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- S1 00:00 Hi, this is Tim Lightfoot the Director of the Huffines Institute. To start the podcast, I'd like to take the chance to tell you about this year's rendition of the award-winning Huffines Discussion. HD-6 will take place on Friday, November 11 from 1:00 to 4:00 PM in the Annenberg Presidential Conference Center here at Texas A&M. We're thrilled to have eight world leaders in sports medicine and human performance give their big ideas, all in a language you can understand and use in your daily life. Dr. William Dexter, Dr. Russell Pate, and Texas A&M legend Mr. Dat Nguyen, are just three of the eight exciting speakers here to share their thoughts on what's next in the field. We'll see you at Annenberg on November 11, and if you can't make it here, all of these talks will be up on the podcast starting in January. Now, on to the podcast.
- S2 00:46 Welcome to the sports medicine podcast, brought to you by The Sydney and J.L. Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance, in the Department of Health and Kinesiology at Texas A&M University. At the Huffines Institute, we're always working to facilitate, apply, and bring you the most up to date coverage of the wide world that is sports medicine and human performance, all in a language you can understand and share with your friends. And now, here's our host, the Director of the Huffines Institute, Dr. Tim Lightfoot.
- S1 01:16 Hello, and welcome to the weekly podcast from the Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance. I'm your host, Tim Lightfoot, and I'm so glad that you took the time to be with us today. Thank you for taking that time to download us and be with us. Every week we strive hard to bring you someone interesting from the world of sports medicine and human performance, and this week is no exception. We are so pleased to have Dr. Marlene Dixon with us. Welcome to the podcast, Marlene.
- S3 01:40 Thank you very much. Glad to be here.
- S1 01:41 And we're glad to have you. I'm going to tell the audience a little about you and then we'll rock and roll at that point. Dr. Dixon is a professor here in the Department of Health and Kinesiology. She specifically is in the Division of Sports Management. She has her PhD in Sports Management from the Ohio State University. For all my Ohio State friends, we have to say the Ohio State, right?
- S3 02:00 That's right, that's right.
- S1 02:01 She has a Master's in Education in Kinesiology and Sports Management from that little school over at Austin - called the University of Texas at Austin - and a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and Biology from Trinity University. She is the former president of the North American Society for Sport Management. She was at Troy University as a professor there. And she's had an adjunct and associate professor position also at the University of Texas at Austin, at one point. And so, I asked Dr. Dixon to come in and chat with us today about her research, and so we're just going to jump right into it. So, your research is in the general area of the relationship between sport and life quality. So, tell us what that means. What is sport and life quality?
- S3 02:48 That's interesting because it has taken a number of different angles as I've gone forward in that. The early part of my research looked at the relationship between-- in sport and life quality particularly with athletes and coaches. And what I was interested in there is that there were many, many coaches, as I worked with them, as I was one in the collegiate level, who claim to be so satisfied with their positions, and they seemed to love coaching. And yet there was a very high burn out rate, particularly among women, and then they sat around and griped about it all the time, they would say to your face - you go and interview them - and they would say to your face how much they loved their job and they never worked a day in their life, and you turn of the recorder, and then they'd tell you all these problems and issues and stuff.
- S3 03:35 So started thinking about what's going on there. And a lot of that led to some examination about work-life balance, and particularly among women but not exclusively. And so we started down that road and did a number of really neat investigations about work-life balance, and what does that mean, and how does that impact your job, but then also how does that impact your life. And looking at-- again, particularly women but them talking about how they were experiencing burn out, how they had just incredible high stress level, how they felt that they weren't the moms that they wanted to be, or they weren't the partner that they wanted to be or the coach that they wanted to be. And they had all these high goals and what that looked like and how they worked that out.
- S1 04:23 So before we get too far away from this though, it's fascinating that as you say one side they told you one thing and then they told you something else. So as you done the research on this, which was it? Did they really hate their job that much and they were deluding themselves? Or did they really love their job that much and they were just fussing because they think that's what they're supposed to do? In general.
- S3 04:44 In general, they really liked their job, and in general, they had a passion for coaching. They were just frustrated.
- S1 04:51 Because they couldn't do some of the other things they thought they needed to do with life? Like you said, be a mom, and so

forth and so on.

