

The Recruiting Process: What Virginia Tech Baseball Coaches Are Really Looking For

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Abstract

This research study described what non-physical skills are looked for when recruiting a prospective player for the Virginia Tech baseball team. Study participants included six Virginia Tech baseball coaches where each of the individuals were interviewed separately regarding their recruiting process for themselves and how they build a team. Through literature review, comparisons of the skills recruited by Virginia Tech coaches are also desired by some of the top businesses in the world. Through qualitative interviews with the coaching using semi-structured interviews, the information was gathered and analyzed resulting in unique codes that were grouped into categories revealing five emerging themes for future program enhancements. The results indicated that coaches look for many of the same similarities as business recruiters in terms of soft skills and that players still need to improve on some certain aspects such as, communication skills, dedication levels, confidence levels, leadership skills, and dependability. The coaches are Virginia Tech now can understand what they have done in the past and can build upon their recruiting strategies using this research. This study can be used for individuals trying to play college athletics one day in order to understand what coaches are looking for. While some coaches may be different, this is an exact rubric of what the Virginia Tech baseball coaches look for and can be beneficial for prospective athletes to understand before they try out for any college teams. This can also be used for individuals trying to get a job due to the similarities between business recruiters and coaches.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

All throughout the world there are opportunities and instances when having certain skills can be favorable. Each of these skills are the main origin as to whether an individual thrives or struggles in a specific task. To a basic fan, they witness a ball being thrown around, however, when delving into deeper analysis, the viewer can observe teamwork transpiring, as the batter attempts to get his teammate around the bases safely to score a run. While coaches typically care about velocity, speed, and hitting ability, there are also some abilities that can enhance a player's success which include soft skills such as teamwork, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and ability to learn. One of the most important aspects in sports is the communication quality to make sure all members understand the goal. Advanced communication skills will allow for improved trust between team members which will in turn can improve a team's success (Bounds & Baghurst, 2016). To show how important these skills can be, The Los Angeles Dodgers, a Major Baseball Team (MLB), published a mission statement expressing how important leadership can be. Per the Dodgers, use "baseball and softball to build community and reinforce what it means to be a team. We create leadership opportunities and provide character development through increased skills, and positive and safe places to play for youth of all abilities" (2018, n.p.).

The college baseball recruitment process is very competitive due to the limited number of spots on teams. The NCAA has many rules and restrictions that limit the number of players and scholarship limits in order to ensure a fair playing field for all teams. Due to this, coaches must recruit very intelligently in hopes of constructing a functioning team. The difficult portion in the recruiting process is for the coaches to know which recruits to pursue. There are many strategies used in order to understand each player individually.

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These skills are not only desired by coaches in sports, but they are also desired by top recruiters for companies such as Google and Amazon. An example in the pharmaceutical business world, one of the top pharmaceutical sales groups (Big Pharma) contains some of the biggest pharmaceutical sales companies in the world. These groups describe their employees needing qualities such as being highly-social, informed about new findings, confident, approachable, and most importantly dependable. Pharmaceutical sales representatives must obtain convincing qualities to ensure success. This is much different than traits needed of a doctor. In this field, an individual must go to a doctor's office and convince the doctor that their medicine is better than the competition through informative communication and demonstration (Clark, 2015). Knowing what business recruiters are looking for is instrumental for individuals due to the real-world application that is provided and if kids can learn these lessons at a young age, then they will benefit their entire lives. Based off of Google and Amazon's mission statements regarding new hires, they describe their highest desired recruits display high levels of humanistic qualities. These qualities include being a team player, being able to communicate effectively, and to also dependability (Connley, 2019). This lesson is primarily for faculty and coaches to ensure that youth are enlisted in programs that teach these lessons before they miss out on valuable opportunities. People in leadership roles, including teachers, staff, and elected officials need to remember these important concepts and the impact that it could have on the future. There should be more priority on developing the youth that will one day be taking over large jobs controlling the world (Willis, 1993). If people realized how big of an impact these skills have, then there would be a much more intense focus on them. The American Psychological Association describes their role in sport psychology and how vital skills such as trust, communication, and even leadership skills can be in competition (American Psychology Association, 2008).

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Since both baseball and major companies such as Google and Amazon depend so heavily on having individuals in their programs with good communication skills and teamwork abilities, it is mandatory that coaches know what compatibility statistics each player possesses and how they will acclimate to the program. Joe Torre (2011), former Major League Baseball manager who led the New York Yankees to four World Series titles, discussed how vital communication and trust are when trying to form a team, either in sports or in business. When a high school player is coming to visit the school, it is vital that a coach can guarantee that the potential player is going to be a good fit and will have certain qualities that they so desperately desire to create a successful team. In this research, the process that is used by coaches will be examined and interviews will be conducted to research the way in which this occurs. Bill Walsh, an ex-NFL coach of the San Francisco 49ers, said about his team experience “coaching is to expect everyone in the organization to be an expert in their particular area of responsibility, to refine their skills continually, and to create a communication channel that allows information to get from the bottom to the top” (Rapaport, 2014, n.p.). Recruiting in any condition is relatively similar but similarly between jobs and baseball there a few connections that definitely coincide. An article titled, *Selecting Individuals in Team Settings: The Importance of Social Skills, Personality Characteristics, And Teamwork Knowledge*, written by Morgeson, Reider, & Campion (2005) explains some key ingredients regarding teamwork. The main purpose of this article, is to indicate why certain characteristics are important especially in teams. The answer is that qualities are magnified when placed in a team environment due to the microscope of competition and trust that is located within the group. This is one of the main aspects that coaches emphasize due to every competition involving an entire group of players working in unison towards a similar goal.

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Not all players are taught the correct way to act and perform on their own. Sadly, not all players have elders to look up to teach them important life aspects such as being a good teammate, being dependable, giving maximum effort in everything, and especially helping others out when in need (De Muynck, Vansteenkiste, Delrue, Aelterman, Haerens, & Soenens, 2017). This is a glaring reason why faculty and coaches need to contribute in this environment due to the knowledge that they can provide. A glaring stat discovered in a study by Melmed (2016) revealed that 47% of dads and 29% of moms say they don't know where to find information they can trust. These coaches and faculty have an audience that needs help, and this could be a huge impact on these individuals.

This topic is very important because I have played baseball since I was 4 years old and I have witnessed many teammates struggle and get kicked off of teams because of their inability to be team players and communicate up to the team standard. Also, I plan on going into pharmaceutical sales after baseball and I want to analyze the similarities between these two concepts and learn what I can use from my past to assist with my future. Similarly, I would like to coach in the future and this type of research would be monumental to teach my players as they try to progress through their own lives. This would improve the likelihood of my players getting accepted into college and receiving scholarships in order to receive a superior education. The percentage of players that get accepted into college is incredibly low so the slightest advantage over competition could mean dividends in the end (NCAA, 2020). When coaches and faculty learn the correct things to teach their players, players chances of earning scholarships will be increased and the acceptance rate will also reflect a positive result. This is information that could change an individual's future if it allows them to get a degree and consequently, impact their entire life. The

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purpose of this study was to describe what soft skills the Virginia Tech Baseball coaches are looking for in players during the recruiting process. Factors being examined are soft skills such as communication skills, leadership ability, and teamwork skills. The intention of the study is to be able to inform high school players, coaches, and faculty, in hopes of showing them what individual traits they should be working towards in hopes of one day receiving a scholarship.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to describe what soft skills the Virginia Tech Baseball coaches are looking for in players during the recruiting process. These attributes are called their team compatibility statistics. Physical attributes such as height, weight, throwing, and actual baseball ability was not taken into account. The element being researched is to see what personality traits or teamwork qualities that a coach is looking for in a player when they are recruiting them. As of 2019, coaches were allotted 35 players to fill a team and they must establish their roster before the season starts. There are some teams that will start the winter off with 36-38 players, however, those extra individuals will be released from the team prior to the season starting (Allen, 2019).

