

*A Report by*

## **The National Institute for Sports Reform**

### **2004 NCAA DIVISION I MEN'S AND WOMEN'S BASKETBALL COACHES' ACADEMIC DEGREE ATTAINMENT SURVEY**

John R. Gerdy  
Ohio University

Dave Ridpath  
Marshall University

Ellen J. Staurowsky  
Ithaca College

Bruce B. Svare  
State University of New York at Albany

#### **Introduction**

A major influence in the academic development and career aspirations of college athletes is their day-to-day interaction with their coaches. With such influence, it is important that coaches are effective in their roles as educators and teachers.

One way of judging a person's commitment to education is to look at their level of education. Although earning an advanced degree is not absolutely essential to being an effective teacher, investing the time, expense and effort to earn an advanced degree demonstrates an individual's belief in and commitment to the value of education. Thus, it can be argued that coaches who have earned advanced degrees should be more effective educational role models for their athletes because they have demonstrated a commitment and made a personal investment in, the educational process.

Coaches are also often the most visible representatives of the educational institution. Because it is becoming more essential for colleges and universities to effectively communicate their mission to the public, a coach's ability to project a positive educational image increases. Institutions that do not maximize a coach's visibility to effectively promote educational and institutional themes and accomplishments are

wasting a tremendous resource. Educational background and commitment can help contribute to a coach's effectiveness in this regard.

Finally, the place of coaches on campus has long been justified by claims that they are teachers and educators. If however, coaches wish to be considered educators, their level of degree attainment is a relevant issue.

Given these considerations, it is particularly important that institutions, academic accrediting bodies, conferences, and the NCAA, along with other higher education officials, consider ways to assist coaches in becoming more effective educational role models for athletes. In this way, coaches will become more effective representatives for their institutions. To that end, a clearer understanding of the current academic credentials of coaches is necessary.

That being the case, the purpose of this survey, conducted under the auspices of the National Institute for Sports Reform, is to determine the level of academic degree attainment of NCAA Division I men's and women's basketball coaches. The survey is intended to generate dialogue regarding issues such as the desired educational credentials of coaches, measures to increase coaches' effectiveness as educational role models, and the appropriate role of coaches in the lives of athletes, educational institutions, and our society.

## **Methodology**

Subjects for this study were members of coaching staffs for NCAA Division I men's and women's basketball teams, including head coaches, associate coaches, and assistant coaches. Coaches were identified by consulting the list of all schools sponsoring men's and women's basketball at the Division I level, found through the NCAA database. Using a report called "Sport Listing By Conference", 1247 college and university men's basketball coaches working in 323 programs from 32 conferences were identified. Using the same report, 1018 college and university coaches of women's basketball teams (both male and female) working in 290 programs from 29 conferences were identified.

Biographies and/or personal profiles served as the data sources for this study. Data collection involved reading this information and recording the educational degrees mentioned for each coach.

The coach biographies and/or personal profiles were accessible on college and university websites and/or athletic department websites. Due to variability in the construction of these websites, the researchers relied on a flexible search strategy to locate the information needed to complete the data collection process. In the vast majority of instances, the biographies and/or personal profiles were found on team websites or in on-line media guides.

In cases where biographies and/or personal profiles were not available on institutional or athletic department websites, sports information offices were, when possible, called to

provide information not available otherwise.

### **Limitation of the Study**

One of the limitations of this study is the reliance on published biographies written by sports information and athletic communications personnel. Due to this, there is a potential bias in the data which reflects the content choices made by the writers. It is possible that not all degrees attained by all coaches surveyed have been mentioned. However, this by itself is revealing from the standpoint that it is accepted practice to routinely mention the highest degree earned by faculty members and academic administrators. If the data are skewed and under represent the level of educational degree attainment we question why the university would under represent this in public documents distributed widely to the press given the mission of academic institutions.

