

---

## Athletes, Coaches, Umpires, and Related Workers

---

(0\*NET 27-2021.00, 27-2022.00, 27-2023.00)

---

### Significant Points

- Work hours are often irregular; travel may be extensive.
- Career-ending injuries are always a risk for athletes.
- Job opportunities for coaches, sports instructors, umpires, referees, and sports officials will be best in high school and other amateur sports.
- Competition for professional athlete jobs will continue to be extremely intense; athletes who seek to compete professionally must have extraordinary talent, desire, and dedication to training.

### Nature of the Work

We are a nation of sports fans and sports players. Interest in watching sports continues at a high level and recreational participation in sports continues to grow. Some of those who participate in amateur sports dream of becoming paid professional athletes, coaches, or sports officials but very few beat the long and daunting odds of making a full-time living from professional athletics. Those athletes who do make it to professional levels find that careers are short and jobs are insecure. Even though the chances of employment as a professional athlete are slim, there are many opportunities for at least a part-time job related to athletics as a coach, instructor, referee, or umpire in amateur athletics and in high schools, colleges, and universities.

*Athletes and sports competitors* compete in organized, officiated sports events to entertain spectators. When playing a game, athletes are required to understand the strategies of their game while obeying the rules and regulations of the sport. The events in which they compete include both team sports—such as baseball, basketball, football, hockey, and soccer—and individual sports—such as golf, tennis, and bowling. As the type of sport varies, so does the level of play, ranging from unpaid high school athletics to professional sports, in which the best from around the world compete before international television audiences.

In addition to competing in athletic events, athletes spend many hours practicing skills and teamwork under the guidance of a coach or sports instructor. Most athletes spend hours in hard practices every day. They also spend additional hours viewing video tapes, in order to critique their own performances and techniques and to scout their opponents' tendencies and weaknesses to gain a competitive advantage. Some athletes may also be advised by *strength trainers* in an effort to gain muscle and stamina, while also preventing injury. Competition at all levels is extremely intense and job security is always precarious. As a result, many athletes train year round to maintain excellent form, technique, and peak physical condition. Very little downtime from the sport exists at the professional level. Athletes also must conform to regimented diets during the height of their sports season to supplement any physical training program. Many athletes push their bodies to the limit during both practice and play, so career-ending injury always is a risk. Even minor injuries to an athlete may put the player at risk of replacement.

*Coaches* organize, instruct, and teach amateur and professional athletes in fundamentals of individual and team sports. In individual sports, *instructors* may sometimes fill this role. Coaches train athletes for competition by holding practice sessions to perform drills and improve the athlete's skills and stamina. Using their expertise in the sport, coaches instruct the athlete on proper form and technique in beginning and, later, in advanced exercises attempting to maximize the players' physical potential. Along with overseeing athletes as they refine their individual skills, coaches also are responsible for managing the team during both practice sessions and competitions, and for instilling good sportsmanship, a competitive spirit, and teamwork. They may also select, store, issue, and inventory equipment, materials, and supplies. During competitions, for example, coaches substitute players for optimum team chemistry and success. In addition, coaches direct team strategy and may call specific plays during competition to surprise or overpower the opponent. To choose the best plays, coaches evaluate or "scout" the opposing team prior to the competition, allowing them to determine game strategies and practice specific plays.

Many coaches in high schools are primarily teachers of academic subjects who supplement their income by coaching part time. College coaches consider coaching a full-time discipline and may be away from home frequently as they travel to scout and recruit prospective players.

*Sports instructors* teach professional and nonprofessional athletes on an individual basis. They organize, instruct, train, and lead athletes of indoor and outdoor sports such as bowling, tennis, golf, and swimming. Because activities are as diverse as weight lifting, gymnastics, and scuba diving, and may include self-defense training such as karate, instructors tend to specialize in one or a few types of activities. Like coaches, sports instructors also may hold daily practice sessions and be responsible for any needed equipment and supplies. Using their knowledge of their sport, physiology, and corrective techniques, they determine the type and level of difficulty of exercises, prescribe specific drills, and correct the athlete's techniques. Some instructors also teach and demonstrate use of training apparatus, such as trampolines or weights, while correcting athletes' weaknesses and enhancing their conditioning. Using their expertise in the sport, sports instructors evaluate the athlete and the athlete's opponents to devise a competitive game strategy.



*Athletes spend many hours practicing skills under the guidance of a coach or sports instructor.*

Coaches and sports instructors sometimes differ in their approach to athletes because of the focus of their work. For example, while coaches manage the team during a game to optimize its chance for victory, sports instructors—such as those who work for professional tennis players—often are not permitted to instruct their athletes during competition. Sports instructors spend more of their time with athletes working one-on-one, which permits them to design customized training programs for each individual. Motivating athletes to play hard challenges most coaches and sports instructors but is vital for the athlete's success. Many coaches and instructors derive great satisfaction working with children or young adults, helping them to learn new physical and social skills and to improve their physical condition, as well as helping them to achieve success in their sport.

