological procedures and methods evaluation criteria and further research methods discussion are discussed in Chapter 3.

Table 2

#### *Phenomenological Research Procedures and Methods Evaluation*

<b>Ascertain if phenomenological approach is best</b>	The primary focus of a phenomenological research design is based upon how a group of individuals with shared life experiences understands their shared experiences. From the understanding of shared experiences, the researcher may construct meanings to what has occurred. Moustakas (1994) expounds on this when he states that “in phenomenological science a relationship always exists between the external perception of natural objects and internal perceptions, memories, and judgments” (p. 47). Given the scope of research and
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	its overarching research question, it has been determined that the phenomenological research approach is appropriate to study American football high school head coaches' shared experiences relating to player sport-related injuries.
<b>Identify/acknowledge the phenomenon</b>	The fundamental phenomenon of this study is the shared experiences of American football high school head coaches involving their motivation and decision-making processes in relationship to player sport-related injuries.
<b>Specify philosophical assumptions of phenomenology</b>	Application of achievement goal theory and the theory of reasoned action with additional attention to behaviors, motivation and competition wherein the researcher gives attention to the determinants of actions in understanding the research participant's behaviors and attitudes within a specific context. For this study, the participants are American football high school head coaches and the behaviors and attitudes to understand are in the context of sport. American football high school head coaches typically have motivations to win and these motivations may influence their coaching practices and decision-making processes. The shared experience meanings associated with these practices and processes vary and there is a need to extract themes to construct patterns to gain understanding of the American football high school head coaches' shared experiences.
<b>Collect data</b>	In alignment with phenomenological principles, there is one broad, overarching research question with accompanying sub-questions that will afford the researcher a means to conduct an orderly, disciplined study with care and rigor (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). Moustakas (1994) said that this form of participant research questions will provide an understanding of the meanings and essences of the experiences.
<b>Analyze data</b>	Using the complete transcription of each participant interview, Moustakas (1994, p. 120) concept of horizontalization, a list of every expression relevant to the experience to delineate the themes from the participant statements, will be used. Moustakas (1994) also shared that these statements will describe each of the participant's experiences ( <i>individual textural-structural descriptions</i> ) and through the synthesis of the statements there will be an understanding of the essence of the common ( <i>composite description</i> ) shared lived experiences.

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Note: Adapted from Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

## **Research Questions**

The central phenomenon of this study is high school American football head coaches' perceived roles, responsibilities, and actions in relation to sport-related injury occurrences from the perspective of NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients. The overarching question and sub-questions for this study are:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences from high school American football head coaches that will advance effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries?

*Sub question 1:* What areas of high school level coach training and development need to be concentrated on to perform as an effective head coach?

*Sub question 2:* What areas of high school level coaching practices need to be explored to reduce player sport-related injuries?

*Sub question 3:* How do high school American football head coaches perceive their roles and responsibilities in reducing player sport-related injury?

## **Research Design and Rationale**

Moustakas (1994) outlined five qualitative inquiry strategies: ethnography, grounded research theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and heuristics. From the researcher observing American football coaches, they effectively respond through storytelling, and from a review of these research strategies, the phenomenological research design best allowed the researcher to explore, understand, and discuss their perspectives of the phenomena. The phenomenological research design was further supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2008) in their discussion of participatory research which means research participants not only expound on their experiences but also allows

the information to assist with affecting positive changes. It is through this inclusive research approach that the researcher was able to understand the rich context of the investigation. Moreover, the phenomenological research design approach provided an open-ended question interview data collection methodology to capture an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, to investigate the phenomenon within a narrow and deep lens provided a comprehensive perspective of the shared lived experiences of the research participants.

Primarily, the phenomenological research approach was selected for this study because it provides the reader with rich descriptions that allows for greater insight into the phenomenon. These descriptions are provided through storytelling and generally people connect with others and share their life experiences in this manner (Guillemin & Heggen, 2012). Engaging in storytelling to discuss a subject and provide an analogy to assist the listener or reader in gaining a more thorough understanding is a common communication approach. Sport coaches, specifically high school American football coaches, also commonly communicate in this manner. During the researcher's 15 years of working with high school American football coaches, there have been frequent encounters with high school head coaches sharing various aspects of the sport through stories to illustrate or demonstrate their lived experiences. From the experiences with the coaches, the determination was made that the phenomenological research inquiry was the most appropriate approach for this study.

**Phenomenon**

Although there are various individuals responsible for player health and safety policies, the head coach is recognized and trusted as the critical person of influence in high school American football sport programs (Jackson, Grove, & Beauchamp, 2010; Jowett & Nezlek, 2011; Kassing & Anderson, 2014; Rathwell et al., 2014; Sawyer et al., 2010). The central phenomenon of this study was high school American football head coaches' perceived roles, responsibilities, and actions in relation to sport-related injury occurrences, including an examination of coach ideologies, influences, motivations and decision-making practices involving player health and safety. Specifically, in high school sport programs, the head coach is the individual that sets the parameters for how the player prepares, practices and performs as well as operating as the authority for making decisions (Jackson et al., 2010; Jowett & Nezlek, 2011; Kassing & Anderson, 2014; Sawyer et al., 2010). Moreover, decision-making processes relating to player safety and injured players returning to play has not been uniformly established throughout the United States (Mitten, 2011). Gaining an understanding of the head coach's ideology, influences, motivations, and decision-making practices will better position high school American football stakeholders to draft and implement effective policy to improve the safety of the athletes and make the sport safer.

**Tradition of Inquiry**

Qualitative inquiries are designed to guide human science research (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) further contributed that human science research needs to prepare and collect data, analyze data, and have its methods and procedures in a unified,

succinct manner to present the most accurate depiction of the investigated experience.

The primary purpose of qualitative inquiries is for the researcher to become immersed in the study to discover “why” or “how” and to capture the full essence of the research question (Moustakas, 1994). Essentially, qualitative research design allows for a phenomenon to be investigated in a way that a quantitative study may not be as appropriate. Essentially, qualitative research is exploratory, and the complexity of the research design requires that the data be collected from communications between the researcher and the participants. Revealing the lived experiences of American football high school head coaches to gain understanding of how their contributions may lead to policy advancement was appropriate for qualitative research inquiry.

### **Phenomenological Research Process**

In research, there is a progression of scientific practices that are based on the researcher’s philosophies and assumptions that form the philosophical paradigm. Within this framework, the accepted set of theories, research methods, and various data are defined and discussed. The accepted set of procedures encapsulate the phenomenological research approach that was formally introduced by Edmund Husserl (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology is an inductive way of *seeing* things through lived that will influence the way human science research is conducted experiences (Finlay, 2012, p. 173). Utilizing the phenomenological research approach influenced the research questions, methods and types of data collection, and the techniques used to analyze the data. Moustakas (1994) further discussed that the phenomenological framework includes four iterative steps: the epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis.

**Step one – epoche.** The first stage involves bracketing the researcher’s biases. Epoche, of the Greek origin meaning “to stay away from or abstain from prejudgments”, is the area allowing for the researcher to disclose their experiences and set aside their previous knowledge, bias and preconceived ideas (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) further said that epoche prepares the researcher to obtain new knowledge by means of setting aside their own knowledge and allowing the entry of new, fresh occurrences as though it is their first time the researcher experiences them. The epoche process supports the researcher in remaining transparent to him/herself as he/she progresses through the lived experiences of the research participants. Accordingly, to derive new knowledge, researcher bias was set aside to view the high school American football coach’s experiences as though they have not been experienced before.

**Step two – phenomenological reduction.** During stage two, the primary task was to describe the phenomenon in rich terms and language. Moustakas (1994) shared that the during phenomenological reduction, the researcher will look to describe the phenomenon; look and describe, again; look and describe again, repeatedly, while making sure to reference the textual qualities of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) further explained that although there may always be an intersection between one perspective and the whole, it is reasonable to separate the two from the researcher’s experience of the whole. Additionally, the whole reduction process entails progress toward a textually meaningful and essential study that will require clear reflexivity and the capacity to recognize and clearly describe the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In retrospect, by following the steps presented by Moustakas (1994): “bracketing, horizontalizing, clustering the horizons into



themes, and organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent textual description of the phenomenon” (p. 97), challenges associated with constructing a complete description of the high school American football coach’s experiences were overcome.

**Step three – imaginative variation.** High school American football head coaches attend many games and review hours of film to study and create game plans to defeat their opponents. From the overall game plan, the head coaches have multiple play options that they believe will lead to moving the ball forward and ultimately scoring a touchdown. The application of imaginative variation is like the head coach’s game planning processes in that it seeks possible meanings of the phenomenon by approaching it from divergent perspectives while utilizing imagination and varying frames of reference, roles, and functions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). Further, Giorgi (2007) discussed that the researcher fully embraces the phenomenon, actual or fictional, and with support of imaginative variation, gains a sense of the essence of the phenomenon to be examined. Essentially, phenomenological imaginative variation allows for the researcher to decipher the essence and relevance of the various themes that become present while collecting data. Moustakas (1994) further explained that there is not an isolated path to the “truth” and there will be an infinite number of possible “truths” that surface from the essence of the meanings of the experiences. With the phenomenological research design, the researcher was charged with supporting the research participants through the discussions of their lived experiences of the phenomenon while effectively determining the true essence of the information provided and its possible relationship with reducing sport-related injuries.

**Step four – synthesis of meanings and essences.** Synthesis is a result of the previous step, imagination variation, in the phenomenological research process.

Moustakas (1994) discussed that the synthesis represents the essences garnered from exhaustive imaginative and reflective analysis of the phenomenon during a specific time and place. Moreover, synthesis occurs as an iterative process throughout the study. The synthesis of meanings and essences lead to an integrated description of the research themes yielding a unified statement of the experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The synthesis yielded themes that supported drafting effective sport safety policies in high school American football programs with the goal of reducing sport-related injuries.

### **Philosophical Foundations**

The research method depends upon multiple factors: beliefs, ontology, epistemology, purpose, goals, participant characteristics, audience, funders, and the positions, environments of the researcher (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). Essentially, qualitative research is the general study of the social world. Moustakas (1994) expounded on qualitative research in his description of the qualities of human science research that included: human experiences not approachable through quantitative approach, focusing on the wholeness of experience, searching for meanings and essences, and obtaining descriptions of experiences from first-person accounts. Moreover, qualitative research compels the researcher to give a direct role and power to the research participant's experiences to gain greater understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, qualitative research affords the researcher an opportunity to take an iterative, reflexive

approach to the research process, hence allowing for more depth and richness of the textural and structural descriptions of the study findings.

During the researcher's quest to know and learn about the social world, the differences in qualitative philosophical foundations arise. Ritchie, et al. (2013) shared that there are qualitative researchers that give full attention to human interpretation of the social world with equal credence to both the participant's and investigator's understandings of the phenomenon - *interpretivism*. There are also researchers that emphasize that knowledge is actively constructed by human beings – *constructionism* (Ritchie et al., 2013). Additionally, there are qualitative research approaches with emphasis on the psychological, social, historical, and cultural factors to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Ritchie et al., 2013). Consequently, the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research are just as varied as its research approaches and may be influenced by the researcher's worldview.

The researcher will incorporate their worldview into the emerging development of the qualitative research methodology. The qualitative research approach should ensure that each research participant is actively involved in the dialogue and allows for data to emerge that will lead to social, cultural, and political changes in sport safety policy implementation. For this study, it was believed that a mixture of worldviews influenced the research design approach, especially with the study findings supporting the implementation of effective sport safety policies in high school American football. The research questions were general and broad, allowing for the participant's responses to determine the scope of the study and meaning of the phenomenon. Open-ended interview

questions were asked to allow for rich participant discussions and interactions that focused on the problem of sport-related injuries that may lead to effecting positive changes through public policy.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Unlike quantitative research methods that have little to no direct involvement with the researcher, qualitative research methods involve direct interaction of the researcher and the research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) also shared that qualitative researchers rely upon the participant's direct statements and observations to provide the meanings to the individual's lived experiences. Through the qualitative research inquiry approach, the research participants provide a window into their inner lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Although the window may be filtered, the researcher may still glean from his/her direct interactions trustworthy accounts of the research participants shared lived experiences. The researcher also takes the role of the research instrument and becomes interconnected with the research participants. In the researcher role, it is imperative to describe various characteristics, including experiences, expectations, assumptions, and bias relative to the qualitative study.

### **Researcher's Role**

Significant to gain understanding of the coach's perceived roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injuries in high school American football programs was for the researcher to be able have a direct dialogue with the coaches. From this dialogue, it was intended that high school American football coaches share information from their shared lived experiences that will be helpful in drafting effective

sport-safety policies. An appropriate means to have direct dialogue in a study was to employ a qualitative research approach. As a critical researcher, it was imperative that the researcher set aside their lived experiences to fully understand the shared lived experiences of the research participants (Moustakas, 1994). The practice of bracketing was the most accurate means to glean the essence and meanings of the phenomenon.

The researcher's role may be very complex if he/she is not able to bracket his/her experiences. Bracketing, isolating predetermined concepts or philosophies, must be intentionally sought. Moustakas (1994) discussed that it is with this intentionality that a freedom to perceive and view things just as they are presented. Finlay (2012) also shared that in phenomenological research, the researcher has a curiosity or passion for a phenomenon that is manifested into a research question. In the decision to research this phenomenon, the researcher was fully aware that personal experiences as a parent of high school American football players along with professional experiences as a high school American football administrator may influence the study and the interpretation of the data. Accordingly, it is posited that from an emic position, as a member of the research group, the researcher fully and effectively explored this phenomenon.

The researcher was aware that the data interpretation involved personal and professional viewpoints. There was potential for researcher bias from these viewpoints and this was where the researcher must remain free from suppositions. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) shared that in research, the researcher's beliefs about the world will always undergird the researcher's views of how the world should be studied and understood. Finlay (2012) stated that there is a challenge for the researcher to bracket

bias and remain vulnerable to new understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, it was critical that the researcher utilized all efforts to interpret the meanings of the phenomenon that the research participants have shared from their lived experiences.

### **Self of the Researcher**

A very important aspect of qualitative research is the researcher's ability to persuade the audience that the research findings are worth paying attention to (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In agreement with Denzin and Lincoln (2008), the researcher was aware that due to passion and experiences with the research focus, the study was generally framed from a distinct place due to the researcher's set of ideas, experiences, and understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, with the researcher conducting the research from an emic perspective, a nuanced understanding of the data collected from the research participants was provided (Bolden, 2013). Further, from this emic research approach, the researcher was more apt to understand the research participant's viewpoint and more capable to frame the study from the perspectives of those who experienced them (Finlay, 2012). In all, as a critical researcher, who was fully immersed into the study as a participatory researcher, ally, and co-agent of change, allowed the research participants to become more engaged because they were confident that the researcher supported their cause to reduce sport-related injuries (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Merriam, 2009, Moustakas, 1994; and Wickert & Schaefer, 2015).

**Researcher Background.** The researcher was raised in Canton, Ohio, the birthplace of professional American football and the home of one of the longest standing high school rivalry games in the United States that began in 1894, Canton McKinley vs.

Massillon Washington (cantonmckinley.com, 2016). Researcher has experienced high school football since primary school as a cheerleader and fan at the youth, middle school, and high school levels. The researcher also has been active in American football programs as a parent of athletes for over twenty-five years and served as a volunteer and compensated administrator for youth, middle school, and high school programs for over twenty years. During that time, researcher has observed players continue to play while injured because they may not have been aware that the perceived minor sport-related injury may have lifelong effects on their quality of life. As the researcher's position in sports advanced, so did interest in the players' health and safety. The researcher has discussed players' health and safety issues with coaches, program administrators, and other stakeholders, and recognized that there is a serious problem with the process of deciding what forms of injuries warrant medical attention and when a player should not continue to play.

The researcher's professional background in American football began with direct interactions with high school American football programs in 2000. The researcher was the primary academic support person for a pilot program, Play It Smart, through the National Football Foundation. As an academic counselor, the researcher worked directly with head coaches who were the on-site direct report regarding the academic and social statuses of the athletes. During the third year with the Play It Smart program, the researcher was promoted to regional coordinator and was assigned to oversee 20 programs throughout 11 states. As a regional coordinator, the researcher rarely attended

games and mostly interacted with academic counselors assigned at the various program sites.