### **Results**

According to the survey of Division I basketball coaches, 29.9% (373 of 1247) of men's basketball coaches possess a Master's degree while 33.5% (341 of 1018) of coaches of women's basketball teams possess a Master's degree. The results, by conference and program (men's or women's) appear below:

<b>Conference</b>	<b>Men's</b>		<b>Women's</b>	
	<b>Proportion</b>	<b>and %</b>	<b>Proportion</b>	<b>and %</b>
<b>America East</b>	<b>13/43</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>14/38</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Atlantic 10</b>	<b>16/49</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>11/48</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Atlantic Coast</b>	<b>18/46</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>18/36</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Atlantic Sun</b>	<b>19/44</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>16/37</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Big 12</b>	<b>13/37</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>Not Available</b>	
<b>Big East</b>	<b>12/54</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>14/56</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Big Sky</b>	<b>7/35</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>5/56</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Big South</b>	<b>8/35</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>5/16</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Big Ten</b>	<b>17/52</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>15/41</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Big West</b>	<b>11/40</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>9/35</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>Colonial</b>	<b>9/40</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>7/35</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Conference USA</b>	<b>10/56</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>26/53</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>Horizon League</b>	<b>8/36</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>12/33</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Independent</b>	<b>3/11</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>2/12</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Ivy Group</b>	<b>10/31</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>4/22</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Metro Atlantic</b>	<b>9/35</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>14/39</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Mid-American</b>	<b>24/56</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>23/55</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>Mid-Continent</b>	<b>13/32</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>10/22</b>	<b>46%</b>

<b>Mid-Eastern</b>	<b>7/30</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>6/25</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Missouri Valley</b>	<b>13/38</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>13/38</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>Mountain West</b>	<b>13/40</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>3/36</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Northeast</b>	<b>9/34</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>11/37</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Ohio Valley</b>	<b>11/44</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>20/39</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>Pac-10</b>	<b>15/38</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>12/40</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Southeastern</b>	<b>19/49</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>9/39</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Southern</b>	<b>16/43</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>18/34</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>Southland</b>	<b>9/37</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>Not available</b>	
<b>Southwestern</b>	<b>2/29</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>Not available</b>	
<b>Sun Belt</b>	<b>11/39</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>15/44</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>Patriot League</b>	<b>4/27</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>10/33</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>West Coast</b>	<b>8/32</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>8/23</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>Western</b>	<b>16/35</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>11/36</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>373/1247</b>	<b>29.9%</b>	<b>341/1018</b>	<b>33.5%</b>

## **Discussion**

Coaches are extremely influential in the lives of athletes and are often the most visible representatives of a college or university. Coupled with the fact that the primary justification for coaches being a part of the academic community is that they are, first and foremost, teachers and educators makes this study timely and relevant to the national debate regarding the role of athletics in higher education.

For a number of reasons, we have lost faith in the “coach as educator” model. This is of great concern because coaches can and should be respected and successful educators. But at a time when we should be emphasizing the role of coaches as educators, it appears they are under prepared to fill that role as evidenced in the alarmingly low percentage who possess advanced educational degrees.

This low number is significant when considering the justification for coaches being on the campus, which is that they are teachers and educators. The disparity between coaches and faculty in the area of degree attainment is particularly stark. According to a 1998 study by the National Center for Educational Statistics, 75.3% of full-time instructional faculty and staff at four year institutions possessed a Ph.D. or first professional degree as their highest degree, while 22.8% earned a Master’s degree. While it may be unrealistic to expect a large number of coaches to have doctorates, inasmuch as 98.1% of faculty have earned at least a master’s degree, it is reasonable to expect that significantly more than the present 29.9% of Division I men’s basketball coaches to possess such a degree.

Do coaches have to have a master's or Ph.D. to be effective educators, role models, and representatives of the institution? No. However, if coaches wish to be considered educators, their level of degree attainment is important. Further, coaches' credibility as educational role models is linked in part to the extent to which they have invested in the educational process themselves. Investing the time, money and effort to earn an advanced degree demonstrates an individual's belief in and commitment to education.

Our purpose is not to single out coaches. Presidents, trustees, administrators, fans, and the media have all contributed to the demise of the coach as educator. It is hoped that this research will spur the higher educational community to begin the challenging process of restoring the coach as educator ideal. To that end, additional issues such as the expectations of coaches, professional development of coaches and evaluation criteria of coaches, as well as NCAA rules affecting the ability for coaches to serve as effective educators must also be examined.

### **Acknowledgement**

Undergraduate research assistants for this study included students from Ithaca College. They include sports media majors Nicholas Cecconi, Lauren Ferrett, and Joseph Macarak, sport management major Darren Newberry, television-radio majors Tara Draper and Craig Kolodny, and cinema and photography major Mike Wattter. Additionally, students in the Gender Issues in Sport class contributed to the data gathered for the Division I coaches of women's teams. Finally, Mark Svare also contributed to data collection.