"Is he my boss? I don’t know": The (Ambiguous) Role of the Sport Supervisor in NCAA Division I Intercollegiate Athletics

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"Is he my boss? I don’t know": The (Ambiguous) Role of the Sport Supervisor in NCAA Division I Intercollegiate Athletics

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Behind every intercollegiate athletic team is an often-unknown athletic administrator known as the sport supervisor (sport administrator). As middle managers, these administrators are key organizational connectors, connecting the individual team(s) to the department, and are vital to organizational success. Understanding the role of sport supervisor is crucial to the success of athletic departments. Thus, the purpose of this study was to define and understand the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA division I intercollegiate athletics utilizing role theory. Through a descriptive phenomenological approach, 22 participants (11 sport supervisors and 11 head coaches) from NCAA Division I institutions were interviewed. The findings from this study illuminate the complexity of the role of a sport supervisor as well as the lack of clarity around what the role is, who sets the expectations, and how the expectations align between a sport supervisor and head coach. The lack of clarity with the role can lead to role stress for both sport supervisors and head coaches as well as negatively impact organizations. This study provides a formal definition and understanding of the critical role of the sport supervisor in intercollegiate athletics helping bring clarity and guidance to practitioners and scholars.

Keywords: sport supervisor, middle managers, role ambiguity
ntercollegiate athletics is pervasive in its use of titles. Examine a staff directory for a NCAA Division I athletic department and one will find a plethora of titles, from coordinators and assistant directors to executive senior athletic directors and deputy athletic directors. As titles and the industry has grown, so too have the complexity of roles of intercollegiate athletic employees. One such role has become more prevalent – the sport supervisor (also known as the sport administrator). Unlike the role of the senior woman administrator (SWA) which was created by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1981 and given a formal definition within NCAA bylaws (Tiell et al., 2012), the role of sport supervisor exists in practice with no formal definition or understanding of expectations. Yet, over 1,800 athletic administrators (29% of associate/assistant athletic directors) self-identify as filling the role of sport supervisor for one or more sports at their respective college or university (D1Ticker.com, 2022).

In June 2019, LEAD1, a membership association that represents NCAA Division I athletic directors within the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) released a “Guide to Sport Supervision” (Lead1 Association, 2019). The guide was developed,

At the request of LEAD1 members and in light of the numerous incidents which have harmed the reputation of many institutions, this guide was developed to assist athletics departments with assessing the strengths and vulnerabilities of their current sport supervision model. Sport supervision has been described as a “sink or swim” experience by both new and veteran sport supervisors (Lead1 Association, 2019).

As evidenced by LEAD1, athletic directors recognize the importance of sport supervisors and want guidance on what the role should be as these administrators are key organizational connectors vital to an organization’s success (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997). As key connectors between the department and the individual team(s) they supervise, the role of sport supervisor may prove crucial to the success of athletic teams and the athletic department as a whole. While this role and population have received little attention from the research community, there are assumptions about the role within the industry that need clarification. For example, as highlighted by the quote in the title, are sport supervisors the boss of head coaches? This quote, in addition to the quote by the LEAD1, illustrate the confusion both administrators and coaches exhibit in understanding the role of sport supervisor which directly impacts multiple stakeholders within the department. This study was guided by two research questions:

RQ 1: How do athletic administrators, who hold the role of a sport supervisor, perceive their role as a sport supervisor within the intercollegiate athletic department?

RQ 2: How do head coaches perceive the role of the sport supervisor within intercollegiate athletic departments?

Current research on intercollegiate athletic departments has focused on populations including athletic directors (Dickman et al., 2021; Kirpatrick, 2018; Smith et al., 2019), coaches (Oja et al., 2015; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), and students (Watson, 2005; Watt & Moore, 2001). Preliminary research has identified athletic administrators who serve as sport supervisors as middle managers within the organizational structure of intercollegiate athletic departments (Ott & Beaumont, 2020). Still, little is known or understood about the role of the sport supervisor including how the role is defined by administrators and head coaches. Moreover,
more research is needed to understand the experiences of sport supervisors whose titles can vary significantly (i.e., assistant athletic director to deputy athletic director) as well as the understanding of sport supervision of revenue versus non-revenue generating sports. As such, examining the role of the sport supervisor is critical to understanding the effect those serving in the role can have on coaches and individual teams, as well as the athletic department. Role theory, which focuses on patterned behaviors and shared expectations (Biddle, 1986), provides the framework to understand and define the role of the sport supervisor.

**Role Theory**

Within social systems, roles are central to understanding organizations (Welbourne et al., 1998) and employee behavior within organizations (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Succinctly, roles are repeated and patterned behaviors that provide stability for organizations (Naylor et al., 1980). Roles are formed by both behaviors and expectations where behaviors are defined as “overt activities of human beings, such as bodily motions, speech content and manner” (Biddle, 1979, p. 24) and expectations are “scripts for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers” (Biddle, 1986, p. 68). Within the context of the role of the sport supervisor, behaviors could include communication style, sharing organizational knowledge, and/or presence at a team event (e.g., game, practice). Expectations, then, are shared between the sport supervisor and the head coach as to what behaviors both or either party understand and adhere.

Focusing on the social interaction of individuals within organizations through the context of role theory, Katz and Kahn (1966) introduced the role-episode construct to explicate how individuals work together to set expectations for a specific role. Within organizations, individuals with direct relationships with each other form role sets. The role set consists of the focal person, their subordinates, and other members whom they may work with closely. For a sport supervisor, their role set would presumably consist of themselves as the focal person, the athletic director (to whom they report), and head coach of the sport they supervise (See Figure 1). The role-episode then is the interaction amongst those in the role set. Wickman and Parker (2006) define the role-episode as, “any interaction between employees whereby role-expectations and role-behaviors are manifest in measurable consequences” (p. 443). Simply stated, the role-episode is the social interaction that occurs between individuals within a role set, where the individual behaviors of the focal person are derived from the expectations of the members of their role set. As such, unclear role expectations and perceptions within the role set can lead to numerous role stressors including role ambiguity and role conflict. This study focuses specifically on the interactions between the sport supervisor and the head coach.