Beginning in January 2006, the researcher joined the NFL as a regional director for the Junior Player Development (JPD) and High School Player Development (HSPD) programs. The researcher was assigned the same region area the Play It Smart program: 8 NFL team markets across 11 states. In 2012, the NFL eliminated the JPD program, added the National 7-on-7 Tournament, increased staff, and the researcher's assigned region decreased to 4 NFL markets and 4 states. The NFL provided the program curriculum, administrative protocol, and contracts to the high school coaches to facilitate program. The researcher's primary responsibility was to oversee the site managers and the overall operation of the program sites. Additionally, the researcher's main persons of contact were high school American football head coaches who mostly served as the program site managers.

From 2007 through 2010, the researcher became the administrator of an international high school American football program in The Bahamas. The researcher designed, implemented, and evaluated a high school program based upon previous experiences with programs in the United States. The program design included coach training and development with specific focus on player health and safety. Specifically, the program required each coach to receive cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification, complete the USA Football level I coach certification course, and attend two coach clinics in the United States. The Bahamas high school American football program



was the first of its kind in the country and there were no rules, regulations or policies that stipulated how American football was to operate within the country.

### **Methodology**

The quality of the qualitative study is developed through selecting the most appropriate sampling technique (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). A non-probability sampling strategy was selected due to the research design of the study. A non-probability, criterion sampling strategy is based upon selected characteristics of the population (Ritchie et al., 2013). The criteria are determined by the researcher and based upon what is deemed most appropriate to answer the research question. Moustakas (1994) discussed that although there are no in-advance criteria for locating and selecting research participants, there may be general considerations (age, race, gender religion, etc.) with an essential consideration given to whether the participants have shared the experiences of the phenomenon. Ritchie, et al. (2013) further explained that the use of criterion sampling strategy provides a means to select features that make the potential research participants well-suited for in-depth qualitative research studies.

Criterion or purposive sampling was used to select the research participants. Ritchie, et al. (2013) described that purposive sampling specifically selects research participants on purpose based upon location or relations that are in line with a definite criterion. Additionally, purposive sampling technique affords the researcher to have key informant interviews with persons of interest that will best answer the research question (Lund Research, 2012). Taking all this into account, caution should be given that the researcher remains objective and that the participant selection criteria will prevail against

independent scrutiny (Ritchie et al., 2013). Although purposive sampling is subjective to researcher bias, using this strategy provided the researcher with a participants who best represented the essence of the phenomenon that supports advancing effective high school American football sport safety policies.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

**Participant selection.** All high school American football sport programs are mandated to report to state and national entities via the National Federation of High School Sport Associations (NFHS, 2012). There are approximately 15,000 high school American football programs annually registered in the United States (NFHS, 2012). For this study, there was a purposively selected group of high school head coaches that are the NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients. “The NFL High School Football Coach of the Year award was created in 1998 (renamed The Don Shula NFL High School Football Coach of the Year award in 2010), by the NFL and its teams to honor coaches who profoundly impacted the athletic and personal development of NFL players” (NFL, 2011). From this group, there were 15 potential participants, including the award recipient for the 2016 award. All 15 award recipients were invited to participate in the study.

The NFL High School Coach of the Year award was implemented to annually recognize and honor a high school coach that “displays the integrity, achievement and positive impact on others” (Associated Press, 2010, para. 3). The NFL High School Coach of the Year award is one of the most prestigious recognitions that high school American football coaches receive. Each of the awardees have been constantly

recognized by their peers and other American football stakeholders for demonstrating a high level of integrity and credibility in coaching as well as exemplary efforts to grow and develop the sport at the high school level. There are thousands of high school coaches nominated annually and through an elimination process, the potential recipients are narrowed down to hundreds, then to 32 representing each NFL team, followed by 1 award recipient selected and publicly recognized during the NFL Super Bowl game (National Football League (NFL), 2013). Each of the potential research participants, both singularly and collectively, would contribute to any effort that would effect positive changes in high school American football health and safety.

From a list of NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients, each of the potential research participants was contacted seeking their voluntary participation in the study. After agreeing to participate, each participant provided contact information for the researcher to confirm participation by forwarding an introduction email (Appendix A). In the email, it was stated that the data collection would take place over a one-day period at a comfortable and convenient time and location for the participant. The researcher did not contact the prospective research participants prior to their agreement to participate in the study. These parameters supported reducing researcher bias.

### **Data Collection**

*Data Gathering.* Qualitative research approach involves interviewing the study's participants and analyzing the data gathered during that process. Planning for the qualitative process includes preparation and execution of exploring data resources like videos, newspaper articles, photographs, observations, field notes, etc., utilizing

analytical software tools, interpreting data collected, and presenting the results.

Moustakas (1994) shared that although the researcher prepares interview questions in advance, they may be varied, altered, or not used at all during the data gathering process. During the data gathering process, the researcher examines the benefits and forewarnings associated with the research approach and determines its effectiveness to the study. What is more, the researcher is responsible for carefully planning the data gathering process to ensure that the study leads to credible and reliable results.

**Data collection process and instrument.** For this study, all 15 NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients were invited to be participants. Although every award recipient did not participate, there remained a strong probability that data collected from the 12 participants was appropriate and adequate to sufficiently answer the research question (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Onwuebugie and Leech (2007) noted that sampling size should not be too small that it will not accomplish data saturation, theoretical saturation, and information redundancy. A sample size of 12 participants was sufficient to extract in-depth, thick, and rich descriptions of the phenomenon (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Further, the broad and open-ended interview questions allowed for the participants to freely describe their lived experiences of the phenomenon. The data collected, analyzed, and presented should catapult dialogue toward implementing effective policies to reduce sport-related injuries and ensure the safety of high school American football players.

The researcher's initial contact with each research participant was by email (Appendix A). The email introduced the study and requested that the participants confirm

their interest and availability to participate in the study. A follow-up telephone call (Appendix B) was necessary to confirm participation and schedule the date and time to conduct the interview through teleconference. Upon confirming participation in this study, each participant provided additional background information (Appendix D). All the participants were asked open-ended questions (Appendix H) by the researcher in semi-structured interviews that were audio recorded. To further strengthen the data collection, detailed notes were taken during each interview.

Ethical concerns were addressed and given attention at every phase of the study. The study did not include participants under the age of 18 and all the purposively selected research participants are or have been previously employed by a school district. There were no known risks taken and no intentional acts to harm the research participants. The researcher remained in compliance with the Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) stipulation to treat each participant, separately and collectively, with respect, dignity, and gave attention to their personal comfortability status continually during their involvement in the study. Additionally, each participant was afforded the opportunity to review his individual interview transcript for accuracy prior to the commencement of the data analysis process (Appendix H). Further, as was stipulated in the informed consent for the study (Appendix E), each participant was unrestricted from discontinuing participation in the study at any time, without any penalty.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Qualitative research is designed to help us understand phenomena in the participant's natural setting. This study utilized the qualitative phenomenological

research approach to answer the overarching research question: What are the lived experiences from high school American football head coaches that will advance effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries? Accordingly, the selected research approach aimed to gain understanding of the phenomenon through the research participant's shared lived experiences and its findings were based upon interpretive analysis of the data. Bazeley (2012) further expounded on the influx of researcher interpretation in the data analysis process in his discussion of how the qualitative data analysis coding is predisposed by the researcher's research intent, selection of methods, and experience. Additionally, data analysis may also be influenced by the study's intended audience. Because the data analysis was subjective to the researcher's experiences and interpretations, the researcher remained cognizant of bias while remaining diligent to maintain an objective viewpoint throughout the data analysis process.

The data collected through qualitative research inquiry typically involves large amounts of textual, audio, and possibly video content. Once the data collection process has become saturated, the data analysis process begins with the researcher becoming engrossed in the rich text of the research participants' descriptions. The goal of the data analysis process is to identify trends and themes in the data that will lead to rich, comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) summarized phenomenological research data analysis as constructing textual and structural descriptions from the synthesis and organization of invariant qualities and themes derived from the essence of the shared experiences. To analyze the data and shed light on the patterns of insight associated with the phenomenon, the researcher engaged in reflective

interpretation and iterative data analysis processes. Accordingly, and as recommended by Moustakas (1994), Table 3 provides a summary of the data analysis procedures.

With large amounts of data and the researcher fully involved in every stage of the study, an effective means to analyze the data is to utilize qualitative data analysis software (QDAS). It is possible to not utilize QDAS in the data analysis process and some may prefer not using software to remain close to the data. It is, however, advantageous to utilize QDAS as it will reduce researcher bias and provides the ability to copy and paste data text as well as computer-generated coding, indexing, categorizing, and retrieval of the data. When comparing the traditional and QDAS methods of data analysis, using computer software may be more efficient and a fully inclusive process due to the software having the capacity to store, sort, and retrieve the data, including pictures, video and voice recordings. Additionally, with large amounts of unstructured data in the qualitative research approach, it may become an overwhelming process to complete data analysis without utilizing QDAS, especially if time and funding restraints are factors.

The researcher preferred to employ support from QDAS and utilized NVivo 11 (QSR International, n.d.) for both the preparation and analysis of the data. NVivo 11 allowed the researcher to work more efficiently to quickly organize, store and retrieve data while revealing connections in the data that may not be readily visible if the data was manually analyzed (QSR International, n.d.). Specifically, NVivo 11 software supported the full management of all facets of the data, drafting data reports, and creating illustrative models of the data (Bazeley, 2007). Additionally, NVivo 11 eliminated the laborious acts of analyzing data void computer support and did not cause interference

with the researcher's data interpretation or progression of data analysis (Bazeley, 2007).

Utilizing NVivo 11, the researcher was able investigate the data from multiple viewpoints which allowed for recognition of trends and themes as they emerged, while remaining in control of the study.

Table 3

*Data Analysis Procedures*

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<b>Prepare and organize data for analysis</b>	<p>Before data analysis commences, all data collected will be backed-up by making copies.</p> <p>All interviews will be fully transcribed and stored in NVivo 11.</p> <p>All video and voice recordings will be stored in NVivo 11.</p> <p>Data in all forms will be stored in secure location with only the researcher having access.</p> <p>All transcripts, video and voice recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the study.</p>
<b>Data review</b>	<p>Review all data in whole at the commencement of the data analysis process.</p>
<b>Data analysis first steps</b>	<p>Identification of relevant and significant statements (quotes, jargon, idioms, etc.) that describe the participants shared lived experiences.</p> <p>Create a list of identified relevant and significant statements wherein each statement will be explored with equal relevance and significance (horizontalization of data).</p> <p>Identification of statements (quotes, jargon, idioms, etc.) that I determine to be relevant and significant that are non-repetitive/non-overlapping, and unique to a single participant's experience of the phenomenon.</p> <p>Create a list of identified relevant and significant statements wherein each statement will be explored with equal relevance and significance (horizontalization of data).</p>
<b>Generation of themes and sub-themes</b>	<p>Synthesize invariant meaning units and themes.</p> <p>Identify relevant and significant statements will be categorized (clusters of meanings).</p> <p>Identifiable themes and sub-themes will emerge from the categories of data and be documented.</p>

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<b>Interpretation of data</b>	Engage the participants as co-researchers to review the descriptions of the experiences to ensure that the construct of the textural-structural descriptions illustrate the meanings and essences of the experiences.
<b>Presentation of themes and sub-themes</b>	Narrative discussions will describe the themes and sub-themes with consideration of the context and location in which the phenomenon was experienced. Integrate all individual textural descriptions to construct composite textural-structural descriptions. Use of verbatim examples in the textural descriptions of the experiences.

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Note: Adapted from Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

### **Steps to Ensure Trustworthiness**

Phenomenological research design and methodology is a qualitative approach to human science research wherein the researcher is able to (a) focus on the whole lived experiences of the research participants; (b) frame questions based upon the researcher's interest and intent for the study; (c) explicate meanings from the experiences; (d) develop textual descriptions of the experiences; (e) presume that all data accumulated from the study is relative to gain an understanding of the experiences; and (f) conclude that all parts of the study, including the experiences, behaviors, and responses to questions, are all a significant part of the entire study's findings (Moustakas, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) shared that the researcher must engage in certain evaluation practices to ensure the rigor of the research inquiry; specifically, internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Further, Guba and Lincoln (2005) posited that the qualitative research approach and findings should be sufficient to construct social policies and legislation. As a qualitative researcher, it was essential that the study's findings were of high quality, realistic, and valid to influence public policies that would allow for high school American

football to be a safer sport. Accordingly, the study's results should have evidence of addressing the criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### **Credibility**

The credibility of a qualitative study is extremely important. Credibility, also referred to as internal validity, is depicted by the level of accuracy of the inferences made during the study and whether the descriptions are recognized by others who have had the experience (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Giving careful attention that the data collection process was accurate and complete during the participants' interviews afforded assurances that the findings provided the in-depth data required to achieve credibility. Tracy (2010) further explained that credibility in a qualitative research approach is accomplished by warranting that there are thick descriptions, triangulation or crystallization, and multivocality and partiality. For example, during the data collection process, the researcher needed to take notes on what was said by the research participants and take notes on the non-verbal communication cues to capture the full essence of the phenomenon. The researcher's set of comprehensive notes combined with the research participants' transcripts were necessary to gain a full understanding of the participants' shared lived experiences and ensure that the study's findings provided meanings that were equally meaningful and applicable to understanding the phenomenon.

### **Dependability**

Morse (2015) shared that achieving dependability is reliant on whether the study's data collection process, interpretation, and analysis maintains consistency and achieves

repeatability of the same results. With qualitative research involving subjectivity of the researcher's approach, focus, intent and experiences, it may be challenging to achieve dependability unless the researcher gives attention to the trustworthiness criteria from the onset of the study (Brazeley, 2012). First, the researcher must establish a neutral stance (Popper, 1965) by bracketing bias prior to and during the data collection, interpretation, and analysis processes to aid in enhancing the study's dependability. Additionally, a keen approach to be able to repeat a study is to include triangulation in the forms of overlapping interviews, focus groups, stepwise replication, and inquiry audit (Morse, 2015). Significant to achieving dependability is the ability to repeat the study in the same context, with the same methods, same participants, and with an expectation that the study's findings will be similar each time (Sata, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, and Kyngäs, 2014). In sum, the researcher must employ in-depth methodological descriptions, void of bias, with the use of triangulation to realize dependability.

### **Confirmability**

The researcher, in a qualitative research approach, takes the role as the research instrument which makes it more challenging to not infuse researcher bias, remain objective, and not invent data interpretations (Polit & Beck, 2012). Researcher confirmability, also known as objectivity, is critical to achieve in a qualitative study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Sata et al. (2014) shared that the way to achieve confirmability is to be sure that the belief construct of the research decisions and methods adopted are discussed in the research report, including explanations of why the approach was favored and to inform of weaknesses in the techniques employed. As discussed earlier,

triangulation and the use of reflective processes will also reduce researcher bias and improve confirmability (Morse, 2015). In sum, it is key that the researcher not only remain cognizant of bias and predispositions, but also remains authentic with the data during the data interpretation and analysis processes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994 and Polit & Beck, 2012).

### **Transferability**

Achieving external validity, also referred to as transferability, is evident when the research results may be extended to other individuals, settings, times, and situations than the one that has been studied (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012). Moreover, transferability occurs when the reader has a sense that the research overlaps and is representative of their own story; the reader can place him/herself in the story and therefore intuitively transfer the research to their own encounter (Tracy, 2010). It is the aim of this study to achieve transferability by presenting thick, rich, and in-depth descriptions of the research participant's shared lived experiences that may be extrapolated into other settings and groups (Morse, 2015). Coupled with the research participant descriptions of the phenomenon, the researcher included participant quotes to illuminate the study's themes and findings to further achieve transferability. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to appeal and seem real to its readers, especially peer high school American football coaches. Also, an intent of this study is to gain the interest of the wider population and have external validity to support its capacity to influence public sport policy implementation.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The discussion of the researcher's plan for ethical procedures is a common requirement for many universities resulting from fears surrounding litigation and funding sources and was addressed to cover the entire plan, preparation, data processes, and study termination (Simpson, 2011). Due to this qualitative study involving human research participants, researcher commitment to authentic representation of the data, and use of raw data, the researcher put forth every effort to protect all parties from risk and harm (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; World Medical Association, 1964; World Medical Association, 2008). Accordingly, the compliance oversight of this study's procedures was the responsibility of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB application was completed, submitted, and received full IRB approval, #02-22-2017-0376593, before the data collection process commenced. There was no contact with the research participants or data collection prior to IRB approval (Rowley, 2014). Throughout the duration of the study, each participant was made aware and reminded that withdrawal from the study could be done at any time, with no penalty (Appendix E).

