

An Autobiographical Exploration: The Long-term Impact of Softball on Former Players Turned Coaches, Trainers, and National Athletes

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Abstract— The study aimed to explore the long-term impact of softball on former players who transitioned into roles as coaches, trainers, and national athletes. Through in-depth interviews as the data generation method, the researcher was able to derive the following findings. Transitioning from player to leader (coach, trainer, or mentor) helped participants embrace personal growth, teamwork, and leadership despite doubts. Dedication, patience, and love for the sport shaped their new identities. For many, softball was more than a game—it became a bridge to education and financial stability, especially for those from humble beginnings. Challenges included balancing roles as teachers, students, coaches, and parents, often leading to burnout and self-doubt. Transitions demanded patience, authority, and professionalism. Yet, triumphs such as championships, awards, and representing the country fueled pride and motivation. Success extended beyond trophies, reflecting growth, recognition, and inspiring others to achieve their goals. Softball became a way of life that instilled discipline, resilience, teamwork, and confidence, extending into education and community leadership. Transitioning was not always easy, but family, coaches, and friends sustained them. Softball provided purpose, opportunities, and stability. More than a personal journey, it became a way to leave a lasting legacy beyond the field, and this study may serve as a foundation for future research on how softball supports education, leadership, and community development. The study recommends using this study as a foundation for examining how sports, particularly softball, can shape education, leadership, and community development.

Keywords— Softball, Athlete-to-Coach Transition, Resilience, Master in Physical Education and Sports, Polytechnic University of the Philippines.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sports have been proven to positively impact individuals, from improving physical fitness to teaching life skills. A study by Cronin et al. (2022) found out that youth sports help develop essential life skills, especially when strong mentors are involved. Many studies examine the physical, social, and psychological benefits of sports such as football, basketball, and weightlifting, among others (Chrispin, 2025).

Softball, like many other sports, teaches players how to work together, how to be disciplined, and how to lead. These are abilities that can help them in their personal and professional lives. Softball is more than just a sport—it shapes lives. Softball has an impact on many athletes' lives outside of the field, affecting their

personal growth, development, relationships, and even their career paths.

In the Philippines, softball continues to grow, with organizations like the Amateur Softball Association of the Philippines (ASAPHIL) actively promoting the sport. Malanum (2024) states that ASAPHIL helps young athletes grow through clinics and tournaments. Many of these athletes go on to become coaches and mentors themselves.

Mentorship is very important for an athlete's journey. According to Fraina and Hodge (2020), mentoring relationships between athletes and coaches significantly impact their confidence, career decisions, and future participation in sports. For many athletes, their coaches are more than just teachers of the game—they are life mentors. This research is deeply personal.

The researcher conducted this study based on the inspiration from their college coach, whose guidance left a lasting impact. Fraina and Hodge (2020) found out in their study that good mentorship in sports leads to personal and professional growth. Through coaching, discipline, and mentorship, the researcher developed a passion for softball that extended far beyond the game. This study aimed to ascertain whether others had encountered similar experiences and how their participation in softball impacted their personal and professional trajectories.

However, there is a lack of research on the long-term effects of softball on players' lives, particularly through their personal stories. Most existing literature focuses on immediate benefits and career paths in coaching or high-level competition, but fails to explore how softball shape's identity, life choices, and skills after retirement.

Fernandez et al. (2023) states that athletes often face challenges during retirement, including identity loss and career regret. Their study emphasizes the need for a well-rounded sense of self beyond athletic competition and notes the absence of sport-specific retirement planning strategies. This gap is particularly evident in softball, where little research has been conducted on how former players transition into life beyond the sport. Addressing this gap can provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of softball on personal and professional development.

Softball is not just about hitting, pitching, or scoring runs. It is a sport that builds character, relationships, and makes players think about their decisions in life long after they have left the field. Understanding this long-term impact can help athletes, coaches, and sports organizations better support players after they stop playing. It can also inspire young athletes by showing them that softball is more than just a game—it is a path that can shape their futures.

This study aimed to shed light on the lasting effects of softball, particularly for those who had chosen to give back to the sport as mentors and leaders. Their experiences helped us understand the deeper impact of the game and how it continued to shape lives beyond

competition. This study explores the long-term impact of softball on individuals who transitioned from being players to becoming coaches, trainers, or national athletes. By gathering personal stories, it aimed to understand how the sport has shaped their identities, skills, and life choices.

II. METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative method to accomplish the study. According to Mosera and Korstjens (2017), qualitative research explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems. Creswell (2012) explains that qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups assign to a social or human experience. Emily Ford (2022) explains that narrative inquiry focuses on human stories. The researcher chose this method because it allows for the collection of information through interviews and written texts.

Narrative inquiry was adopted to explore the life stories and experiences of participants in relation to softball. The population consists of ten (10) former players from different cities within Luzon who have transitioned into roles as coaches, trainers, or national athletes. The research instrument and data collection procedure were approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC-2025-4381). The researcher conducted in-depth interviews, recorded on video with participants' consent.

Thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework was employed. In-vivo coding was utilized to ensure that participants' exact phrases served as the foundation for analysis. The steps included transcription, familiarization, generating initial codes, clustering codes, reviewing themes, and finalizing themes and subthemes. Manual judgment was exercised in clustering codes, interpreting meanings, and refining categories.

The study utilized primary sources of data. The ten (10) informants were former softball players who have become coaches, national athletes, or trainers, aged 23 to 73. Their verified backgrounds confirmed their athletic credentials. The researcher used purposive sampling, wherein participants are chosen based on the

study's requirements. Creswell (2013) emphasizes purposive sampling as a strategy in qualitative research.

The researcher formulated a set of questions designed to explore the perceived benefits of the study. The interview protocol consisted solely of primary questions. The interview guide underwent content validation by five experts: three faculty members, one principal, and one Division Sports Officer/EPS in MAPEH, with qualifications in Educational

Management, Teaching MAPEH, Physical Education and Sports, and Educational Leadership.

