

19 JUNE 2020

RESEARCH NOTE

Coaching:

**Public Perceptions of Shoving
Players and Mandated Certification**

Volume 1 Issue 3

global sport
institute poll



Preferred Citation: When citing this document, please use the following citation: Brooks, S. N., Brenneman, L., Gallagher, K. L., Lofton, R. (2020). Coaching: Public Perceptions of Shoving Players and Mandated Certification. Retrieved from Global Sport Institute 2020 Poll; Global Sport Institute at Arizona State University (GSI 2020 Poll Research Notes, Volume 1, Issue 3): globalsport.asu.edu.

Coaching: Public Perceptions of Shoving Players and Mandated Certification

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Introduction

In a 2020 poll of U.S. residents' perspectives designed and analyzed by the Global Sport Institute at Arizona State University, we asked questions about coaching, including coach certification and physical aggression toward players at various competitive levels. Coaching is integrated into society at a personal level, as many children and their families interact with coaches of youth teams on a regular basis. It is also prominent on a larger societal and media scale because college and professional coaches are often in the news for their hiring qualifications, salaries, and treatment of players. A quick web search of "high school coach shoving player" will likely yield several local and national news stories about coach resignations, suspensions, and/or controversy, including a recent action by [Tara Poovey](#), a Phoenix, Arizona, high school girls' basketball coach. Prominent former men's college basketball coaches, such as California Berkeley's [Mike Montgomery](#), Rutgers' [Mike Rice](#), and, most famously, Indiana's Bobby Knight, received a wide range of consequences for their physical aggression toward players. Researchers have analyzed such aggressive behaviors for their effects on athletes and performance (Kassing & Infante, 1999), coach-athlete conflict more generally (Wachsmuth et al., 2017), and fostering appropriate coaching behaviors (Paterick et al., 2015). On a related note, there are currently no universally-mandated certifications for coaches across all levels of sport, including community youth leagues, high school, college, and professional. This may be on the horizon as many universities now offer coaching certificates and degrees (e.g., Texas Tech University, Michigan State University). We have seen the media reports and read the scientific evidence, but we wanted your perspectives. So, we asked.

Aims

We examined opinions and perspectives about coaches shoving players at youth, collegiate, and professional levels. We specifically wanted to explore how people's age, ethnicity, gender, political affiliation engagement with sports, and/or personal engagement in gambling corresponded with their perspectives on this topic.

Method

We analyzed data from 750 completed online surveys administered by Latino Decisions, an independent survey research firm, in 2020. The data represented here are a subset of a larger poll. The survey was available to both registered voters and an adult sample of non-registered voters, including non-citizens. All respondents were U.S. residents. For respondent demographics, see Appendix A. For full methodology, see Appendix B.

Results

Note: AAPI = Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; Age is reported in years; Dem = Democrats; GOP = Grand Old Party and represents Republicans; Foll Close = Follow Closely and represents closely following sports; Not Close = Do Not Follow Closely and represents not closely following sports; Part Yes = Participating Yes and represents currently participating in sports; Part No = Participating No and represents not currently participating in sports; Bets/No Bets = respondents' self-reported engagement in or abstinence from gambling. Percentages are rounded to nearest whole number and may not equal 100.

Question 1. Do you believe coaches should be allowed to shove their middle school players?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18- 34	Age 35- 59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Yes	10%	7%	18%	12%	16%	6%	14%	17%	9%	2%	10%	11%	13%	5%	31%	3%	19%	3%
No	90%	93%	82%	88%	84%	94%	86%	83%	91%	98%	90%	89%	87%	95%	69%	97%	81%	97%

Question 2. Do you believe coaches should be allowed to shove their high school players?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18- 34	Age 35- 59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Yes	13%	9%	24%	16%	22%	9%	18%	23%	13%	2%	12%	15%	16%	9%	36%	6%	23%	6%
No	87%	91%	76%	84%	78%	91%	82%	77%	87%	98%	88%	85%	84%	91%	64%	94%	77%	94%

Question 3. Do you believe coaches should be allowed to shove their collegiate players?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18- 34	Age 35- 59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Yes	18%	13%	29%	22%	24%	13%	22%	28%	16%	7%	16%	18%	23%	10%	40%	11%	27%	10%
No	82%	87%	71%	78%	76%	87%	78%	72%	84%	93%	84%	82%	77%	90%	60%	89%	73%	90%