The researcher was present and active in all phases of this study and was the only person to have direct access to the data. There were no additional persons engaged in the data collection or data analysis process and there was no requirement for any additional person to sign a confidentiality agreement (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012). The research participants were informed of all aspects of the study prior to their involvement (Appendix E). Further, each participant was made aware of the procedures to protect the confidentiality of the data, including: data storage in a locked cabinet, saved on a

password-protected computer, and deletions of all audio and transcripts at the completion of the study. Even though there were no anticipated risk or harm to be done to any of the research participants during this study, each participant was given the opportunity to have anonymity with no direct identifying markers stated in the research report.

Additionally, it was the researcher's responsibility to fully disclose to the research participants the purpose of the research, study's procedures, and interview protocol. Following IRB standards, each participant was given an informed consent form (Appendix E) to complete indicating their agreement to participate in the study (World Medical Association, 2008). The informed consent form detailed the nature of the study, participant expectations, anticipated risks and benefits, confidentiality notices, and outlined that participation in this study was strictly voluntary. It was also disclosed to them that the research will be utilized to fulfill a portion of the doctoral degree requirements for Walden University. The researcher shared that the study's information and findings may be published in whole or part in academic journals, textbooks, and utilized for presentations purposes at academic and sport stakeholder settings, inclusive of sport governance conferences and meetings. The researcher also provided each participant a copy of the study's executive summary, abstract, and detailed information of how to retrieve the final approved research dissertation.

### **Summary**

To richly capture the essence of the phenomenon involving the examination of the shared lived experiences of high school American football coaches relating to player health and safety, the qualitative phenomenological research approach was most

appropriate. The determination to utilize this qualitative research approach was solidified during the research design and rationale section of this chapter wherein the traditions of inquiry and philosophical foundations were discussed and supported the selection of the phenomenological research approach. Upon selecting the research approach, it was imperative to discuss the role of the researcher and how bias was bracketed to produce a quality study (Moustakas, 1994). In the research methodology section, detailing participant selection logic, data collection, and data analysis plan further illustrated that this research approach provided a thorough and comprehensive research report that presented understanding of the phenomenon to support possibly influencing sport policy implantation to assist with making high school American football as safer sport. It was crucial that the trustworthiness concerns of the study were considered and addressed, which was discussed in detail with full descriptions of what steps were taken to achieve credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability according to Guba and Lincoln (1994). The final section of Chapter 3 provided an in-depth explanation of the ethical procedures and concerns, including discussion of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight and compliance, data handling procedures, and care of the research participants, which were critical components in the data collection, analysis, and reporting the study's results that are presented in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine a purposively select group of the NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients' ideologies, influences and motivations in their decision-making processes. The phenomenological research design was employed to provide opportunities for the head coaches to discuss their shared lived experiences relating athlete health and safety assessments and how they determine the athlete's capacity to play after sustaining a sport-related injury. The following central research question and three sub-questions shaped the in-depth interviews for this study:

*RQ1:* What are the lived experiences from high school American football head coaches that will advance effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries?

*Sub question 1:* What areas of high school level coach training and development need to be concentrated on to perform as an effective head coach?

*Sub question 2:* What areas of high school level coaching practices need to be explored to reduce player sport-related injuries?

*Sub question 3:* How do high school American football head coaches perceive their roles and responsibilities in reducing player sport-related injury?

The chapter presents findings from participant interviews of 12 high school American football head coaches who had previously received the NFL High School Coach of the Year award. Comprehensive descriptions of their shared lived experiences was gathered from the participant interviews. Additionally, in this chapter, the settings of



the interviews, the research participants' demographics, and method of data collection will also be discussed. There is also discussion involving data analysis of the study as well as a presentation of the evidence supporting the trustworthiness of the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the results of the study answering the overarching research question and each of the three sub-questions.

### **Setting**

Each research participant was in a different setting for their interview. No one was requested to be moved from their regular routine, place of residence, or employment to conduct the interview. Upon receiving informed consent (see Appendix E) from the participant, a location, date and time were scheduled for the interview. Each participant selected the location, either at their high school, office, football field, or home. Each participant set the date and time to be interviewed. The scheduled interviews were confirmed through email to each participant.

Because all research participants reside in different areas throughout the United States, each interview was carried out through teleconference. Conducting the interviews through teleconference assisted in minimizing researcher bias because the interviews were free from interference from researcher's facial expressions in reaction to the participant responses. Also, only the pre-determined open-ended interview questions (see Appendix G) were asked and each participant was allowed as much time as they wanted to freely respond. Each research participant was comfortable in their setting of choice and freely answered the interview questions and openly expressed their true experiences. Additionally, each interview was voice recorded and enough information was gathered to

gain an understanding of the phenomenon. Further, there were no circumstances that prejudiced the participants or their sharing of experiences at time of the data collection interviews that may hinder or influence the interpretation of the study results.

### **Demographics**

The criterion sampling design for this study required that the research participant was a recipient of the NFL High School Coach of the Year award. Each participant was awarded the NFL Coach of The Year award between the years of 1999 and 2014. There were 12 male participants with one recipient receiving the award twice. The participants reside and work in ten different states with two from Minnesota and two from Ohio. The participant ages ranged from 49-76, with an average age of 63, and they have a total of 373 combined years of serving as high school American football head coaches. Additionally, each participant is or was a head coach at an urban, suburban, or rural high school in the United States. Table 4 is a summary of the participants' general demographic information.

Table 4

#### *Participant General Demographic Information*

<b>Award Yr</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Current Age</b>	<b>Yrs as HC</b>	<b>Type of HS</b>	<b>Coach Status</b>
1999	CA	64	33	Urban	Active
2000	OH	63	35	Suburban	Retired (2014)
2001	LA	54	20	Urban	Active
2003	NY	74	48	Ur/Suburban	Active
2004	MD	68	35	Ur/Suburban	Active
2006	MN	71	22	Urban	Retired (2005)
2007	ND	66	35	Urban	Retired (2006)
2008/2010*	TX	76	46	Urban	Retired (2011)
2010	FL	68	35	Suburban	Retired (2011)
2012	OH	49	13	Suburban	Active
2013	MN	60	34	Suburban	Active
2014	WI	53	17	Rural	Active

\*Two-time award recipient

Although each of the research participants did not equate coaching success with win-loss records, they each did explain the importance of having success on and off the playing field. Having success on and off the playing field is important for retaining coaches and players, maintaining productive programs, and being in position to share their experiences with other coaches and sport stakeholders. Coupled with receiving the NFL High School Coach of the Year award, the research participants have collectively been awarded numerous local and state recognitions by their peer groups and sport stakeholders. Some have also received national recognition from the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA), a national organization of over 12,000 members with focuses on education and networking to further advance American football. There have also been a plethora of high school student-athletes under their tutelage who continued their academic and sport careers into NCAA colleges and universities throughout the United States, with some continuing into the NFL.

#### **Combined List of Research Participants' Reported Accomplishments**

- 16 USA Today top 25 nationally ranked teams
- 22 State championships
- 134 State playoff appearances
- 23 state Coach of the Year awards received
- 64 local/regional Coach of the Year awards received

Significant to this study is the head coach's perspectives of reducing sport-related injuries in high school American football programs. To gain an understanding of this

study's phenomenon, it was imperative to explore each of the research participant's participation in American football. Table 5 is a summary of the research participants' playing history from youth through college. The majority (66%) of the research participants participated in organized youth football programs. Almost all (91%) of the participants played American football at the high school level for 3-4 years each with just over half (54%) reporting that they sustained sport-related injuries. Moreover, the majority (66%) of the participants also continued to play American football at the college/university level with two receiving athletic scholarships.

Table 5

*Participant American Football Playing History*

	<b>Played Youth Football</b>		<b>Played HS Football</b>	<b>Avg Yrs Played</b>	<b>HS Sport-Related Injury</b>		<b>Played College Football</b>	<b>Rec'd Athletic Scholarship</b>
<b>Yes</b>	8	<b>Yes</b>	11	3.25	6	<b>Yes</b>	8	2
<b>No</b>	4	<b>No</b>	1			<b>No</b>	4	

**Data Collection**

The NFL Football Foundation office confirmed that there were 19 NFL High School Coach of the Year awards presented from 1999 to 2016. From the list of 19 award recipients, there were 15 potential research participants due to two being deceased. One recipient is 90 years old and not able to be interviewed, and one recipient received the award twice. For this study, data was collected from 12 of the 15 potential research participants. All the participants were active or retired male high school American football head coaches who have received the NFL High School Coach of the Year award. Each participant was located by using various internet search engines. Recruitment,

research interview, and member checking took approximately 90 days from the date of receiving IRB approval and there were no variations in the data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3.

At the commencement of each in-depth interview, each participant was thanked for agreeing to participate in the study. Following the greeting and appreciation, questions were asked to complete the background information form (see Appendix D) with any missing information. After completion of the background information form, each participant was reminded of the research focus, that the interview would be recorded, and the purpose of the recording and transcription. Each participant was also informed that they would receive a copy of the transcript for review, editing, and approval (see Appendix H). As the final statement before the beginning of the interview, the participant was told that at any time they could opt-out of the study for any reason, with no penalty. The average participant interview was 52 minutes, with the longest interview lasting 93 minutes and the shortest was 34 minutes.

Although the in-depth questions were not able to be totally scripted, the interview was guided with 13 open-ended questions and probes for questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 10 as outlined in the data collection tool (see Appendix G). The probing questions assisted with gathering information of specific examples of the lived experiences. Each in-depth interview occurred during a single session and was recorded using *Voice Recorder*, TapMedia, Ltd. (2016) digital recording application made available through Apple, Inc. Following recording the interviews, each was transcribed and a copy forwarded to each participant for their review, editing, and approval. Participants responded that the

transcriptions were acceptable, with five requesting minor revisions or additional information to be included. There were no participants who stated that they had any issues during the interviews and none withdrew from the study once an interview was scheduled.

### **Data Analysis**

Phenomenological research data analysis involves the researcher dwelling on the raw data (Finlay, 2014). Additionally, Moustakas (1994) summarized phenomenological research data analysis as constructing textual and structural descriptions from the synthesis and organization of invariant qualities and themes derived from the essence of the shared experiences. Finlay (2014) further explained that the researcher must be fully engaged to manage all intrusions and pre-understandings of the data to do justice to the studied phenomenon. Spending time in the dwelling process while remaining fully engaged, brought to the front the trends and themes in the data that identified the rich, comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon and gave way for the essence of the phenomenon to be revealed. Consequently, to inductively maneuver through the data analysis process and maintain integrity, data analysis procedures were followed.

#### **Prepare and Organize Data for Analysis**

After the data was collected, copied, and transcribed, it was organized and both audio and transcriptions were saved to a password-protected computer and stored in a safe place in the researcher's home office. Research participants' last names were used to identify each set of data and full transcripts, after member checking, were uploaded into NVivo 11 from QSR International. Following the copying, storing, and uploading of the

full transcripts, data organization continued with the re-arrangement of the full responses to each of the open-ended interview questions and accompanying probes into separate files for each participant response to the same question. For example, the responses from the 12 research participants to the first open-ended interview question: “What influenced you to become an American football coach?” and the accompanying probes, were all placed into a separate file. The creation of separate files for each of the research participant responses to the questions and probes were organized in this manner. All data was then reviewed in whole.

### **Data Review**

From the 12 research participant interviews, the transcribed audio records totaled 108 single-spaced pages of raw data. Each interview transcription ranged from 6-13 pages, with an average length of 9 pages. With these page lengths, it was not complicated to review the full transcripts multiple times. After creating additional files by re-organizing each full transcript into response-focused files, the additional reviews were also completed with ease. Even though some of the interview question responses were lengthy, at this point, full transcript responses was reviewed and all data was considered equally relevant and significant.

### **Data Analysis with Horizontalization Process**

In accordance with Moustakas (1994) data analysis procedures, relevant and significant statements (quotes, jargon, idioms, etc.) were identified. The statements were used to describe the research participants shared lived experiences. Each statement was explored with equal relevance and significance and include:

- “Football is a game that I love.”
- “... it’s much more than the wins and losses. It’s a relational game. How you relate to people; how you treat people.”
- “Take great care of your players.”
- “...we meet with the players and their parents. We review all of the safety issues. We have to nowadays.”
- “The reported increase in injuries is because you have a lot more awareness, you have a lot more trainers doing a better job at keeping records.”
- “Every school should have a trainer.”

Additionally, statements (quotes, jargon, idioms, etc.) that were relevant and significant while also remaining non-repetitive/non-overlapping, and unique to a single participant’s experience were identified. These unique statements were also explored with equal relevance and significance and include:

- “We work hard to look at our practice structure just as we work hard to look at our teaching progression to make sure we simplify everything and keep kids safe.”
- “Analyze everything you do. If you say, “we do it that way because we’ve always done it that way,” that’s not good enough.”
- “One thing that’s missing is the relationship between that medical professional, whether it’s a doctor, nurse, or all the way down to your athletic trainer, with the head football coach and his staff. “



- “At my personal clinic, I would make sure there was a lot of discussion about proper ways to train, ways to avoid over-training, ways to make sure that kids are at their optimum.”
- “I think part of our job is to mentor younger coaches, the ones that will replace us in our jobs.”
- “... you spend four years with me, I owe you something. I owe you an opportunity; I owe you something.”

### **Generation of Themes and Sub-themes**

Qualitative data analysis requires that the raw data be placed into some logical order to synthesize invariant meaning units and themes (Moustakas, 1994). In working with the data, organizing and breaking it into manageable units, the following questions came to the forefront while searching for patterns:

1. What things about head coach’s lived experiences stand out to me?
2. What is to be learned from the head coaches’ shared lived experiences?
3. What needs to be told to others to effect positive social change in the operation of high school American football sport programs?

After full exploration of the data categories (clusters of meanings), themes and sub-themes emerged (See table 6).

Table 6

#### *Emerged Themes and Sub-themes*

<b>Theme No.</b>	<b>Main Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>
Theme 1	Establishing head coach practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing experience</li> <li>• Experience with former coaches</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer coaches</li> </ul>
Theme 2	Important head coach responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-being of the athlete</li> <li>• Mentor other coaches</li> <li>• Passion for the sport and position</li> </ul>
Theme 3	Coach qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach/not teach in the school district</li> <li>• Sport knowledge</li> <li>• Coach certification</li> </ul>
Theme 4	Coach training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimize Xs &amp; Os</li> <li>• Sport safety</li> <li>• Sport psychology/relationships</li> </ul>
Theme 5	Injury prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipment</li> <li>• Strength and conditioning</li> <li>• Skill development and playing</li> </ul>
Theme 6	Health and safety policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Areas to address, include in policy</li> <li>• Standardization of health and safety protocols</li> <li>• Athletic trainer</li> </ul>

### Codes and Categories

In qualitative research design, to consolidate meaning and develop explanation of the data, a systematic application of organizing, dividing, grouping, re-organizing, and linking the data must occur (Saldana, 2016). The systematic application creates order through data coding that can be both a priori, and emerging. After multiple reviews of the research participant transcripts, a priori codes were identified from the research purpose and problem areas, theoretical framework, and list of research questions to maintain coherence during data examination. For example, with research sub-question 1 category: coach certification/training, the following codes were initially utilized:

- Codes
  - Course topics
  - Classroom
  - Online
  - Frequency

- Monitoring/supervision.

As codifying ensued, additional categories and codes emerged.

### **Interpreting the Meaning of the Data**

Each research participant was very comfortable with discussing their shared lived experiences. All participants freely responded to each interview question and provided detailed responses. Because of the rich, in-depth responses, it was not necessary to rely upon researcher subjectivity or explicit interpretation of the data to describe the participant experiences of the phenomenon. In exploring the participant responses, there was discussion surrounding the influences of both the achievement goal theory and the theory of reasoned action in relation to the phenomenon. Additionally, textural-structural descriptions and verbatim examples illustrating the meanings and essences of the experiences were discussed.

### **Presentation of Themes and Sub-themes**

The study was prompted by one overarching research question and three sub-questions. Narrative discussions described the themes and sub-themes of the phenomenon that were experienced by the research participants. Further, there was an integration of textural descriptions to construct composite textural-structural descriptions. A descriptive narrative, including verbatim examples, details the study's results. The findings for the study are discussed in the results section of this chapter and presented by answering each of the research sub-questions and the overarching research question.