The Data Privacy Act of 2012 protects the fundamental human right to privacy. The researcher ensured that participants' names would not appear in the paper and used standardized pseudonyms. Ethical clearance was secured from the University Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained before interviews, documented through a signed form, and participation was voluntary. One participant was a senior citizen.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table I: Lived Experiences of Softball Players in Terms of Their Role Transitions

Theme	Participants	Statements
Navigated change through leadership	Participant 1	"Automatically, being a coach became part of my teaching leader. 'I was a playing coach. I played and coached at the same time.'"
Navigated change through leadership	Participant 2	"When I was a player, actually, I have the experience of being a coach. So, during those times, I am able to understand or know even the smallest things that I can actually observe to a certain player."
Navigated change through leadership	Participant 4	"Learn how to communicate effectively with my players." "Let go of focusing on my own personal accomplishments." "Earning some respect from my former peers and my players today." "I had to adjust to a leadership role."
Navigated change through leadership	Participant 7	"Before, I was the one being taught. Now, I'm the one doing the teaching."
Navigated change through leadership	Participant 8	"Now, I can coach and train younger athletes."

Theme	Participants	Statements
Adapted to unfamiliar roles through perseverance	Participant 1	"Didn't really have a hard time." "There was really no time, no trouble during the transition."
Adapted to unfamiliar roles through perseverance	Participant 2	"Coaching students who doesn't have zero knowledge in playing softball." "It's very hard. It's actually hard up to this time."
Adapted to unfamiliar roles through perseverance	Participant 4	"It wasn't an easy step." "Every time I watched them, I felt encouraged to give it a try."
Adapted to unfamiliar roles through perseverance	Participant 5	"In the beginning, it was really difficult."
Adapted to unfamiliar roles through perseverance	Participant 6	"Teaching isn't easy." "The real challenge comes when you're trying to teach a child who doesn't want to follow instructions."
Adapted to unfamiliar roles through perseverance	Participant 7	"It was a big change." "It felt unfamiliar at first."

Evidently, Table 1 shows that the softball players' real-life experiences showed how hard it was for them to switch between roles, especially when they went from player to coach, learner to leader, and novice to mentor. Two main themes shape this category: (1) Navigated change through leadership, and (2) Adapted to unfamiliar roles through perseverance. These changes often required emotional adjustment, rebuilding one's identity, and learning new skills, which is in line with models of athletic career transition and life-span development (Park et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022).

Navigated change through leadership

Participants who took on leadership roles, like coaching or mentoring, tackled about how these roles came about naturally or out of need. Participant 1 said, "Being a coach automatically became part of my teaching load," and stressed that he had two jobs: "I was a playing coach." I coached while I played". These experiences show how sport identities have changed, with roles as athletes overlapping with roles as leaders and teachers (McEwan et al., 2021).

Some people made a more conscious change. Participant 4 said, "I had to get used to being a leader," and then went on to say, "I had to learn how to talk to my players in a way that worked for them and stop worrying about how well I was doing." This change from focusing on oneself to focusing on others is an example of transformational leadership development, which happens a lot in team sports when former players start to care more about the group's growth and cohesion (Wright et al., 2019).

Participant (7) also talked about this change, saying, "Before, I was the one being taught. I am the one who is teaching now". Participant 8, on the other hand, said that this change gave him a sense of purpose: "Now I can teach and train younger athletes... helping them improve their skills." These stories show that leadership in sports often happens on its own, but it still needs to be adapted on purpose, with patience, and with new skills (Gledhill & Harwood, 2021).

Not everyone identified as a leader, but their experiences suggested that their identities were

changing to fit with servant leadership, which is about helping and uplifting others (Becker, 2020). These stories show that leadership isn't always about being in a position of power; it can also be shown through behavior, such as mentoring, modeling, and influencing others.

What stands out here is how athletes like Participant 1 and Participant 7 experienced this transition in very different ways. For Participant 1, leadership emerged out of necessity and blended naturally with his playing identity, while for Participant 7, the shift was more emotional—moving from being the one who learned to becoming the one who teaches. These differences highlight the personal adjustments required, showing how their self-concept as athletes gradually evolved into a leadership identity. This reinforces that leadership in sports is not uniform but deeply tied to individual journeys and emotional adaptation.

Adapted to unfamiliar roles through perseverance

Moving into new roles was also hard and uncomfortable. Some people said it was easy—Participant 1 said, "Didn't really have a hard time," and "There was really no issue, no struggle during that transition." But other participants said it was harder to learn.

Participant 2 said, "It's very hard to coach students who don't know anything about playing softball." "It's actually hard up to this time," which shows how hard the task is and how emotionally draining it is to teach. Participant 5 added, "In the beginning, it was really hard... you really needed a lot of patience," which meant that you had to keep going until you got what you wanted" After all the hard work, there was also happiness in the end."

Participant 6 agreed with the mental and emotional work and said, "The real challenge comes when you're trying to teach a child who doesn't want to follow instructions..." It's not easy to teach."

This is in line with research that says being a teacher and a coach at the same time is hard on both the mind and the heart (Fletcher et al., 2021).

Participant 7 reflection shows that he felt uncomfortable and lost at first: "It was a big change... it felt unfamiliar at first." But with hard work and growth, it turned into a meaningful experience: "It was fulfilling... the kids were actually learning."

These problems are similar to the ones that athletes face when they change roles in sports, especially when they do so without any formal training (Park et al., 2020). Still, participants were able to get through these

uncertain times with the help of their determination, reflection, and support networks. Mentorship and encouragement from peers helped them persevere through the transition, showing that resilience was not only individual but also socially reinforced. As the researcher, I see that these coping mechanisms not only sustained them through the challenges but also prepared the ground for the next theme, where they drew strength from support systems and social influence.

Table II: Influences and Motivations

Theme	Participants	Statements
Drew strength from support systems and social influence	Participant 1	"Why are you picking her? He wasn't even a national player."
Drew strength from support systems and social influence	Participant 2	"No specific person."
Drew strength from support systems and social influence	Participant 3	"No one really influenced me."
Drew strength from support systems and social influence	Participant 5	"My loved ones and my friends. They also influenced and supported me along the way." "Especially if someone notices your performance." "You want to be validated."
Drew strength from support systems and social influence	Participant 6	"Sir Money Llamas called me over." "He's still helping so many students." "Come practice. I'll teach you how to pitch."
Drew strength from support systems and social influence	Participant 9	"My family. They're the ones I draw strength from." "John, a well-known player." "Softball was something completely new to me."
Drew strength from support systems and social influence	Participant 10	"I grew up watching him." "I really want to be blood."
Pursued sport as a pathway to education and a better life	Participant 1	"I was motivated by the hope that I could finish my studies." "Softball became my way out—my bridge through poverty." "I had no other pastime but to play softball." "If I need to be officially enrolled just to play, then I might as well complete my degree."
Pursued sport as a pathway to education and a better life	Participant 2	"The grades. It's very important."
Pursued sport as a pathway to	Participant 3	"Just my weekly allowance... I had a way to make it work." "I didn't expect to end up in softball."

education and a better life		
Pursued sport as a pathway to education and a better life	Participant 5	"Being a scholar is a huge help in college."
Pursued sport as a pathway to education and a better life	Participant 6	"Free tuition in college, plus allowance."
Pursued sport as a pathway to education and a better life	Participant 7	"I used to get sick easily." "I wanted to be stronger." "I wasn't as prone to injury anymore."
Pursued sport as a pathway to education and a better life	Participant 8	"Some were already in college—and they weren't paying for tuition at all."

