Our Coalition, like any great sports organization, has been built by leaders valuing experience over everything else, enacting a vision to create something bigger than themselves. This week’s Coalition Spotlight features another one of those, Matt Griffin from Sports International Academies.

Originally founded in 1983, Sports International Academies is centered by its role of education and experience through the game of football. Griffin, who became owner of the organization in 2019, believes in curating the perfect learning environment for every young athlete and that begins with their coaches and instructor training.

Since 2011, more than 450 current and former pro coaches and players have served that role. Every instructor goes through background checks and orientation sessions to ensure they adhere to the organizational values established by Griffin.

While COVID-19 forced an entire summer of football camp experiences to be taken away from Griffin, his team of coaches and trainers and thousands of young people, he is determined to innovate and ensure he does what it takes to be back, better than ever, next summer.

That’s the type of grit and resilience we all strive to pass on to young people through the power of sport.

Name
Matt Griffin

Title
CEO

Organization/Sport(s)
Sports International Academies

Location
Nationwide

Who was your favorite team and/or athlete growing up?
As a born-and-raised Pittsburgh fan — Steelers

Who do you attribute your values and perspectives as a sports leader to?
More people than I can count. Mom and Dad are first and foremost, also my extended family, coaches, teachers, friends and former employers. My number one story when
asked this question is my father making me learn to change a tire before being able to get my (driver’s) license. As a young 16-year-old kid, all you want is that license and changing a tire was not something that was high on the priority list to learn. My father taught me and then said ‘do it yourself,’ proceeding to walk away. I was furious, but I stuck with it and changed the tire. Right on cue, I got a flat not more than two months after I got my license. Although it took me a while to say thanks, had he not taught me I’d probably still be in that parking lot waiting on help. My father taught me to slow down and think ahead. If you take the time to prepare, it makes things MUCH easier. Whether it be a flat tire, a job loss, COVID-19 or some other curveball, when you prepare, life will be alright.

How has your job changed most, due to COVID-19, in 2020?
It changed drastically, as did many others in our situation. We run summer football camps for athletes ages 7-18 and every camp was shut down. The best part of what we do is having the ability to help young athletes succeed in life. There is nothing more rewarding than to have someone come back and say thank you. That was sadly taken away this year, but gives you a passion to come back stronger next year. Youth are going to need help and direction now more than ever.

What’s the most challenging aspect of your position as a sports leader?
I have been with Sports International for 17+ years and made the decision to buy it in 2019. It is much different from leading a team to leading a company. Every day is a blessing and an opportunity to learn and get better. We are a family and that is important to me.

Why did you initially join the Coalition?
It is a great initiative that A LOT of people can benefit from. I appreciate the work behind it and what everyone has done to put it together.

What excites you most about the Coalition’s long-term potential?
Employees! Many companies in the field had to lay off the heartbeat of their company and we were not exempt. With the Coalitions help, we are hopeful to be able to rehire these good people back.

Tell us about the most inspiring moment you’re most proud of in your career.
It is not a moment but I would undoubtedly say it is the people in my life and what they have done for me. I was raised the right way and try to treat everyone fairly and with respect. If you do that, it will be returned to you 10fold. There is no way I would be
where I am today without those people in my life. I am most proud of the relationships that I have.

*Finish this sentence — if I weren’t a sports leader, I would be...* an NFL wide receiver.....well, that was the plan when I was 9!