**Discrepant Information**

The use of open-ended interview questions during data collection allowed each of the research participants to respond in as much detail as they desired. Given the opportunity to freely expound on areas involving high school American football safety, there were occasions that participant responses were different. Some statements provided additional clarity and other statements were not closely related to the research focus. Even though there was data collected that did not relate to this study, all participant statements were recorded and included in the data analysis process. The information shared in statements perceived to not be closely related to the study, increased the scope of the patterns that emerged from conforming data. Moreover, inclusion of the anomalous statements helped to gain additional insight into the phenomenon.

**Evidence to Increase Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research design, it is critical that the researcher ensures that the study's findings are of high quality, realistic, and valid to effect positive social change. Moustakas (1994) supported that a valid research inquiry: (a) proves its truth value; (b) delivers the basis for applying it; and (c) permits external judgments to be made about the consistence of procedures and neutrality of the findings. Moreover, the qualitative study and findings should be sufficient to construct social policies and legislation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). These standards of significance, practicality, and authenticity are incorporated into the trustworthiness of this study and pursued to reassure the study's audience that the findings are reasonable. The following is a discussion of the strategies that were implemented to achieve trustworthiness.

**Credibility**

Credibility, also referred to as internal validity, is depicted by the level of accuracy of the inferences made during the study and whether the descriptions are recognized by others who have had the experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To ensure the accuracy of the collected data, four strategies were employed: data collection tool, voice recording each participant interview, taking written notes, and member checking each transcript. The data collection tool allowed the researcher to ask each participant the same questions and probes with variations occurring when the participant prompted additional inquiry due to their response. Reflective and interview notes were taken during the interviews and data analysis that included attention to the participant's voice inflections, subliminal comments, pauses, and researcher thoughts and reactions to the participant responses. Each interview was voice recorded to safeguard that a thorough and complete verbatim replication of the participants' responses and reactions. As a final strategy to ensure credibility, there were peer examinations of the results, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

**Dependability**

Achieving dependability is the ability to repeat the study, in the same context, with the same methods, same participants, and with an expectation that the study's findings will be similar each time (Sata et al., 2014). For this study, the researcher ensured dependability by following the same data collection, analysis, and interpretation procedures for each participant. The research methods included code-recode procedures spanning eight weeks to ensure rich, comprehensive examination and account of the

findings. Each participant provided in-depth responses to fully describe their lived experiences of the phenomenon. The researcher utilized overlapping interview questions to ensure that the responses were to similar inquiries. The research methods employed during this study support the use of a stepwise replication process that would allow other researchers to have similar findings.

### **Confirmability**

Researcher confirmability, also known as objectivity, is critical to achieve in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Miles and Huberman (2014) discussed that research confirmability involves the researcher's willingness to admit bias. To acknowledge researcher bias as a critical source of researcher subjectivity, steps were taken to openly disclose to each participant the researcher's background in high school American football. The researcher briefly introduced past involvement with the NFF Play It Smart and NFL High School Player Development programs and each participant shared that they were familiar with each program. Researcher further discussed never serving in the capacity of a player, coach or head coach in American football. Following disclosing researcher experiences to the participants, it was also necessary to bracket bias to further suspend the researcher experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Along with acknowledging researcher bias and bracketing bias, the researcher took reflective and interview notes detailing what was known and what was perceived as new information.

To further assure the study's confirmability and minimize intrusion of researcher bias, an audit-trail of the data was created (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Steps were taken to facilitate researcher objectivity by employing a data collection tool to aid in guiding

the participant interview questions. The participant interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and member checked by the participants. Additionally, data was code-recode with no omission of statements. Commonly used words and phrases in the responses revealed their shared lived experiences of the phenomenon. The combination of these steps ensured a full reporting of the raw data. Further, once data was identified to be relative to answer the research question, it was included in a chart to safeguard against researcher bias.

### **Transferability**

External validity is evident when the research results may be extended to other individuals, similar settings, times, and situations other than the one that has been studied (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012). To achieve transferability, the researcher engaged the purposefully selected group of NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients due to their high level of trustworthiness among their colleagues and sport stakeholders. Even though this study's sample size was very small compared to the potential number of research participants, the selection of these head coaches and the research process supports the transferability of this study. This study was designed with a specific criterion sample and data collection tool and it is feasible that additional high school American football head coaches could be studied in the same manner. Additional research could target different groups of high school head coaches with a different set of criteria, i.e., school district type, years of coaching experience, ethnicity, etc. utilizing the same data collection tool in various data collection settings.

To further advance transferability of this study, the qualitative research design approach was very appropriate for the high school head coach participant group because it afforded the research participants to openly share lived experiences. Although the participants answered pre-selected open-ended interview questions, each was allowed the opportunity to expound on their experiences of the phenomenon without limitations. With the use of common language and phrases, themes, and frequent research participant quoted responses in the research results section, the findings and conclusions are applicable to other groups and situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This study also advanced transferability with the use of thick, rich, and in-depth descriptions of the research participants' experiences that could be inferred as relevant by other groups of head coaches and sport stakeholders. Additional head coaches would be able to identify the research overlap and view this research as applicable and transferable to their own experiences.

## **Results**

The current study presented the following overarching research question: What are the lived experiences from high school American football head coaches that will advance effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries? To answer the research question and the additional sub-questions, the purposively selected group of research participants responded to 13 open-ended interview questions and probes. There was a large amount of raw data collected. From raw data, it was determined that the significant themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis process would be inter-connected to provide the focus for the results discussion. It was also determined that the most effective means



to present the findings would be to organize the results discussion according to the research participant experiences and perspectives, research sub-questions, the overarching research question, and include research participant quoted responses.

### **Research Participant Experiences and Perspectives**

The interviews commenced with questions to gain an understanding of the participant experiences and perspectives relating to the study's phenomenon. During the onset of the interviews, the participants shared that all but one of the research participants had played tackle American football prior to high school graduation. To further expound on the experiences associated with playing American football, an active head coach stated:

“One of the things that I talk to parents about is that most high school kids don't love the game of football because it's hard, it's difficult to do what we do. But what they do is love the experience associated with playing the game. I have over 110 juniors and seniors on my roster right now and only 11 of them are going to play. Why do so many stay? Well, it's about the experience.”

Each of the research participants disclosed that they were a high school teacher and two shared that they also coached other sports. The primary influences of the head coach's approaches and practices for each of the participants emanated from a variety of sources that included watching the movie “Jim Thorpe All American,” great relationships with youth, high school, and college coaches, assumption that young teachers also coach sports, and the “love of the sport.” As the discussions ensued, each participant also discussed their role models and mentors during their coaching career which included

former middle school, high school, and college coaches, peer coaches, priest, English teacher, and a father that was a head coach in the NFL.

**Successful head coach.** Continuing with the interviews, each participant described how they viewed a successful head coach:

- “It’s more in the hearts and the minds of the people that they worked with. Leaves the program better in all regards than it was when the head coach arrived.”
- “Teaching the kids the right things; to be successful in their lives”
- “At the high school level, the ultimate goal is a state championship. I am of the belief that you win a state championship daily when you approach each day as though you’re going to win the championship that day; one man and one kid at a time.”
- “It’s probably no different than being a teacher. A teacher is trying to maximize everyone’s potential in the classroom, whether it’s the best student or the worst student.”
- “He can look at young people 25 years later and see them happy; young people knowing where they’re going in life; and enjoying their families and whatever work that they go into. That they’re respectful of their community and give back. A successful coach is a great teacher, period.”
- “Uses football as a tool to teach kids how to live life, how to conduct themselves in life, and how to go about things in a positive way.”

- “Someone who has a positive impact on his players and a lot of times you can’t tell that until afterward.”
- “Everything that he does involves trying to create an environment where everything is about teaching and learning relative to the nuances of the game.”
- “Creates a program that is meaningful for kids. Also, having a program where you are going to teach the kids how to do things the right way.”
- “One that can get his kids through high school or college, where ever he is and get them to the next level and get them to be successful at that level after they pass you.”
- “You win by developing great people. A successful coach could be measured by where his players are 10-15-20 years down the road.”
- “You have to put everything into those kids. Every single decision that you make has to be done for what’s good for them. Everything that you do with those kids and how it affects their lives.”

Seventy-five percent of the research participants referenced win/loss records. One head coach stated that success is “when a coach wins more than he loses,” a retired head coach explained that “winning is a part of it,” and the remaining seven responded that a successful head coach is not based upon their win/loss record. Additionally, one head coach shared that, “We should understand that we’re developing young men. We’re trying to help kids make the transition from bring teenagers to adults; young boys to men. So, all those characteristics and ideologies that go into raising a kid have to be present in a successful high school coach’s toolbox.” In sum, the research participants described a

successful head coach in terms of teaching, youth development, athlete successes, and positive experiences.

**Successful vs. qualified head coach.** Broadening the discussion relating to successful head coaches, each research participant was asked to share their perspective on the accompanying probing queries regarding a qualified head coach as also a successful head coach and to describe the most important responsibility of a head coach. For the probe concerning the qualified head coach as also a successful head coach, there were three participants that had no direct response and five responded no. One head coach answered, “not particularly.” and explained that, “he wouldn’t put them in the same bowl.” There were also two coaches that responded yes and one decisive “Absolutely. You have to be in that type of education and be able to deal with people and motivate people.” During an additional probing query regarding the most important responsibility of a head coach, each of the research participants responded with three similar descriptions:

1. Loving the kids;
2. Mental, emotional, and physical development of your kids; and
3. Well-being and safety of the players.

One of the research participants captured the essence of all the participant responses in his response of the most important responsibility of the head coach as “looking out for his kids and making sure, number one, that they’re safe in your program. Also, making sure that they’re taught what it takes to be successful and keep themselves from getting hurt.”

**Increase in sport-related injuries and decrease in participation.** The participants also provided their perspective on reasons for the reported increase in sport-related injuries during the past ten years (Badgeley et al., 2013; CDC, 2011; Nation et al., 2011) and the reported decrease in American football participation at the youth and adolescent levels during recent years (Mihoces, 2013). As shown in Table 7, there were five different reasons relating the to the increase in sport-related injury occurrence and for the reported decrease in American football participation at the youth and adolescent levels provided by the research recipients.

Table 7

*Reasons for Increase in Sport-related Injury Occurrence and Decrease in Participation*

<b>Reasons for Increase in Sport-related Injury Occurrence</b>	<b>Reasons for Decrease in American football Participation</b>
1. Athletic trainers doing a better job at tracking, keeping records and reporting injuries	1. Concerns about concussions and fear of injury
2. Players are bigger, faster, and stronger	2. Media and publicity of sport-related injuries
3. Football is not taught correctly in some areas and kids are not using proper techniques	3. Demands of the sport and the option to play other sports
4. More awareness and more of an emphasis and impact on the safety elements of the game	4. Costs of playing has gone up
5. Kids think that they need to emulate what they watch on TV	5. Video game culture

Over half (58%) of the research participants referenced the increased presence of the athletic trainer and their reporting of sport-related injuries has increased and almost half (42%) of the research participants responded that there is likely an increase in sport-related injuries because the speed of the game is faster because players are bigger and stronger. A few (25%) of the head coaches shared that the players are not correctly taught

proper technique and this leads to sport-related injuries. Relating to the reasons for the decrease in American football participation at the youth and adolescent levels, over half (58%) of the research participants shared that they believe it is because of the attention given to concussion injuries and almost half (42%) stated that the media plays a role by “putting information out there daily in the news” and “pointing the finger at football because it is physical.” There were also a few (25%) research participants that mentioned that the option to participate in other sports as a factor for the reported decrease in American football participation at the youth and adolescent levels.

### **High School Level Coach Training and Development**

Research sub question 1: What areas of high school level coach training and development need to be concentrated on to perform as an effective head coach?

Each of the research participants responded to questions relating to high school coach training and development practices. There were a series of questions that included discussions of the head coach and staff’s attendance to coach training and development clinics and workshops. In conjunction with the coach training and development attendance discussions, the research participants described the school district and state athletic association required qualifications to coach high school American football in their respective state. Also discussed was who or what entity the research participants believed were responsible to monitor the completion and renewal of the qualifications. Research participants provided suggestions for additional subject matters to be explored and included in the development of future coach training and development qualification standards.

**Required qualifications to coach high school American football.** Each of the research participants described the qualifications for their respective school district and state athletic association that are necessary to remain in compliance to coach high school American football while they served as a head coach. From the participant responses relating to coach required qualifications, there was a significant (75%) reference to the requirement to teaching or having a coach certification and a college degree to be a head coach and only a couple participants (17%) mentioned fingerprinting and background checks. Over half of the participants (58%) stated that cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification was required and almost half (42%) stated that completion of a first aid course was also required. A couple programs (17%) required that the coaches take courses specific to American football and there was a small group of participants (33%) that shared that there was a requirement to complete sport injury and concussion protocol courses. Each respondent shared that all certifications, renewals, and qualification standards were monitored by their respective athletic director, state high school athletic association, and one course, “specific to football, more along the lines of safety and tackling,” was monitored by the NFHS.

**Additional subject matters for coach training and development.** The research participants were asked if there were any additional subject matters that should be explored and included in high school American football coach training and development. Two of the participants shared that they believe, “we should have higher standards” and that “new coaches should go through coach training sessions, not just one, before they come out and actually start coaching.” From the discussions of additional training and

development subject matters, there were these collective responses:

1. **Self-development**, including interpersonal skill development, learning styles, and likes/dislikes;
2. **Youth and adolescent growth and development**, including psychology of youth and adolescent development how to treat youth and adolescents, and ensuring commitment to the children and their welfare; and  
**Coaching preparation**, including how to treat people, deal with the community, administration, other coaches, and most of all, getting along with people working with the sport program.

As the discussions progressed, the research participants expounded on additional topic areas that they would focus upon if they were developing coach training and development clinics, workshops, and other opportunities. The majority of the participants (58%) emphasized that their trainings would be focused on areas other than “sport specific” and there would be “minimum discussion of the Xs and Os of the game.”

Each participant provided a list of training and development topics that they believed to be important for coaches to learn, teach, and perform. There were a variety of responses to the question regarding what topics would be important to include in a coach training and development workshop. The combined list of suggested topics are as follows:

1. **Health and safety issues and emergency protocols**, including concussion training, heat and hydration, sudden cardiac, bee stings, asthma, and other injuries;



2. **Proper teaching of safe football fundamentals and techniques**, including teach tackling, blocking, initiating contact, deflecting contact, how to hold a dummy;
3. **Correct use of equipment**, including how you size equipment and how players wear equipment;
4. **Program building**, including developing a coach philosophy, team culture, team value system, sportsmanship, respecting the game, respecting your opponent, respecting the history and tradition, and the importance of paperwork and signed documents;
5. **Relationship building**, including coach-player relationships, coach-parent relationship, player-teacher relationship, coach-teacher relationship, community relations, coach-trainer and player-trainer relationships, including the importance of informing trainers or doctors about injuries, especially to the head; and
6. **Physical training and conditioning**, including weightlifting techniques, proper ways to train and avoid over-training, optimum performance, nutrition, and rest.

Leading the list was teaching about health and safety protocols (75% of the respondents) and teaching proper football fundamentals and techniques (50% of the respondents). Correct use of equipment was also moderately referenced (33% of the respondents), especially discussions on equipment fitting.

**Coach training and development attendance.** The research participants shared

that they have a vested interest in the coach training and development clinics, workshops, and methods as their primary learning and teaching resources in their profession. Each participant provided a description of how their staff attended clinics, what type of clinics they attended, and when they attended them. As depicted in Table 8, there was a variety of means to accomplish attending and participating in coach training and development opportunities.

Table 8

*Description of Coach Training and Development Attendance*

<b>Types of Trainings</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Brand sponsored clinics	Winter – Summer, and Online
Staff retreats	Winter - Summer
Staff meetings	All Year
Staff meals	All year
University clinics	Spring – Summer, and Season
University coach visits to high school campus	Winter – Spring, and Season

All the research participants explained how they took advantage of the available formal training clinics. One head coach shared that, “We always took advantage of the university’s clinics that they put on, participate in the camps, and so forth. We would, generally as a group, try to travel to usually one major clinic a year out of town.” A small group of the research participants (33%) also described how they conducted their own staff development in the form of meetings, staff meals, and off campus retreats.

### **Coaching Practices to be Explored**

Research sub question 2: What areas of high school level coaching practices need to be explored to reduce player sport-related injuries?