*Umpires, referees, and other sports officials* officiate at competitive athletic and sporting events. They observe the play, detect infractions of rules, and impose penalties established by the sports' rules and regulations. Umpires, referees, and sports officials anticipate play and position themselves to best see the action, assess the situation, and determine any violations. Some sports officials, such as boxing referees, may work independently, while others such as umpires—the sports officials of baseball—work in groups. Regardless of the sport, the job is highly stressful because officials are often required to make a decision in a matter of a split second, sometimes resulting in strong disagreement among competitors, coaches, or spectators.

Professional *scouts* evaluate the skills of both amateur and professional athletes to determine talent and potential. As a sports intelligence agent, the scout's primary duty is to seek out top athletic candidates for the team he or she represents, ultimately contributing to team success. At the professional level, scouts typically work for scouting organizations, or as freelance scouts. In locating new talent, scouts perform their work in secrecy so as to not "tip off" their opponents about their interest in certain players. At the college level, the head scout is often an assistant coach, although freelance scouts may aid colleges by providing reports about exceptional players to coaches. Scouts at this level seek talented high school athletes by reading newspapers, contacting high school coaches and alumni, attending high school games, and studying videotapes of prospects' performances.

### **Working Conditions**

Irregular work hours are the trademark of the athlete. They also are common for the coach, as well as umpires, referees, and other sports officials. Athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers often work Saturdays, Sundays, evenings, and holidays. Athletes and full-time coaches usually work more than 40 hours a week for several months during the sports season, if not most of the year. Some coaches in educational institutions may coach more than one sport, particularly at the high school level.

Athletes, coaches, and sports officials who participate in competitions that are held outdoors may be exposed to all weather conditions of the season; those involved in events that are held indoors tend to work in climate-controlled comfort, often in arenas, enclosed stadiums, or gymnasiums. Athletes, coaches, and some sports officials frequently travel to sporting events by bus or airplane. Scouts also travel extensively in locating talent, often by automobile.

### **Employment**

Athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers held about 158,000 jobs in 2002. Coaches and scouts held 130,000 jobs; athletes, 15,000; and umpires, referees, and other sports officials, 14,000. Large proportions of athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers worked part time—about 37 percent, while 17 percent maintained variable schedules. Many sports officials and coaches receive such a small and irregular payment for their services (occasional officiating at club games, for example) that they may not consider themselves employed in these occupations, even part time.

About 27 percent of workers in this occupation were self-employed, earning prize money or fees for lessons, scouting, or officiating assignments, and many other coaches and sports officials, although technically not self-employed, have such irregular or tenuous working arrangements that their working conditions resemble self-employment.

Among those employed in wage and salary jobs, 20 percent held jobs in private educational services. About 12 percent worked in amusement, gambling, and recreation industries, including golf and tennis clubs, gymnasiums, health clubs, judo and karate schools, riding stables, swim clubs, and other sports and recreation-related facilities. Another 7 percent worked in the spectator sports industry.

### **Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

Education and training requirements for athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers vary greatly by the level and type of sport. Regardless of the sport or occupation, jobs require immense overall knowledge of the game, usually acquired through years of experience at lower levels. Athletes usually begin competing in their sports while in elementary or middle school and continue through high school and sometimes college. They play in amateur tournaments and on high school and college teams, where the best attract the attention of professional scouts. Most schools require that participating athletes maintain specific academic standards to remain eligible to play. Becoming a professional athlete is the culmination of years of effort. Athletes who seek to compete professionally must have extraordinary talent, desire, and dedication to training.

For high school coach and sports instructor jobs, schools usually prefer to hire teachers willing to take on the jobs part time. If no one suitable is found, they hire someone from outside. Some entry-level positions for coaches or instructors require only experience derived as a participant in the sport or activity. Many coaches begin their careers as assistant coaches to gain the necessary knowledge and experience needed to become a head coach. Head coaches at larger schools that strive to compete at the highest levels of a sport require substantial experience as a head coach at another school or as an assistant coach. To reach the ranks of professional coaching, it usually takes years of coaching experience and a winning record in the lower ranks.

Public secondary school head coaches and sports instructors at all levels usually must have a bachelor's degree. (For information on teachers, including those specializing in physical education, see the section on teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) Those who are not teachers must meet State requirements for certification in order to become a head coach. Certification, however, may not be required for coach and sports instructor jobs in private schools. Degree programs specifically related to coaching include exercise and sports science, physiology, kine-

siology, nutrition and fitness, physical education, and sports medicine.

For sports instructors, certification is highly desirable for those interested in becoming a tennis, golf, karate, or any other kind of instructor. Often, one must be at least 18 years old and CPR certified. There are many certifying organizations specific to the various sports, and their training requirements vary depending on their standards. Participation in a clinic, camp, or school usually is required for certification. Part-time workers and those in smaller facilities are less likely to need formal education or training.

Each sport has specific requirements for umpires, referees, and other sports officials. Referees, umpires, and other sports officials often begin their careers by volunteering for intramural, community, and recreational league competitions. For college refereeing, candidates must be certified by an officiating school and be evaluated during a probationary period. Some larger college conferences require officials to have certification and other qualifications, such as residence in or near the conference boundaries along with previous experience that typically includes several years officiating at high school, community college, or other college conference games.

