

'It's Going to be Colder Than San Diego': Pre-Transition Experiences of American Post-Graduate Athletes at One British University

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Abstract

Globalization is a defining attribute of twenty-first century life, with athlete migration a visible element of the sport-globalization nexus (Maguire, 1994). At the intercollegiate level, athlete migration has traditionally flowed in one direction, to the United States (NCAA, 2022). However, a new migration pattern of intercollegiate athletes has emerged in recent years. Numerous British universities have begun strategically recruiting American post-graduate student-athletes to compete in a variety of sports. While extensive research has profiled the migration of professional athletes across international boundaries (see Rojo et al, 2022) and foreign athletes to American universities (Kirk & Weaver, 2019; Parrish et al, 2020; Love & Kim, 2011), minimal research has examined the experiences of American college athletes who migrate internationally. One framework used to examine international athlete migration is Ryba et al.'s (2016) cultural transition model (CTM). CTM is comprised of three phases (pre-transition, acute cultural adaptation, sociocultural adaptation) that profile the developmental tracks migrant athletes experience in a new culture. The purpose of this study was to apply the CTM to explore the experiences of American post-graduate student-athletes at one British University.

Twenty Americans playing at one British university participated in a longitudinal study of sociocultural adaptation. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and in-person throughout the 2022-23 academic year. Interview data were recorded, transcribed, and interpreted using Braun and Clark's (2006) process of thematic analysis. This presentation reports the findings from the interviews conducted during the pre-transition phase of the CTM. The focus of this presentation is to expand the understanding CTM's pre-transition phase for American migrant athletes.

Results uncovered several distinct elements of the pre-transition phase. Initially, most of the participants discovered the migration opportunity through peer connections or a third-party broker. They were motivated to migrate primarily due to career goals rather than sporting ones. During their pre-transition phase, many collected information on their sport, academic major, and/or British culture—in some cases this research was extensive. Emotionally, participants described themselves as “nervously excited.” Much of the nervousness was related to academics while the excitement was often linked to cultural exchange. Socially, athletes spent time connecting with future coaches and teammates while physically training for uncertain competitive seasons. In addition, this phase was full of bureaucratic and practical procedures.

These results build on previous work using CTM (Ryba, et al. 2016; Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2019; Schroeder & Killick, 2023). Consistent with previous literature, participants used pre-transition to collect knowledge about the migration and to psychosocially prepare themselves for it. However, these American migrants were unique in three ways. First, they added physical preparation to the phase. Second, they were less concerned about disengagement from their home cultures. Third, their migrations were facilitated by third parties. These findings can be used to i) inform recruitment personnel about the tasks and challenges faced by migrant athletes during

pre-transition, ii) develop resources to facilitate more effective pre-transition, and iii) support future migrants to lessen the socioemotional impact of the pre-transition phase.