The research participants shared their experiences relating to the general operation of their respective high school American football program. Insight was gained on the procedures utilized to assess, monitor, and convey information about the high school American football program to coaches, players, parents and other sport stakeholders. The participants explained their relationships and influences involving sport program stakeholders. Each participant discussed their schedules of formal and informal staff meetings during the off-season, pre-season, and season. The research participants described meetings and presentations involving coaching staff, athletes, parents, and other sport stakeholders explicitly addressing sport health and safety issues and concerns.

**Relationships with sport program stakeholders.** The research participants were asked to discuss and rank in order of program influence the following group: athletes, parents, assistant coaches, school administration, and alumni/booster club. Two of the participants explained that all of them have an important role and a share in the influence on the program operation. Additionally, another head coach shared that:

“Ultimately, the decision falls on me and I see better than I hear. I can hear from my trainer and I can hear from my players, and when I watch them on the field I know. I can tell right away if he’s going to be ready to go. I think it puts way too much pressure on my coaches. I don’t want them to make any decisions on players. I think they know why I don’t care what they have to say because the reality is a lot of times with young coaches, they want to win.”

Half of the participants (50%) explicitly stated that when there was a situation involving a player injury, the athletic trainer, doctor, and medical staff would have the most

influence. Sharing similar ranking levels (25%) were the athletes and assistant coaches relating to influences involving aspects of the sport program operation not involving injuries, with parents closely following (17%). One research participant explained that, “Number one, I have no choice involved if a parent says something. That’s his/her child.” Ranking last was the school administration (8%), when it did not involve following rules, regulations, mandates, and guidelines, followed by alumni/booster clubs, if there was any influence at all.

**Formal and informal coach staff meetings.** The research participants shared their practices relating to program staff meetings. In responding to the query involving how often and in what format do the research participants facilitate staff meetings, almost half (42%) explained that since the coaching staff had been together for “many years,” their meeting schedules and format had changed to be less formal, particularly “during the off-season.” The various responses from the participants are separated according to the time of year:

1. **Post-season** (December-January) included the range of meeting “as few as possible,” once, maybe twice a month, monthly “supper off-campus,” and 2-3 times total;
2. **Off-season** (February-April) included the range of meeting “as few as possible,” “sporadically,” “informal talks all the time,” 2-3 times, 4-5 times, once every two weeks, and once a month;

3. **Pre-season** (May-July) included the range of meeting “as few as possible,” several days, once a week, every day after practice, and every day during spring football; and
4. **Season** (August-November) included the range of meeting “continuously, ongoing, and more structured” 2-3 times a week, before practice, every day before and after practice, structured Saturday mornings, and every Sunday morning, all day, or evening.

There was only one participant that discussed the increase in formal staff meetings due to participating in spring football. An additional participant further explained that, “The key is organization. When the coaches show up for me, I give them a book. That book is going to go from August to May. Everything I want from the coaches is in that book. Everything that I expect from you is in that book. All of your duties are in that book.”

**Meetings addressing sport safety issues and concerns.** The research participants further discussed that they each ensured that there was at least one meeting with the coach staff, athletes and parents with a focus on sport health, safety and injury/emergency protocols. One participant explained that, “With the parents, we only had one official meeting that all the parents are required to attend. That’s our school policy. That’s where we had to give them the state mandated things about concussion awareness and heat stroke awareness. Plus, then we would add in what our code of conduct is for coaches, parents and players.” Additionally, half of the participants (50%) had multiple meetings with the coaches, athletes and parents discussing sport health, safety, and injury/emergency protocols as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

*Sport Health, Safety and Injury/Emergency Protocols Meetings*

<b>Time of Year</b>	<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Meeting Facilitator</b>
Spring	Athletes and Parents	Head Coach and Athletic Trainer
Summer Practices	Athletes	Athletic Trainer
Pre-season before equipment	Athletes and Coach staff	Athletic Trainer
Beginning of Season	Athletes and Parents	Head Coach and Athletic Trainer

A few (17%) of the research participants hosted a program health, safety, and injury/emergency protocols meetings twice a year for the parents while most of the participants (75%) conducted similar meetings at the beginning of the season. A few of the participants (17%) conducted their program health, safety, and injury/emergency protocols meetings during the spring for the athletes. One head coach, and supported by a few more participants (25%), explained that, “We have a meeting with the kids, parents and coaches and our athletic trainer to introduce her/him and provide the contact information. We also give them handouts, discuss how we handle an injury and explain that they will be notified immediately if their son is injured. We also talk about heat prostration.”

**Coach Perceived Roles and Responsibilities**

Research sub question 3: How do high school American football head coaches perceive their roles and responsibilities in reducing player sport-related injury?

To gain an understanding of head coaches’ perceived roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injury occurrences, the research participants were asked questions relating to how sport-related injuries are managed within their programs. The participants responded to queries and probes regarding player injury assessments, reporting, and

information sharing with the relative parties. Discussions also explored the coach-player and coach-athletic trainer relationships relative to sport-related injury occurrences.

Additionally, each participant discussed how their coaching approaches have changed due to the focus on sport-related injuries. Discussions continued to include what each research participant believed was his role and responsibility in preventing sport-related injuries.

**Player injury assessments, reporting and information sharing.** The research participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions relating to assessing player injuries after games. Each participant stated that they have an athletic trainer available during conditioning workouts, practices, and games, depending on funding and contracts. One-hundred percent (100%) of the participants responded that their athletes were assessed after games. One head coach explained that, “We do immediate postgame assessments before we send kids home with their parents. We do follow-ups when they come in on Saturday mornings. Many times, our team doctor will come in and see them and that's when we would probably make a recommendation for them to see their personal doctor.” The participants further explained that the trainers, even when not mandated by the school district or state athletic association, maintain records and regularly reported the status of the athletes to the head coach. A participant explained that, “We have 2 full-time trainers. All injuries go through our training staff and I get a weekly report on all of the kids; whether its kids that have had season-ending injuries, they will still give me the report on where they are and the rehab program, all the way down to the kids that are questionable, the kids that are probable.”

**Coach-player relationship.** Each of the research participants at different points during their interviews shared their lived experiences relating to coach-player relationships. One participant stated that, “I know what my kids want to do, I know where they wanted to go because I went to their homes. I talked to their parents. I looked in their icebox to see if they had anything to eat. So, I knew how to treat each kid.” Another participant shared “the importance of relationship building” because the athletes “look to the coaches to tell them what to do.” Also, during the interviews, the research participants discussed the importance of the player telling the coach when they are injured or having a teammate tell the coaches when his teammate was injured. For example, the participant explained that, “we talk to the players about their overall health. We also talk to their teammates about being their brother’s keeper. You might be in practice and see a kid experience heat exhaustion symptoms and we talk to the kids, again, about being their brother’s keeper. You go tell the coach, grab the nearest coach about him not looking right or not feeling right. Our kids are pretty good with that.”

**Coach-athletic trainer relationship.** Coupled with coach-player relationships, the discussion continued to include the importance of the coach-athletic trainer relationship. A research participant shared that, “When I look back on that time, I don’t know how I ever coached without having one. Back then, basically, one of the coaches would walk in and determine if somebody needed tape, they would come up to us and we would tape it ourselves. Or, if somebody was injured, basically, we would assess the injury right there. When you’re coaching a football game, it wasn’t very safe at all.” Another participant explained that, “He has 100% control. Every injury is recorded and



reported. After practices, he comes in and gives me a report of who got hurt during practice. He's there every day. If we're doing something, he's there. We're very spoiled. It's a paid position by the county." Additionally, a third participant discussed that, "At our staff meetings, I made sure our coaches knew that none of us, not myself and certainly not them, were going to be allowed to overrule a trainer." Research participants were unanimously adamant that the presence, role, and authority of the athletic trainer was paramount to the health and safety of their programs.

**Changes to coaching practices.** As the interviews continued, the research participants shared their lived experiences involving their general coaching practices and sport-related injury occurrences. An active head coach shared:

"When I first started, you had the salt tablets and told the players to chew on a piece of ice. Water was unheard of. Coaches would kick over the bucket of water when I played. We never got water. In the old days, we use to have 2-a-day practices, some schools would even have 3-a-day practices with full pads. Which is totally insane. Then you would have full equipment on Monday through Thursday, and even have full go before the game on Friday. Then turn around and bring the kids in on Saturday and work them again so their bodies never have a chance to recuperate."

As each participant reflected on their coaching practices, there was almost a split down the middle (42%, no and 58%, yes) as to whether their coaching practices have changed in relation to the current focus on sport-related injuries. Of the 42% that said that they had not changed their coaching practices, these are the reasons:

1. “I would like to think that we always did that, what was the right way to tackle. We even taught them how to fall. It’s just the things that you do.”;
2. “It really hasn’t changed my approach ... you’re always looking to make it better.”; and
3. “The best way to keep from getting injured is to go out, play hard, have fun and not worry about it.”

The remaining 58% shared reasons for why their coaching practices had changed:

1. “Our big talk is the actual contact in practice. How much physicality and contact are we doing.”;
2. “All during practice we would monitor their pulse rates, stop, and take a break. We took more water breaks.”; and
3. “The old ‘rub some dirt on it, you’re going to be ok’ has been replaced with a greater sense of detail and attention to what’s going on. More programs have the athletic trainer on site, during practice. It’s just greater protection.”

In sum, for both groups, with the influx of attention to sport-related injuries, especially head injuries, the practice sessions have minimal physical contact and there is always an athletic trainer present.

**Perceived coach roles in preventing sport-related injuries.** The research interviews continued and the participants responded to queries relating the coach roles in preventing sport-related injuries. One participant shared that, “We are teachers first. It’s just that our classroom is big, it’s outside, and has a lot of moving parts. These aren’t college players or pro players that know how to play the game. You start from square one

and it's literally: this is how you use your pads; this is how you finish a block; or this is how you protect yourself." Research participants described their perceived roles (shown in Table 10) in preventing sport-related injury occurrences.

Table 10

*Perceived Coach Roles in Preventing Sport-related Injury*

<b>Program Operation</b>	<b>Athlete Welfare</b>	<b>During Practice</b>
Plan the practice sessions	Discipline	Teach safe techniques
Explain practice sessions to coaches and athletes	No incorrect playing	Teach fundamentals
Schedule breaks and hydration	Injury recognition	Philosophy of minimal or no contact
Continuously check playing surfaces	Trust the athletic trainer	Safe drill design and implementation

Throughout the research participant discussions relating to perceived coach roles in preventing sport-related injury, the most consideration (42%) was given to the presence of the athletic trainer as well as some consideration (33%) to the importance of creating and implementing safe drills during practice. The research participants moderately (25%) explained how to have minimal or no contact during practice and a few participants (17%) shared about teaching safe techniques, fundamentals, and how to conduct practices.

### **Head Coach Policy Contributions**

Research overarching question: What contributions from American football high school head coaches will assist with advancing effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries?

Literature indicated that high school American football head coach are a credible advocate for effecting positive change in the quest to make the sport safer (Billings et al.,

2012; Dyson et al., 2011; Gearity & Denison, 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). To gain additional understanding of the research participant shared lived experiences relating to drafting and implementing effective health and safety policies, each participant responded to an inquiry into their participation in injury prevention, reduction, and awareness groups. The participants shared their experiences mentoring other coaches not on their staffs. They also provided insight into a recent proposal to reduce the number of youth American football players from 11-man tackle to 6, 7, or 8-man tackle (Barnett, 2017) and its potential impact on high school level participation. Lastly, each research participant expounded on what information should be included in drafting effective health and safety sport policies to reduce sport-related injury occurrences at the high school level.

**Injury prevention, reduction or awareness groups.** With the widespread interest relating to sport-related injury occurrences, the research participants were asked to describe their affiliations with injury prevention, reduction or awareness groups. More than half of the participants (58%) disclosed that they have not participated in any groups. Thirty-three percent of the head coaches have participated in groups affiliated with their respective state coach associations. Even though one of the four head coaches served as chairman of his state coach association, he “deferred to the professionals on safety topics because his background was simply that he worked with a lot of kids that were probably injured, had good treatment, and he was not qualified to make medical decisions.” Another head coach discussed his participation as serving on panels with discussions targeting “how to teach kids to play, how to teach them early, how to monitor

what they're doing, and how to set up drills that you can control." Only one of the research participants remains actively involved in injury prevention, reduction or awareness groups, has served on the USA Football Board of Directors, and is currently serving as a Master Trainer for the USA Football Heads Up program.

**Mentoring coaches.** Almost all the research participants (91%) are or have served as a mentor to younger coaches. One retired head coach shared that he has mentored "just about every head coach that has come into the area for the last 20 years because they come in and they're not prepared and they weren't told anything." There was one participant that has not mentored because he does not have "any direct connection to any youth programs." For the remaining participants, they have spent their time mentoring former players that are now coaching or head coaches, mostly at the youth level. One participant shared that, "Right now, during the offseason, we're running youth clinics. I have a youth clinic every week. I started this about 10 years ago because I didn't like what was going on in the youth level." The participants also discussed that they are presenters at youth clinics, national brand clinics and their state coaches' conventions.

**11-man tackle to 6, 7, or 8-man tackle.** USA Football proposed and piloted a new "Rookie Tackle" at the youth American football level to reduce the traditional 11-man tackle to 6, 7, or 8-man tackle (Barnett, 2017). The research participants responses regarding their position on these proposed changes and the impact at the high school level were in three distinct areas:

1. Yes, can help with training and teaching the coaches and players;

2. No, leave it at 11-man tackle and focus on teaching and training the youth coaches; and
3. Undecided because more information is needed to respond.

Half of the research participants (50%) were in some level of agreement, ranging from a resounding “absolutely” to a “maybe.” A participant explained that, “I think that it’s intriguing. I think we’re missing a piece from flag to actual 11-man contact and I think that will be a great bridge from the flag program up to the 11-man tackle program.

“You can get more kids involved, more kids to be in skilled position players” The other smaller group (33%) said no, “the game is played 11 on 11.” “The whole key to it is how you teach it. It’s what you teach. It would be better to keep it like it is and just teach it like it is supposed to be taught.” “I would think that this would impact the high school programs drastically. In my time here, a couple hundred kids received Division I scholarships and quite a few of them have been linemen.” The remaining participants (17%) did not offer a comment in support or opposing because they “have not read enough studies about it and don’t want to comment on something that I’m not too familiar with,”

**Key information to include in sport policy development.** The research participants shared what they viewed as key information to be included in sport policies to make high school American football a safer sport. One of the participants shared that in the development of sport health and safety policies, “You have to be thoughtful about what you’re doing and always have that physical well-being of the student in mind; about

overuse, about whatever it might be, not only physical, but psychological.” Table 11 depicts the participant collective responses.

Table 11

*Key Information to Include in Sport Policy Development*

<b>Program Operation</b>	<b>Training and Development</b>
Every program to have a certified athletic trainer for practices and games	Standardized minimum coach qualifications
Equipment to be NOCSAE approved, properly fitted, and worn	Training guidelines for youth and high school coaches
Standardized injury assessment, ‘return to play’ protocols	Training guidelines to keep youth and adolescents mentally and physically healthy
Standardized heat prostration, infections, sudden cardiac awareness, allergies, etc. emergency protocols	Test and monitor proficiency in the basics of American football
Contact during practice parameters: going from just working on air then going to full and live tackle	Nutrition, conditioning, and weight training guidelines

The research participants agreed that every high school American football program must have a certified athletic trainer present for all practices and games. Understanding that there may be programs where cost may prohibit a full-time certified athletic trainer presence, one participant explained that there may be need to “get creative on how to fund that. That should be fundamental. If you can’t provide good medical attention and proper training and conditioning, then you have to question whether or not you should have the program. Maybe you need to collaborate with more schools to come together to provide funding.” There was a consensus among the research participants that there is a need to standardize injury and emergency protocols as well as coach qualifications and training guidelines.

### Summary

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of the rich, in-depth data collected from the purposefully selected research participant group of NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients that spanned 10 different states throughout the United States and included a combined 373 years of head coach experiences. The 12 research participants responded to 13 open-ended interview questions and probes to gain understanding into the phenomenon of high school American football head coaches' perceived roles, responsibilities, and actions in relation to sport-related injury occurrences. The responses were utilized to answer the study's overarching research question: What are the lived experiences from high school American football head coaches that will advance effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries? The additional research sub-questions were also answered during the results narrative discussions in this chapter. Research participant responses revealed insights that could be essential in the sport policy-making processes to reduce sport-related injury occurrences and make high school American football safer.

