

My Journey Kevin Leonoff

My journey towards becoming a coach began while I was attending high school. One day while I was at home, my youth baseball coach visited my home. I thought it was just to say hi, but to my surprise, he was there to give me an opportunity to join his Little League baseball staff as his assistant coach. I figured it would be a great way to give back to my community and also see the other side of athletics. At this point in my life I had already thought about becoming a teacher, but was not completely sure. I had always enjoyed learning and thought teaching would be a great way to continue learning as well as helping others enjoy what learning has to offer. A few of my teachers and especially my coaches were a motivating factor behind my desire to teach. I had learned so much from them. Subject matter and athletic content were not the only topics they taught. They taught me aspects of life that are oftentimes overlooked in education and athletics today. I felt like I could also help teach young men and women how to be successful members of society.

As I began coaching youth baseball as an assistant, I started reaping the benefits of helping children improve abilities and also enjoyed seeing the accomplished looks on their faces once they achieved a goal. This convinced me that I would become a teacher. After continuing to coach this team for a few years, I knew that I wanted to become a physical educator and coach. Teaching physical education was perfect for me because I could reach out to virtually every type of student. Considering physical education contains such a wide array of sub-topics, every student is able to excel in some capacity. I knew that I would be able to teach physical activity ideas and skills in class and then utilize various strategies while coaching.

I chose to attend Michigan State University to fulfill my undergraduate work towards becoming a teacher. While in East Lansing, I was able to coach numerous youth sport teams. I took an opportunity to become a head youth baseball coach, while assisting on a youth football and basketball team in the area. By this time, I knew I would love to coach in addition to teaching.

After graduation from MSU and earning my teaching certification, I was hired as a physical educator as well as a junior varsity football and basketball coach. After my first year as a professional, I knew I had to continue growing as a person, teacher, and coach. To that extent, I chose to earn my Master's Degree. Knowing the department of Kinesiology at MSU was integral to what I had already learned and that the College of Education at MSU is consistently ranked number one for their graduate programs, it was an easy decision to attend MSU once again. However, I did not want to give up my current job as a teacher and especially as a coach because I was trying to improve my coaching ability, so I elected to utilize their online learning platform. This has allowed me to continue as a teacher and coach while enhancing my ability to help young students grow.

Coaching is not always about the X's and O's. Coaching in a lot of cases is about providing positive experiences among the participants as well as helping them become successful members of society. In addition to character building, proper and knowledgeable training is essential. Not only that, but a coach also needs to understand the legal concepts that affect the athletic world. I was able to learn about each of these three areas through the Sport Leadership and Coaching concentration.

To help me prepare for upcoming seasons as a coach, I elected to enroll in three coaching related courses – KIN 854 *Legal and Administrative Issues of Coaching*, KIN 856 *Physical Bases of Coaching*, and KIN 857 *Promoting Positive Youth Develop through Sport*. Each of the courses has informed and

developed my knowledge base in the world of coaching. The great part of these three classes is that all three can relate to my job as a physical educator as well. Not only was I able to improve my ability to coach but also I was able to incorporate many of the concepts I learned into my everyday teaching.

After completing an introductory course for my Masters of Arts in Education Degree, I began the journey towards completing the Sport Leadership and Coaching concentration. The first stop was KIN 854 *Legal and Administrative Issues of Coaching*. This course allowed me to see the legal side of coaching and administrating sport. I now know that I, as a coach, am held responsible for virtually everything that happens to my players, certain things with my opponents, and even issues that may arise with spectators and parents. I know that I will need to stay up to date on current events related to sport law in order to help myself understand new theories and legal consequences. As a coach, I am one of the most responsible people related to the event. Therefore, I am held liable for injuries due to negligence of a playing area, lack of training opportunities, as well as various other consequences. In order to take proper steps towards preventing myself from being considered negligent, I need to observe and inspect the playing areas for needed repairs and improvements to keep athletes and spectators safe. For example, a dip in the turf of a football field would need to be filled and flattened for the players' safety. Also, a loose step in the bleachers would be my responsibility to be fixed for the spectators' safety. In addition to playing area safety, I am responsible for the physical and emotional safety of the players. Hazing is a rising concern among sport teams. As a coach, I need to address any hazing issues that may arise among my team. Keeping a close eye on risk management and player safety will help me become the most prudent and responsible coach possible.