The Influences and Motivations gives a bird's-eye view of the social and structural factors that made the participants want to keep playing softball as shown in table 2. Two related sub-themes came up: (1) Drew Strength from Support Systems and Social Influence, and (2) Pursued Sport as a Pathway to Education and a Better Life. These themes show both the social and practical reasons why people kept playing the sport.

Drew Strength from Support Systems and Social Influence

Most of the participants said that their family, friends, coaches, and teammates encouraged them to start or keep playing softball. This shows how important relationships with other people can be.

Family and mentors played a big part in this. Participant 10 affirms this by saying, "My dad is the coach, and he also pushes me to do my best." "It really runs in the blood," which shows how much parents can affect their child's athletic identity.

Participant 6 also remembered, "Sir Manny Llave... called me over," and said that he was the reason "I'm here today." This shows how important it is for coaches to mentor athletes.

Even casual invites changed everything. Participant 9 said, "Join us, we're short of players," and Third Base said, "You want to try softball?" That's where it all

began". These participants' shared experiences show how social nudges that happen on their own can make people stick with sports for a long time. These examples support the social cognitive view that peers and important people in a person's life can affect their participation in sports by modeling and encouraging them (Bandura, as cited in Chan et al., 2020).

Some people also said that they depended on their social network for emotional support. Participant 7, said, "It's definitely my family and friends." Participant 9 said, "My family—they're the ones I draw strength from," but "more than anything, it's myself."

These phrases fit with what the current literature says about how supportive environments can help people deal with their emotions (Harwood et al., 2019).

Interestingly, not all of the people who took part said they were influenced by things outside of themselves. Participant 3 and Participant 4 both said, "No one really influenced me."

This shows that self-driven motivation and exposure to the environment (like watching others play) can also get other athletes or people interested. This shows that both social and independent factors can affect an athlete's motivation (Ullrich-French et al., 2021).

Pursued Sport as a Pathway to Education and a Better Life

In addition to relationships, participants said that practical goals, especially educational and financial ones, were the main reasons they kept coming back. Participants stayed in the sport to get scholarships and make their lives better.

Participant 1 said it clearly: "Softball became my way out—my bridge through poverty," and "I was motivated by the hope that I could finish my studies." Participant 3 (First Base) said something similar: "It became my way of finishing school... I fought for my wish to finish school.

Participant 6 and Participant 8 said that playing softball helped them get free tuition and money. Participant 6 said, "Softball could help me get into college for free," and Participant 8 said, "Some were already in college and weren't paying for tuition at all... that became a big motivation." These events show that sports can help people move up in society, especially young people from low-income families (Madsen et al., 2021).

Another common theme was academic integration. "Grades," said Participant 2. "It's very important," and Participant 10 talked about how hard it is to balance two roles: "I still try to balance my academics—I'm a

student-athlete." This is similar to the dual career model in athlete development, where education and sports are both important but often at odds with each other (Guidotti et al., 2023).

People also wanted to get better, both physically and mentally, which drove them to participate. Participant 7 said "I wanted to be stronger..." "I wasn't as likely to get hurt anymore," which shows a motivation based on health and resilience that goes beyond traditional measures of success. This backs up the idea that young people may start playing sports for real benefits but stay to improve themselves and get better at them (Fransen et al., 2022).

These stories remind as that softball was not only about competition—it was about survival, opportunity, and growth. For athletes like Participant 1, the sport was a lifeline, a way to escape poverty and pursue education. For others, like Participant 8, it was a practical stepping stone, offering free tuition and easing financial burdens. Their different socioeconomic backgrounds shaped how they saw the sport: some viewed it as a bridge out of hardship, while others saw it as a chance to advance themselves. Together, their stories show that sport's benefits are layered—it can provide financial relief, open doors to education, and nurture resilience and personal growth, depending on the athlete's circumstances.

Table III: Self-Realization and Personal Growth

Theme	Participants	Statements
Fulfilled in contributing to other's growth	Participant 2	"I can actually observe to a certain player." "I was able to fully engage with the event." "I have a good chance to really help those students." "It's very fulfilling because I was able to correct even the smallest things." "I was able to witness the development of those students." "At the end of the day, I don't want them to regret joining the event." "I'm so happy because it's very fulfilling." "To have a chance to really showcase what I learned."
Fulfilled in contributing to other's growth	Participant 3	"Now that I'm a teacher, I see that experience as my motivation."
Fulfilled in contributing to other's growth	Participant 4	"Helping my players grow and get as athletes, but also as students."
Fulfilled in contributing to other's growth	Participant 5	"We actually won a few games." "That win really showed a big improvement in them." "It was such a joyful experience." "After all the hard work, there was also happiness in the end." "It's really something special to see a player's growth."

Fulfilled in contributing to other's growth	Participant 8	"You begin to see them grow."
Grew through emotional challenges and reflection	Participant 1	"It's become..." "It's not..." "I'm not feeling." "Relax. Okay. Leave it to me." "I didn't waste any time. At my age, why would I slack off?" "I passed the board exam eventually. I was promoted as Sports Director."
Grew through emotional challenges and reflection	Participant 2	"It's kind of telling." "I was able to observe, experience the difficulties, the good things."
Grew through emotional challenges and reflection	Participant 3	"I proved him wrong." "I had the right and the authority to speak up and correct him." "I actually asked him to leave the field." "I really wanted to finish my education." "I'm the only one in our family who was able to graduate."
Grew through emotional challenges and reflection	Participant 4	"I just wanted to try it for the experience."
Grew through emotional challenges and reflection	Participant 6	"They should finish their education."
Grew through emotional challenges and reflection	Participant 7	"My understanding of the game deepened." "I became physically stronger." "I've experienced the game."
Grew through emotional challenges and reflection	Participant 8	"It wanted to improve." "It's the kind of experience that's both difficult and fulfilling." "It's stressful at times... my biggest challenge—and greatest realization." "It all happened by accident."
Grew through emotional challenges and reflection	Participant 9	"I began to enjoy it." "That's when I started experiencing things like mental breakdowns."