Definition of Terms

The following key terms are defined accordingly for this project:

- **Compatibility Statistics-** how easily an individual is able to adapt to a new way of interacting based on their current behavior
- **Confidentiality:** a research condition in which no one except the researcher(s) knows the identities of the participants in a study. It refers to the treatment of information that a

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participant has disclosed to the researcher in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be revealed to others in ways that violate the original consent agreement, unless permission is granted by the participant.

- **Ice-breaker:** is a facilitation exercise intended to help members of a group begin the process of forming themselves into a team. Icebreakers are commonly presented as a game to "warm up" the group by helping the members to get to know each other.
- **Leadership:** is both a research area and a practical skill encompassing the ability of an individual, group or organization to "lead", influence or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations.
- **Rapport:** a close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well.
- **Recruit-** a prospective player that a coach is actually interesting in offering a scholarship. A recruit is typically 17-18 years old and is close to graduating high school.
- **Representative Sample:** in which the participants closely match the characteristics of the population, and thus, all segments of the population are represented in the sample. A representative sample allows results to be generalized from the sample to the population.
- **Semi-structured interview:** is a meeting in which the interviewer does not strictly follow a formalized list of questions. Instead, they will ask more open-ended questions, allowing for a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question and answer format.
- **Student-athlete:** means an individual who engages in, is eligible to engage in or may be eligible in the future to engage in any intercollegiate sport.
- **Transition:** the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.

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- **Young-player-** a child that plays the sport for fun and is developing their abilities strictly for pleasure.

Limitations of the Project

There are several limitations included within this research topic. The first issue, which is a good problem in this study, is there are minimal articles preexisting about the recruiting processes for coaches right now. The information gathered and reported will be one of the first reported ideas in this area and could lead to many new discoveries after. Another possible constraint is the fact that coaches may not want to discuss precisely what they are looking for in a player for several reasons. They may not want to publicly say what they want their athletes to look like and do, this could come out as a bad mark on the university if we have a certain “type” and all other individuals they are uninterested in. An example is Alabama Head Football Coach, Nick Saban, and how he rarely discusses what he looks for during the recruiting process. Instead, he participates in team bonding activities to help his team grow closer. For example, Saban will host players at his house for winning scrimmages and events for steak dinners. The losing team is left with pork and beans (Byington, 2017). These traditions assist and encourage the team members’ bonding, especially when it comes to the team’s new players. This is a great time for him to learn about his players better and to see how they interact off of the football field. By ensuring his players become familiar with each other early in the off-season, Saban builds a positive norming stage and that helps their team to be successful every year (Hildebrandt, 2020).

Another problem may be that if Virginia Tech displays their recruiting model and what they are looking for in their players, other schools could possibly change their views and try to find players that are the exact same, increasing the competition rate. Another likely limitation

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could be that coaches recruit solely on intuition. This would be a limitation because there is no way to take notes on instinct and gut feelings. Instead, few qualitative research questions will be asked that lead directly back to the central idea (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Overall, this research method is going to be mainly interviews and then several literature reviews to compare the information to.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature in this category of sports is limited at best. There are not many published literature pieces regarding coaches' models that demonstrate how they perform their jobs. The recruiting process is one of the most stressful key factors in elite sports, and yet, there are no pre-existing connections that have been expressed to assist the general public (Flett, Gould, Paule, & Schneider, 2010). The focal concepts researched will be on the characteristics that are desired and how they determine if their qualifications are met when meeting a prospect and how they determine whether or not they want to offer a scholarship to the player. The transition from high school to college can be immense, and coaches must ensure that the players they recruit can handle the transformation. "While academic intensity and the quality of one's high school curriculum are crucial for academic success and making a smooth transition to college (Adelman, 2002), other factors such as parents, friends, high school teachers and guidance counselors, college professors, academic advisors, college orientation programs, and first-year seminars facilitate students' transition from high school to college" (Zhang and Smith, 2011, p. 644). Baseball requires various skills between players in order to function properly such as trust, communication, and critical thinking. A study conducted by Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer (2003) demonstrated that coaches have to develop their players in order to fit the mold that they are trying to create. Communication is a vital stage in the relationship due to the incoming player needing to know what is expected, and to know what the coach expects. In their research, it demonstrated that the more respectful and professional relationships, resulted in less issues on and off the field. When players fully comprehend how to work together and depend on each other that is when the real "team" comes together.

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Per Gonzaga University women's Basketball Coach Kelly Graves discussed the issue of how recruiting a player's non-physical attributes is much more difficult than the physical due to time constraints and NCAA regulations. He explained how he watches a prospective player on the bench almost as much as he watches them play on the court. If a player is on the bench frustrated with themselves and not cheering on their team, it might show that she is a selfish player, however, if she is happy for her teammates and trying to help them to improve and talking through plays, then this is a great sign for a coach. "I think leadership is at the start of every venture, whether it's a business or a basketball program," Graves said, noting that successful athletic teams and companies alike find ways to help their people improve their skills so they can contribute more to the organization" (Tormey, 2011, n.p.). In this regard, baseball is comparable regarding if a guy strikes out and goes and slams his helmet, instead of trying to tell the other hitters what he saw, the same personal qualities can be seen by a coach which might cause them to not offer a scholarship to the player. These factors are all important when trying to create the 'Superorganism' as described by Duarte, Araújo, Correia, and Davids (2012).

High school players need to be taught what these coaches are looking for. Many of these players believe that if they play well, then they will receive a scholarship, when in actuality, there is a much more profound process. As described by in the article titled, *A Coach's Responsibility: Learning How to Prepare Athletes for Peak Performance* written by Johnson (2011) and described how a coach is responsible for showing their players what habits they should be practicing to assist the players later in life. Youth will use whatever skillset they developed growing up and they can create habits with those skills. The more fine-tuned these habits become the longer they will last

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in their lifetime. The qualities will propel these individuals further in not only sports, but also in the workforce.

Groups such as Big Pharma are looking for qualified individuals who obtain specific skills. The top Pharma company, Pfizer, has a strict interviewing process with several individuals who are all looking for certain intangible characteristics. Beth Keeler, Pfizer Human Resources Lead Business and Finance Operations, explained, “having the ability to be a leader of leaders is key. Successful pharmaceutical executives build careers off of driving leadership teams in order to exceed business results” (Keeler, 2014, n.p.). Similarly, there must always be communication between team members to be successful. “In an open environment however, there can be discussion among the agents in order to form a team that can achieve the collective intention of solving the problem” (Dignum, Dunin-Keplicz, & Verbrugge, 2001, p. 150). These types of skills can sometimes be taught however, natural leadership skills are something that people develop and take time to grow therefore an employee or teammate that already obtains this quality is more desirable.

Likewise, another company that has published what they look for during the recruiting process is Johnson and Johnson. In their recruiting process they described how important it is for there to be communication and collaboration in a team. They are looking for individuals who can effectively get their point across without wasting time and money, and at the same time, partner with people. They agree that there are traits that people must work on every day in order to polish their teamwork skills (Sneed, 2020). CEO of Johnson and Johnson, Alex Gorsky, stresses his focal point when he explains, “the world today requires the very best that Johnson & Johnson has to offer, and we are constantly striving to come up with ways we can innovate and lead” (Gorsky,

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2020, n.p.). Without individuals coming together and using their talents, how can anyone or anything improve? These companies are attempting to stay at the top of their prospective fields and if they do not have individuals who can come together and brainstorm new technology, they will get left behind by their competition. Just like in baseball, if a team is not progressing, they will lose games and the coach will get fired.

