

Recruiting in a new era: A conceptual college choice analysis of Division I men's basketball athletes

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Abstract

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Topic Significance

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has drastically transformed the collegiate athletic model by creating the NCAA Transfer Portal, the inclusion of the one-time transfer exception for all sports, and implementing interim name, image, and likeness (NIL) legislation within the last five years. These changes have altered the recruiting landscape in Division I men's college basketball, as student-athletes are now able to transfer and compete immediately while also considering sizable financial payouts for their NIL. Where to attend college has never been more fraught with multi-criteria-based decisions. Consequently, prior college choice research findings are no longer wholly applicable in the current Division I recruiting environment, particularly in men's basketball. This study aims to achieve three primary methodological and practical objectives to expand the breadth of literature on this topic: i) introduce a new college choice scale that incorporates the presence of NIL-related factors in the institutional selection process; ii) determine which college choice factors are most influential to Division I men's basketball athletes; and iii) statistically compare the most influential college choice criteria between college athletes who attend "Power Six" institutions and all other Division I men's basketball athletes to determine if significant differences exist. By accomplishing these goals, this study can assist men's basketball programs and its players in better understanding how NIL and other salient factors may influence decisions to attend a particular institution. In doing so, programs can enhance their communications and resource allocation processes, thereby increasing their efficacy in meeting the needs of prospective college athletes.

Review of Literature

Coaches are now required to alter their approach to recruitment and roster construction to compete at the highest levels. Why is recruiting so important in college athletics? Ian McCaw (2014, p. 1), the former Director of Athletics at Baylor University, proclaimed that "recruiting prospective student-athletes is the lifeblood of every intercollegiate athletics program and is a differentiator between programs that thrive and those that fall short." This statement is supported by studies conducted by Caro (2012) in football and Treme and Burrus (2015) in basketball. Both studies linked the ability of institutions to recruit effectively having a causal relationship to wins. Simply put, greater talent translates into greater on-the-court/field success.

Effective recruiting is crucially important to the athletic success of college programs. It is imperative to make the connection between college-choice factors, recruiting, and a successful college athletic department. Morton (2019) examined how investing in two significant college

choice factors, athletic facilities (Judson et al., 2004) and coaches (Vermillion, 2010; Vermillion & Spears, 2012), can lead to increased organizational effectiveness (winning) of college athletic programs. The results of his study provide an example of how an increased investment in particular college-choice factors can predict greater organizational effectiveness by investing in the areas that will assist in recruiting student-athletes to commit to an institution. Consequently, if it was determined that another college-choice factor, such as academic support services, was the greatest factor for student-athletes in choosing their future institution, a shrewd move by athletic administrators would be to invest more heavily in that area. Not only does college-choice guide athletic administrators on how to effectively allocate resources, but it also provides coaches with information to attract athletic talent more effectively and efficiently. Together, the athletic programs will increase their efficacy in recruiting the best talent available to their institutions, thereby increasing overall organizational effectiveness.