Table 3 illustrates how participants changed, not only through their own successes but also through the ways they helped others grow and dealt with emotional challenges. These experiences show how development is both based on reflection and on relationships, which is common in the paths of athletes and educators (Stambulova et al., 2021).

These are the two emerged themes: (1) Fulfilled in contributing to other's growth, and (2) Grew through emotional challenges and reflection. The cross-sectional indicates that all participants experienced growth through emotional difficulties and contemplation.

Fulfilled in contributing to other's growth

Many participants said they felt very fulfilled by helping other players grow and watching them do so. These events marked a change from being self-centered to being a selfless leader and mentor. Participant 2 said, "It's very fulfilling because I was able to correct even the smallest things," which shows the satisfaction of coaching players. Participant 5 also said, "That win really showed a big improvement in them," and called the process "such a joyful experience." This change from being a player to being a mentor fits with what research says about how mentoring others can make coaches feel more purposeful and valuable (White & Bennie, 2021).

Participant 6 iterated that, "It's really something special to see a player's growth." In addition, second base added, "I found a sense of fulfillment in helping others,". These experiences show that their personal growth was closely linked to their ability to care for others. This supports the idea that helping others is a powerful way to learn about yourself in sports (Holt et al., 2020).

Participant 7, who was new to coaching, thought about how their role was changing: "I learned more about the game." "My love for it grew even stronger," which shows that teaching made both knowledge and passion grow.

Fulfillment took on different forms for the participants. For Participant 2, the sense of growth came from within—finding satisfaction in developing patience and sharpening coaching skills. In contrast, Participant 5 spoke more about the joy of seeing others succeed, showing how fulfillment can also be rooted in the progress of those they mentor.

These differences remind us that mentoring is not experienced in a single way: for some, it is about self-development, while for others, it is about celebrating the achievements of others.

Taken together, their stories show that contributing to others' growth not only benefited the players they guided but also reshaped their own identities, allowing them to step more fully into the roles of mentors and leaders.

Grew through emotional challenges and reflection.

Overcoming emotional and mental challenges brought about another level of personal growth. This means dealing with changes in identity, pressure, problems, and doubt about oneself.

Participant 9 openly said, "That's when I started having mental breakdowns," about the stress of playing college softball. "The pressure is higher." "I'm not just representing my school anymore; I'm representing the whole country," - Participant 10. Showing how hard it

is to represent your country at the national level. These events show the emotional work and strength needed to do well in sports (McArdle et al., 2022).

Participant 8 said their time was "stressful at times... my biggest challenges—and greatest realizations." Participant 1 talked about how they changed as a "late bloomer" who "didn't waste any time." These stories show how athletes get better when they have to deal with hard things, which is an important idea in positive psychology and post-adversity growth (Côté & Turnnidge, 2021).

For Participant 3, taking back her voice gave her power: "I proved him wrong..." "I had the right and authority to speak up," a statement that shows how important it is to stand up for yourself to embrace growth and change.

Others, like Participant 6, used reflective endurance, saying, "Teaching isn't easy," and saying that it was "overwhelming in a good way."

These phrases show how complicated growth can be emotionally, which supports the idea that change comes from reflection, not ease (Ronkainen et al., 2021).

These experiences serve as powerful reminders that adversity can become a turning point for growth. The athletes' struggles with pressure, identity, and self-doubt were not simply setbacks; they became opportunities to build resilience and uncover deeper strength.

Consistent with Côté & Turnnidge (2021), their narratives show how post-traumatic growth can emerge when challenges are transformed into sources of empowerment.

In this study, participants revealed that emotional struggles were more than obstacles. Through reflection and perseverance, they became catalysts for self-realization, reshaping how the athletes understood themselves and their capacity to grow.

Table IV: Role-Related and Identity Challenges

Theme	Participants	Statements
Struggled with conflicting roles and responsibilities	Participant 1	"The challenge I encountered later on was, how to handle my schedule." "There's also problems towards, not necessarily conflicts of interest, but more of time management issues." "My teaching duties started to suffer." "Managing all of it without affecting any of my roles became a serious challenge for me." "You really have to dedicate your whole week." "This is not my priority now." "There's a lot of things that I missed to do." "Playing softball is not your everyday thing now." "Maybe a time. That's the challenge."
Struggled with conflicting roles and responsibilities	Participant 2	"Managing my time was really the hardest part during that time." "Being a student-athlete." "Doing my homework, and attending other academic activities." "After school hours, I still had to train." "Sometimes there really wasn't a fixed schedule." "We had to practice and couldn't attend our classes." "It was really hard to catch up." "You've already tried, and you can't always do everything."
Struggled with conflicting roles and responsibilities	Participant 7	"Managing your time when it's no longer your own."
Faced Emotional Pressure in Leadership and Transition	Participant 3	"I really needed to prove myself." "You're teaching them how to throw, catch, field, and hit from scratch." "Discipline becomes a challenge." "Today's players aren't as focused anymore."
Faced Emotional Pressure in Leadership and Transition	Participant 5	"There were many challenges." "It's different when you become a trainer." "Everything was heavier the mental aspect of teaching."
Faced Emotional Pressure in Leadership and Transition	Participant 6	"Some players didn't show up on time." "That's one day I'll never forget." "They made me feel like a fool waiting there in the oval."
Faced Emotional Pressure in Leadership and Transition	Participant 7	"Physical exhaustion from training." "Handling younger players."
Faced Emotional Pressure in Leadership and Transition	Participant 8	"It was really difficult." "I had to tell them not to call me Kuya anymore." "It was a huge shift." "It took almost 3 to 4 months before they were able to fully adjust to me."
Faced Emotional Pressure in Leadership and Transition	Participant 9	"That's when the pressure began to set in." "I started experiencing mental breakdowns." "Much more demanding, both mentally and emotionally."
Faced Emotional Pressure in Leadership and Transition	Participant 10	"My body wasn't used to that kind of routine." "I immediately got injured."

Role-Related and Identity Challenges as pictured in table 4, shows the stress that participants feel as they try to balance their many roles, which can be athlete, coach, teacher, parent, and student. The conflicts they

have with themselves and with others affect their sense of self, their ability to manage their time, and their mental health. These are the two emerged themes: (1) Struggled with Balancing Conflicting Roles and

Responsibilities, and (2) Faced Emotional Pressure in Leadership and Transition.