Once I was comfortable with my legal responsibilities, I moved on to KIN 856 *Physical Bases of Coaching*. This class prepared me in many aspects related to coaching. The major principles I learned were those based on biomechanics and specific training principles, sport nutrition, proper warm up procedures, as well as growth and development ideas. Not only was I able to learn how to use video recording tools to improve performance but I was able to understand the importance of sport specific training to any given sport. To be an efficient coach, I need to first assess the major skills needed in my sport. Taking those skills into account as well as the most common injuries in the sport, I need to focus on the muscles that control those actions and areas of injury. To strengthen those specific muscles, I would find the most related exercises. These exercises should combine strength training and appropriate energy system training as well as injury prevention. In order to make training the most effective, my athletes should understand proper recovery nutrition techniques based on their body's need for protein and carbohydrates. All of this should then be looked at from an overtraining perspective whereas I need to keep my athletes interested and motivated for performance without feeling burned out. There is always a fine line between the most effective training and overtraining, especially with high school athletes. During the season, I need to focus on proper instruction for various skills. I need to keep in mind the age of my athletes and the skills that are age appropriate and able to be completed. I need to have an effective way to communicate proper form with my athletes as well as understand the correct form myself. I want to avoid injury by instructing my athletes the proper way. Putting all of these ideas together will help me create both an in-season and off-season training structure to help my athletes become effective and efficient as they compete in their sport.

Now that the legal and training sides are covered, I was able to submerge myself into the reason why many individuals become coaches – to help children improve themselves. Sports are very rarely about the X's and O's, they are about building character qualities and learning how to persevere and be a teammate in the right situation. KIN 857 *Promoting Positive Youth Development through Sport* allowed me to discover many issues elating and corrupting the world of youth sport today. As a coach, I need to

provide an atmosphere for my athletes which allows for personal growth, character building, and a positive experience. At the youth level, I believe a coach is successful if he/she is able to provide an experience that encourages an athlete to continue competing in the sport the following year. All too often winning and losing are the major focus at this level. This causes added pressure and stress on children. Children should be competing to have fun, which is the reason why most children choose to play a sport in the first place. This course allowed me to realize a very realistic definition of competition. Instead of competing against someone else, an athlete should compete with someone else in order to enhance both competitors' level of achievement. In other words, athletes should want to compete with an opponent who is at their best instead of one who is having a bad day. The final exercise for this class was to develop a program that provided positive youth development. I chose to create a strength training program for athletes and non-athletes that encouraged positive character traits and responsibility in addition to the physical training. I am happy to say that I am putting parts of the program to use in my professional career. As part of the program, I explained how the fitness facility at my school was in poor shape and would need to be upgraded. I am currently in the process of leading the charge to renovate our facility. This has allowed more opportunities for our students and student-athletes to strength train. With training responsibility and improved character traits will follow. This course really has helped me see why I want to coach and the path I should take to help athletes improve themselves in other ways than on the playing surface.

In addition to my coaching specific courses, I was able to take a course that explained the importance of literacy instruction. As a physical educator, it is difficult to incorporate a lot of literacy techniques into my classes. However, through TE 846 *Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners* I was able to find various strategies to include literacy into my classes. Some strategies I have used and others I plan to use in the future include providing short fitness and sport related articles, vocabulary related to active units, written work including fitness journals, and oral speaking projects. Knowing that not all students are at the same literacy level, I will not hesitate to work with struggling learners to help them become more engaged in fitness and sport literacy. I believe literacy is just as important in physical education as it is in core classes and that students who are literate are more likely to learn at a higher level. Thanks to this class, I have tools I am able to use to help students achieve a higher level of literacy.

That is my journey from discovering that I wanted to teach and coach through learning how to teach and coach more effectively and now to continuing my education. As I continue on in my career I expect to continue learning just as I would expect my athletes to continue improving. As the world and society changes, I need to continue to stay up to date to stay effective. I am in one of the most rewarding professions as I am able to impact student lives through a variety of avenues and see the outcomes. Like I have stated earlier, coaching as well as teaching is not always about the X's and O's, but is about helping my athletes and students become better individuals.