

An Examination of NCAA Transfer Portal and Division I Women's Basketball Players Over Four Years

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Abstract

The NCAA transfer portal, an online database originally put into place in 2018, is a tool to help track student-athletes movement, making it easier to keep track of for college administrators (Benson et al., 2022). It also works in student-athletes' favor, giving them more control over their athletic careers by allowing them to transfer to different programs, with certain regulations and stipulations in place (Saunders, 2022). Five years from its inception, current transfer portal activity could safely be described as 'rampant' in comparison to its beginning. While the transfer portal allowed for easier mobility between schools, a 2021 rule change made it even more accessible by allowing athletes to transfer and immediately compete as opposed to previously having to sit out for a season (Saunders, 2022). Another rule change in 2021, Name, Image, and Likeness allowed athletes to profit on their successes. On top of this, the COVID-19 pandemic granted many athletes an extra year of eligibility (Saunders, 2022), prompting many to use this extra year to move to a different university. There has been a significant shift in college athletic transfers at the Division I level since 2018 (Homan, 2021), leading to recent inquiry into the phenomenon.

Little to no research has been conducted or published in regard to transfers in women's college basketball. This is interesting, as women's basketball acts as a revenue-generating sport in most schools, whereas most research aligns with the other two revenue-generating sports of basketball and football (Dohrn & Lopez, 2022; Pifer et al., 2021). For example, past research on college football found that 69% of athletes in the transfer portal were Quarterbacks (Dohrn & Lopez, 2022). Furthermore, Pifer et al. (2021) found male basketball athletes are more likely to go to school in-state as opposed to leaving their home state. These few studies shed light on the variables being examined in men's basketball and football, but exploration in women's college basketball must be explored. Thus, this study aims to examine the transfer patterns of women basketball players.

To best examine the transfer patterns of women's college basketball, data from the transfer portal was collected. This included all transfers from 2020 through 2024, the transfer portal provides information on the athlete's name, transfer year, position, original school (transfer from), and destination school (when applicable). The transfer portal included 3,200 women's basketball players. From here, the research team also collected the following variables: hometown (and state), division and conference (both transfer from and at destination school), win percentage of transfer year (and win percentage of new school), statistics (both transfer from and at destination school), and distances of hometown from original and destination

schools. We collected this information from the school's athletic webpages and used Google Maps for distances from hometown to school(s). Utilizing the data collected, the following research questions were investigated: 1) does year in school impact transfer patterns?, 2) what positions are most likely to transfer?, 3) are athletes more successful at their new institutions (personally and team)?, 4) what are the patterns of athletes transferring between conferences?, 5) are athletes more likely to transfer closer to home?

The aims of this research surround finding a better understanding of player mobility within Division I women's college basketball. While this study is not investigating the personal motivations to transfer, the data will help the field better understand players' movement patterns across multiple variables. This data could be used by women's college basketball players to better understand the factors in transferring, along with assisting coaches in best targeting athletes from conferences/schools that assist their winning chances. Lastly, this data could be used by NCAA leadership to analyze the impacts of the transfer rules and how they have impacted women's college basketball.