Struggled with Balancing Conflicting Roles and Responsibilities

Most of the participants said it was hard to keep up with all their responsibilities, especially when their roles as coaches, teachers, and family members all needed time and energy. Participant 1 said, "The hardest thing for me later on was figuring out how to handle my schedule. It became very hard for me to handle everything without affecting any of my roles". This struggle is similar to what other sports literature has found about role strain in athlete-coaches, especially when the participants have to balance two jobs that are time-sensitive and emotionally taxing (Ronkainen et al., 2021).

In the same way, Participant 4 said, "The hardest part was managing my time. I had to split my time between going to school and training as a player". This stress is in line with research that shows that athletes who have to balance school and sports often feel worse and more stressed because of the demands of both (Gledhill et al., 2020).

Participant 6 and other female participants also talked about how hard it was to be in charge and keep the players in line: "Some players didn't show up on time—they didn't follow the call time. That day will always be in my mind." These experiences show how gendered expectations of leadership and emotional labor can make role conflict worse (Roberts et al., 2023).

These narratives show that role conflicts were not just short-term struggles but challenges with lasting impact. The constant strain of juggling responsibilities—as athletes, coaches, teachers, and family members—often pushed participants to the edge, sometimes leading to burnout and forcing them to set aside parts of their athletic identity to meet other demands. The stress they carried went beyond managing schedules; it reshaped how they understood themselves, influencing their sense of identity as athletes, mentors, and individuals, and leaving

enduring effects on their mental health and personal growth.

Faced Emotional Pressure in Leadership and Transition

Many former players who became coaches and leaders had problems with their identities that changed how they saw themselves and how others saw them. Participant 8 said it best: "The players I started coaching were actually the same people I used to train with... I told them they couldn't call me Kuya anymore." This kind of identity negotiation happens a lot when someone goes from being a peer to being in charge. Research shows that these changes can make relationships tense and uncertain (Wylleman et al., 2023).

Participant 5 also thought about how things had changed in her head: "When you were in college, you just played." You liked what you were doing. But things change when you become a trainer... The mental part of teaching is now a part of everything". The shift from being an athlete who focuses on performance to a coach who focuses on reflection and pedagogy means a change in identity, which can cause role confusion and burnout if not supported (Stambulova & Ryba, 2019).

In addition, Participant 2 also said, "This isn't my top priority right now..." There are a lot of things I didn't do". This statement shows how people can feel like they have lost something when they stop seeing sports as their main identity, especially when they must take care of new responsibilities in their lives. The experience fits with (Tekavc et. Al, 2021) recent study about athletic identity foreclosure and the sadness that comes with leaving peak performance roles.

These stories reveal how demanding the emotional side of leadership transitions can be. Participants were not only working through changes in their own identities but also carrying the responsibility of guiding and supporting their players. This emotional work—balancing empathy, authority, and performance expectations—often weighed heavily on their well-being. Moving from athlete to coach meant taking on the emotions of others while redefining their

own roles, which intensified the pressure and, at times, led to feelings of loss or burnout. Their experiences remind us that leadership in sports is not only about

technical skill—it is equally about emotional endurance and the strength to support others while navigating personal change.

Table V: Personal Triumphs and Milestones

Theme	Participants	Statements
Achieved Recognition Through Competitive Success	Participant 3	"They became champions when we competed in the regional games." "We became champions." "Our opponents were male players."
Achieved Recognition Through Competitive Success	Participant 6	"I promise you, we're going to win the National SCUAA Championship."
Achieved Recognition Through Competitive Success	Participant 8	"We made it to the championship round."
Achieved Recognition Through Competitive Success	Participant 1	"That runner and the opportunity to go abroad really helped me a lot."
Grew in Confidence Through Recognition and Personal Progress	Participant 2	"Enhancing your skill is a good success already for me." "Look at you during the first day. Just look at you now." "They wanted to praise me."
Grew in Confidence Through Recognition and Personal Progress	Participant 3	"That was the happiest time for me."
Grew in Confidence Through Recognition and Personal Progress	Participant 6	"That was one of my personal achievements."
Grew in Confidence Through Recognition and Personal Progress	Participant 7	"I had a well-earned medal."
Grew in Confidence Through Recognition and Personal Progress	Participant 8	"That was one of the biggest achievements for me."
Grew in Confidence Through Recognition and Personal Progress	Participant 10	"I was also honored with awards such as the Overall Best Athlete and other Games Paragons." "It's already a huge achievement."

Table 5 shows the most important points in the athletes' journeys when they achieved personal goals and were recognized for them in public. These successes, whether they came from winning competitions or growing as a person, helped them develop their sense of self-worth, identity, and purpose. There are two main themes that the results are grouped into: (1) Achieved Recognition Through Competitive Success and (2) Grew in Confidence Through Recognition and Personal Progress. It also affirms that all the participants were able to have this as their triumphs and milestones in Softball.

Achieved Recognition Through Competitive Success

For a lot of people, winning tournaments, championships, or coaching jobs was proof that their hard work and dedication had paid off. These achievements confirmed their athletic identity and often led to more chances in the future. As Participant 3 said, "They became champions when we played in the regional games..." "Our opponents were male players," a statement that shows how hard and satisfying it is to break gender norms through performance.

Participant 6 also talked about how happy and proud she was to see all the hard work payoff: "I promise you; we're going to win the National SCUAA Championship... That was the best time of my life." The strong feelings that come with these moments show how competition can be a very important way to prove your skills (Csikszentmihalyi, 2020; Vealey & Chase, 2024).

In the same way, Participant 8 said, "We made it to the championship round... We became champions," showing that success was not only about the results but also about the happiness and validation it brought to everyone. These wins boosted the athletes' intrinsic motivation and gave them real proof of their progress, which research has shown is important for staying interested in and healthy in sports (Deci & Ryan, 2021).

Competitive successes were more than just trophies; they became powerful motivators that kept the athletes deeply engaged in softball. Winning championships or breaking gender barriers gave them a strong sense of pride and strengthened their inner drive, fueling their desire to continue playing and eventually coaching.

At the same time, the recognition they received from others acted as an external source of encouragement, affirming their identity and opening doors to new opportunities. This blend of inner passion and outward validation reflects self-determination theory, showing how success in competition can nurture both motivation and long-term commitment to the sport.

Grew in Confidence Through Recognition and Personal Progress

While competitive results were important, personal milestones that showed growth in self-efficacy, skill, and self-recognition were just as important. For instance, Participant 2 talked about how powerful it is to think back on things by saying, "Look at you on the first day. But look at you now, which shows that you have grown slowly and from the inside out". Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy says that making progress in one's own life boosts confidence and affects future behavior and choices.