**Role Ambiguity**

A form of role stress experienced by individuals is role ambiguity. Role ambiguity is a lack of clear understanding about the actions required to perform one’s role (Kahn et al., 1964). Role ambiguity has been further defined by two types of ambiguity, task ambiguity and socioemotional ambiguity (Kahn et al.). Where task ambiguity “results from lack of information concerning the proper definition of the job, its goals, and the permissible means for implementing them” (Kahn et al., p. 97), socioemotional ambiguity “manifests itself in a
Figure 1.
Assumed Role Set for Sport Supervisor

person’s concern about his standing in the eyes of others about the consequences of his actions for the attainment of his personal goals” (Kahn et al., p.94). This two-dimensional approach to role ambiguity accounts for the task element of the role process while keeping consideration for the perception of expected behaviors. When a focal person does not understand their role, negative outcomes at both the individual employee level and the organizational level manifest. Specifically, when a sport supervisor does not understand their role, the relationship with the head coach and, thus, the success of the team could be compromised. Team success, or lack thereof, may result in coaching turnover or a change in sport supervisors; both scenarios interrupt the progression of a team and, perhaps, the success of an athletic department.

Thus, role ambiguity has consistently had a negative effect on job performance (DeClerq & Pereira, 2022; Tubre & Collins, 2000). In addition, role ambiguity affects several other job-related factors including higher levels of job stress (Orgambidez & Benitez, 2021; Richards et al., 2017), lower levels of job satisfaction (Eys et al., 2003; Thakre & Shroff, 2016), propensity to leave the organization (DeClerq & BelausteguiGoitia, 2017), and organizational effectiveness (cf. Kahn et al., 1964; Orgambidez & Benitez, 2021). An employee’s need for achievement has also been shown to influence their need for role clarity (Chow & Feltz, 2007). Thus, in an industry focused on winning and other metrics of success (e.g., graduation rates), it would not be surprising to find coaches and sport administrators seeking clarity in for the role of the sport supervisor. Organizational factors have also been identified as moderators to role ambiguity. The culture of an organization affects the level of stress of individual employees and the level of stress is mediated by role conflict and role ambiguity (van der Velde & Class, 1995). Ultimately, if individuals experience role ambiguity and uncertainty of their role within the organization, there is a likelihood that the uncertainty they are experiencing will have a negative impact on the organization. With this in mind, it is imperative to better understand and define the role of the sport supervisor to benefit coaches, teams, and the athletic department.

The study of role ambiguity in the sports context has derived from multiple arenas in sport including, sport management and sport psychology. Building on Kahn et al.’s (1964) framework, research in the sport context has argued that role ambiguity is multi-dimensional and needs to be examined through such a lens (Eys & Carron, 2001; Sakires et al., 2009; Schulz & Auld, 2006). Eys and Carron (2001) examined the relationship between role ambiguity, task
The Ambiguous Role of the Sport Supervisor

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cohesion, and task self-efficacy experienced by athletes on a team. They found athletes whose scope of responsibility was unclear to have lower perceptions of team task cohesion (Eys & Carron, 2001). Sakires et al. (2009) used a three-dimensional approach including, scope of responsibility, means-ends knowledge, and performance outcomes. Scope of responsibility was found to be the best predictor of job satisfaction in Sakires et al.'s (2009) examination of role ambiguity in volunteer sport organizations.

Role theory provides a thorough and multi-faceted approach to analyze and understand the role of the sport supervisor, which is currently not defined or well understood. Furthermore, it is important to understand the role stressors that sport supervisors may or may not experience as role ambiguity has been contributed negatively to organizational effectiveness (Orgambídez & Benítez, 2021; Rizzo et al., 1970). Thus, the purpose of this study was to define and understand the role of the sport supervisor.

Method

Sport supervisors are integral to organizational success linking the individual teams and units to the organization (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). This study utilized a qualitative approach to understand the role of the sport supervisor focusing on the experiences of those individuals who interact with the role, the athletic administrator and head coach, and how they experience the role (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). While most studies on role theory have utilized a quantitative approach (e.g., Chaudhry et al., 2021), a qualitative approach was appropriate for this study to explore the perceived role of the sport supervisor through two members of the role set – the sport supervisor and the head coach. Qualitative research, especially the interpretative approach, recognizes that reality is a social construct that is derived by the individuals in the given context (Glesne, 2016). Thus, the perceptions of individuals are the reality. As noted by Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992), through the eyes of a role theorist, roles are seen through shared experiences; a qualitative approach fosters the understanding of the shared experiences of sport supervisors and head coaches to fully appreciate the role of a sport supervisor.

Participant Sample

The study focused on sport supervisors and head coaches at NCAA Division I institutions. Participants were selected using criterion sampling (Suri, 2011). To be included in the study, individuals had to hold the position of either a current sport supervisor or head coach at an NCAA Division I institution. Sport supervisors were identified as those who had supervisory responsibilities for a specific team or teams within the athletic department. Additional criteria for selection included being an athletic administrator from a NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic department and having a formal designation as a sport supervisor for one or more sports. Head coaches were identified based on their formal title as "head coach" for a specific sport as listed on the department staff directory.