Assessing how coaches and companies are looking for relatively the same characteristics will be complex due to the different types of literature amounts that are available. Currently, the amount of literature in the field of recruiting is minuscule due to all of the factors listed in the limitation section. One study titled, *Do Former College Athletes Make the Best New Hires*, (Barr, 2018) discusses how athletes learn specific skills that will have them better fit for jobs than regular students. Certain traits such as responsibility, and time management are a few concepts that are drilled into athletes' heads during school so they are better at transitioning into the work environment than other students that only attended school (Barr, 2018). The way that coaches introduce and develop these skills are all different, so that is why it is important for coaches to really get to know a player before they offer a scholarship.

Interestingly, this year with the Coronavirus Pandemic, players had an even more difficult time getting recruited due to no coaches allowed to go to games, no personal interactions, and lack of games occurring at all. These players were robbed of an opportunity to go play baseball at a school when they had the ability necessary, simply due to the crisis that was occurring in the world. More importantly, the players that were in high school last year missed out on an entire year of high school sports and missed out on all opportunities to practice these teamwork qualities that are so important throughout the season. Even outside of athletics, this past year, individuals missed

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out on so many memorable activities such as, proms, homecoming, yearbook signing, graduating, and simply just interacting with their peers in public every day. This year people have gotten comfortable being behind a screen so peoples' social skills may have taken a hit due to the amount of time it has been since people spoke face to face regularly. A recent study discussed in a psychological magazine showed that the anxiety level of teenagers is peaking due to an all-time high amount of screen time because youth have nothing else to do (Mustari and Rahman, 2020).

Teachers and coaches need to heavily implement the usage of communication and try to make up for the time missed. Instead of having students use technology these next few years, teachers should implement more time where the students discuss what they think and have them work together towards goals. Likewise, coaches need to find a way to develop their players to make up for time lost. West's (2012) book, *Effective Teamwork: Practical Lessons from Organizational Research*, describes how important time together can be for a group and that when they are together, they can begin to think similarly. This is ideal for a team since the goal is to have all players striving for one singular goal and to work towards that goal in a collected manner. Coaches need to teach their players these important skills in hopes of recruiting picking back up soon and no other individuals getting robbed of the chance of earning a scholarship.

Lastly, due to coaches deeply analyzing a player before they offer them, a player should know what they are looking for in hopes of trying to develop these traits before it is too late. It is the responsibility of the high school educators and administrators to try to add in life skills into the classrooms instead of focusing so hard on concepts that children will never use in life. Instead, youth should be taught to look an adult in the eye, shake their hand, and how to dress for interviews. Research shows that improper eye contact or hand shaking can show a lack of confidence or

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commitment issues before an interview even begins and be a red flag to a recruiter (Argyle & Dean, 1965). When coaches are only allotted 11.7 scholarships with a maximum roster size of 35, it can be understood why the recruiting process is so significant. Overall, there a lot of things that go into developing young adults and especially after this pandemic, there is a lot more work to be done.

Why This is Important

When companies look for individuals that they want to hire, they have specific qualities that they search for. The interviewing process is a test to see if the person is similar to the type of person that is desired and they want to see how their personality type would mix with the current employees. Jones, Baldi, Phillips, & Waikar (2016), completed a research journal titled, *The Hard Truth About Soft Skills: What Recruiters Look for in Business Graduates*, and in this research, it was discovered that the resume does not carry as much weight as generally perceived. Business recruiters are looking for soft skills that these individuals may have received from these tasks. One of the main reasons they ask about playing sports or other hobbies is because they want to know how efficient someone is with time management.

These skills such as teamwork and communication skills are ones that are difficult to be taught and can have a dramatic impact on the company. Lotzar (2018) researched how important soft skills are to employers by showing how many interviews have now transitioned into team interviews. They want to put interviewees in a real-life situation and analyze how they respond instead of having such a controlled predictable environment. There is a benefit for having these attributes for teams obviously, but there is also a large group of people that carry these skills into their everyday lives after sports are over. “Although there are some negative outcomes associated

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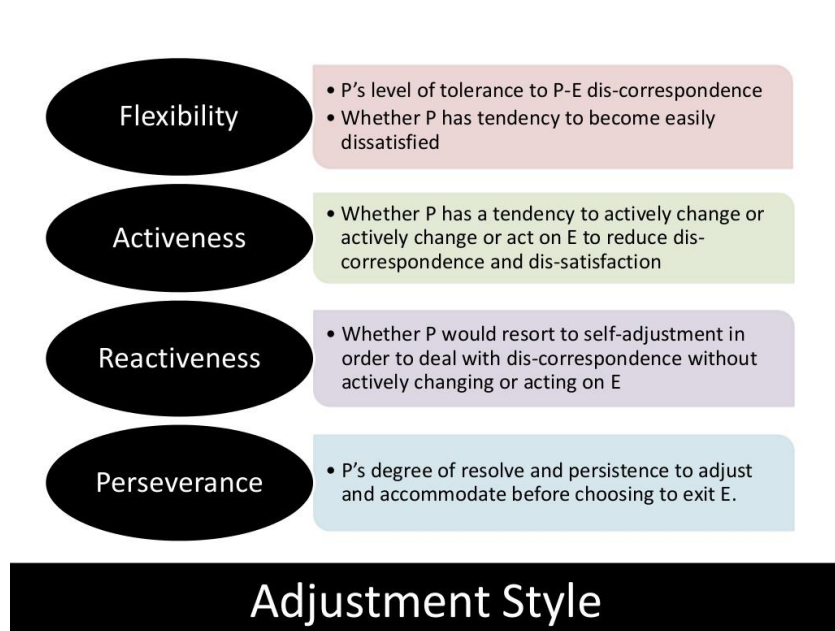
with sports participation, these negatives seem to be outweighed by the positive impact sports can have on the personal and social development of youth” (Larson, 2000, p. 177). The earlier people learn to work effectively with others, the more chances they will have and more successful they will be.

Theoretical Framework

There are a few theories that have helped develop this study. A player with extremely low self-confidence will never make it in the ACC playing baseball so they want to try to limit any issues of that nature before it is too late. The main theory that is suitable for this research is the Theory of Work Adjustment. The Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) defines the relationship between a person and the place that he or she works (University of Minnesota, 2021). This theory is used due to each of the players having to adapt their old lifestyles with the ways that the coaches want and there must be a middle ground that both parties are sufficient with. For some individuals, it is more difficult to reach this equilibrium and they struggle longer than others. This theory will be used to help predict what may happen in the future and can hopefully determine which qualities may help make the transition from a normal individual to a Virginia Tech Baseball player as efficient as possible and then they can set a standard of what they are looking for.