Participant 1 said, "That return and the chance to go abroad really helped me a lot," which shows how recognition and more responsibilities can make someone feel more purposeful and connected to their identity. Participant 10 also thought about how people recognized her accomplishments: "I was also honored with awards like the Gawad Gintong Kabataan... It's already a huge achievement." This kind of recognition makes athletes feel more competent and encourages them to make a difference outside of sports (Bloom, 2020).

It's important to note that these times of personal pride were often turning points. Participant 4 said, "Becoming a more resilient student-athlete..." "I'd still push myself to do more, even when I was tired," a lot of people, these were not just one-time successes; they were a series of realizations that showed how the sport had changed them.

Ultimately, these personal triumphs highlight These personal triumphs demonstrate that the athletes' journeys were more than just about the medals they earned. They also focused on the development of one's identity, sense of purpose, and personal growth that came with each step. Public or private recognition was very important in boosting their self-esteem and motivating them to keep going, not just in softball but in other areas of their lives as well.

Recognition, whether through awards or personal milestones, carried lasting meaning in the athletes' journeys. For some, it became the spark that kept them in the sport—encouraging them to stay on as coaches and mentors, eager to pass their knowledge to the next generation.

For others, being recognized gave them the courage to step into new opportunities beyond softball, whether pursuing careers abroad or taking on leadership roles in their communities. These stories remind us that recognition was never just about celebrating a single achievement. It shaped future goals, strengthened resilience, and influenced how the athletes imagined their lives beyond the playing field.

Table VI: Long-term Transformative Impact

Theme	Participants	Statements
Developed Lifelong Values, Skills, and Identity Through Softball	Participant 4	“Becoming a more resilient student-athlete.” “Gaining greater self-confidence.” “My discipline improved.” “These victories ultimately led to personal growth and lifelong skills.” “I wasn’t really the type to socialize.” “I gradually learned how to open up more.” “I learned as an athlete, I now try to pass it to the players I’m coaching.” “Even if you’re not the best player, discipline and willingness to learn.”
Developed Lifelong Values, Skills, and Identity Through Softball	Participant 5	“I learned so much during that time—things I can now pass on to my players.” “How to compete, how to enjoy the game, and how to handle challenges.”
Developed Lifelong Values, Skills, and Identity Through Softball	Participant 6	“All my grades were in the line of seven.”
Developed Lifelong Values, Skills, and Identity Through Softball	Participant 7	“God had other plans for me.” “You really felt the effort, the sacrifices.” “So many lessons to be learned.”
Developed Lifelong Values, Skills, and Identity Through Softball	Participant 10	“Some of my most meaningful experiences.” “Even just for the sake of being called a national athlete—it means a lot.” “So many people aspire and try, but not everyone makes it.”
Used Softball as a Platform for Impacting Others and Building a Legacy	Participant 1	“Built connections and relationships with various officials.” “I’ve been able to help many young people in their education.” “I’ve helped kids who wanted to study and play.” “I was able to send all my children to school.” “Now, even if we’re not wealthy, we’re able to live comfortably.” “Help younger my children to raise their own families someday.”
Used Softball as a Platform for Impacting Others and Building a Legacy	Participant 2	“There’s a progress.” “Being able to encourage a lot of students.” “One step at a time.”
Used Softball as a Platform for Impacting Others and Building a Legacy	Participant 3	“When people already recognize me.” “I’ve been here for 10 years already.”
Used Softball as a Platform for Impacting Others and Building a Legacy	Participant 6	“I’ve really seen how the kids improve.” “They now understand the plays, they’ve learned how to pitch.” “They use you as their inspiration.”
Used Softball as a Platform for Impacting Others and Building a Legacy	Participant 7	“We slowly improved year after year.”
Used Softball as a Platform for Impacting Others	Participant 8	“What you do can actually affect their lives.” “I don’t really feel the happiness for myself anymore. I feel it more for the kids.” “What I really want is to coach.” “You can clearly see their improvement.”

and Building a Legacy		
Used Softball as a Platform for Impacting Others and Building a Legacy	Participant 9	“We were carrying the name of the Philippines.” “A lot of people really dream of that. Exactly.”

Participants’ lived experiences showed in table 6 affirms that playing the sport changed them in lasting ways and gave them a role in shaping the lives of others. There were two emerging themes: (1) Developed Lifelong Values, Skills, and Identity Through Softball; and (2) Used Softball as a Platform for Impacting Others and Building a Legacy.

It is also evident from the cross-sectional analysis that all of the participants experience both emerged themes for the Long-term transformative impact of softball in their lives.

Developed Lifelong Values, Skills, and Identity Through Softball

Created values, skills, and a sense of self that will last a lifetime. Softball helped the participants develop lasting personal traits like resilience, discipline, emotional maturity, and confidence. Participants talked about how their experiences shaped them as athletes and as people who can handle the bigger problems in life.

For example, Participant 4 talked about how she had grown, saying, “Becoming a more resilient student-athlete” and “These victories ultimately led to personal growth and lifelong skills.” Moreover, Participant 5 agreed with this, saying that playing in national and international tournaments helped her grow as a person: “I learned how to compete, how to enjoy the game, and how to deal with problems.”

Participants stressed how these lessons went beyond the field. Participant 6 shared a touching story of academic struggle and emotional vulnerability: “All my grades were in the line of seven... “I used to cry a lot in secret,” which shows how softball helped her get back on her feet and become a leader.

Even the best players, like Participant 10, talked about how important it was to them to be part of national-level events: “Even just for the sake of being called a national athlete—it means a lot...” A lot of people want to do it and try, but not everyone does. This shows how closely identity was linked to the honor and duty of representing the country.

Lifelong skills of resilience, discipline, and emotional maturity reached far beyond the softball field. They shaped the way participants built their careers, cared for their families, and contributed to their communities. Resilience gave them the strength to push through academic and professional challenges, while discipline guided their work ethic and leadership. Their identity as athletes became more than a title—it served as a foundation for broader life goals, showing that the lessons learned in sport carried into every corner of their lives.

Used Softball as a Platform for Impacting Others and Building a Legacy

Participants who took part went from being players to mentors and coaches, using their experiences to make a difference in other people’s lives. Their stories show that they feel a strong duty to pass on the discipline, values, and inspiration they got from playing sports.

