

# The Transfer Portal and Division II Men's Basketball: Greener Grass or a Road to Nowhere?

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## Abstract

Since the introduction of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Transfer Portal in October 2018, the movement of student-athletes has been compared to professional free agency (VanHaaren, 2022; Walsh, 2022), and has garnered significant media attention as high-profile Division I football, and basketball players move from university to university (Kramer, 2023). Often neglected in the conversation is that large numbers of student-athletes at the other levels of the NCAA are also using the transfer portal. A recent report revealed that 32% of Division II student-athletes had transferred to their current university (NCAA 2020). It has been argued that from a student-athlete's welfare perspective, there should be real concern that there is "no mandatory orientation session for prospective transfer portal applicants that highlights the pros and cons of their decision, and there are few guardrails that protect student-athletes from making impulsive decisions," (Reese, 2023, p.1). In that vein, it is essential that research be conducted to determine the outcomes for student-athletes after they choose to enter the Transfer Portal to help provide data for other student-athletes who might consider this course of action in the future.

It is well documented that recruiting is essential for success in collegiate athletics, and perhaps best summarized by former Director of Athletics at Baylor University, Ian McCaw, when he said that "recruiting prospective college athletes is the lifeblood of every college athletics program and is a differentiator between programs that thrive and those that fall short" (2014, p.1). In fact, research has shown that a transfer student generally makes a more immediate on-court impact than a freshman in Division I basketball (Pifer et al., 2021), so it should be no surprise that coaches will turn to the Transfer Portal to fill immediate needs on their teams. Particularly important to consider is the "win now" attitude that pervades society, and specifically college athletics, and how that can drive recruiting priorities for coaches who want to excel or avoid termination.

While there are many criteria to weigh for student-athletes who are considering a transfer (Kramer, 2023), opportunity to play is certainly one of them. In a study of Division I football players, that serves as a basis for this research, Dohrn and Lopez (2022) found that players tended to transfer to a lower level of football (more were transferring out of the Power Five Conferences (59%) than in (31%)), but the players afforded themselves a chance to move up the depth chart and to achieve higher levels of individual performance, including passing completions, attempts, yards thrown and touchdowns.

This research examined the outcomes of Division II basketball players that entered the Transfer Portal following the 2022-23 season. Of the 923 players, 97 (10.5%) transferred up to Division I, with six matriculating to Power Five Conference universities. Whereas 452 (49%) of the Division II basketball players who entered the Transfer Portal failed to find a new team. The remaining

374 basketball players either stayed in Division II (23.5%) or transferred to lower levels including the NAIA (7.2%), NJCAA (5.5%), NCAA Division III (3%), or went to universities in Canada (0.7%). We will present the measurable outcomes for those who moved to Division I, as compared to an equal sized sample of players who transferred but remained in Division II, including games played, playing time, points per game and rebounds per game. Information of this type will prove to be valuable for student-athletes considering entering the Transfer Portal.