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Figure 1-2: Theory of Work Adjustment



Egurrola, J. (2014). Theory of Work Adjustment. Retrieved January 08, 2021, from

<https://pt.slideshare.net/jeelchristine/theory-of-work-adjustment-45075959/7>

Importance

Coaches will want to know how well a player will take care of their body in the upcoming years and how seriously they will take on aspects such as recovery and gaining strength. With a coach taking a risk on a player by giving them a scholarship and also attaching their name and the school's reputation on the line, they must have at least a decent idea of what they are recruiting before they regret their decision. A coach is judged not only on how they do on the field, but also based off of other factors such as grades and conduct in the community. Forgotten by most, these athletes have to remain eligible by having good grades in the classroom. If they fail to get good grades, they will be deemed ineligible and hurt the team. This is why the coaching staff must perform in depth interviews to try to figure out exactly what kind of person they are getting. Also,

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in baseball, there is much more failure for individuals than in any other sport. Coaches want to know what an individual will be like after they fail and if they will have the mental capacity and courage to get back up and keep fighting. They do not want players that are going to get knocked down and then feel bad for themselves for it. “For most players (all but the biggest stars) careers are short and the possibility of failure is always upon them; it is one of the constantly problematic facets of their occupational lives that they may face being failed at any time” (Ball, 1976, p.729). Similar to a business recruiter, they want employees that are motivated to keep fighting in order to be successful.

Connection

This theory contains just a few of the main concepts that the coaches at Virginia Tech use to try to recruit players for their teams. Also, these concepts are also used by many recruiters in effort to find workers who are hardworking, dedicated, and will do whatever it takes to be successful. A study completed by Stevens (2011) stated that they wanted to get individuals to a professional level who were able to express themselves effectively and to work in a place with other people. They want to have each person to feel as if they are on a team. Overall, coaches are looking for very similar things to companies (soft skills) due to the fact that both entities want individuals who work hard all the time and will do the right thing even when they are not being supervised.

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Chapter 3: Methods

Designing and planning interviews

The purpose of this study was to describe what soft skills the Virginia Tech Baseball coaches are looking for in players during the recruiting process. This research will hopefully serve as an icebreaker for others to start researching this field and to see if there are any connections within any of the data. The arrangement of the interviews consisted of semi-structured questions that were open ended and modeled after Flett et al., (2010) regarding intangible attributes. The purpose of the semi-structured interview was so interviewees had the freedom to discuss information that was not addressed in the question. This process led to new discoveries and new questions and can open up new fields of research for others. Per Miles and Gilbert, “a good semi-structured interview is like a conversation rather than a series of questions and answers” (2008, p.70). Interviews were conducted with the coaches in hopes of discovering the methods that they have configured to attempt to get a type of player and what skills are most desirable. Also, this was a qualitative study and described one procedure in depth instead of having many different objects to study.

Conducting Interviews

Six coaches were intentionally selected as participants in the study due to the fact that all of the coaches are associated within the recruiting process. These coaches were also selected due to their backgrounds and their successful histories coaching at other schools. Rowley (2012) explains how important rapport is within a study to have a connection between the interviewee and the interviewer. In this study, rapport will already be established due to the connection that is obtained from player and coach. All coaches originated from different schools and backgrounds

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but have now worked together for the past 4 years. Coaches were asked to partake in their interviews without pay or any monetary benefits (Appendix A). However, they do realize that reflecting on past recruiting experiences may be a good practice for the future and to learn what they should strive to accomplish during the process (West, 2012). They were informed that the interview would occur in a quiet professional location for a brief meeting and the topic would include the recruiting process. The coaches participated one at a time to allow for maximum discussion to occur and in order to limit the number of interruptions due to the short window of time to avoid interview fatigue.

These interviews occurred in person and were audio-recorded using the Temi app. The coach's names were all concealed to keep answers honest. Instead, names were replaced with titles such as Coach 1 and Coach 2. The interviews took place in the Presidential Suite in the Press Box at English Field which created a convenient location for coaches. Due to the fact that all recruits meet the coaches in that space, it was more convenient for the coaches to demonstrate how a typical visit progresses in order to understand the process as deeply as possible. Rowley (2012) expresses that interviews must be short enough to ensure that interview fatigue does not occur. For this purpose, interviews were kept under 30 minutes to ensure that participants were not repeating themselves. It was expected to reach saturation quickly, but all six coaches were still interviewed.

A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix B . In a study completed by Goyder (1985) he discovered that results can vary due to the way in which research is conducted. If interviews take place, a completely different consensus can be formed rather than people completing questionnaires and written tests. All interviewees have the same knowledge of the

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process but different past experiences. However, due to all coaches currently working for the same program, it was expected to reach saturation levels relatively quickly.

This project was submitted for approval by the University Institutional Board (Appendix C) and consent was received from the coaching staff (Appendix D). Before the participants were interviewed, two trial interviews were completed. These sample interviews were intended to assist locate any biases and to ensure the validity of the questions. As expressed by Kim (2010) “to highlight the benefits of pilot work, it describes the specific practical and methodological issues emerging in the pilot exercise as well as the modifications made for the main study as a result of the pilot work” (p.1). This work illuminated any possible issues prior to interacting with actual participants.

It was important to get the interviewees interested in the topic as well to ensure they gave the most detailed fulfilling answers. Rowley (2012) discusses how beneficial it can be for both parties due to the information that can be obtained after the study. For the coaches, they can analyze what they have done in the past, and possibly learn some different techniques that they want to implement in the future. The reason a semi-structured design was selected was due to the likelihood of the coaches using techniques that were not previously noted and can be built upon. In an article titled, *Writing Interview Protocols and Conducting Interviews: Tips for Students New to the Field of Qualitative Research*, completed by Jacob and Furgerson (2012), the interview process was analyzed in efforts of determining the best strategies to ensure the most accurate results. Due to this, prompts/questions were created and used, however, new concepts mentioned by interviewees were recorded. The goal of this research was to get all of the possible data therefore having them answer individual questions may have forced some details to be left out. The main reason that this

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topic was chosen was because the availability of the coaches to be researched, and the lack of information in the field of recruiting. This study demonstrated that there are certain behaviors regarding soft skills that prospective players need to develop in hopes of one day getting recruited to play at Virginia Tech. Having participants that are trustworthy and determined to help are a huge asset for this study and increased the reliability of the data gathered.

Analysis of Data

Following the conclusion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed with the assistance of the app, Temi, and names replaced with proper titles. To protect each person, there will be no access to names in order to ensure truthful responses. After all coaches are interviewed, the data was transferred into the findings and then any materials used by the coaches were analyzed. After transcribing was complete, the transcriptions were carefully examined multiple times in order to begin coding. Codes were placed into certain categories that were reoccurring from each participant. After finding a similar pattern within the categories the researcher was able to combine categories into themes. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) “a typical procedure might involve collecting survey data in the first phase, analyzing the data, and then following up with qualitative interviews to help explain confusing, contradictory, or unusual survey responses” (p. 222). Any themes between coaches or new devices that arose were discussed with the coaching staff in hopes of assisting with recruiting down the road. Coaches were permitted to see their individual answers and make sure they liked how the information was transcribed. Edits were tolerated if the coaches did not feel comfortable with their information or if they wanted to add any extra comments regarding their responses. One more benefit of this process was the

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possibility of assisting the coaches with getting to know recruits better before they offer them one of the few scholarships available.

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Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to describe what soft skills the Virginia Tech Baseball coaches are looking for in players during the recruiting process. These attributes are called their team compatibility statistics. Physical attributes such as height, weight, throwing, and actual baseball ability was not taken into account. The element being studied was to see what personality traits or teamwork qualities a coach is looking for in a player when they are recruiting them. All results were in connection to the interviews that were conducted with all of the coaches on the Virginia Tech Baseball team during the spring of 2021. Six coaches were invited to participate and all participated in the study voluntarily. All of the coaches have previous experience from other schools and have been in the coaching profession for many years. Participants were given a list of questions with bullet points and they were allowed to answer the questions in order, and any deviations from the answer would be permitted unless it was unnecessary information that would not benefit the study. All interviews followed the discussion format instead of a formal question and answer. Table 1.1 displays the coach's names, title, and years of experience.