Question 4. Do you believe coaches should be allowed to shove their professional players?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18-34	Age 35-59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Yes	23%	19%	33%	26%	25%	17%	29%	35%	21%	8%	21%	24%	29%	13%	47%	15%	33%	14%
No	77%	81%	67%	74%	75%	83%	71%	65%	79%	92%	79%	76%	71%	87%	53%	85%	67%	86%

Question 5. If a high school coach shoves a Black player, what do you think should happen, if anything, to this coach?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18-34	Age 35-59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Coach should be fired	29%	30%	23%	34%	21%	27%	31%	35%	35%	7%	28%	23%	30%	27%	38%	26%	34%	26%
Reprimanded & forced to undergo mandatory training	60%	62%	61%	55%	59%	63%	58%	52%	55%	84%	61%	62%	62%	57%	54%	63%	51%	68%
Nothing, the coach is teaching this player discipline	10%	8%	17%	12%	20%	10%	11%	12%	10%	9%	11%	14%	7%	16%	8%	11%	15%	6%

Question 6. If a high school coach shoves a White player, what do you think should happen, if anything, to this coach?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18-34	Age 35-59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Coach should be fired	27%	28%	19%	35%	23%	30%	23%	35%	35%	5%	23%	30%	29%	25%	42%	24%	43%	16%
Reprimanded & forced to undergo mandatory training	66%	70%	68%	50%	54%	63%	73%	54%	59%	91%	72%	63%	64%	68%	53%	69%	53%	77%
Nothing, the coach is teaching this player discipline	6%	2%	13%	15%	24%	7%	5%	11%	6%	3%	4%	7%	6%	7%	5%	7%	5%	8%

Question 7. If a college coach shoves a Black player, what do you think should happen, if anything, to this coach?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18-34	Age 35-59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Coach should be fired	22%	20%	26%	22%	25%	17%	26%	27%	29%	3%	25%	21%	23%	21%	38%	17%	32%	15%
Reprimanded & forced to undergo mandatory training	71%	74%	66%	69%	66%	76%	67%	61%	67%	96%	72%	74%	68%	76%	54%	76%	60%	79%
Nothing, the coach is teaching this player discipline	7%	6%	8%	9%	9%	7%	7%	13%	4%	0%	2%	5%	9%	4%	8%	7%	8%	6%

Question 8. If a college coach shoves a White player, what do you think should happen, if anything, to this coach?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18-34	Age 35-59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Coach should be fired	22%	20%	31%	20%	30%	28%	16%	26%	24%	14%	32%	9%	24%	19%	40%	14%	23%	21%
Reprimanded & forced to undergo mandatory training	68%	72%	56%	63%	61%	67%	68%	59%	70%	76%	59%	90%	61%	77%	48%	76%	68%	67%
Nothing, the coach is teaching this player discipline	10%	8%	13%	17%	9%	5%	15%	16%	6%	10%	8%	1%	14%	4%	11%	10%	9%	12%

Question 9. Currently there are no universally-mandated certifications for coaches, across all levels of sports. Should college coaches of color be certified and go through a continuing education curriculum?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18-34	Age 35-59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Yes	59%	61%	60%	56%	53%	59%	60%	62%	71%	42%	59%	69%	65%	52%	71%	55%	67%	54%
No	41%	39%	40%	44%	47%	41%	40%	38%	29%	58%	41%	31%	35%	48%	29%	45%	33%	46%

Question 10. Currently there are no universally-mandated certifications for coaches, across all levels of sports. Should female college coaches be certified and go through a continuing education curriculum?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18-34	Age 35-59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Yes	56%	56%	44%	62%	65%	54%	57%	57%	52%	62%	59%	64%	55%	57%	66%	53%	59%	53%
No	44%	44%	56%	38%	35%	46%	43%	43%	48%	38%	41%	36%	45%	43%	34%	47%	41%	47%

Question 11. Currently there are no universally-mandated certifications for coaches, across all levels of sports. Should college coaches be certified and go through a continuing education curriculum?