Research sub-question 1 inquired about the areas of high school level coach training and development that should be concentrated on to perform as an effective head coach. The themes that emerged were: coach qualifications, coach training, course training topics, and training attendance. In answering the research sub-question, the participants provided information relating to qualifications required to coach high school American football, additional topics to be included in coach training and development opportunities, and training and development attendance schedules. The majority of the research participants (75%) shared that there is a requirement for a coach to hold a



teaching certification or be a teacher within their respective school district. The participants also explained that there is a need to include coach training and development in the areas of self-development, youth and adolescent growth and development, and coach preparation.

Research sub-question 2 queried into the areas of high school level coaching practices that need to be explored to reduce player sport-related injuries. The themes that emerged were: sport stakeholder relationships, coach meetings, and health and safety education. The research participants explained their relationships with and influences from various sport stakeholders, coach meeting schedules, and player health and safety education. To answer the research sub-question, the participants provided details regarding their relationships with school administrators, athletic trainer, coaching staff, players, parents, alumni/booster clubs and the presence of program influence originating from each relating to player health and safety. Half of the participants (50%) explicitly stated that when there was a situation involving a player injury, the athletic trainer, doctor, and medical staff would have the most influence. The discussions on how the research participants conducted coach meetings, player and parent meetings, and the involvement of the athletic trainer in sport safety education provided information on the importance of facilitating multiple health and safety meetings throughout the year.

The final research sub-question examined high school American football head coaches' perceived roles and responsibilities in reducing player sport-related injury occurrences. The themes that emerged were: player injury assessment, player injury reporting, coach-player relationship, and coach-athletic trainer relationship. Responding

to the interview questions, the research participants provided information relating to player injury assessments, reporting, and information sharing with the relative parties, coach-player and coach-athletic trainer relationships, and changes in coaching practices. In answering research sub-question 3, one-hundred percent (100%) of the participants responded that their athletes were assessed after games. Additionally, there was almost a split down the middle (42%, no to 58%, yes) as to whether their coaching practices have changed in relation to the current focus on sport-related injuries. Further, regarding coach roles in preventing sport-related injuries, the most consideration (42%) was given to the presence of the athletic trainer as well as some consideration (33%) to the importance of creating and implementing safe drills during practice.

In this qualitative phenomenological study, the shared lived experiences of the research participants were explored to understand their perspectives of judgment and decision-making processes regarding player participation and sport safety. To gain understanding, the overarching research question investigated the lived experiences of American football high school head coaches that will advance effective policies to reduce sport-related injuries. The themes that emerged were: policy groups, coach mentoring, youth football, policy key information. In answering the overarching research question, more than half of the participants (58%) disclosed that they have not participated in any groups and a large majority (91%) shared that they are or have served as a mentor to other American football coaches, including the youth level. The research participants provided a list of key information to consider in drafting national health and safety sport policies that include a certified athletic trainer for every high school American football

program, standardization of injury/emergency protocols and coach qualifications and training guidelines.

Chapter 5 focuses on discussions involving the conclusions and recommendations related to the study's findings. The study's limitations will also be discussed. Recommendations for future research and contributions to sport health and safety policies will also be presented in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore head coaches' shared lived experiences regarding their ideologies, influences and motivations in their decision-making processes to gain an understanding of how they perceived their roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injury occurrences. The head coach is the best resource to provide information relating to the full operation and management of the sport program. Specifically, the head coach determines the program's schedule for the off-season, pre-season and season, including weight-training/conditioning sessions, practices and player line-ups for the games (Billings et al., 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). There is limited research exploring head coach roles and responsibilities relating to sport-related injury prevention and reduction. Therefore, the inclusion of the high school American football head coach as the primary person of influence and key decision-maker was imperative to identifying areas to improve high school American football health and safety.

With the reported consistent increase in sport-related injuries during the past 10 years (Badgeley et al., 2013; CDC, 2011; Nation et al., 2011) and the reported decrease in American football participation at youth and adolescent levels during recent years (Mihoces, 2013), the nature of this study was to investigate and describe the high school head coaches' experiences and perspectives of their roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injuries. Because there are approximately 15,300 active high school American football head coaches, this qualitative phenomenological study purposively

selected a small sample size. The phenomenological research design was determined to be most appropriate for this study because it focuses on shared experiences and behaviors of the individual and group to describe the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). There were 12 research participants that are or have been high school American football head coaches and have also received the NFL High School Coach of the Year award. Each participant completed an interview and provided rich, in-depth responses to answer this study's overarching research question: What are the lived experiences from high school American football head coaches that will advance effective policy to reduce sport-related injuries? Key findings that emerged from this study were:

- The need for standardized high school American football coach minimum qualification requirements.
- Participants conveyed the necessity of enhancing current high school American football coach training and development opportunities to include coach self-development, youth and adolescent development, coach preparation, and sport-specific modules.
- Participants shared that there is a need for standard health and safety education guidelines for coaches, athletic trainers, players, and parents.
- Participants explicitly suggested a mandate to assign a certified athletic trainer at every high school American football activity, including conditioning/weight-training, practices, and games.
- Participants expressed the need to implement consistent injury and emergency protocols for every high school American football program.

- There was a need to establish local, state, and national injury prevention, reduction, and awareness commissions to support establishing effective sport health and safety policies.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

This study's research participants provided rich, in-depth responses during their interviews. There were 13 open-ended questions. The participants shared details of their lived experiences that included reflections of the participation in youth, high school, and college American football, early coaching years, and coaching practices as head coach. The data collected provided insight into high school American football head coaches' perceived roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injury occurrences. This section is a discussion of the researcher's interpretation of the study's findings.

The research participants shared details of their participation in youth and high school American football and other sports, emphasizing the important role and influence of their coaches. As discussed in Chapter 2, the coach, specifically the head coach, is both important and influential in creating and maintaining positive experiences for the athlete (Coakley, 2011; Gearity & Denison, 2012). Further, it is due to these positive coach-player relationship experiences that former athletes decide to become a coach, usually in the sport that they played (Gilbert et al., 2009; Nash & Sproule, 2009). Additionally, during the participants' quest to become a coach, they returned to their former coaches for guidance and advice. It was clear from the research participants and supported by the literature that coaches primarily develop their practices and program

management methods from what they experienced and learned from former coaches (Jacobs et al., 2014).

### **Discussion of Findings for Research Sub-question 1**

Coach training and development practices, and establishing national sport standards to improve and enhance how coaches teach and develop athletes have been the focus of multiple studies (Gilbert et al., 2009; Mitten, 2011; Nash & Sproule, 2009). This research included observation of coach practices, reports of former athlete experiences, and analyses of existing sport standards in the United States and internationally. As referenced in Chapter 2, there has also been research relating to the head coach as the program leader and in being charge of scheduling training and development opportunities for the coach staffs (Rathwell et al., 2014). Although there has been research in these areas, there was little known from the coach perspective, especially if there were training and development areas that should be considered to improve the coach skillsets. Additionally, there was minimal research and discussion on how training and development standards are managed at the high school American football level and if it is feasible to have national standards.

**Coach training and development requirements and practices.** The intent of research sub-question 1 was to ascertain information relating to coach training and development requirements and practices that may need revisions or enhancement to support high school American football coaches to be effective in all aspects of the coach profession. The research participants shared from their recollection what the requirements were to coach in their state. For this study, there were 10 states represented by the

participant pool. From the discussions of the coach requirements, it was apparent that there is no minimum standard of coach trainings and certifications at the high school level within the United States, which is consistent with what Mitten (2011) reported. Table 12 illustrates that currently there is not an alignment of coach training and certification requirements within state athletic associations and there is a need for investigation to determine if adopting national minimum coach training and certification requirements will aid in making high school American football safer.

Table 12

*State Coach Training and Certification Requirements*

<b>State</b>	<b>State Coach Training and Certification Requirements</b>
CA	General coaching education course; Sports specific concussions course; Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) training; and First aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) certification (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017)
FL	Athletic Coaching Certificate; Fingerprint and background check; Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) certification; Annually view NFHS online education course “Concussion in Sports – What You Need to Know”; and Recommended viewing of NFHS courses in CPR/AED (Florida High School Athletic Association, 2017)
LA	Employed by the school’s school board; Head coach attend LHSAA administered state rules clinic in that sport; and Non-faculty coach completes LHSAA/NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching course (Louisiana High School Athletic Association, 2017)
MD	Completion of Care and Prevention course; One certified person in CPR shall be available on site at all school sponsored athletic events; one individual trained in the operation and use of an AED present at each school-sponsored athletic event (includes practice and scrimmages). It is strongly recommended that all coaches complete a course in CPR/AED (Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association, 2014)
MN	The MSHSL offers a head coach certification program. Individuals who want to be a high school head coach in Minnesota can now obtain the head coach credential through the MSHSL Head Coaches Course. Coaches will receive instruction and education in: Fundamentals of Coaching, Sports First Aid, and League Rules and Policies. Individuals who successfully complete this program will meet MS122A.3, the state statute for head coaches (Minnesota State High School League, 2017)
ND	Coaches Certified Permit Requirements: Complete the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Fundamentals of Coaching on-line course or have completed a coaching fundamentals course while in college; Complete the NFHS Concussion Management Course; Complete a First Aid Course; Complete Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) certification and Automated External



	Defibrillator (AED) usage every two years (North Dakota High School Activities Association, 2012)
NY	A certified physical education teacher or a teacher certified in an area other than physical education, e.g. English, mathematics or holds no teaching certificate and must qualify for a Temporary Coaching License; First aid skills and knowledge certification; adult CPR certification; Fingerprinting and background check; and Child Abuse and Violence Abuse workshops (New York State Department of Education, 2009)
OH	Coaching or pupil activity permits; Background check; Trainings/Certifications: Fundamentals of Coaching; Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training; First Aid for Coaches; Concussion Training; and Sudden Cardiac Arrest Training (Ohio Department of Education, 2017)
TX	Head coach and assistant high school coaches are full-time employees of the school board of the school which the team represents; All first- year coaches and any coach who is not a full time employee of the school district must complete the National Federation of State High School Associations Fundamentals of Coaching Course; Annually complete the UIL Rules Compliance Program; Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training; First Aid for Coaches; Safety Training; Concussion Training; and Sudden Cardiac Arrest Training (University Interscholastic League, n.d.)
WI	Coaches that are not licensed to teach are required to take a coaching fundamentals course as well as a sports first aid course before they may coach their second year at a WIAA member senior high school; watch the rules video and write the exam each season in the sport they coach; and First Aid, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) certification and AED operation. (Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association, 2017)

**Suggestions for coach training and development topics.** The topics for future coach training and development opportunities that should be added and/or emphasized was also discussed. The research participants provided responses that supported this study's theoretical framework of achievement goal theory, theory of reasoned action, and positive youth development through sport. Specifically, the participants sought to include training in the areas of coach self-development, youth and adolescent development, and coach preparation. Additionally, the participants discussed having focus on program building, relationship building, and teaching safe football. Setting aside the technical aspects of the sport, the participants agreed that there should be more training involving understanding and improving the coach as an individual that is responsible for the full development of youth and adolescents.

## **Discussion of Findings for Research Sub-question 2**

High school American football functions in multiple roles for athletes, coaches, and sport stakeholders. As discussed in Chapter 2, participation in American football programs a) enhances the athlete's social capital (Morris, 2015; Numerato & Baglioni, 2011; Okada & Young, 2011; Petipas et al., 2005; Spaaij, 2009; Widdop et al., 2014); b) improves education attainment opportunities (Haskell, 2012; Jonker et al., 2009; Petipas et al., 2005); c) provides a source of increased economic gain (Clotfelter, 2011; Genovese, 2013; Howie & Campbell, 2015; Razavi, 2014; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013); and d) serves as a conduit to enacting sport policy (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). From the high level of interests in sport outcomes, many persons of interest in high school American football programs are actively involved. It was not clear in the literature what individuals influence the decision-making process relating to injured athletes. Therefore, these persons of interest, may or may not be a factor in the health and safety of the sport.

**Relationships and possible influences from sport program stakeholders.** The intent of research sub-question 2 was to examine how the research participants managed and operated their high school American football programs to potentially identify coach practices that could elevate the risk of sport-related injury occurrence. The research participants discussed their relationships and possible influences from sport program stakeholders. The participants acknowledged that there are occasions when coaches, athletic trainer, players, parents, school administrators, and school alumni/boosters may have input and/or suggestions with the final decision made by the head coach which is

confirmed by research that the head coach is the primary person to make decisions in sport programs (Gearity & Denison, 2012). Figure 1 illustrates an example of a communication process from the onset of an athlete sustaining a sport-related injury.

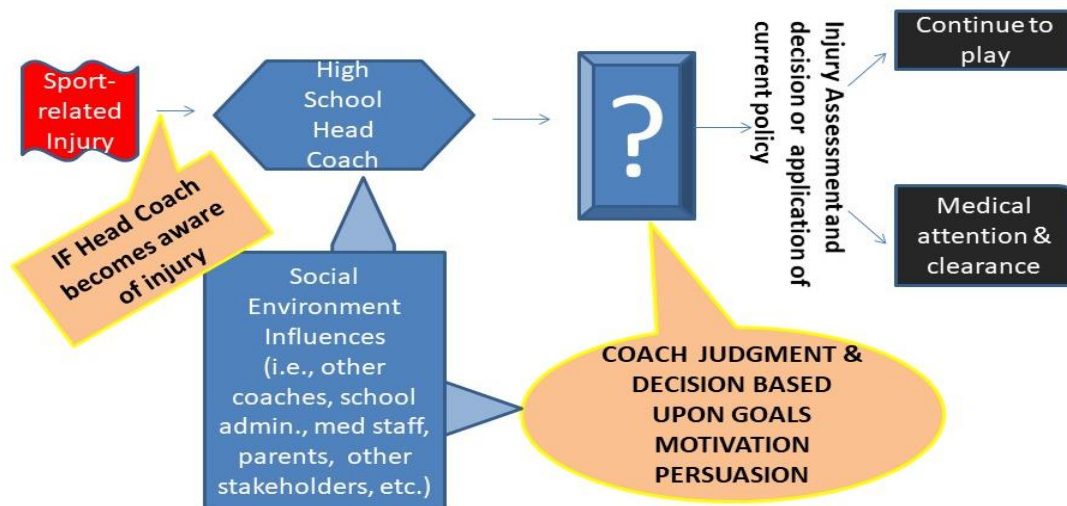


Figure 1. Example of injured athlete communication process.

Responses from this study's participants indicated that when the situation involved player health and safety, the process and decision was always left to the athletic trainer.

Allowing the athletic trainer to have full autonomy regarding athlete health and safety situations was not a matter of policy, but practice.

**High school American football program meetings.** The participants explained how they managed coach staff meetings throughout the calendar year. there were also meetings with the coaches, players, parents and other sport stakeholders to introduce the athletic trainer and inform all parties of health and safety areas of concern. A couple participants referenced that they were mandated to facilitate an annual parent meeting, but none shared that meetings directly related to player health and safety were mandatory. With respect to the literature presented in Chapter 2 relating to American football having

proportionately the highest rate of injuries of all the sports investigated (Darrow et al., 2009; Monroe et al., 2011; Rechel, 2008; Schroeder et al., 2015), health and safety should be the topic of multiple meeting sessions for every sport program. Moreover, it is commendable that the participants found it necessary to facilitate health and safety player and parent meetings but considering the literature, there is need for mandatory meetings with standard guidelines to cover key sport safety issues and situations.

### **Discussion of Findings for Research Sub-question 3**

There is a plethora of research examining sport-related injury occurrences at the youth and adolescent levels within the United States (Badgeley et al., 2013; CDC, 2011; Nation et al., 2011). The literature focused on the number and types of injuries but did not offer solution to reverse the increasing trend. There are also research studies investigating sport-related injury occurrences from the athlete perspective detailing the psychological factors of sustaining injuries (Kerr et al., 2013; Kucera et al., 2014; O'Brien & Meehan, 2014; Schiff et al., 2010). In all the research relating to the topic of sport-related injuries, there was minimal research specifically focused on high school American football programs within the United States. Moreover, there was a gap in the literature exploring sport-related injuries from a preventative position from the high school head coach's perspective.

**Reducing sport-related injury occurrences.** The intent of research sub-question 3 was to explore the research participant perspectives of what could be done to reduce sport-related injury occurrences. In the Chapter 2 literature review, the head coach was described as a primary advocate for improving sport (Billings et al., 2012; Dyson et al.,

2011; Gearity & Denison, 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). Supporting the literature, the participants shared information to aid in ensuring proper medical care for the athletes regarding not causing additional harm and steps to potentially prevent sport-related injuries. Key to solidifying a safe sport environment are positive leader-member exchanges occurring in the coach-player and coach-trainer relationships because positive relationships will yield open communication (Cranmer & Myers, 2015; O'Boyle, 2014). To the credit of the research participants, measures were undertaken to ensure proper medical care was practiced by having all the players assessed by the athletic trainer after each game. The player health assessments were reported and discussed with all relative persons, player, parents, and other coaches.