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Table 1-1: Coaches History:

Name	Title	Experience
Coach 1	Head Coach	28 years
Coach 2	Pitching Coach	12 years
Coach 3	Assistant Coach / Recruiting Coordinator	10 years
Coach 4	Assistant Coach	10 years
Coach 5	Director of Baseball Operations	10 years
Coach 6	Director of Player Development	6 years

Using semi-structured interview methods to answer the study question 5 common themes emerged:

- Describe the non-physical skills that are looked for when recruiting a prospective player for Virginia Tech baseball coaches.

Interviewee engagement was held with interesting conversations and real examples. There were very in-depth responses and drawn-out examples of how the recruiting process works for them. One way to keep the interview moving forward was to constantly remind the coaches how this information could be beneficial to them in the future and how it could aid with their recruiting process in the years to come. Interview questions were followed by prompts. The prompt (Appendix B) was used to assist the participants recall information for their process

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and what actually occurs. Prompts were rarely needed due to the quick and fluent response of the coaching staff.

Theme 1 / Effective Communicator

There were five themes that emerged from the interviews: communicating, dedication analysis, confidence, leadership skills, and dependability. Theme one displays the importance of communication and how vital it is for a prospective player for Virginia Tech.

Below is a shared quote from the coaching staff in regard to how and why communication is so important. Coach A, discussed the ability to effectively communicate:

“I want players who are able to be told a plan and insert it into their gameplay. At a school like this we need players with outgoing personalities that are able to come in and have an immediate impact. When guys are timid and are too afraid to speak up, they will get left behind and that has been seen in my many years of experience coaching. If a player has questions, I want them to ask because there is a great chance that another player has the same issue.”

Coach B discusses his progression to determine communication skills during the recruiting process:

“I want my guys to understand what they are good at in order to set and achieve goals. Whenever I visit a recruit at his house or in any location, I like to notice whether the player is speaking up or if the parents are the ones that are talking for their child. I want players that know what they want and can effectively hold a conversation with me without the parents having to help. After all, when the kid comes to school, I do not deal with the

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parents anyway. I just like to see the family in order to get a read on how the dynamic is and if the player is able to take charge and lead a conversation.”

Coach C discusses how vital it is to effectively communicate and what he looks for on the recruiting trail:

“As an infield coach, I need guys that can communicate and let others know if they have room to catch the ball, if they see it, or even what defense type they should be in. This is one of the most important qualities for me because there is a correlation between good teams and their communication abilities. When I am recruiting a player, I will ask them why they did a particular thing or what they were attempting to do. I do not even care if they were successful at that point, I just want to hear the individual describe their process and see if they had a plan before they started and if they can successfully explain what they thought, that is a good sign. Whenever a player says, “I just went up to hit,” then that serves as a red flag for myself and my staff.”

Coach D explains his process and explains why communication is the most vital component for his recruits.

“The catcher is the captain of the team and is in charge of setting up plays, moving players, and calling pitches. This player more than anyone else, must be able to effectively communicate and have the ability to explain their processes. Whenever I am recruiting a catcher, I like to ask him what he intended to do during his gameplay. If there was a pitch call that I disagreed with, I will ask the catcher why he thought to do that, then if he can successfully express why he went along with it then I am happy. I am not expecting these high school players to be perfect by any means, I just want to hear that they are thinking

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through their actions and can successfully explain why they did something. These are the types of players that we enjoy the most because they are coachable and receptive to our information.”

Coach E discussed how important good communication in his aspect of the game:

“We rely on our players to be able to handle themselves on social media and to talk to the public. We have a lot of interactions with fans and people who follow us, therefore, we need players that are able to speak fluently and competently meet fans. There are many things we do for our community as well such as calling fans and season ticket holders therefore having players that have the skills to communicate effectively, makes this a much more successful process.”

Coach F spends much more time on the analytical side of the recruiting aspect of coaching but had a few things to say regarding communication skills:

“Since a large part of my job is developing players, I want players that are able to discuss their thoughts and take in new information that is given to them. Being able to have an adult conversation with a player is vital in order to help them grow as a person and player while they are here. If we cannot verbalize our goals and what we are currently doing, there is no room to grow and the process will be halted. I look for player that can efficiently express what they have done in their past, and what has gotten them to the place that they are currently. By asking this, I am able to see what kind of player a certain guy is while also getting to observe how proficiently he can communicate.”

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Theme 2 / Dedication Analysis

Theme two conveys the importance of dedication in players during the recruiting process. Below are a few of the quotes from each of the coaches regarding how important it is that a recruit has a strong personality that is devoted to their craft.

Coach A discusses how vital it is for his players to be strong willed individuals that take pride in working at the game:

“It is like any other skill, the more you practice it, the better you will become. I want players that want to be the best that they can possibly be and I want to know that they will put in the extra work that it takes to excel in this league. We only get so many hours of the day that we can spend with these guys by NCAA rules, therefore a lot of development must be completed whenever coaches are not there. That is why I try to ask around to other players and previous coaches to get an understanding of what a player is like before I offer him a spot on this team.”

Coach B expresses what he looks for in a recruit based on dedication levels:

“Being a pitcher is very tough due to the amount of time that we can actually work on throwing. Due to soreness and recovery speeds, A lot of the work that goes on within pitching occurs on the players own. When recruiting, I look for players that have a good work ethic and are passionate about their craft. I want a player that desires to be successful more than anything else due to the amount of commitment that becoming elite requires.”

Coach C discusses what he attempts to recruit in relation to dedication:

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“Being a baseball player at this level requires hundreds of hours and thousands of repetitions in order to be good enough to compete with the best teams in the country. When I am examining a player, I want to see a player that will put in the extra work to get better, and is not afraid to be the last one to leave. To be great at this game, players must make many sacrifices and if I notice a kid that prioritizes his game, then I am much more attracted to that player.”

Coach D explains why this skill is one of the most vital in his recruiting process:

“Being a catcher, you get hit with baseballs all the time and are pretty much destroying your body every day with the constant squatting, throwing, and it’s incredibly hot wearing all the gear. I find players that are tough and will not give up and are determined to be the best that they can be. I look for the player that is acting like nothing hurts them, and are doing extra drills or stretching extra to protect their bodies. These types of non-physical skills are what it takes to be elite in this league therefore that is what I look for during a recruiting trip.”

Coach E discusses how important each individual player must be dedicated to keep passing grades and balance practice schedules:

“Getting into Virginia Tech is no easy task. However, when five to six hours of baseball practice is thrown on top of classwork, then it becomes more of a struggle. Due to this, we need to know that our players can handle the pressure and are strongminded enough to get ahead and stay on top of their work. When recruiting a player, I look at their classes that they took in high school, how they did and will also sometimes call past teachers or guidance counselors just to hear their opinion on a certain prospect.”

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Coach F emphasis how difficult the game can be and why dedicated players are a necessity:

“As everyone knows, baseball is a difficult game. There are many times when players will not be their best or will not be successful for a number of reasons. Players must be able to remain tough and continue practicing due to the baseball season consisting of so many games and so many players having to contribute. When recruiting, I like to look for players that have had a bad outing previously, then I will go and watch how they bounce back. If they are still working hard and putting in work, that is a great sign. We need players that are durable and will not stop working hard due to a bad result. Every professional baseball player has had times in their career when they have struggled, however, what they all have in common is that they keep grinding and working just as hard in order to get back on track.”