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, the research team sent emails to a random sample of individuals who met the study criteria; snowball sampling was also employed using the professional contacts of a research team member. A total of 66 emails were sent (36 to sport supervisors and 30 to head coaches). Two weeks later, follow-up emails were sent. Through these efforts, a total of 22 people (11 sport supervisors and 11 head coaches) from various NCAA Division I institutions participated in this study. The sport supervisor participants...
represented nine conferences, including FBS and FCS, as indicated in Table 1. Similarly, the head coach participants represented seven conferences, including FBS and FCS, as shown in Table 2. The sport supervisor participants held titles such as Senior Associate Athletic Director and Deputy Athletic Director and had administrative responsibilities over both internal (i.e., financial operations) and external operations (i.e., development) within their respective departments. On average the athletic administrators served as a sport supervisor for 11.7 years and worked in intercollegiate athletics for an average of 20 years. The head coach participants included coaches of both revenue generating (i.e., football) and non-revenue generating (i.e., men’s soccer) sports and worked in college athletics on average for 16.3 years. Head coaches and sport supervisors represented revenue and non-revenue generating sports.

**Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both NCAA Division I athletic administrators who held the role of sport supervisor as well as NCAA Division I head coaches. A pilot study with a sport supervisor and a former head coach was conducted; minor changes to the interview protocol were made based on their recommendations. The interview protocol was developed from the literature on role theory and adapted for the role of sport supervisor and head coach, respectively. Interview questions for sport supervisors included questions to understand the role of the sport supervisor (i.e., In your own words, describe for me the role of a sport supervisor; In your experience, what behaviors/skills/attributes make an effective sport supervisor?). Interview questions for head coaches included questions to understand their perception of the role of the sport supervisor (i.e., What word would you use to describe the role of sport supervisor? What skills, expertise, and knowledge do sport supervisors need to be an effective sport supervisor?). Each interview occurred via video conferencing and lasted between 40 minutes and 80 minutes. All interviews were transcribed using a transcription service; transcripts were reviewed by the lead researcher for clarity and correctness. Edits were made to the transcripts as necessary and then shared with participants for member-checking.

**Data Analysis**

This study utilized thematic analysis in reviewing interview transcripts to look for patterns and discover themes (Glesne, 2016). According to Glesne (2016), thematic analysis is appropriate when a researcher is examining “underlying complexities” (p.184) and seeking “to identify tensions and distinctions, and to explain where and why people differ from a general pattern” (p.184). Given this study’s purpose was to understand the perceived role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics, thematic analysis guided the process of understanding this complex role in an equally complex organizational structure.

This study utilized inductive coding as the study was focused on exploring the role of the sport supervisor through the framework of role theory. Inductive coding allowed new themes to emerge as the behaviors and expectations of the role of the sport supervisor were explicated. Attribute and in vivo coding were utilized during the first cycle of coding followed by pattern coding during the second cycle of coding. Attribute coding assisted in organizing the data into initial categories while in vivo coding honored the words and voices of the participants Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding guided the grouping of data discovered in first cycle coding into a “smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldaña, 2016, p.236).

To increase the trustworthiness of the data, the researchers employed several strategies. First, the researchers used a semi-structured interview protocol. Semi-structured protocols ensure
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Revenue/Non-Revenue</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
<th>Years as a Sport Supervisor</th>
<th>Years at Current Institution</th>
<th>Years in college sports</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Senior Associate AD</td>
<td>Strategic Affairs</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>0-2 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peyton</td>
<td>Executive Senior Associate Athletics Director</td>
<td>External Affairs</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>16 - 20 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Deputy Athletics Director</td>
<td>Internal Affairs</td>
<td>Revenue &amp; Priority</td>
<td>10 - 15 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Senior Associate AD</td>
<td>External Affairs - Development</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>3 - 5 years</td>
<td>4 as primary/ 3 as secondary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rexton</td>
<td>Deputy Athletic Director</td>
<td>Internal &amp; External Affairs</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>3 - 5 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Senior Associate Athletic Director</td>
<td>Internal Affairs</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>3 - 5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Deputy Athletic Director/SWA</td>
<td>Internal Affairs</td>
<td>Revenue &amp; Non-Revenue</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon</td>
<td>Chief Financial Officer</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>3 - 5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Deputy Director of Athletics and CFO</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>20+ years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Chief of Staff/Sr. Associate Athletics Director</td>
<td>Internal Affairs</td>
<td>Tier 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>10 - 15 years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlon</td>
<td>Deputy Director of Athletics</td>
<td>Finance &amp; External Affairs</td>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>0 - 2 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Revenue/Non-Revenue</td>
<td>Years in Current Position</td>
<td>Years with Current Sport Supervisor</td>
<td>Sport Supervisor Gender</td>
<td>Sport Supervisor Race</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlene</td>
<td>Women's Basketball</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Men's Soccer</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Women's Soccer</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Women's Volleyball</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-Revenue (Priority Sport)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>Men's Soccer</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncan</td>
<td>Rifle</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamar</td>
<td>Men's Soccer</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-Revenue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Women's Basketball</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
core questions are asked of all participants, while also allowing flexibility for the researchers to delve deeper into topics that emerge during conversation (Adams, 2015). Second, researchers engage in member checking (Glesne, 2016) to seek feedback from participants to verify the researcher’s interpretation of their responses or to gain clarity on certain topics. Third, the use of a semi-structured protocol combined with member-checking and an iterative data review process ensured thick description and a depth of understanding of the participant experience. Through this process, the research team observed and documented recurring themes and concepts, which suggested saturation of data from coaches and sport supervisors (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Finally, the researchers employed self-reflection of personal perspectives and experiences to mitigate bias and distortion in the interpretation of results (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). Collectively, these strategies contribute to the trustworthiness of qualitative data analysis, bolstering the credibility and dependability of the findings.

**Findings**

As the purpose of this study was to understand and define the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA division I intercollegiate athletics, this section begins with an overview of the expectations and behaviors for the role of the sport supervisor as explained by the participant groups (i.e., coaches and sport administrators). The findings illustrate the evidence of role ambiguity in understanding who sets role expectations and how those expectations are communicated. Shared expectations identified by both participant groups on the expectations of the role will be discussed to further help clarify the role of the sport supervisor. The three shared themes are advocate, support, and evaluator. Additionally, both head coaches and sport supervisors identified expectations that were not shared by the other group. Head coaches identified partner and knowledge of sport while sport supervisors identified middle manager and professional necessity as expectations for the role.