- S3 04:57 Either that, or they felt like they weren't receiving the support that they needed. Is that, "Man, if you could just get it, all the things that I'm doing, and maybe help me have a little bit more flexibility in my scheduling." Or, "If you could just understand that it's expensive for me to pay for childcare when I go on the road. And now, I'm going on a road trip, and I'm leaving on a Thursday, and I'm coming back on Sunday afternoon, and traditional childcare centers are not open on the weekend, and I do not have family support for my child. And my husband's also a coach, and so he's traveling, how are we going to pay for this? How could we structure some supports that would help me make this?" Or, some of them, and again, I get this from a managerial standpoint, how do you lower performance standards? But I talked to a number of women who simply said, "Look, you gave me a two-year contract, how about a five-year contract that understands just a little bit of the length of time that I'm going through here, so all kinds of things like that. I really never once heard a person say, "I hate coaching." It was really, "I love coaching, could I get a little help here."
- S1 06:14 Because coaching is certainly a performance-based profession. If your teams don't perform, especially at this level in college, you're gone. And they don't hesitate to let you go to move to the next level. So I'm sure you feel that pressure all the time, and so you work more and more and more. The stories are legend about how many hours coaches put in.
- S3 06:36 Yeah, and it's really interesting because it's different at various levels, right? So at the division one level, there's different kinds of pressures and different kinds of strains in terms of the kinds of hours that people are spending. But we've spent a lot of time also talking with coaches, for example, at the division three or the high school levels, where, especially here in Texas, they're asked to wear a gazillion hats. And so not only are you coaching, but you're also teaching. If you're at the division three level, you may be the head coach of one thing, sometimes, not as much anymore, the assistant coach of something else. You might also have a hand in managing the facilities. You might also be doing all your own marketing and your own sport information stuff and so--
- S1 07:19 As well as recruiting and all the other stuff, right?
- S3 07:21 Exactly. And so it's interesting because some people suggest that the division one level has so much pressure, but it also has so much support. And these guys get paid so much money, how are you griping if you're making \$2.5 million, how are you griping about work-life balance? But on the whole, we're not just talking about division one level coaches. We're really talking about the entire gamut, and the vast majority of coaches are not coaching at the division one level. They're not head coaches with the \$2.5 million salaries. They are journeymen, laypeople who are working under \$100,000, and they're just trying to make it like anybody else, without the support that we give coaches at the division one level.
- S1 08:13 I thought when I went to school I was going to be either a basketball or soccer coach. I did my student teaching and helped with the football team and that semester was all it took to break me of that. It was like, "No, I'm not going to do this," because those guys were at work in the morning before school, they taught during the day, and then they had practice in the evenings, and then you had all this stuff around the football games and so forth. And I think part of their responsibility was lining the field as well. I'm going, "I don't want to do this all my life. No." So it would be tough.
- S3 08:46 Yeah, it is a dedicated profession and those who do it for a long term-- what we're finding now, in more of our recent studies, is with coaching dads-- done some more recent work with coaching fathers. What we're finding out is that those who make it either figure out some sort of coping mechanism, some way to balance it, or by and large, I guess this is kind of sad, they typically ditch their family before they ditch their job. And women are the opposite, women would typically ditch their job before they ditch their family, but I guess what's concerning to me is the fact that they have to choose. And are there ways we just continue to try to explore, are there ways that we can help great people, great coaches, great parents make it work.
- S1 09:35 Yeah. It sounds like the pressure is a little bit higher on female coaches because again they are often are tasked with the child rearing aspects of their family and dealing with those issues more predominately than the males and that would put an extra burden on them as well.
- S3 09:49 Yes, at least traditionally, although we're seeing that shift significantly as we see traditional gender notions about who should take care of the kids and who should do the house work and those kinds of things. I wouldn't say it's balanced yet, but much, much more demands being placed on young fathers to be involved with their children at home, to share the house duties and things like that. And so even our most recent stuff demonstrates some cohort effects where the younger generation of men are feeling a stronger tug of work-life conflict than they ever have before.
- S1 10:27 Interesting. So you mentioned in the beginning that you also were looking at this in athletes as well.
- S3 10:33 Life quality?
- S1 10:34 Yeah. So how does that branch off from the coaching because certainly they have the job, this is their issues with that. So how does this effect the athletes?
- S3 10:43 So our explorations with athletes don't really have to do much with work-life balance, it's really more about creating excellent sport participation opportunities. And what I mean by that is for a long time now-- and I'll never forget when I went in to interview for the very first time at the University of Texas and I was there for about ten years, so I was just a baby when I went there. And one of the professors, I kept him telling me all these great things that comes from sport and all this great stuff, and so he said to me, "So you're telling me that sport is good [laughter]? And sport participation is good for people?"