Participant 1 is a good example of this change evidently from his response “helped kids who wanted to study and play” and “was able to send all [his] children to school” because of the opportunities he got through softball. Participant 1 also added, “Even if we’re not rich, we can live comfortably,” which sums up how the sport affects people of all ages.

In the same way, Participant 8 talked about how he went from being a peer to a mentor: “All of a sudden, I became their coach... I don’t really feel happy for

myself anymore. I feel it more for the kids.” Participant 8 comments show that he has gone from focusing on his success to the success of the group.

Participant 7 said that her job had bigger effects: “What you do can change their lives.” On the other hand, Shortstop said that she affected them: “They see you as their inspiration. They want to keep playing softball”. These statements show how much the participants took their role as role models to heart.

Even younger athletes, like Participant 9, saw their participation in events like the SEA Games as part of a national legacy: “We were carrying the name of the Philippines. A lot of people really want that to happen”. Softball becomes more than just a sport here; it becomes a service and a symbol.

These legacies show how athletes used their experiences and status to give back, building connections that reached far beyond the softball field.

By mentoring younger players, supporting education, and proudly representing the nation, they created circles of trust, inspiration, and opportunity. Their influence was not limited to teammates or peers—it touched families, communities, and future generations. In this way, softball became more than a sport; it became a shared journey and a lasting legacy, one that continues to empower and inspire long after the athletes’ own playing days are over.

Overall, the narratives emphasize that softball's long-term transformative effects went beyond personal development to include a greater sense of social responsibility. The participants understood that the lessons, values, and opportunities they brought to their journeys had the potential to transform the lives of others. They developed into mentors, teachers, and nation-builders in addition to being athletes. Thus, the legacy of softball in their lives is a continuous cycle of growth, contribution, and inspiration, ensuring that the impact of the sport lives on through the people they touch.

Table VII: Legacy-Building

Theme	Participants	Statements
Legacy Through Uplifting Family and Community	Participant 1	“There is a great chance to finish school, especially if you are a softball player.” “I was able to support my children until they completed their education.” “They, too, can do the same to their own lives if they persevere.” “Help you by giving others, and the recognition of the people around you speaks on your behalf.” “They serve as inspiration—not to lose hope even if they come from poverty.”
Legacy Through Uplifting Family and Community	Participant 5	“Help my parents.” “Support my family in Tarlac.” “Hope for my family.” “Ever since I’ve been around.”
Legacy Through Lasting Influence in the Sport	Participant 1	“All the successes we achieved became meaningful examples.” “Proud of what I’ve achieved.”
Legacy Through Lasting Influence in the Sport	Participant 3	“My handling the team that coach used to lead.”
Legacy Through Lasting Influence in the Sport	Participant 5	“Played for Adamson and the national team.”
Legacy Through Lasting Influence in the Sport	Participant 9	“Younger players can replace me.” “Won’t be in the national team forever.”
Legacy Through Lasting Influence in the Sport	Participant 10	“Be a role model for the emerging youth.” “Role model in various sports events.” “Everything comes full circle.”

The findings of this study as demonstrated on table 7 shows how legacy-building among current and former softball players goes beyond personal accomplishments, impacting family development and the sport's survival, thus reflecting broader cultural, educational, and communal values. Legacy Through Uplifting Family and Community and Legacy Through Lasting Influence in the Sport emerged as two interrelated sub-themes.

Legacy Through Uplifting Family and Community

Many softball players viewed their careers to improve the social and economic standing of their families. "There is a significant opportunity to complete education, particularly for softball players," stated Participant 1, highlighting the ways in which participation in sports opens up educational and mobility opportunities. This is in line with recent research showing how sport can promote upward mobility, particularly for underrepresented groups (de Vasconcellos et al., 2020; Bell et al., 2021).

Participants described how helping others was a part of their efforts. Participant 6 expressed the desire to "Assist my parents," while Third Base stated, "Support my family in Tarlac." These answers demonstrate how athletes view their legacy in relation to their family and community, rather than trophies. Participant 1 statement, "I was able to support my children until they completed their education," exemplifies a generational influence and what some researchers call the multiplier effect of athletic performance (Poucher et al., 2020).

Filipino cultural values such as bayanihan (community spirit) and utang na loob (debt of gratitude) are deeply woven into this legacy, indicating that the athlete's achievements are both communal and personal (Aguilar & David, 2020). These motivations reveal a strong collectivist viewpoint, in which the athlete's identity is closely related to societal and familial responsibilities.

Legacy Through Lasting Influence in the Sport

The second theme demonstrates the participants' desire to increase their influence in the softball community through coaching, mentoring, and role

modeling. Participant 3 took pride in "managing the team previously led by the coach," which denotes the upholding of values and expertise. Similarly, the Participant 10 emphasized a dedication to inspiring the next generation of athletes by saying, "Serve as a role model for the youth."

Participants understood that future generations would eventually inherit their contributions to the sport. The pitcher emphasized the importance of humility by saying, "Feet firmly on the ground," while the right fielder stated, "Younger players can supplant me." These viewpoints align with the concept of generativity in sports, wherein seasoned athletes pass on their knowledge, values, and passion to younger athletes (Brown et al., 2019).

There was also a clear correlation between humility and pride in one's achievements. "With each defeat, I've recognized the significance of humility," Participant 7 stated, suggesting that legacy is built not only through victories but also through tenacity and reflection. According to Cunningham et al. (2020), the ambition to "continue learning, not solely in the sport, but also in life," as expressed by the Participant 10, represents a legacy centered on growth, rooted not in past achievements but in continuous personal and community advancement.

Additionally, it was important to want to be known for integrity as well as skill. The Participant 1 highlighted a lasting ethical legacy when he said, "The help you have given to others, along with the acknowledgment from those around you, speaks for itself."

Improving the family/community and having an impact on the sport are not mutually exclusive forms of legacy. Players like Participant 6 and Participant 5 demonstrated how individual can bridge the gap between the public (sport) and private (family) domains. A successful legacy for these softball players is all-encompassing, as evidenced by their dual heritage, which is based on both cultural values and athletic discipline. It affirms their experiences as educators and community developers in addition to their experiences as athletes.