**Expectations of the Sport Supervisor Role**

Biddle (1986) defines expectations as “scripts for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers” (p.68). Exploring perceptions on who and how expectations are currently set for the role of the sport supervisor is foundational to understanding the role of the sport supervisor. Some sport supervisors indicated they were given no guidance or set of expectations for the role. Peyton noted,

> So, I didn't have a blueprint or even a one sheeter with 'hey, here are the things that are important to me as an AD that I see from us as a sport administrator,’ I just kind of figured it out.

Paula further confirmed this idea,

> Let me just preface it by saying that one of the things that I think we don't do well in college athletics is, is explain what that [role of sport supervisor] is to people. But then I think we as an industry need to do a better job of explaining what it is that the expectations are about what to do as a sports supervisor.
On the other hand, some institutions have developed more formalized guidelines for their sport supervisors on the expectations for the role. Sheldon explained,

> So for us, our chief sport administrator, we have like a two or three page description that we hammered out over the last year. And it talks a lot about what we should expect of ourselves as sport administrators…it’s knowing practice times, knowing the academics, knowing all of the people that support the program, and making sure that they’re engaged.

Yet, other institutions lie somewhere in the middle with loose guidelines. When asked how expectations are shared, Ian stated, “there are a set of expectations and kind of guidelines that we established as a department and it was kind of written, not in a handbook, so to speak.” Virginia noted her institution is similar in that, “we've kind of like, formalized like, what our expectations are, like, things that you should be doing, conversations you should be having. Kind of like rules.”

When examining who sets the expectations for the sport supervisor, the findings were distinct between the two participant groups. Most of the sport supervisors indicated that the expectations for their role as a sport supervisor were set solely by their athletic director. Only one sport supervisor acknowledged that their role as a sport supervisor is set by expectations from the athletic director, head coach, and support staff. Interestingly, the majority of head coaches did not know who set the expectations for the sport supervisor. William stated, “in 30 years, I've never been given a set of expectations.” Lamar echoed that sentiment, “eventually I think I need to probably have a conversation about clarity of the role, too. Because I've never been provided that.” Role ambiguity is present for athletic administrators serving as sport supervisors, as well as coaches’ understanding of the role.

The findings from the data illustrate the current inconsistency of who sets expectations and how expectations are communicated with sport supervisors and head coaches. This inconsistency further laminates the lack of clarity of the role as well as an understanding of the sport supervisor’s role set. As Lamar stated when referencing his sport supervisor, “Is he my boss? I don’t know.” Meanwhile, William states, “Because they're the boss, they can do whatever they want.” Head coaches struggle to understand the sport supervisor’s role as it relates to their position as a head coach.

**Shared Expectations**

Even though there is ambiguity around who sets the expectations and how the expectations are communicated, both participant groups identified three shared expectations: advocate, support, and oversight and evaluation.

**Advocate.** Participants in both groups shared the expectation for the sport supervisor to be an advocate. Both head coaches and sport supervisors spoke about the importance of the sport supervisor “being a voice” for the program. Rachel illustrated this,

> Be a voice when I'm not in the room that's supporting what I'm doing and illustrating what I'm doing in a positive way. Whether that's to other administrators, whether that's to a parent, whether that's a student athlete, whether that's to my coaching colleagues, I just want that to be a big thing.
Samantha noted, “So I expect them to be comfortable and trusting to take things to the director that need to be taken... So, I guess just an advocate, like a strong advocate.”

Head coaches recognize sport supervisors serve as a connection point to the athletic director and other departments for their programs; thus, coaches expect sport supervisors to be advocates. Additionally, coaches have an understanding that they are not present in all decision-making processes but feel strongly that their sport supervisor should be advocating for their program when they are not present and are unable to do so themselves.

Similarly, most sport supervisors agreed with the head coaches’ expectations for sport supervisors to serve as an advocate for the program. Paula noted, “I guess, in a big way, being the program's advocate in everything, whether you're a priority [sport] or not.” Sandy confirmed this idea stating, “I like to advocate for the program. Number one, without anyone telling me I need to...I should know how to advocate for my program appropriately.” Ian extended the definition of the program to include advocating for the student-athlete stating, “First and foremost, I'm kind of an advocate and a resource for the coaching staff and the student athletes.”

Head coaches and sport supervisors share the expectation that individuals serving in the role of a sport supervisor need to be advocates for the program they are supervising. Through the expectation of being an advocate, participants in both groups recognize the sport supervisor is an important connection between the individual program(s) they are overseeing and the rest of athletic department.

**Support.** Sport supervisors and head coaches also identified support as an expectation for the role of the sport supervisor. While advocacy focuses on the support of a specific cause (i.e., issue or project), support is more general in nature and can be relational and personal. All head coaches recognized support as an expectation for the role of the sport supervisor, while the majority of sport supervisors agreed.

As head coaches, both Rachel and Samantha shared the sport supervisor should be someone who “has your back.” Duncan noted, “your sport admin, they need to be really supportive of what you're doing.” Heather agreed saying, “Support. I mean, I think generally, like you want them to be a fan of what you're doing.” Samantha continued by noting how lack of support can have both an emotional toll as well as a negative impact on coaches’ feelings of safety. She shared,

> When you have a bad one [sport supervisor], it just makes it really difficult to ask for anything and feel like you can [pause] you don't want to feel like an athlete can go to your sports supervisor and you're automatically in trouble.