Standards are even more stringent for officials in professional sports. For umpire jobs in professional baseball, for example, a high school diploma or equivalent is usually sufficient, plus 20/20 vision and quick reflexes. To qualify for the professional ranks, however, prospective candidates must attend professional umpire training school. Currently, there are two schools whose curriculums have been approved by the Professional Baseball Umpires Corporation (PBUC) for training. Top graduates are selected for further evaluation while officiating in a rookie minor league. Umpires then usually need 8 to 10 years of experience in various minor leagues before being considered for major league jobs. Football also is competitive, as candidates must have at least 10 years of officiating experience, with 5 of them at a collegiate varsity or minor professional level. For the National Football League (NFL), prospects are interviewed by clinical psychologists to determine levels of intelligence and ability to handle extremely stressful situations. In addition, the NFL's security department conducts thorough background checks. Potential candidates are likely to be interviewed by a panel from the NFL officiating department and are given a comprehensive examination on the rules of the sport.

Jobs as scouts require experience playing a sport at the college or professional level that enables them to spot young players who possess extraordinary athletic abilities and skills. Most beginning scout jobs are as part-time talent spotters in a particular area or region. Hard work and a record of success often lead to full-time jobs responsible for bigger territories. Some scouts advance to scouting director jobs or various administrative positions in sports.

Athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers must relate well to others and possess good communication and leadership skills. Coaches also must be resourceful and flexible to successfully instruct and motivate individuals or groups of athletes.

### **Job Outlook**

Employment of athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers is expected to increase about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2012. Employment will grow as the general public continues to increasingly participate in organized sports as a form of entertainment, recreation, and physical conditioning. Job growth also will be driven by the increasing

numbers of baby boomers approaching retirement, during which they are expected to become more active participants of leisure-time activities, such as golf and tennis, and require instruction. The large numbers of the children of baby boomers in high schools and colleges also will be active participants in athletics and require coaches and instructors.

Expanding opportunities are expected for coaches and instructors, as a higher value is being placed upon physical fitness in our society. Americans of all ages are engaging in more physical fitness activities, such as participating in amateur athletic competition and joining athletic clubs, and are being encouraged to participate in physical education. Employment of coaches and instructors also will increase with expansion of school and college athletic programs and growing demand for private sports instruction. Sports-related job growth within education also will be driven by the decisions of local school boards. Population growth dictates the construction of additional schools, particularly in the expanding suburbs. However, funding for athletic programs is often one of the first areas to be cut when budgets become tight, but the popularity of team sports often enables shortfalls to be offset somewhat by assistance from fundraisers, booster clubs, and parents. Persons who are State-certified to teach academic subjects in addition to physical education are likely to have the best prospects for obtaining coach and instructor jobs. The need to replace many high school coaches also will provide some coaching opportunities.

Competition for professional athlete jobs will continue to be extremely intense. Opportunities to make a living as a professional in individual sports such as golf or tennis may grow as new tournaments are established and prize money distributed to participants increases. Most professional athletes' careers last only several years due to debilitating injuries and age, so a large proportion of the athletes in these jobs is replaced every year, creating some job opportunities. However, a far greater number of talented young men and women dream of becoming a sports superstar and will be competing for a very limited number of job openings.

Opportunities should be best for persons seeking part-time umpire, referee, and other sports official jobs at the high school level, but competition is expected for higher paying jobs at the college level, and even greater competition for jobs in professional sports. Competition should be very keen for jobs as scouts, particularly for professional teams, as the number of available positions is limited.

### **Earnings**

Median annual earnings of athletes were \$45,320 in 2002. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$14,090, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$145,600. However, the highest paid professional athletes earn salaries far in excess of these estimates.

Median annual earnings of umpires and related workers were \$20,540 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$16,210 and \$29,490. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$13,760, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$40,350.

Median annual earnings of coaches and scouts were \$27,880 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$17,890 and \$42,250. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$13,370, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$60,230. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of coaches and scouts in 2002 were as follows:

Colleges, universities, and professional schools .....	\$36,170
Other amusement and recreation industries .....	25,900
Elementary and secondary schools .....	24,740
Other schools and instruction .....	22,570

Earnings vary by education level, certification, and geographic region. Some instructors and coaches are paid a salary, while others may be paid by the hour, per session, or based on the number of participants.

**Related Occupations**

Athletes and coaches have extensive knowledge of physiology and sports, and instruct, inform, and encourage participants. Other workers with similar duties include dietitians and nutritionists; physical therapists; recreation and fitness workers; recreational therapists; and teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary.

**Sources of Additional Information**

For general information on coaching, contact:

- ▶ National High School Athletic Coaches Association, P.O. Box 4342, Hamden, CT 06514. Internet: <http://www.hscoaches.org>

For information about sports officiating for team and individual sports, contact:

- ▶ National Association of Sports Officials, 2017 Lathrop Ave., Racine, WI 53405. Internet: <http://www.naso.org>