The research participants also explained that they can control health and safety risk factors during non-game activities, i.e., weight training, conditioning, and practices. Controlling these activities are significant to reducing sport-related injuries because, as noted in Chapter 2, sport-related injuries are most common in player-player contact sports (Kerr et al., 2011; King et al., 2014). Specifically, by not permitting full contact during practice and designing safer drills, the athletes are at less risk of injuries. The research participants shared that they have either always limited contact during non-game activities or have changed their coach practices in recent years to limit contact. The important aspect is that the participants are aware that they may reduce and potentially prevent player sport-related injury occurrences with coaching methods and program management.

### **Discussion of Findings of Overarching Research Question**

It has been discussed in the literature and throughout this study that the head coach is the primary person of influence for a sport program (Billings et al., 2012; Falcão et al., 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). Head coaches are aware of and understand the athletes' needs, coach training and development needs, and regulations that may need to be addressed to ensure the best positive experiences for all parties. Research also reported and was confirmed in this study that head coaches are charged with the responsibility of developing and maintaining positive coach-athlete relationships and ensuring positive outcomes for the athletes (Cranmer et al., 2016; Kendellen & Camiré, 2015; Mazer et al., 2013; Nicholls et al., 2016; Pruter, 2013). Essentially, high school American football head coaches are some of the most knowledgeable individuals of the sport program. Therefore, in the capacity of head coach and as the persons responsible for all aspects of the sport program, including athlete health and safety, research supports that head coaches are one of the best persons to serve as policy advocates for the sport (Dyson, Wright, Amis, Ferry, & Vardaman, 2011; Petitpas et al., 2005).

**Key sport health and safety policy information.** The intent of the overarching research question was to identify key information that is beneficial to draft and implement effective health and safety policies to potentially make high school American football a safer sport. Significant to sport safety are the coach's teaching methods. As discussed in Chapter 2, the head coaches are usually the principal educators for the coaching staffs and athletes (Jacobs, Claringbould, & Knoppers, 2014). The research participants, all head coaches, shared that there should be a set of guidelines to teach

coaches how to instruct safe football at high school and youth levels. When provided with these guidelines, head coaches throughout the United States will be able to help their staff become more effective coaches.

**Standardized injury and emergency protocols.** The participants also discussed the need for standard injury and emergency protocols. During recent years, there has been an overwhelming focus on concussion injuries throughout all levels of American football. There has been a widespread ratification of concussion and return-to-play protocols at the high school level (CDC, 2015; NFHS, 2012; Washington State Traumatic Brain Injury Council, 2011). Although the concussion protocols are not uniform, they are a beginning toward establishing national sport health and safety policies for high school American football. Figure 2 illustrates the overlap of health and safety sport policy to the example of the injured athlete communication process shown in Figure 1.

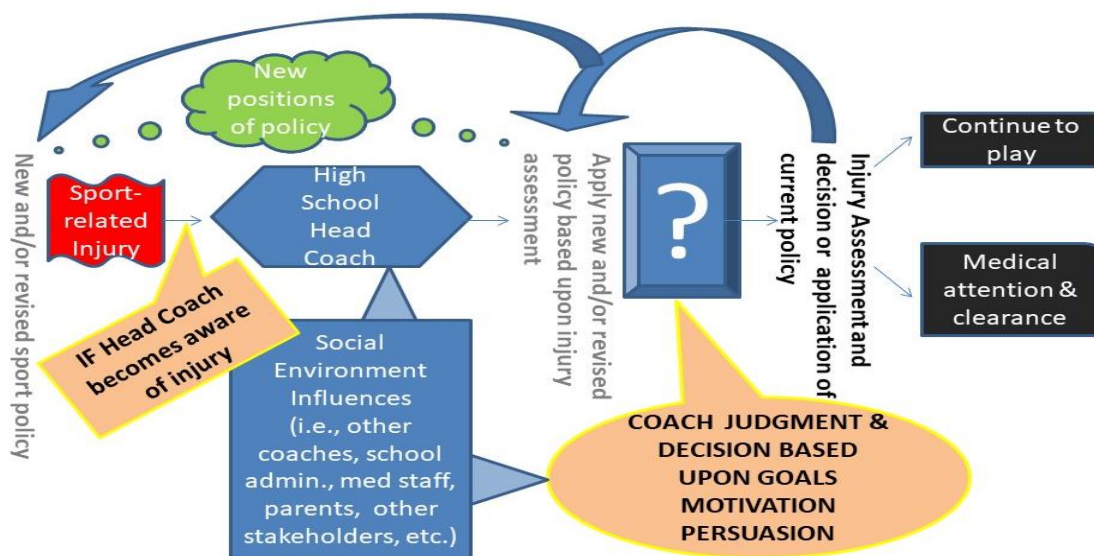
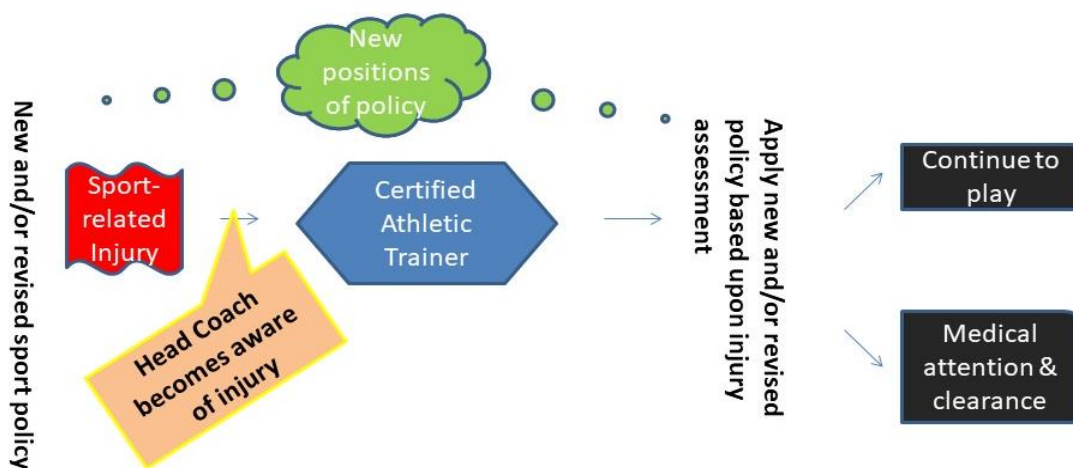


Figure 2. Implementing sport health and safety policy to injured players communication process.

The research participants agree with Mitten (2011) that there is a need for national sport policies. Specifically, all sport-related injuries and emergency situations should follow a standard health and safety policies and return-to-play protocols. To aid in implementing effective health and safety sport policies, the research participants discussed the need to mandate that every high school American football program has a certified athletic trainer. Further, the participants explained that the athletic trainer needs to be present at all non-game activities and during the games. As shown in Figure 3, the presence of athletic trainers and the implementation of standard health and safety sport policies will eliminate coach involvement in the sport-related injury decision-making processes. The implementation of sport health and safety policies also eliminate the



*Figure 3.* Sport health and safety policy eliminates coach decision-making relating to sport-related injury situations.

potential influences from other sport stakeholders in the decision-making processes relating to sport-related injury occurrences.



### **Limitations of the Study**

Study limitations are extended due to variables that may not be accounted for and/or controlled in the research design. Although the limitations may be out of the researcher's control, attention must be given to their existence. For this qualitative phenomenological study, the goal was to gain understanding of shared lived experiences of purposively selected high school American football head coaches relating to their roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injury occurrences. A notable limitation for this study was the narrow exploration of the phenomenon from only high school head coaches' perspectives. Additionally, there were limitations involving researcher bias, sampling size, dependability, and transferability.

**Researcher bias.** The limitation of researcher bias is from the researcher's emic role (Bolden, 2013; Finlay, 2012) and interpretive framework (Bazeley, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), based upon previous affiliations with multiple high school American football programs throughout the United States. Moreover, the researcher selected the open-ended interview questions based upon the premise that the research participant responses would answer this study's overarching research question and sub-questions. Researcher bias was reduced by applying Moustakas (1994) phenomenological reduction processes of bracketing, horizontalization, and composite textural descriptions during the data analysis and study's findings narratives. Specifically, the researcher maintained reflective journal and interview notes to support setting aside bias. Whole content of the research participant transcripts was analyzed with equal value and participant quoted

responses were used in the findings narratives during the phases of the data analysis process.

**Sample size.** The limitation relating to this study's sample size arose from there being approximately 15,300 active head coaches throughout the United States (NFHS, 2012) that could have been potential research participants. This study had 12 research participants selected through criterion sampling. Regarding this study's research participant sample size, Moustakas (1994) posited that when investigating using a qualitative phenomenological research approach, it is appropriate to have a smaller sample size. From a supported position of a smaller sample size, the researcher selected the NFL High School Coach of the Year Award recipients as this study's potential research participants. This research participant criterion sample only permitted 15 possible respondents with 12 respondents participating which was within the proposed 12-15 participant range to provide rich, in-depth descriptions of their shared lived experiences to gain understanding of this study's phenomenon.

**Dependability and transferability.** In qualitative research, both dependability and transferability are challenging to achieve because they are subjective to the researcher's approach, focus, intent, and experiences (Bazeley, 2012) as well as affording the study's readers to share in the lived experiences through overlap of the research story (Tracy, 2010). This limitation involves achieving dependability and transferability of the study's findings from a small group of research participants with limited experiences and span of coverage. Specifically, the research participants were from ten states throughout the United States. All except two participants have coached in primarily one type of

school, either private, public, suburban, or rural, and five participants have been retired for three years or more. To support achieving both dependability and transferability, this study's research participants, NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients, are national recognized, well-known and respected head coaches within their peer and sport stakeholder groups.

### **Recommendations**

While there are limitations to this study's findings, the examination of head coaches' perspectives relating to reducing sport-related injury occurrences was significant in identifying the coach roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injuries and provided information to draft effective sport health and safety policies. This study has revealed key areas that are imperative to the continued improvement of sport health and safety. Specifically, the research participants confirmed the importance of a) coach training and development; b) program operation and management; c) coach-athletic trainer relationship; and d) coach relationships with sport stakeholders.

Additionally, this study's data analysis prompted further research areas that are beyond the scope of this study. The research focuses to consider are: 1) exploring the effectiveness of American football coach preparation and certification curriculum; 2) investigating American football high school head coach practices within specific school type, i.e. urban, suburban, private, etc.; and 3) examining the effectiveness of coach-coach mentoring programs in making youth and adolescent American football safer.

**Exploring the effectiveness of American football coach preparation and certification curriculum.** Chapter 2 discussed the role of the high school American

football head coach as the principal individual responsible for the overall operation and management of the sport program (Billings et al., 2012; Rathwell et al., 2014). This study explored head coaches' roles in relationship to coach training and development along with coach qualifications. Each research participant explained the requirements for their respective state athletic association. What was not discussed was if completion of a coach certification course renders the coach to be prepared to effectively engage and teach the American football athletes. Further research focused on coach preparation resulting from coach certification courses would be beneficial to the quest to improve the American football coach performances in providing safe football at youth and adolescent levels. Further research exploring the effectiveness of coach certification courses could aid in the future advancement of coach training and development opportunities.

**Investigating American football high school head coach practices within specific school type.** This study explored coach practices based upon the research participants meeting the selection criteria. The purposively selected group of head coaches were from 12 different high schools and school districts spanning ten states throughout the United States and each research participant reported the type of high school, i.e., urban, suburban, rural, and private. As noted in Chapter 2, Kendellen and Camiré (2015) supported that coaches may direct the overall outcomes from sport participation at the high school level. Different school types may require different coach practices to meet the goals of the programs. Further research exploring head coaches' practices within a specific school type could be beneficial to gain understanding of effective coach's practices across school types and if there is a difference. This

information could aid in the advancement of effective coach training and development opportunities and coach teaching methods for specific school types.

**Examining the effectiveness of coach-coach mentoring programs.** Though every research participant, except one, shared their experiences relating to mentor other coaches, there was no discussion or examination into the effectiveness of the mentorship relationship. As discussed in Chapter 2, mentorship is a component of leader-member exchange and should be effectively performed and managed to execute the program goals (Cranmer, 2014; O'Boyle, 2014; Rezanian & Gurney, 2014). For this study, one research participant shared that he has been mentoring coaches for over 20 years and has also received a national award from the AFCA for his program. Other participants also served as formal and informal mentors to both youth and high school level coaches. Further research could reveal more insight into coach-coach mentorship effectiveness in enhancing American football at youth and adolescent levels. Additionally, further research could stimulate the implementation of coach-coach mentoring guidelines and curriculum.

### **Implications to Social Change**

American football's largest participating group has the least amount of universal health and safety policy (Broglia et al, 2013; CDC, 2015; NFHS, 2012; NFLPA, 2011; NCAA, 2014; Washington State Traumatic Brain Injury Council, 2011). With the large number of high school American football players playing and annually seeking to secure a full or partial athletic scholarship (Haskell, 2012; Jonker et al, 2009; Petitpas et al., 2005), it is imperative to examine ways to make the sport safer. The aim of this research

was to explore high school American football head coaches' ideologies, influences and motivations in their decision-making processes to gain an understanding of how they perceived their roles and responsibilities in reducing sport-related injury occurrences. The study adds to the body of knowledge of high school American football coach practices and program management. In this section, there are discussions of the potential impact to positive social changes for coaches, athletes, and high school American football programs. Policy suggestions that could support enhancing high school American football to make it a safer sport will also be discussed.

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

During recent years, youth and adolescent participation has decreased (Mihoces, 2013). The research participants cited concerns about concussions, fear of injury and media publicity of sport-related injuries as the main reasons for the participation decrease. Nation, et al. (2011) supported the research participants' responses in reports listing that children between the ages of 12-17 accounted for 77.8% of all injuries and were two times more likely to sustain a concussion. For participation to increase, the sport will have to reduce the number of sport-related injuries. This study explored coach practices and teaching methods to catapult dialogue and provide options to aid in impacting positive change to make the sport safer.

**Coaches and athletes.** The coach-player relationships are very important in any sport. The research participants agree with Gearity & Denison (2012) that athletes will often yield to head coaches for guidance and approval. With this prominent level of belief in the head coach, it is imperative that coaches do their best to keep the athletes as safe as

possible. Safety begins with coach training and development. Through training and development coaches learn to manage and operate football programs, teach players safe football fundamentals and techniques, and how to ensure the integrity of the sport. This study focused on exploring coach training and development to gain understanding of the areas that could be considered to enhance the training opportunities and improving safety in high school American football.

The research participants suggested subject areas and topics that should be included in future training and development opportunities that would support improving coach practices. Majority of the participants (58%) emphasized that their trainings would be focused on areas other than “sport specific” and there would be “minimum discussion of the Xs and Os of the game.” Significant to the participants’ suggestions was the inclusion of training topics involving self-development, youth and adolescent development, and coach preparation. These training suggestions are in alignment with this study’s theoretical framework of achievement goal theory, theory of reasoned action, and positive youth development through sport. Further, the research participants, in their responses, support developing coach ideologies, influences and motivations in their decision-making processes to keep the athlete’s well-being first and maintaining a safe football programs.

**High school American football programs.** Safety in high school American football programs is paramount to the sport’s existence. While parents and players believe the rewards outweigh the risks, participation continues to decrease (Mihoces, 2013). It is the head coaches’ role and responsibility to work toward eliminating

shortcomings within high school American football programs to decrease the rate of sport-related injury occurrences and make the sport safer. To do so, head coaches must remain open to implementing and following evidenced-based sport health and safety policies, like the adapted concussion protocols (CDC, 2015; Washington State Traumatic Brain Injury Council, 2011). This study's research participants explicitly explained the importance of following rules and regulations as well as giving the athletic trainer/medical personnel full responsibility of the athlete's health and safety.