Speaking in terms of what he would like to see in a sport supervisor, Lamar shared, “it would be a person I could go to with any issues within the program and seeking advice and support to navigate the certain situation.” Head coaches also recognized sport supervisors can show support to them by utilizing their department and institutional expertise, as well as their ability to guide them through situations. As David stated,

> there are other logistical things that are involved with running the program that you don't always know who the right person is to go to, or what the right answer is with some of those things. So, for [sport supervisors] to be incredibly knowledgeable in the parts that I don't want to have to commit to memory.
Most sport supervisors interviewed acknowledged their role was to support the program and the coach. Andrea stated,

I feel a sport supervisor is there to support and guide coaches. And what I mean by that is supporting is being there for them to come in and talk about different things that are going on not only with the student athletes, but with budgeting with scheduling with plans for future you know, even with recruiting…So really as a support to, you know, make sure that we're giving them all the tools they need and all the resources they need to be successful.

Participants in both groups recognize the need for sport supervisors to provide support, especially departmental and institutional support.

**Oversight and Evaluation.** The third expectation shared by sport supervisors and head coaches was the theme of oversight and evaluation; nearly all head coaches and sport supervisors identified this theme with head coaches using the term oversight more frequently and administrators using the term evaluation. When asked to describe the role of the sport supervisor, William, a 30-year veteran head coach, noted, “Sport supervisor, it should be there for oversight of you know, some of the logistical things, recruiting, scheduling, who we’re making offers to, those type of things.” Similarly, Brad stated that the role of the sport supervisor is, “someone who oversees the operations of my team and of my program.” Rachel agreed stating, “and I just think it is somebody that monitors your sport, your progress...somebody that kind of directly oversees me.” In addition to discussing program oversight, almost half of the head coaches used the term “boss” when describing their sport supervisor.

Sport supervisors provided a more thorough and extensive description of evaluation. Sport supervisors illustrated that in their role they are constantly evaluating the program. For example, Andrea described how joining teams on road trips is a form of evaluation,

I think that's why you take a trip...So you can really see that, because there's some, you know, I've gone to coach and been like that was the most unorganized trip I've been on. Like, why didn't I get an itinerary? Why did it change? Why didn't nobody tell me the time that the bus was meeting? You know, stuff like that.

Andrea, Marlon, Sheldon and Paula also noted that part of their role is to evaluate the entire program during competitions, including bench decorum as well as the student-athlete and coaches’ behavior. Andrea said,

I'm also looking at our team, if we're down...What does the team look like when they get back on the court? Are they frazzled? Are they really relaxed? Are they too relaxed? Are they too high? I mean, you know, what does that look like?

Marlon discussed it as “providing feedback and constructive criticism and observations so that they can be better.” He further noted that sometimes coaches are “too close” and as a sport supervisor he can help them see “things they can’t see.” Ian summed it up stating,

I think that the sport supervisor plays in the overall evaluation of the program. Where is the program headed? How is the program doing? You know, are we being successful in
what we’re trying to do? What’s the mission of the program? And are we being successful?

It is agreed sport supervisors provide oversight to their respective head coaches, but a disconnect exists as to the level of oversight sport supervisors provide.

*Head Coach Only Identified Expectations*

In addition to the three common expectations identified by both sport supervisors and head coaches each group also identified two additional expectations. Partner and knowledge of sport were identified by head coaches as expectations for sport supervisors.

**Partner.** All head coaches shared expectations of the sport supervisor being a partner to them and the program. The coaches described being a partner through the terms, “sounding board” or a “coach for me.” David described it saying, “I'd like to think that you can get to a point with an administrator where they can be a sounding board if you need them to be and you can vent about certain things.” Charlene noted that being a head coach can be lonely, “because it's like, you want to be able to talk about some things, but you can’t.” She further explained, “I had to tell [sport supervisor] like, well, you're in that circle [circle of trust]… but as I told her, I was like, it's not my fault, you earned your way right in there.” Rachel noted that she looks to her sport supervisor for help with tasks outside her area of expertise stating, “I think also just being a sounding board, if there's certain things that come up that are non-coaching things.” Duncan shared how he sees his sport supervisor as his “first phone call” to facilitate any ideas that he and his staff may develop. Head coaches look to their sport supervisors to be their partner, to be the person they can bounce administrative ideas off, the person they can get opinions from, the person to provide them with a safe space to discuss ideas and issues and to not feel like they are being judged.

**Knowledge of Sport (Head Coaches).** Most head coaches shared a desire for their sport supervisor to have knowledge of their sport. Knowledge of sport is defined as general knowledge about the game (e.g., how the game is scored), understanding trends within the game (e.g., recruiting, governance or rule changes), knowing the competition (e.g., who are the national powers). Knowledge of sport should not be confused with knowing tactics of a sport, which would entail more specifics on positions and strategies for the game. This theme was shared through various scenarios from the participants. Lamar shared, “I feel like they should have a good sense of the sport itself that they're overseeing.” William echoed this sentiment while also elucidating that sport supervisors need to be able to discern that each sport is unique. He shared, “Discerning that sports are a little bit different. Soccer is different than basketball. Which is different than baseball, which is different than cross country, you know...” Interestingly, each soccer coach interviewed addressed the need for a sport supervisor to have knowledge of the sport. Brad shared this from the perspective of recruiting as well,

She said to me probably a month ago that I understand that the international recruiting starts now. Whereas before they would be upset that I signed a player in April. And now she knows that like it's still going on. So, I was very appreciative and honestly surprised that she kind of knew that. But it was very comforting.

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Similarly, Rachel shared that she expects her sport supervisor to have knowledge of her sport (women’s basketball) and recruiting cycles,

I think they need to be aware of like recruiting trends, they need to be aware of the culture; transfer portals are really big thing for us. So, you know, for kids leaving a program may have been a lot of red flags four years ago. Now, it is par for the course. And if you don't know that, you're thinking there's an issue, and there's really not…

Head coaches expect sport supervisors to discern that each sport is unique and, therefore, has unique attributes. In showing this recognition of differences and nuances specific to the sport(s) they are supervising, sport supervisors can show a high level of support to their coaches.