And I said, "Well of course it is [laughter]."

- S1 11:25 Well that's just what everybody thinks. Right?
- S3 11:26 Exactly and he said, "Well why? How do you know that? In what circumstances?" And that question was incredibly compelling for me, and has lead to a lot of my investigation, is we assume that sport is some magic bullet and if we have a problem, just apply sport.
- S1 11:45 Cure all.
- S3 11:46 It's like a hydrocortisone or something, right? If you have kids at risk, apply sport. If you have--
- S1 11:54 Homelessness.
- S3 11:54 Yeah, apply sport. And I reject that notion. And so we talked a lot in my research about how and when is sport good for people, and if sport is good for people, what do those sport designs look like? How do we design and implement sport that might actually be beneficial? And so a lot of the work of late has been looking at some, for example, some flag football programs and some other sport interventions that would, say-- for example, if we have 120 girls in a middle school environment that go out for volleyball, and 30 of those make the team, at best, what do we do with those other 90 that then just drop out of sport because we have this hole in our sport development system in the United States? Could we design some kind of sport for those other 90 that is maybe less involved, maybe is a new entry, so you didn't have to start playing it when you were five in order to be good at it? Maybe something that fit a wider range of body types. And so we're finding out, for example, and it's not the only sport, but some sports like flag football that we haven't typically offered for girls are filling a niche there and they're finding some social benefits, and this is great, and my buddies are on the team, and a lot of us get to play, and it's a lower commitment level where I'm not spending two to three hours every day.
- S1 13:33 Yeah. I don't have to be there at 6:30 in the morning for practice.
- S3 13:36 Yeah. Every single day. And when it comes to Friday night or when it comes to game day I actually get to play. And so there's a lot of those things that we're finding out that make sport great for the person who is not the elite athlete. And in the United States we actually do a really good job of providing opportunities and training for the elite athlete, and we do a pretty good job for the kind of fun recreational athlete, the one who just kind of maybe wants to go play around. But where we have done a poor job of providing an excellent sport experience is for that middle ground.
- S1 14:17 It's almost like what we call in the university an intramural--
- S3 14:20 Exactly.
- S1 14:19 --club sport kind of level.
- S3 14:21 Where we want to compete and we want that competition to be meaningful, but we don't have the same kind of time or maybe ability to commit to it as an elite athlete.
- S1 14:33 Well, we just want to have fun. We like the sport and we just want to have some fun in it.
- S3 14:35 Yeah. And yet I guess I disagree with that in some regard because it's not just about fun. There is a competitive element and people want to improve and they want to get better and they really actually want it to be meaningful. It's not just going around and playing on a Saturday afternoon, but there's very little space for that in our sport landscape. And that's one of the things that we're working on now is trying to fill that gap at the middle and high school level.
- S1 15:06 How do you fill that gap?
- S3 15:08 Well, I think it's providing those programs, and my guess is as we continue to work that, we're going to need to continue those with some public-private partnerships that probably use school facilities but not school personnel. And I'm talking in the state of Texas in particular because-- but this may be more national, but I've only really looked at it in Texas where teachers are already overburdened.
- S1 15:36 Right. They don't need to add one more thing to their plate.
- S3 15:38 Yeah, so to go ask teachers to run a program isn't going to help, but my guess is that we're going to utilize public facilities that are already in existence - we're not going to build new - so that keeps our cost down there. But then we're going to use private delivery-- private design, private delivery in a public setting so that increases your access. It keeps down your cost.
- S1 16:02 And most places will allow you to use the public setting because, again, they recognize that it is a public facility and so there are certainly rules and so forth. But I know my brother out in California deals with such things in the school district where the public has a right to use these facilities.
- S3 16:18 Yes, and a couple of programs we've looked at provided at a lower rate or at an off time and I've seen programs that utilize parks and rec types of facilities and also ones that use school facilities. They're really fun and, for example, the flag programs we've seen either play in the fall at the same time as the guys - and they really struggle for practice space - but they use the stadium on an off-night. The program in New Orleans plays on a Monday night. Or conversely, they might play in the Spring which opens up some field space in both ways. The program up in Austin area plays on Friday nights, but they

play in the Spring.