There are constant changes in the rules and regulations governing high school American football programs. Each year, head coaches are responsible for knowing the changes and for implementing them. One of the research participants explained that, "if a head coach does not attend the rules meeting in his state, he is not permitted to coach that year." This study will serve as a tool to assist with catapulting dialogue with high school American football stakeholders to affect positive change in the sport. Some of the research participants have expressed interest in continuing to work with sport health and safety stakeholders to ensure that high school programs are managed and operating with safety in the forefront.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

As discussed in Chapter 2, concussion injuries have gained attention concussion protocols have been adopted throughout high school American football program in the United States (CDC, 2015; McCrory et al., 2013; Washington State Traumatic Brain Injury Council, 2011). This has set the stage to draft and implement additional policies to enhance coaching practices that may prevent and reduce sport-related injury occurrences.



During the interview discussions, the concerns ranged from coaches learning and teaching basic football fundamentals through standardizing injury and emergency protocols for every high school program. The participants, as credible policy advocates (Dyson, Wright, Amis, Ferry, & Vardaman, 201; Petitpas et al., 2005), provided requests and recommendations for the implementation of effective sport health and safety policies. The recommendations from the participants include: 1) mandated certified athletic trainer at all sport activities, including conditioning/weight training, practices, and games; 2) minimum guidelines for teaching safe football techniques and fundamentals; 3) required NOCSAE approved equipment and equipment fitting/usage; and 4) national standards relating to practice and physical contact parameters. Additional recommendations derived from the research participant data includes: 1) national injury and emergency protocols; 2) minimum national standards for coach qualifications; 3) training guidelines to keep youth and adolescents mentally and physically healthy; and 4) refined focus on regulating and monitoring youth football.

### **Conclusion**

High school American football is a very popular sport that boasts approximately 1.1 million participants annually throughout the United States (NFHS, 2012). Even though the sport is widely played, it has imperfections. From the first high school competition in 1862 (Holmes, 2012) to present day, there have been sport-related injuries. In fact, over the past ten years, sport-related injury occurrences have steadily increased (Badgeley et al., 2013; CDC, 2011; Nation et al., 2011), while participation has decreased (Mihoces, 2013). These sport-related injuries sustained while playing high

school American Football may diminish the athlete's long-term quality of life, and in some cases cause death.

This qualitative phenomenological study was an exploration of head coaches' perspectives to potentially identify areas to consider in drafting effective sport health and safety policies. This study examined a purposively selected group of NFL High School Coach of the Year award recipients' ideologies, influences, and motivations in their decision-making processes. Twelve research participants responded to interview questions to answer the study's overarching research question investigating the lived experiences of American football high school head coaches that will advance effective policies to reduce sport-related injuries. The rich, in-depth participant responses provided valuable insights into coach practices, sport program management and operation, and general treatment of athletes that will reverse the current high school American football sport-related injury trend and possibly prevent athletes from sustaining injuries. It was imperative to add to the body of knowledge from the head coaches' perspectives to ensure that future changes in coach practices and sport health and safety policies reflect contributions from high school American football leadership and advocates (Dyson, Wright, Amis, Ferry, & Vardaman, 2011; Petitpas et al., 2005).

High school American football is at a critical point where positive changes must be made or the sport at this level, and younger, will continue to be plagued with sport-related injuries and decreasing participation. There has been a start with the current concussion protocols and policies (CDC, 2015; McCrory et al., 2013; Washington State Traumatic Brain Injury Council, 2011), but there is need for more. The research

participants, as high school American football head coaches, made recommendations to improve program management and operation that will lead to making the sport safer. There needs to be certified athletic trainers at all program activities, national injury and emergency protocols and policies for all situations, and enhanced coach training and development opportunities. High school American football athletes are more than players lined-up in position to win games, and all sport stakeholders, especially head coaches, share in the responsibility to keep them healthy and safe.

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## Appendix A: Initial Participant Solicitation E-mail Letter

“Potential Participant’s Name,”

It is known that there are great concerns for player safety in American football. Through the years, it appears that injury occurrence has been increasing and player safety has become secondary to winning the game. This perception may or may not be true but nonetheless, there remains the need to implement uniform sport policy to support ensuring player safety throughout American football sporting programs.

Literature has revealed that although there are a number of individuals responsible for the player health and safety policy, the head coach is the key person of influence in high school American football sport programs. Drafting and implementing effective sport safety policy in high school American football should not be attempted without the input from the high school coach. Given that the high school head coach is the best primary source of information for all aspects of American football, it is imperative to engage him/her in understanding the decision-making processes and motivations surrounding player safety.

Study Name: ***Reducing Sport-related Injuries: Perspectives from NFL High School Coach of the Year Recipients***

The purpose of this study is for the researcher to describe the experiences that contribute to how coaches make decisions regarding player health and safety in high school American football programs. The study focuses on the effective and efficient practices of head coaches throughout their coaching careers. The results of this study may play a vital role in determining how to effectively assist with drafting sport policy to reduce the occurrence of sport-related injuries and make the sport safer.

You have been purposively selected to participate in this study. The study will include (a) completing a Participant Informed Consent form, (b) Background Information form, and (c) participating in an interview. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time.

I will call you within a week to confirm your interest to participate. If you agree, we will schedule an interview time. The interview process will take less than 60 minutes. Upon your request, your identity, geographic location and interview responses will remain confidential.

The results of this study will be used to prepare a Ph.D. dissertation. Your participation and cooperation in this study is very important and much appreciated.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

LaLisa Anthony, Graduate Student  
Email: lalisa.anthony@waldenu.edu,  
Telephone: 330-268-9615

## Appendix B: Participant Telephone Call Follow-up Script

Hi “potential participant’s name,” my name is LaLisa Anthony. I am a graduate student at Walden University. I am calling today regarding my study: *Reducing Sport-related Injuries: Perspectives from NFL High School Coach of the Year Recipients*. I introduced it to you in an e-mail a few days ago.

The purpose of this study is for the researcher to describe the experiences that contribute to how coaches make decisions regarding player health and safety in high school American football programs. The study focuses on the effective and efficient practices of head coaches throughout their coaching careers. The results of this study may play a vital role in determining how to effectively assist with drafting sport policy to reduce the occurrence of sport-related injuries and make the sport safer.

You have been purposively selected to participate in this study. The study will include completing an informed consent form, background information form, participating in a 60-minute interview. The process will take no longer than 90 minutes.

Please be assured that if you request, your responses and identity would be kept confidential. The information collected during the interview will be used to complete my Ph.D. dissertation. If you request to be anonymous, you will receive a pseudonym to ensure the confidentiality of their participation. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time.

Your participation and cooperation in this study would be much appreciated. Do you have any questions regarding this study that I can answer for you now? Are you interested and able to participate in this study?

**If participant does not agree to participate:** Thank you for considering this request. Have a nice day.

**If participant does agree to participate:** Thank you. When would be a convenient time to meet to conduct the interview?

I’m looking forward to our meeting. Please e-mail (lalisa.anthony@waldenu.edu) or call (330-268-9615) if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you!



## Appendix C: Email Reminder Letter Prior to Interview

Date

“Participant’s Name,”

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study: ***Reducing Sport-related Injuries: Perspectives from NFL High School Coach of the Year Recipients***

Let’s plan to meet at [time] at [location]. We will (a) complete the Participant Informed Consent form, (b) Background Information form and (c) conduct the interview. The informed consent form and background information forms are attached to this email. You may complete these forms prior to our scheduled interview time.

Also attached are video clips from high school American football activities. Please review the general coach practices depicted in the video clips prior to our meeting, reflecting on “what” you have specifically experienced as a high school American football head coach. Also, think about “how” you have experienced decision-making throughout your coaching career —what contexts or situations have affected or influenced your motivation, engagement and decisions while employed as a head coach.

I’m looking forward to our meeting.

Please e-mail ([lalisa.anthony@waldenu.edu](mailto:lalisa.anthony@waldenu.edu)) or call (330-268-9615) if you have any questions or concerns.

LaLisa Anthony, Graduate Student

## Appendix D: Participant Background Information Form

(Completed prior to interview)

Study Name: *Reducing Sport-related Injuries: Perspectives from NFL High School Coach of the Year Recipients*

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Location:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym (First Name): \_\_\_\_\_  
**(If Applicable)**

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate (MM/D/YYYY): \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Time as a High School Head Coach  
(years/months): \_\_\_\_\_

Type of High School you were a Head Coach: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Urban    Suburban    Rural  
 (circle one)

If no longer (Last time as High School Head Coach (year): \_\_\_\_\_

Did you play high school football? \_\_\_\_\_  
 If yes, how long \_\_\_\_\_ What \_\_\_\_\_  
 position? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you sustain a sport-related injury? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Yes    No

Did you attend college on an athletic scholarship? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Yes    No

Provide a coaching career biography. You may submit biography on a separate sheet with the above information the day of the interview or e-mail to lalisa.anthony@waldenu.edu.

## Appendix E: Participant Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study investigating the experiences of NFL Coach of the Year award recipients. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is conducted by a researcher named LaLisa Anthony, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a former Regional Director for the NFL High School Player Development program.

### **Background information:**

The purpose of this study is for the research investigator to describe the experiences that contribute to understanding the motivation and decision-making processes that American football coaches engage in during sport activities. This may play a vital role in determining how to implement effective sport policy that will lead to reducing sport-related injuries and make the sport safer for high school players.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a background information form and submit your coaching biography. These documents will provide the general demographic and coaching experience information.

A 60-minute interview will take place at a mutual time and location between March 1-31, 2017. The researcher will provide all materials needed for completion of this study, including any video recordings of football activities to be discussed during the interview. Sample questions that will be asked are:

- 1) What influenced you to become an American football coach? and
- 2) What are the qualifications/mandates necessary for a coach to complete to remain in compliance to coach at high school?

You are also asked for your permission to audio-record this interview, but if you wish not to be recorded, only notes will be taken. Prior to the researcher analyzing your interview transcript, you will be provided a full copy of the interview transcript within one (1) month of your interview that should take you approximately one (1) hour to review for accuracy. The recording and transcript will only be reviewed by the researcher, who will transcribe and analyze them. They will then be destroyed.

There are no alternative procedures. Study information will be kept in a secure location in the researcher’s office. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings and your identity will be withheld. Knowing that the findings of this study may be published, your personal information will be confidential and not included.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The probability of harm and discomfort will not be greater than your daily life encounters.

You will experience, first-hand, the process of qualitative interview research. You may find the interview experience enjoyable and reminiscent of your own experience of coaching. This information gained from this study may help us better understand the potential influence of coach motivation and decision-making process involving player participation. This information can be used to assist with drafting effective sport policy to make the sport of American football safer. You will receive a copy of the summary of the research results.

**Payment:**

You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home and on a password protected computer. Only the researcher will have access to the data. Audio recordings and transcripts will be deleted after the completion of the study. The information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals or presented at academic meetings and/or conferences.

Your consent is given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study. If you choose to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Please save or print a copy of this consent form for your records.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:**

You may ask any questions concerning this study and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in this study. Should you have questions once the study begins, you are welcome to ask those questions and to have those questions answered to your satisfaction. You may call the research investigator at any time at 330-268-9615, if you have questions or concerns. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the research investigator to report any concerns about the study, you may contact Walden University Institutional Review Board. The telephone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **02-22-2017-0376593** and it expires on **February 21, 2018.**

**Obtaining Your Consent:**

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words, "**I consent.**"

## Appendix F: Interview Protocol

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Position:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Interviewer:** LaLisa Anthony  
(If applicable)

Interviewee has signed consent form       Recording device turned on and tested

---

**Introduction**

Thank you for taking time to visit with me. I will be recording and transcribing verbatim what we say today. It is important that the transcription be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase something you've said with an incorrect interpretation. I will also be taking notes during our conversation. This interview is one of 12 that will be conducted with the NFL High School Coach of the Year recipients who are experiencing or have experienced coaching high school American football as a head coach in the United States. Upon your request, your identity will be confidential, otherwise, your name will be used in the research report.

High school American football coaches, school administrators, medical professionals, and other sport stakeholders are searching for ways to lessen the number of sport-related injury occurrences and improve the safety of the sport. A current review of the literature reveals that most studies regarding high school American football player sport-related injuries have focused on concussions and care after the injury. Also, many researchers have focused on the data collected from a quantitative research methods approach. This qualitative study will focus on the shared lived experiences of the purposively selected high school American football head coaches.

The purpose of this study is for the research investigator to describe the experiences that contribute to the head coach motivation and decision-making involving sport-related injuries and player health and safety. I really want you to give some thought to the interview questions that I am about to ask you so that I am able to get your full experience of your coaching experience involving motivations, decision-making processes while coaching high school American football programs. It is my goal to understand your perspective, so please feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answers. I may ask a few follow-up questions as we proceed to help me understand your responses. Are you ready to begin?

**Interview**

Thank you for spending time with me today. I will provide you with a copy of the transcript of this interview before we begin to analyze the data and ask that you review it for accuracy. I would ask that you do that review as quickly as possible after you receive it. Upon completion of the study, I will share a summary of the findings with you.

Thanks again for your assistance!

## Appendix G: Data Collection Tool

1. What influenced you to become an American football coach?
  - a. PROBE: Where did you grow up and did you play youth football? For how long did you play at any level?
  - b. PROBE: Describe your coaching career journey?
  - c. PROBE: Who were your mentors and/or role models as coaches and why?
2. How do you describe a successful head coach?
  - a. PROBE: Is a successful head coach also a qualified head coach? Explain.
  - b. PROBE: What is the criteria of a qualified head coach?
  - c. PROBE: What is the most important responsibility of a high school head coach?
3. What are the qualifications/mandates necessary for a coach to complete to remain in compliance to coach at high school?
  - a. PROBE: How/by whom are these qualifications/mandate monitored?
  - b. PROBE: Do you know who establishes these qualifications/mandates? Who?
  - c. PROBE: What additional qualifications do you believe should be considered to be added?
4. How do (did) you schedule coaching staff meetings (during season, off-season, as needed)? Please describe in terms of the calendar year.
  - a. PROBE: Was the team assessed after each game?
  - b. PROBE: Were individual player physical assessments shared and discussed?
  - c. PROBE: How do (did) you and your staff maintain a log or record of player injury reports (log book, reports)?
5. How often does your coaching staff have training and development workshops?
  - a. PROBE: How often does your coaching staff have training directly related to sport-related injury?
  - b. PROBE: Who were the facilitators or providers of the trainings (in-person, online, textbook and text)?
  - c. PROBE: Were players, parents and other sport stakeholders also in attendance at any of the training and development workshops? Please describe.
6. If you were designing a coach training/development workshop, what would be the topics you would include?

7. How does the coaching culture view the coach's role in preventing injuries?
8. What type(s) of injury(ies) do (did) you document and report?
  - a. PROBE: Who do you report to?
  - b. PROBE: In what format(s) do you report (verbal, written, both)?
  - c. PROBE: What is (was) the sport program's policy on reporting injur(ies)?
  - d. PROBE: What is (was) the player 'return to play' process?
9. According to research, sport-related injury occurrences have consistently increased over the past ten (10) years. What do you believe are the reason(s) for this increase?
10. How has the focus on sport-related injury occurrences changed your approach to coaching?
  - a. PROBE: How would you describe a serious vs a superficial sport-related injury?
  - b. PROBE: How do you feel about players continuing to play while injured?
  - c. PROBE: How do you decide if the player will continue?
  - d. PROBE: What's your viewpoint on the 'return to play' policy that is in effect for most states?
11. Do you participate at any level and in any capacity on any injury prevention, reduction, or awareness group? If yes, please describe your involvement.
12. How would you place these persons in order of influence to your coach decision-making processes:
  - a. Parent
  - b. School Administrator(s)
  - c. Medical doctor
  - d. Team Trainer
  - e. School Alumni/Sponsor
  - f. Athlete
13. What do you consider to be key information to include in sport health and safety policy that could lead to reducing sport-related injuries?

## Appendix H: Interview Verification Form

LaLisa Anthony, Ph.D. Candidate  
 Email: lalisa.anthony@waldenu.edu  
 Phone: 330-268-9615

Study Name: *Reducing Sport-related Injuries: Perspectives from NFL High School Coach of the Year Recipients*

Dear Research Participant,

Please review the enclosed transcript of our recent interview concerning effective and efficient practices of head coaches throughout their coaching careers.

Feel free to note any content errors that you find in order to make all information as accurate as possible. Also, please initial the appropriate statement below to indicate your level of approval. Thank you.

Please initial the appropriate statement below:

- \_\_\_\_\_ I approve the interview transcript without reviewing it.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I approve the interview transcript without changes.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I approve the interview transcript with noted changes.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I do not approve the interview transcript.

_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Research Investigator	Date