**Sport Supervisor Only Identified Expectations**

Continuing an exploration of the different expectations identified by sport supervisors and head coaches, the next section discusses the two themes, middle manager and professional necessity, identified by only sport supervisors.

**Middle Manager.** While head coaches may be lonely, sport supervisors are stuck in the middle. Most sport supervisors acknowledged that, in their role as a sport supervisor, they are middle managers. Sheldon stated, “I call it a point guard, but it probably officially is a middleman.” Virginia gave an example regarding decision making, “I’m just merely that extension. He [athletic director] has to approve it.” Paula expanded on how the lack of authority in her role makes it difficult to lead stating, “It makes it hard, in my opinion makes it hard to lead when you can’t, when you don’t feel like you have all the final decisions.” Marlon admitted to feeling “like a person in the middle” but acknowledged, “once you know the role, and you accept that you’re in the middle…you end up just understanding that’s the role and you accept it.”

Linda shared an example of how as the middle person she acts as a mediator between coaches and support staff, “a lot of times, you'll have department heads or whoever's working with that sport, they might approach the sport supervisor, not go to the head coach…I'm having this issue…can you ask them to do this?” As described by the participants, sport supervisors find themselves sandwiched in the middle; sandwiched between the head coach and the athletic director and sandwiched between the head coach and support staff. The challenges this poses for those in the role are considered further in the discussion.

**Professional Necessity.** The final theme identified by sport supervisors is the theme of professional necessity. When discussing the role of the sport supervisor as a collegiate athletic administrator, the majority of sport supervisors perceived sport supervision as a necessary next step for career progression within intercollegiate athletics. Paula shared, “Because I think especially in the last, say, decade, I think career matriculation equals sport supervision.” Linda echoed this sharing, “I asked for it. I asked to oversee a sport back when I initially got women's tennis…kinda went for my career development. I felt like I was ready for that next step.” Specifically, Virginia, Marlon, Linda, Sheldon, and Ian discussed how sport supervision is a requirement if an athletic administrator aspires to be an athletic director. Virginia shared,

Its [sport supervision] definitely a resume builder…. And, also understanding what our coaches are dealing with on a daily basis, situations, issues that may arise, how you respond, and then the priority of the student athlete experience, and coaches.
Linda and Sheldon also shared that through their experiences, there is a notion within the industry to become an athletic director you must supervise either men’s basketball or football. As Linda shared her experience as a female athletic administrator with aspirations to be an athletic director,

…if as a female, they are scrutinized if they do not have experience with football, or men's basketball, in the ability to oversee an athletic department, even though their male counterparts may not also have experience overseeing football, men's basketball. So there, I see a huge push with friends and other institutions where they're trying to quote unquote, “strengthen their resume” by gaining sports supervision over a revenue sport, because even some athletic director job descriptions will distinctly say experience with overseeing revenue sports.

The participants’ insights illustrate sport supervision is considered professional development for athletic administrators in intercollegiate athletics to increase their responsibilities and skill set. In addition, it is a known requirement for becoming an athletic director. Thus, for many, sport supervision is a professional necessity.

In discussing the expectations for the role of the sport supervisor, sport supervisors and head coaches share three common themes: advocate, support, and oversight and evaluation. Each participant group also separately identified two additional expectations. For sport supervisors, additional themes were middle manager and professional necessity, while head coaches identified partner and knowledge of sport as expectations for their sport supervisor. Figure 2 provides an illustration of the expectations findings. With an understanding of the expectations as elucidated by both participant groups, an examination of the behaviors is needed to further understand how individuals in the role meet the expectations with their behaviors.

*Figure 2.*
Expectations of the Role of the Sport Supervisor

![Figure 2. Expectations of the Role of the Sport Supervisor](image-url)
Behaviors of the Sport Supervisor Role

Expectations alone do not define a role; desired behaviors must also be examined to fully understand a role. Specifically, understanding how role senders perceive expectations are or are not met through the behaviors of the focal person (Biddle, 1986; Naylor et al., 1980). Behaviors support the expectations providing a comprehensive illustration of the role of the sport supervisor. In other words, the actions (behaviors) of individuals and how they interact with others, in part, set the expectations for the role. In this study, coaches and sport supervisors identified numerous behavioral skills including empathy, communication, listening, and being able to ask good questions. When considering these behaviors in aggregate, these skills are identified as emotional intelligence. Therefore, the singular overarching behavioral theme identified by coaches and sport supervisors was emotional intelligence. One additional behavioral theme was revealed from the head coaches, the theme of being present.

**Emotional Intelligence.** Emotional intelligence is defined as, “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others and for managing emotions well in ourselves AND in our relationships” (Goleman, 1998, p. 317). Linda captured the essence of why emotional intelligence is vital to the role of a sport supervisor stating,

> This is a people business, and you have to effectively understand how to work with people, not deal with them, but work with them...So, I think that's one of those things is just understanding how to how to work with different personalities, how sometimes it's working with difficult people, sometimes it's working with people who you love, and they just aren't getting the job done.

Rexton echoed the sentiment stating, “You have to have patience and understanding and empathy. Because coaching is an emotional business. And you can't be overly emotional and deal with it as a supervisor.”

Several sport supervisors noted the importance of effective listening skills and as Andrea noted, a sport supervisor needs to “listen to hear not listen to respond.” Many of the head coaches concurred with sport supervisors needing to be good listeners. David stated, “I like to think that they were a good listener, there [were] very few things that I could come to them with that they would simply disregard, that they wouldn't at least take on board.” Coaches also recognized that good sport supervisors ask open-ended questions. Charlene described how her current sport supervisor utilized the skills of listening and asking open-ended questions to help her reach her own conclusions. She shared, “You already have your mind made up and she's like, okay, let's, let's talk all the way through, tell me everything you're thinking.” Charlene’s quote exemplifies how the behavior of being an active listener and asking good questions (demonstrating high emotional intelligence) makes the coach feel like their sport supervisor is their partner (an expectation).