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18-34	Age 35-59	Age 60+	Dem	GOP	Foll Close	Not Close	Part Yes	Part No	Bets	No Bets
Yes	83%	86%	81%	69%	83%	83%	83%	82%	82%	85%	85%	90%	79%	89%	81%	84%	79%	87%
No	17%	14%	19%	31%	17%	17%	17%	18%	18%	15%	15%	10%	21%	11%	19%	16%	21%	13%

Discussion

Overall, respondents strongly rejected that coaches should be allowed to shove their athletes at any level of competition, with the majority stating that coaches should be reprimanded for such behavior and undergo mandatory training as opposed to being fired or facing no consequences. Across demographic variables, slightly more respondents thought shoving players was okay as players got older. White respondents were least tolerant of shoving, as were female and older respondents across races. When looking across all demographic groups, people over 60 years old were consistently least likely to condone shoving, but simultaneously they did not endorse firing a coach for such behavior. People who follow sports closely, participate in sports, and/or gamble were much more likely to say coaches should be allowed to shove players regardless of the level of competition. In fact, people who currently participate in sports answered that shoving should be allowed—by a margin of at least 11 percent more than any other group—regardless of competition level. Curiously, when asked about consequences for shoving, they were also most likely to say a coach should be fired at the high school and college level.

Respondents' opinions differed when the athlete shoved was Black as opposed to White. (Note: We did not include the coach's race in these poll questions related to shoving.) When asked about a Black high school player being shoved, slightly more Democratic than Republican respondents said the coach should be fired. If a White player were shoved, the results were swapped – slightly more Republicans than Democrats supported firing the coach.

Regarding consequences for coaches shoving Black college players, politically-delineated opinions followed a pattern similar to those around shoving Black high school players. Curiously, for shoving a White college player, 32% of Democrats supported firing compared to 9% of Republicans. This opinion shift observed in Democrats—weaker consequences for shoving a Black player than a White player—also occurred with people over 60 years old. Also, at the college level, more female respondents would fire the coach for shoving a White athlete, whereas more male respondents would fire the coach for shoving a Black athlete.

There are currently no universally-mandated certifications for coaches across sport, and the vast majority of respondents thought such certification and continuing education should be required for college coaches. However, just over half believed female coaches and coaches of color should have certification.

Future Directions

While consensus is that coaches should not shove their players, future research should explore reasons for variability in people's opinions regarding coach shoving, consequences, and the race of the athlete. Also, the data suggest that engaging in sports via participating, following, and/or gambling corresponds with greater tolerance for shoving athletes. Does participation create a blind spot and/or lead to desensitization to physical aggression in sports settings? Why does the race of an athlete influence people's beliefs about the consequences for a coach who shoves them? Additional investigation is warranted regarding why respondents feel opinions that college coaches should have mandated certification and training and the reasons that this varied with coaches' race and gender. We recognize that our data came exclusively from U.S. residents, and we emphasize the need to investigate these questions in a broader international context.

References

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Appendix A

Weighted Respondent Demographic Data

	Total	White	Latino	Black	AAPI	Female	Male	Age 18- 34	Age 35- 59	Age 60+	HS or <	Dem	GOP
White, not Hispanic	65%	100%	5%	0%	3%	64%	66%	59%	60%	83%	59%	54%	80%
Hispanic or Latino	16%	0%	100%	0%	0%	16%	15%	19%	18%	7%	21%	16%	14%
Black or African American	15%	0%	4%	100%	0%	16%	15%	20%	17%	7%	17%	26%	3%
Asian American	6%	0%	2%	1%	100%	6%	5%	5%	7%	4%	4%	6%	4%
American Indian/Native American	2%	1%	5%	1%	0%	2%	1%	4%	1%	0%	2%	1%	1%

Note: AAPI = Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders; Age is reported in years; Dem = Democrats; GOP = Grand Old Party and represents Republicans.

Appendix B

We analyzed data from 750 completed online surveys administered by Latino Decisions, an independent survey research firm, in a respondent self-administered format from January 8, 2020, to January 18, 2020. The survey (and invitation) was available to both registered voters and an adult sample of non-registered voters, including non-citizens. All respondents were U.S. residents.

The full data are weighted within each racial group to match the adult population in the 2017 Census American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year data file for age, gender, education, nativity, ancestry, and voter registration status. A post-stratification ranking algorithm was used to balance each category within +/- one percent of the ACS estimates. Overall, the survey contains 86 questions and a median completion time of 13 minutes.

Data for registered voters comes from the national voter registration database email sample, and respondents were randomly selected to participate in the study and confirmed they were registered to vote before starting the survey. Among the 1,510 people who started the survey, 20 potential respondents were terminated due to being screened out or quotas being full, for a cooperation rate of 84% and measurement of error of +/- 3.58. Non-registered voters were randomly selected from Pure Spectrum, a research automation platform, and confirmed that they were not registered to vote before starting the survey. Programming and data collection for the full project were overseen by Pacific Market Research in Renton, Washington.