Theme 3 / Confidence

Theme three proves the importance of confidence during the recruiting process and why it is necessary for recruits. Below are quotes from each of the coaches regarding how important confidence is on a team and the reasons why they recruit these specific personality traits.

Coach A discusses the need for confident players in the program:

“In this game, there are so many ups and downs during a season, players will go into slumps, and struggle at times, however, it is essential to find players that believe in themselves and can battle through a situation simply by trusting their abilities. In a prospect, I like to look for body language and the way the individual presents themselves. First of all, social interactions such as being able to look me in the eye when speaking to

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me, did they shake my hand like a man, and did they present themselves in a way that draws my respect. A player's body language is a huge indicator on their confidence level."

Coach B discusses why confidence is the main quality he looks for regarding non-physical skills:

"During a baseball game, where is everyone looking? Right at the pitcher. It is mandatory that a pitcher controls the pace of the game and takes charge. I want my pitchers to act like they are 10 feet tall and nobody is going to be able to touch them. Confidence is half the battle in pitching. If a pitcher believes that they are better than the hitter and that they are going to be successful, the hitter is already at a major disadvantage. I love when I see a player that struts around the mound and is a presence on the hill. Even if the player isn't having their best stuff, a pitcher that acts confident and knows he is better than the hitters, is a key step to becoming elite in this league and that is why I recruit many individuals based off of it."

Coach C discusses how vital confidence is as a hitter for Virginia Tech and why he recruits players that have this trait:

"In baseball, hitting is the hardest thing to do. Professional hitters are considered Hall of Fame if they are successful three out of ten times. Due to this, it is important to not get too down on oneself or act like it is the end of the world every time they get out. During the recruiting process, I look for players that walk up to the plate with swagger and dare the pitcher to throw the ball over the plate. I want a hitter to compete in every swing in every at bat and even if they are unsuccessful, they realize that they will redeem themselves the next chance they get. I want players that are hungry to get in the batter's box and are excited to hit because they know that they can do some damage whenever they are up. I want hitters

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that believe that they are the best hitter in the world when they step up to the plate and that no pitcher can beat them.”

Coach D explains why confidence is a great quality to have as a catcher:

“As a catcher, they are the only player that can see the entire field therefore they are the “Quarterback of the Diamond.” They are in charge of putting on plays and adjusting the defense in order to try to give the defense the best chance to be successful. If a catcher has no confidence, they will not follow their gut and call the plays that are necessary. They will second guess every decision because they are too afraid to mess up. I want a player that is not afraid to mess up, and will take charge of the team when necessary. This is a huge quality that we look for in the recruiting process due to it being a trait that is nearly impossible to be taught.”

Coach E describes why confidence is necessary when interacting with the public:

“At Virginia Tech, we have a great fan base that loves getting to know our players. We need players that are able to talk to families and kids and not be nervous in front of crowds. We want players with outgoing personalities that are comfortable in situations with other people. During a recruiting trip, I can tell what type of person someone is simply by how they speak to the coaches whenever they approach the player. If they are nervous and hesitant to speak, that is a bad sign, however, if they are relaxed and can joke around, that is a great indicator of confidence.”

Coach F described how important confidence is during the development process and why he looks for it during the recruiting process:

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“When developing players and trying to force them to grow, they must have the confidence in themselves to try new things. We need to recruit players that are open to new experiences and not afraid of difficulties but instead welcome them. Also, a guy must learn what he is good at and be confident enough in his abilities to overcome these obstacles that will allow them to grow. Being confident in oneself is one of the major factors in baseball that contribute to success. If an individual does not believe in himself, then nobody else will.”

Theme 4 / Leadership Skills

Theme four expresses why leadership skills are necessary for coaches and why the players that have these skills are more alluring.

Coach A explains how important leaders are within a team:

“As coaches, we only get so many hours to spend with the players to guide them, therefore it is important that leaders arise within the group to make sure things are being done the correct way. I want to bring in players that were leaders in their high school due to the skills that they learned in those positions. Players that are leaders are more likely to do the right things due to the number of others that are likely following them.”

Coach B describes why leadership is a great quality for prospective recruits:

“When recruiting a pitcher, I want to bring in guys that will help others develop with them. For example, on this year’s team, we have 28 pitchers and 2 coaches. That is very minimal time for all guys to receive coaching, however, if players can help each other, there is much more help going around. I need players that can lead this staff therefore when I am looking for players, I try to find athletes that are popular in their community and have a large

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following. Then, I will call around and ask that individuals peers and friends to get more details regarding how the individual works.”

Coach C states that leadership on the offensive side of the team is crucial:

“On offense, there are always going to be players that are leaders due to their baseball talents, however, it is also important to recruit natural leaders. These types of leaders are players who will have individuals clean their lockers, clean the busses, and help other teammates. These types of players are key contributors to a team and cause the coaches less stress. When talking to a recruit, I like to watch the player and see how their teammates react to them on and off the field. We need players that can lead others and help to push the group along. Being brave enough to speak up to the group is a key characteristic that we look for because there will be many situations in which a player must address the group or be an example for others.”

Coach D expresses how imperative leadership skills are as a catcher:

“Catchers are constantly leading the team due to their position on the field. Catchers are in charge of all of the players positions and need to be leaders on and off the field. Also, we have in/out groups on our team and the ability of players to communicate with the team and discuss any concerns with the coaches, is a great quality that creates a great team dynamic. This is why when recruiting, I deeply analyze the catchers and see if they are taking charge and controlling the team. If so, that is a great sign as a recruiter.”

Coach E defines how imperative leadership is within the team regarding the community aspect of Virginia Tech:

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“There are many camps and events that occur at Virginia Tech and the players are expected to help the coaching staff to run these camps and help make sure everything is run smoothly. In these camps, the players are titled “Camp Leaders” and are in charge of different age groups of kids. These players teach the younger children baseball skills and must lead them through the same activities that the actual Virginia Tech Baseball team completes on a daily basis. Through these camps we are able to watch our players help others and grow themselves. Having players who can lead helps in literally every aspect.”

Coach F explains how he looks for leadership qualities in the recruiting process:

“When I am analyzing a player, I look for a player that elevates his team without being selfish. I do not want players that are selfish and care more about their stats. There are many times where we have passed up on players due to them not demonstrating any leadership qualities and being a follower. Being an effective leader means allowing others to step up whenever they are more suitable to do so and understanding everyone’s strengths and weaknesses. I will ask players after a game; how did it go for example. If the player responds with the team outcome, that is a much better indicator than if the player describes their individual outcome for the game by putting themselves first.”

Theme 5 / Dependability

Theme five is regarding dependability and how important it is that recruits will do what they are told to do and can be trusted especially when nobody is watching.

Coach A expressed his ideas regarding dependability and how important this skill is:

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“Our goal here is to obviously bring in good players. However, our other goal is to transform our players into mature men as they develop and get ready for the real world. This is why during the recruiting process we try to understand the player as a person and learn their work ethic and some details about them before we offer them one of our few scholarships that we are allowed to give. Having players that can handle themselves and do not need to be babysat are the types of players that we want in this program. I want to be able to relax once I get home knowing that my players are safe at home and not running the roads looking for trouble putting the team in danger.”

Coach B discusses how dependability is a huge factor in the recruiting process:

“One of the scariest parts about being a coach is the fact that our players spend all of December and most of January at their homes. We work all fall and winter and make sure everyone is on a good track, then they go home for the Holidays. We must be able to depend on our players to continue to practice on their own and keep improving. Our season begins in February so having players that we can trust to work on their own is a priority. This is a huge reason that I call past coaches and ask how the individuals work ethic was when they are by themselves. I am in charge of 28 pitchers on this team, and I do not have time to worry about kids getting in trouble. Even within our team, we have away games we must spend some nights in hotels in other cities. We must be able to trust that our players are not sneaking out, and getting into trouble when they are supposed to be resting for a game the next day. We select specific players because they are trustworthy on and off the field.”