- S1 17:01 Do you see some sports like-- the recent trend to quidditch as being indicative of this because quidditch is certainly not an elite athlete sport but there seems to be a lot of involvement in that and we see a lot of it here as well.
- S3 17:18 I think so. I think so that-- there's another one that a professor here created--
- S1 17:24 Oh, action ball.
- S3 17:25 Action ball, there we go. I think quidditch, action ball, flag-- the characteristic, in my opinion, that they share is that they're late entry sports where you didn't have to start early and that there's something for everyone to do. For example, we find in basketball that kids who can't shoot a ball - regardless of how good a defender they are, regardless of how quick they are - they eventually quit because they can't score. But everybody that plays basketball has to be able to score, whereas in these kinds of sports you only need one person that can do certain things. You only need one quarterback. You only need a couple of people that can catch. So, if you can't throw or catch, you're not discounted. You could still be a blocker. You could still be a rusher and so, same with action ball. You don't have to be able to be adept at every skill in order to play that sport. You could just be good at one thing and so, that gives you a place.
- S1 18:21 Now, you mentioned earlier that you had some coaching background. What has led you to this point in your life? We often ask our guests if someone wanted to have their job, what would they have to go through to get their job? Is this something that you started when you were ten years old and you said, "That's what I want to do. I want to be a sports management professor."
- S3 18:41 I've always wanted to be a teacher. I've known that from a very young age, but what that has looked like has changed over time. So, coaching is largely teaching and I really, really enjoy that. But just looking futuristically to work-life balance, my husband was also a coach and then also, just thinking about the bigger picture policy issues and the bigger picture kinds of sport design issues that I wanted to address led me to go back and get my doctorate after I'd coached for a number of years, and I really enjoyed it. There were just some other things I wanted to do and I suppose that's sort of been the track since there.
- S1 19:21 It wasn't work-life balance issues that ran you out of coaching?
- S3 19:25 Not at the time although I think they were anticipated, work-life balance issues and let's prepare here. Although it's really interesting because the professor is not necessarily amenable to work-life balance either and there are a lot of challenges and one of the things that I have a lot of students come to me and say, "Hey. I think I want to be a professor and I think that would be a lot easier than this job that I'm in right now." And particularly coaches, they're like, "I just need a break. I need to--" and it's not any easier. There's challenges in every profession and it just looks different and so, I think that's one of the things that I've had to explore even in the professorate and that we've talked about is what is work-life balance look for anyone who wants to be excellent at their work and also excellent in their family.
- S1 20:22 We're going to be careful here because we we're just going to explode this myth that professors have it easy [laughter] and all we do is sit around and sleep all day, right? Yeah. There are certainly some challenges. We're running out of time here and I want to thank you so much for your time today and as our regular listeners know, we always give our guests an opportunity to tell us their take-home message. So, if there's something that you want people that listen to this podcast to take away from this podcast, what would that be?
- S3 20:46 I think what I would tell people is that sport is not a magic bullet and that the design and implementation of sport is what matter. And so, let's continue to look at how we design sport, how we measure sport performance, how we implement our sport programs, and let's keep the end in mind before we deliver so that we get more of the outcomes that we desire.
- S1 21:15 Great take home message.
- S3 21:16 Thanks.
- S1 21:16 Thanks for being with us today.
- S3 21:17 Thanks for having me.
- S1 21:18 And I want to thank all of you that are listening for, again, taking the time to download us and listen. We hope that you join us next week when we have another podcast up. And again, regular listeners of the podcast will know this is the time of the podcast when we have the podcast question of the week. And here with our podcast question is our producer, Kenneth McIntyre.
- S4 21:37 Who, according to Dr. Dixon, is more likely to place their family obligations ahead of those for their job in their coaching profession?
- S1 21:44 Great question, Kenneth. And be the first one to send us the response to huffines@tamu.edu. Be the first one and you'll win one of those nifty podcast t-shirts. Again, the email address is huffines@tamu.edu. So again, thank you for being with us. Marlene, thanks for being with us today.
- S3 22:04 Thank you so much.

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- S1 22:05 And again, we look forward to having y'all back next week with us when we have another interesting person from the world of sports medicine and human performance. And until then, we hope that you stay active and healthy.
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