Table VIII: Strengthened Social Commitment

Theme	Participants	Statements
Life Guidance Beyond the Field	Participant 1	“Stay grounded.” “Stay low profile.”
Life Guidance Beyond the Field	Participant 3	“Learn how to respect one another.”
Life Guidance Beyond the Field	Participant 4	“To help others grow and become—especially my players.” “Support and develop my players.” “Understand the game at a whole.”
Life Guidance Beyond the Field	Participant 5	“Dedicated to helping and teaching others.” “I’m the one guiding them.” “Now I’m more open with them.” “How did it work for them?” “There’s no rule that is close to you.” “Being able to help the kids—it already is a huge thing.”
Life Guidance Beyond the Field	Participant 6	“Coach and Tanya also guidance really made a huge difference.” “I was the one who actually experienced how what you do.” “Kids today have very different attitudes.” “Handling players, especially when you’re just starting out, is honestly not easy.” “The challenge really taught me how to handle players better.”
Life Guidance Beyond the Field	Participant 7	“Guide them—in life as well.” “Discipline comes in, along with the determination to teach and become an inspiration to others.”
Life Guidance Beyond the Field	Participant 8	“Kids improving and enjoying, that’s already enough for me.”
Life Guidance Beyond the Field	Participant 10	“Keep learning—not just in the sport, but also in life.”
Empathy and Support	Participant 1	“Pushed me to work even harder.”
Empathy and Support	Participant 2	“Doing very well as a coach.” “Started with zero knowledge.” “They’re going to have a big part on how am I going to be a good coach or a good educator.”
Empathy and Support	Participant 4	“Empathy—for fellow trainers or co-coaches.”
Empathy and Support	Participant 8	“Volunteer and offer your time.” “Importance of respecting one another.” “Respect for each other, respect for the coach.” “Contribute knowledge.” “Sacrifice to make sure your team grows.”
Empathy and Support	Participant 9	“Help my team so that we can win.”
Empathy and Support	Participant 10	“Apply that sense of responsibility, discipline, and focus.” “Role model for other athletes.”

Apparently on table 8 focuses on how playing softball gave the participants a greater sense of social responsibility, which went beyond just winning

games. Two related themes emerged: Life Guidance Beyond the Field and Empathy and Support. Both

show how the participants took their roles as teachers, mentors, and community leaders seriously.

Life Guidance Beyond the Field

Participants' lived experiences showed that they were committed to more than just teaching players how to play; they also mentored young people on issues in their lives. For example, Participant 4 said, "To help others grow and succeed, especially my players," and Participant 7 said, "To mentor them, in life as well." These claims are in line with research on how athletes' identities change, which shows that athletes who are going through a transition often feel a sense of social responsibility and act as role models for younger generations (Brown et al., 2019).

Mentorship is seen as both a duty and a moral duty based on being humble and disciplined. The Participant 10 said, "Keep learning, not just about the game but also about life." The Participant 7 said, "Discipline is important, along with the desire to teach and inspire others." Kram and Ragins (2019) call these kinds of relationships developmental relationships. In these relationships, both the mentor and the mentee learn from each other and change in positive ways.

The coaches did not act like they were in charge; instead, they acted like "the ones guiding them," as Participant 5 put it. A lot of people talked about how important it is to understand how people think today. For example, Participant 6 said, "Children today have very different views," and "Managing players, especially in the beginning, is really hard." These problems forced participants to improve their emotional intelligence and ability to understand other people, which are both important parts of being a good leader (Gould et al., 2021).

Mentorship in softball reflected transformational leadership, where leaders inspire and motivate others to reach their full potential. By guiding players not only in the sport but also in life, participants showed humility, discipline, and vision. Their leadership went beyond teaching drills or strategies—it gave young athletes the confidence to grow, adapt, and believe in themselves. In this way, mentorship was not just about passing on skills; it was about shaping character,

nurturing resilience, and helping players imagine future possibilities both inside and outside the game.

Empathy and Support

Empathy grew not only as a feeling but also as a key part of coaching. Participant 4 said, "Empathy—for fellow trainers or co-coaches," which means working together in a way that builds relationships. Participant 8 also said that "volunteering and offering your time" and "children improving and having fun, that suffices for me," which shows that they were motivated by altruism.

The testimonies back up Newman et al. (2020) study that empathy in coaching leads to more honest and trusting interactions, especially when people are working together. For some of the participants, their problems as players made them more empathetic. The Participant 1 said, "All the problems I had at that time taught me important things," which shows a growth-from-adversity point of view.

Pakikipagkapwa, or "shared identity with others," is a concept in Filipino culture that may help explain this deep empathy and concern for others (Enriquez, 1992; Reyes & Galang, 2020). Participant 2 and other coaches said, "They will greatly affect how well I can coach or teach," giving credit for their growth to their interactions with the players, which creates a dynamic of mutual progress.

Participants stressed values like respect, responsibility, and humility. The Participant 8 said, "Mutual respect and respect for the coach," and Participant 10 talked about how military discipline affected them, "Incorporate that sense of responsibility, discipline, and focus." These are in line with the ideas of servant leadership, which says that the leader's main goal should be to help others (Eva et al., 2019).

The two themes show how people went beyond their athletic identity to take on leadership roles in their communities, which was influenced by both their thoughts and the dynamics of their relationships with others. By becoming coaches and mentors, the

participants were able to redefine their legacy in a way that honored their roots and gave others strength. Participant 2 said, "My care for them feels more real," which means that their social involvement is not just for show, but true. This finding shows that social commitment in sports is not just a coincidence; it is the result of personal challenges, cultural values, and transformative growth. This makes these softball players both beneficiaries and catalysts of change in their communities.

Empathy was not just a personal trait—it became a way of leading that made participants more effective as coaches. By listening closely, understanding deeply, and sharing in the struggles of their players, they built trust and created safe, supportive spaces where athletes could grow.

Their empathy showed in the way they coached: mentoring with compassion, motivating through encouragement, and leading with respect. Real-life moments, such as helping players through academic challenges or standing by them during personal hardships, reveal how empathy shaped their leadership and strengthened their commitment to others.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Softball shaped the lives of former players far beyond athletic performance. Their transition into roles as coaches, trainers, and national athletes reflected deep personal growth, strengthened identity, and expanded opportunities for leadership and community involvement. Despite challenges such as burnout, role strain, and self-doubt, participants demonstrated resilience, discipline, and commitment. Triumphs—including championships, recognition, and representing the country—reinforced their motivation and sense of purpose. Softball became a lifelong pathway that provided stability, education, and a platform to inspire future generations.

The study highlights the sport's enduring influence on personal development, professional trajectories, and legacy-building within the Philippine sports community. The researcher recommends using this study as a foundation for examining how sports, particularly softball, can shape education, leadership,

and community development. The findings and conclusions here may guide future work in sustaining grassroots programs, strengthening athlete well-being, and promoting inclusive participation, while also comparing local practices with international models to create lasting impact.

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