Coach C clarifies another reason why dependability is so important:

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“We trust that our guys are going to execute the plans that we tell them. We need guys that can be told to do something and to perform. Due to this, I like to ask recruits to constantly shoot me texts or call me after their games. I personally do not really care how they did as much as I want to see if the player is able to be trusted to do what they were told to do. This is a huge indicator if this player has their priorities straight and can follow simple instructions. When at a camp, I try to find the players that have their priorities straight and act professional like they are auditioning for a job. If a player can be trusted to do the minor annoying things correctly, there is a high likelihood that they will be able to do the big things correctly as well.”

Coach D explains why players must be dependable:

“As coaches, we need players that we can trust to do the correct thing when they are asked. A lot of this can be seen from the player’s family dynamic. For example, if a player has his parents carrying his bag for him and bringing him snacks all throughout the day, we know that that player is going to expect to be handheld and not independent. In this league we need men who can not only take care of themselves, but others as well. Catchers are in charge of everyone on the field therefor this is a quality trait that we really look for when deciding whether or not to pursue a player.”

Coach E demonstrates how important dependability is in his realm of coaching:

“We need players that are going to be good influences to the community and not give us a bad name. We want players that are able to handle themselves in all environments. We constantly have meetings and times that the players must be present at certain events throughout the community and as coaches, we have to trust our players to be respectful of

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our fans and try to get to know donors and alumni. Due to this, when recruiting a player, I like to see if he arrives to the field early, has a clean uniform, and has all of his materials neatly placed in the dugout. Typically, individuals that are neat, are much more dependable in my opinion based on my past experiences.”

Coach F is in charge of developing players and being able to trust them goes a long way:

“When I am recruiting a player, one of the first things I do is go look up their social media accounts. If a player has inappropriate material, and uses bad language, that is an immediate red flag. We want our players to act like professionals on and off the field. Our goal is to create men that are respectful and responsible and if we cannot trust what they are doing in their free time, then that is a bad sign. I want to be able to trust that on a weekend, our player is not getting into trouble and is trying to make sure he is putting himself in a good position to be successful.”

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Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe what soft skills the Virginia Tech Baseball coaches are looking for in players during the recruiting process. Factors being examined are soft skills such as communication skills, leadership ability, and teamwork skills. This was completed through interviews with the coaching staff in regards to how they have completed the procedure in the past. The importance section was significant in order to describe why the coaches need particular characteristics on their team and also was beneficial to help connect the themes that were discovered throughout all of the interviews. Five themes emerged that connect the findings to the research objective to describe what the Virginia Tech coaches look for during the recruiting process.

Within theme one, the message was to help better understand the importance of communication for players and how the coaching staff makes this quality trait a priority during the recruiting process. Coaches expressed having the comfort in being able to effectively connect with prospects and learn what they are actually like before offering them a scholarship. Coaches are in charge of developing these young individuals into respectful adults therefore they must be individuals that are able to effectively communicate and discuss goals. If a player is not able to verbalize their thoughts and explain why they acted a certain way, it is much harder to improve as a player. The coaching staff also discussed how important communicators are during the actual game such as calling for a ball, changing the defense, or even helping out a player. This skill is also vital for businesses as shown in the literature due to employers needing employees that are proficient at collaborating. Lastly, communication is a vital skill that these athletes will be able to use while transitioning into the workforce after they complete their degrees at Virginia Tech.

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Theme two was focused directly on analyzing the dedication levels of a prospective player. In this section the quotes from the coaches all expressed the need for devoted players in the program and how a determined player can create a domino effect and promote others to begin to work harder. This is a huge asset to a team and this can create a culture within the group that displays hard work regardless if the coaches are watching or not. Through findings from the interview coding process, the reoccurring themes demonstrate that the players that typically are determined to be great players, will become great players. The coaches are able to visually see who is working on their own and who does not, simply by the rate of development that occurs throughout the year. Coaches expressed that players are much better leaders than coaches in this aspect due to the fact that all kids want to be the superstar and actions speak louder than words. Therefore, if players see their teammates working hard, then there is much higher likelihood that they will begin to work harder themselves.

Theme three, confidence, emphasized how vital confidence is in a recruit. In this section all coaches provide examples of why players needed to have confidence in order to be successful. The common example came up of how frequently failure is dealt with in baseball and how individuals that are strong enough to overcome bad situations are the types of players that are most desirable. A large indicator that the coaches discussed was the body language that a prospect obtains. The Virginia Tech coaches expressed how important a player's view of themselves actually is. Many coaches examine this statistic by asking a recruit about their mindset and what they were thinking during the game. A player needs to have a strong sense of pride in their ability. The coaches expressed that the players that believe like they are going to succeed, most likely will succeed. This quality also helps build other important qualities. For example, more confident

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players, usually are better leaders, are better at communicating, and also, elevate other people around them.

Theme four demonstrated how the coaches look for leaders during the recruiting process. Finding a leader is sometimes difficult because players may not have previous experience in doing so. One of the main recommendations the coaches made is for players to try to gain experience in soft skills such as these due to it being a task that is typically very difficult to teach. The Virginia Tech coaches love to see individuals that held leadership positions in high school and they believe it will translate to being a good team leader. High school players should try to register and attend as many events that will provide themselves with leadership opportunities. While it may be awkward in the beginning, it will pay dividends in the end when they are asked to be a leader of fifty players in the ACC and they are prepared for it. The Virginia Tech baseball team is a very experienced team with a lot of old players that will be leaving soon which is why the coaches are looking for recruits that will step up and become a leader when they get on campus. Whenever there is leadership within a team, there is a high likelihood that the team will be successful due to everyone having assigned roles and knowing what is expected of them at specific times.

The final theme was built around dependability and the fact that the coaches need to recruit players that will act the way they are supposed to and can be trusted. The coaches discussed some issues that have come about in the past with players on weekends and getting in trouble and how that harms the team. Therefore, the coaching staff tries to find players that are trustworthy to keep their noses clean and not act in any way that puts the team at risk. They look for recruits that are able to not only do the right thing, but also can nudge their teammates back on track if they notice something dangerous arising. Especially in college baseball, this theme is one of the most

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important traits due to the fact that from the months of December and January, the players are not having any supervision from the coaches. They must be reliable enough to continue to progress and improve their skills in preparation for the season. Due to this, that is why coaches look so heavily at a players dependability levels and do so much research before offering any player a scholarship. The coaches have had success recently in filtering through the players that demonstrate high dependability characteristics, however, there are still many players that have room to grow.

As a researcher and a participant on the Virginia Tech Baseball Team, I feel incredibly confident and comfortable in these findings. Through my experiences within this program, I was able to relate many of the topics discussed by the coaches back to my personal life and able to remember real-life examples of the scenarios that were discussed. From this, I was able to answer questions I needed to answer myself, as well as connect with the coaches to help them with their concerns. Through this research, much of this data reflected the ideas discussed in the literature review as to how important these skills are and how they can be used in the real world. There are many things that both groups learned throughout this interaction and I think there is definitely a benefit that comes from discussing the process that has been in place for many years. Being able to perform this research was a great experience to understand which areas need improvement in the recruiting process and this study will be able to aid with the recruiting process long after I am gone and there are many interesting aspects regarding the Theory of Work Adjustment throughout these themes that were discussed by coaches.