**Being Present (Head Coaches).** Nearly all head coaches noted that when sport supervisors are present, they feel supported. Being present is a behavior that distinctly aligns with the expectation of support shared by coaches. Moreover, being present includes being physically present on a consistent basis and accessible. Rachel described this behavior stating, “I think another way is just being visible, whether it's, you know, in practices, at maybe events that we're doing, at games and showing that you are completely invested...and just what it is that we are doing.” Sally described how her sport supervisor being present shows her that her program is
supported, “like seeing her at our games or like seeing her interact with our players, I think that really shows that she like supports our program.”

Lamar conversely noted that he goes weeks without speaking to his sport supervisor and how he has a desire for them to be more present. He stated, “Yeah. For me, I would want them around our program a lot more, like know exactly what’s going on. Not just pop in every once in a while, and kind of gauge the feel of the program based on maybe a given day.” Lamar noted the lack of presence by the sport supervisor makes the time when he does come around feel more evaluative than supportive. Sport supervisors can also be a stronger advocate for the program when they are visible and present. Samantha illustrated this by stating, “They need to understand what we do, so when they go to bat for us that they have some ground to stand on site.” Being present is also defined by head coaches as being accessible. Heather stated, “her accessibility is what makes her a great supervisor. I think that’s how she's able to respond and be available for us.” Sally shared that her sport supervisor is always available, “I think she's very good about like, making sure the head coaches get her attention… if I call her, she will answer. Head coaches desire sport supervisors who are visible and accessible. Through these behaviors, head coaches feel supported, are more confident in their sport supervisor being a strong advocate for the program, and view them as a partner, all of which are expectations head coaches have for sport supervisors.

When examining the behaviors of the role of the sport supervisor, one overarching behavioral theme, emotional intelligence, was indicated by participants from both groups, while head coaches indicated one additional behavioral theme, being present. The behavioral themes focused on how (e.g., communication style, interpersonal skills) individuals in the role of sport supervisor engage with the role (Biddle, 1979). Figure 3 illustrates the expectation and behavior themes found from each participant. Similarly, behaviors of the sport supervisors aligned and often supported their perceptions of the role, as well as coaches’ perceptions of the role. Moreover, the behaviors and expectations identified in this study illustrate the importance of the relational nature of the sport supervisor/coach dyad.

**Figure 3.**
Behaviors & Expectations of the Role of the Sport Supervisor

![Figure 3](http://csri-jiia.org)

*Note.* Behaviors are indicated in italics.
Discussion

Understanding the roles of people within an organizational structure is imperative for organizational effectiveness (Cameron et al., 2011; Katz & Kahn, 1978). This is even more true within intercollegiate athletic departments, which have been defined as “peculiar institutions” that are both “a part and apart” of institutions of higher education; athletic departments are also businesses within their own right (Thelin, 2008). Furthermore, intercollegiate athletic departments are often the front door of the universities and, thus, have a far-reaching scope of awareness to both internal and external stakeholders (Ott & Beaumont, 2020). The findings from this study illuminate the complexity of the role of a sport supervisor as well as the lack of clarity around what the role is, who sets the expectations, and how the expectations align between a sport supervisor and head coach. As such, this study has both theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

This study applied role theory to better understand and define the role of the sport supervisor. Through the application of the role theory framework, the research team explored the prevalence of role ambiguity and how both participant groups perceive the role of the sport supervisor. Findings indicate sport supervisors and head coaches shared three common expectations—advocate, support and oversight and evaluation. Head coaches, however, shared two additional expectations that were not recognized by sport supervisors: partner and knowledge of sport. It is evident that role ambiguity, specifically task ambiguity, exists for sport supervisors as there is no proper definition of the role, expectations for the role, or how to leverage the role to accomplish team and athletic department goals. In other words, there is a disconnect between the expectations of the focal person (the sport supervisor) and the role sender (the head coach) (Kahn et al., 1964). This disconnect underscores the ambiguity in the role as sport supervisors are unaware of the expectations the coaches have of them to be their partner and to have knowledge of their sport. The lack of clarity around the role can lead to role stress for both sport supervisors and head coaches (De Clercq & Belausteguiquitoita, 2017). Previous research has noted that when individuals have unknown expectations, they can experience role ambiguity which can lead to decreased individual satisfaction and organizational effectiveness (De Clerq & Pereira, 2021; Tubre & Collins, 2000; Welbourne et al., 1998).

Furthermore, findings illuminated the lack of consistency with how expectations for the role of the sport supervisor are shared by both parties. When examining the role set for the sport supervisor, sport supervisors only identify one role sender, the athletic director, as the individual setting expectations. However, as a member of the role set for a sport supervisor, head coaches are, in fact, setting expectations for sport supervisors (Wickman and Parker, 2006). Without acknowledgement of the two role senders in the role set, the sport supervisor is destined to experience role ambiguity as they are only aware (at least consciously) of one role sender’s expectations (Kahn et al., 1964).

This study has expanded the use of role theory to a new population, intercollegiate athletic employees, within the context of sport. By applying role theory as a framework, this study illuminated the expectations and behaviors needed by those serving in the role of sport supervisor. Furthermore, the use of role theory in examining positions and roles within an intercollegiate athletic department is critical to help managers and leaders define and communicate expectations for all employees within an athletic department. The following
section outlines additional practical implications for intercollegiate athletic departments and their employees.