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Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to describe what soft skills the Virginia Tech Baseball coaches are looking for in players during the recruiting process. Factors being examined regarding soft skills include characteristics such as communication skills, leadership ability, and teamwork skills. Six interviews were conducted with coaches from the coaching staff which resulting in five occurring themes. From coaches, findings resulted in the need for prospective players to demonstrate a great sense of communication due to the amount of dialogue that occurs in the game and how being able to effectively communicate is a skill that is vital for an individual's development in college. Multiple coaches discussed how sometimes they had to pass on certain kids simply because they could not get on the same page due to unsatisfactory communication skills and the individuals not being able to overcome those issues.

For the Theory of work Adjustment, many connections can be observed and how important of a role this theory plays in this study. It can be observed that the environment and how someone was raised both have a great impact on the personality traits of individuals. In all interviews, the coaches expressed how vital getting to know the family is. The coaches attempt to see how the family functions and if the player is able to take charge of a group. Understanding the family and knowing how they function is a great indicator as to what the player will be in the future. However, coaches must be willing to adapt and change to mold to the players just as the players must mold to the way that the coaches are trying to develop them. Not all players are the same and cannot be treated as such. Some players prefer distance and trust, while others need constant overwatch and praise.

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Recommendations

Based on the research this study found, there are five recommendations that should be considered by parents and faculty that teach youth that are attempting to play college baseball. In the future, coaches expressed that they would like to see an increase in communication skills in youth, leadership skills being practiced at a younger age, dedicated, organized, and confident prospects. The coaches believe that athletes with these abilities at a young age stand out and it will be easier for them to get noticed by universities. If more youth were able to learn these skills at a young age, it would take much of the stress off of the coaches and make developing the players a much easier task. The coaches would be able to spend more time working on physical development instead of mental improvements. This is an opportunity because having these skills could take college baseball to a higher level than it has ever been.

Those who wish to replicate this study should consider the need for an inside source of the coaches and first-person point of view from how things function within the group. While it is not mandatory, it definitely been beneficial to see some of the individuals that have succeeded and struggled in this program and understand why it may have happened. The results of the study were very strong and accurate because saturation was being achieved due to all of the coaches communicating daily about what kind of individuals they want and the qualities that they look for in specific players. Many of the answers were very similar overall, however, there were minor differences when looking for specific positions and how coaches would ideally like them to act. When designing questions is it much more effective to have 8-9 quality questions instead of 15-20 broad questions. Make sure that the questions are detailed enough to where the interviewee can elaborate and not answer the questions to all of the questions in one answer. Using semi-structured

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interviews allowed for the elaboration on the key points during the recruiting process. I found that humor and laughter was a beneficial way to help relax the interviewee and make it feel more like a conversation rather than an interview. When recruiting participants, make sure to reach out to all coaches within the team in order to understand all the key components that go into the recruiting process. If coaches are left out, then it is possible to miss key ingredients to the recruiting formula that the team could use. Each coach brings a new element to the table regarding recruiting their specific position. Without all elements, it could possibly devalue the study and cause it to be invalid. After interviewee participants agree to be interviewed, make sure that they understand to stay on task and keep the interviews short. This will reduce the likelihood of the interviewees losing interest and decrease the quality of responses that are received. When going through the process of coding, categorizing, and creating themes make sure to label as many codes as possible. As you move from categorizing to creating themes, there will be a large amount of coding which will allow for the discovery of high-quality outcomes to better backup your findings. Remember the interviewer confidence is needed to finish the interview as strong as possible so the findings will be held to a high standard. After transcribing the interview and protecting their identity, show them the outcomes and assure that they like the results and approve how everything was transcribed. Allow them to add any details, and if not, then thank them for participating in the study.

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Appendices/Questions:

Appendix A–Recruitment Script

Hello (insert name), my name is Peyton Alford, and I am currently working towards the completion of my Master's degree and I will be conducting my project on the Virginia Tech Baseball coaching staff. Part of this project includes multiple semi-structured, in-person interviews with the baseball coaches and several members of the Virginia Tech Baseball Team. Due to your involvement and knowledge within this program I am asking if you would like to participate. The interview would be no more than 30 minutes and will be conducted by myself.

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Appendix B-Icebreaker, Interview Questions & Prompts

Icebreaker – Tell them the purpose of the study and why I am doing it. Thank them for their time and let them know that all of their answers will remain confidential and no names will be used. Ask some of the questions that I always wanted to know and also ask some of the players on the team about their experiences.

Interview Questions and Prompts

- 1. Describe the team skills that Virginia Tech coaches are looking for in players outside of athletic ability in the recruitment process.**
 - a. Communication
 - b. Motivation
 - c. Leadership skills

- 2. What skills are they looking for and how are they accessing them?**
 - a. Current skills
 - b. Future skills
 - c. Potential

- 3. Is there a sheet that the coaches use to judge and score a player?**
 - a. Personality Tests
 - b. Home-made Test

- 4. On a scale of 1-10, how important is it that the recruit has good communication, problem solving, and teamwork skills?**
 - a. Can these be fixed?
 - b. How if so?

- 5. Are coaches looking for leadership skills in players before they offer them?**
 - a. Is it a deal breaker if these qualities are not instilled?
 - b. Is there a cutoff where there must be a certain score or ability?

- 6. How do leadership skills that are developed during sports, affect the human in everyday life?**
 - a. Helps within job environments
 - b. Helps interactions
 - c. Do the players know this and are told how important they are?

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- 7. Do you have to teach leadership different ways to different groups?**
 - a. What methods are there?
 - b. Who teaches them?
 - c. Can they teach each other?

- 8. What is the best way to see if leadership has taken place and it being used?**
 - a. Do you ask the players?
 - b. Are in/groups used?
 - c. How do the players communicate with you if there is an issue?

- 9. Are there any red flags that warn you to stay away from a prospect?**
 - a. What are some things that will turn you away immediately?
 - b. What advise should we tell young athletes that want to play college athletics one day?

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Appendix C – IRB Approval Letter

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 24, 2021

TO: Richard James Rateau

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)

PROTOCOL TITLE: The Recruiting Process: What Virginia Tech Baseball Coaches Are Really Looking For

IRB NUMBER: 21-298

Based on the submitted project description and items listed in the Special Instructions section found on Page 2, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by HHS and FDA regulations.

Further review and approval by the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) is not required because this is not human research. This determination applies only to the activities described in the submitted project description and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made you must immediately submit an Amendment to the HRPP for a new determination. Your amendment must include a description of the changes and you must upload all revised documents. At that time, the HRPP will review the submission activities to confirm the original "Not Research" decision or to advise if a new application must be made.

If there are additional undisclosed components that you feel merit a change in this initial determination, please contact our office for a consultation.

Please be aware that receiving a "Not Research" Determination is not the same as IRB review and approval of the activity. You are NOT to use IRB consent forms or templates for these activities. If you have any questions, please contact the Virginia Tech HRPP office at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu.

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Not Research**
 Protocol Determination Date: **March 24, 2021**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

The Recruiting Process: What Virginia Tech Baseball Coaches Are Really Looking For**Appendix D-Consent Form**

Hello (insert name), it is Peyton Alford and I am currently working towards the completion of my Master's degree and I will be conducting my research on the Virginia Tech baseball coaching staff. As a part of my Virginia Tech Master's Degree project, I will be conducting interviews. These recorded interviews will provide feedback that will not only guide my project, but will also allow for the Virginia Tech Coaching Staff to continue enhancing their strategies. Please answer the following questions below to the best of your abilities.