**Practical Implications**

This study provides administrators and coaches with several practical implications that can be applied to improve role clarity for those serving as sport supervisors, for coaches, and for employees interacting with sport supervisors. As evidenced by the findings, the role of the sport supervisor is ambiguous to both sport supervisors and head coaches. Without a proper definition of the sport supervisor role, an understanding of what constitutes success in the role, and without guidance on how to execute the role, sport supervisors are bound to experience role stress. The result could lead to negative outcomes for the sport supervisor, their assigned team(s), head coaches, and the department. Current studies on the well-being and experience of employees within intercollegiate athletics has shown employees are experiencing a high level of burnout and exhaustion among other negative work outcomes (Huml et al., 2021). Therefore, athletic departments are encouraged to intentionally define the role of the sport supervisor, by including insights from coaches, and openly discussing the role with all athletic department staff members. Based on the findings from this study, the following definition of sport supervisor is recommended:

*The “sport supervisor” in NCAA Division I athletics is a role held by athletic administrators whose function is to be a partner with the head coach by providing support, advocacy, and oversight and evaluation of the program(s) they supervise.*

In addition to defining the role, athletic departments and professional organizations (e.g., NCAA, NACDA, Women Leaders in Sports) should provide learning and development opportunities for individuals who currently serve as, or express an interest in becoming a sport supervisor. Additionally, professional sport (e.g., United Soccer Coaches Association) and professional coaching organizations (e.g., WeCoach) should provide training for coaches on the role of the sport supervisor. These trainings address Shuetz’s et al. (2022) call for developing intercollegiate athletic department personnel and the critical role human resources, specifically middle managers with a sport supervision role, play in building a competitive advantage for their organizations. These trainings should include a focus on interpersonal skills (e.g., communication skills, conflict management, emotional intelligence, etc.) as well as an understanding and appreciation for the nuances of each sport and the current trends in specific sports.

Furthermore, it is imperative for sport supervisors to have individual conversations with their head coaches recognizing that sport supervision is a role that requires emotional intelligence, namely social awareness, to develop shared expectations for the role with the coach(es) they supervise. Developing shared expectations also facilitates a stronger relationship between the sport supervisor and head coach. If athletic administrators do not provide clarity around the role, it is probable that head coaches will assert their own expectations on the role, thus creating even more confusion and potentially more expectations for sport supervisors.

Responding to Wood et al. (2021), sport supervision is a critical requisite for athletic administrators who desire to advance professionally. Yet, studies on career paths and mobility of leaders in intercollegiate athletic departments only peripherally acknowledge the importance of sport supervision for future athletic directors (Dickman et al., 2021; Kirkpatrick, 2018; Smith et al., 2019). Interestingly, most women with the SWA designation supervised sports (Smith et al.,
2019), whereas sport supervision was not identified as requisite experience for Black senior leaders in athletic departments to advance (Waller et al., 2022). This study confirmed the importance of sport supervision for industry professionals wanting to grow in their career. Succinctly put, if you want to progress in your career in intercollegiate athletics, you need to find an opportunity to supervise sports. Even more poignantly, if you want to be an athletic director, you need to supervise revenue generating sports. When athletic departments are considering succession planning and growth opportunities for individual employees, the role of sport supervision is an integral part of that conversation. However, athletic departments need to provide opportunities for employees to learn the skill set necessary to be an effective sport supervisor, as noted early, as the role has challenges that are unique from departmental functions within an athletic department. While administrators in this study acknowledge sport supervision to be a necessity for their professional growth, the prevalence of and access to the role of the sport supervisor needs further exploration, especially within minoritized populations in intercollegiate athletics.

The role of the sport supervisor is ambiguous, however, this study illuminates the importance of this role for the sport supervisor’s themselves as well as for the department and head coaches. As the complexity of intercollegiate athletics increases, so do the challenges and opportunities. With these changes, coaches need even more administrative support to help navigate the ever-changing landscape and issues of student-athletes. Additionally, athletic directors cannot manage these changes for all sports on their own, thus the role of the sport supervisor is instrumental in supporting both the department and the individual teams/units.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to define and understand the role of the sport supervisor. Every sport supervisor and head coach’s experience are unique to their past and current situations, thus impacting their perception of the role. Furthermore, every institution has its own unique organizational structure and culture which impacts the role of the sport supervisor. To account for the potentially disparate experiences of participants, the research team engaged in triangulation of the data by employing an interview process that allowed for flexibility for the researchers to delve deeper into topics that emerge during conversation (Adams, 2015); engaged in member checking (Glesne, 2016); conducted iterative data analysis to ensure the saturation of data; (Fusch & Ness, 2015) and self-reflection to mitigate bias. Collectively, these strategies aid in the transferability and trustworthiness of this study. This study is also limited to NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. Nevertheless, triangulation of the data aids in the transferability and trustworthiness of this study; suggesting that when other sport administrators and/or head coaches read this study, they are likely to relate to some, if not many, of the experiences shared in the findings.

With limited research on middle managers in intercollegiate athletics and especially those athletic administrators who hold the role of sport supervisor, there are numerous opportunities for future research. First and foremost, a more robust understanding of the relationship between the sport supervisor and the coach(es) they supervise would help deepen the partnership aspect of the relationship identified by head coaches. Secondly, this study interviewed sport supervisors and head coaches not in shared dyads within the same institution. This was intentional as to remove power dynamics and social desirability in answers during the interview process. Findings from this study illuminate the inconsistency in the role across institutions, it is suggested that future research examine sport supervisor/head coach dyads within a singular institution. Additionally, with the discovery of the multi-dimensional role set for sport supervisors, it would
be beneficial to understand the role from the perspective of athletic directors, support staff, and student-athletes. An examination of the role from a group-level analysis could provide a more thorough understanding of the impact of the relationships on team performance and organizational effectiveness (Manata, 2020). Simultaneously, it is evident there is no consistent evaluation process for the role of sport supervisor. Thus, there is ambiguity on what constitutes good sport supervision from bad sport supervision even though the role is a professional necessity. This is another area for future research as athletic departments determine to what extent the sport supervisor is responsible for the success or failure of an individual program.

References


