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Career Readiness in Division I Football Players

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Honors Project

Submitted to the University Honors Program at Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with University Honors.

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Introduction

This study sought to find a relationship between Division I football players and their readiness for a career after their time as a student-athlete comes to an end. There are several athletes that will not make it past the collegiate level, and those that do make it have an average career of less than five years. This makes it highly important for these student-athletes to prepare for a career in preparation for when their time in sport is over. Students that take advantage of the services that are offered by the institution they attend are more likely to feel prepared than those who do not use those services.

There are several reasons why a football player may be more or less prepared for a career after their time in football is over compared to their peers. One major thing that athletes often do not consider to be something that may impede their chance to continue on their path of sport is injured. Through the study conducted by Arvinen-Barrow, Hurley, and Ruiz, they showed that many players are significantly influenced psychologically when an injury occurs (2017). This then means that these players are not typically focused on the positive things or what they could do later on in their life, because they are focused on making it back to their sport.

Blinde and Greendorfer also bring up a very important point, and that is that when athletes retire, they are not at the age of other people who retire (1985). So, if a retired athlete wants to go into a career now, they are behind their counterparts who may have started out of high school or directly after finishing a college degree. Then, they also would be far younger than the average retired person, because athlete's do not have the typical retirement age of 65, because if an athlete hits 40 years old in sport, it is surprising.

Then, there is the idea of a voluntary versus involuntary retirement, where if an athlete is able to choose when they retire, because it was foreseen, they will be more likely to have a plan for when their time in sport is over (Erpic, Wylleman, & Zupancic, 2004). Athletes that are either forced to leave or have unforeseen circumstances tend to not have a plan for when they are done, because they had not thought about that time coming when it did (Erpic et al., 2004). With this, it tends to be a much more difficult transition than it may have been otherwise.

The purpose of this paper is to see how prepared Division I football players are for a career besides football, when their time in football comes to an end. This is an important topic, because many times, people will look at athlete, and believe that because they may have a scholarship or just because they are attending school that they will be fully prepared to go into a career after their time in football winds down, whether that be after college or after a professional career in the sport. Also, having a plan for a career is important for anyone, and oftentimes athletes are asked to set goals on that career plan aside, so then they can pay more attention to their sport, in this case, football.

To help determine Division I football players career readiness, we first decided to ask them a few basic questions surrounding their schooling so far, including GPA, number of credit hours taken during season, what school they attend, and what their major is. This was to see if there was anything vastly different between players at different schools. Then, we looked at what they are also involved in on campus, how they feel their resume amounts to their peers, what career services are provided at their institution, have they used any of these services and about how many times, do they believe these service were useful in helping them prepare for a career after sport, what are their career aspirations, what have they done as an undergraduate to prepare for that career, what steps do they need to take in order to achieve that aspiration, do they have a

plan for when their time in football is over, and if they do, what is it or if they do not, would a plan be beneficial?

These questions were created to help gauge whether or not these student-athletes have thought about their time after football is over, because that is not always the case. For students who do have career aspirations, we were able to look at what that looks like, and for those who may be uncertain, we hope that they recognize and prepare for a possible career after sport.

Methods

This study was a survey distributed to twenty, Division I Football programs across the country during the spring of 2019. It was sent to two teams in each of the ten conferences. In order to get as many participants as possible, this survey was able to be distributed by the person of contact for the football program to anyone on the football roster for these twenty schools. The link to the survey was sent in an email, so then any athlete who was sent the email by the person of contact for football would easily be able to access the survey. The respondents that were willing to participate indicated their consent by clicking “I agree,” after reading the statement describing the purpose of this study.

The data was collected using Qualtrics Online Survey Software. The survey began by asking basic information regarding their education, such as their GPA, major, number of credit hours, and what school they attend. Then, the survey went into questions asking about what services their institution offers for their student-athletes, whether or not they use the services, their perceived usefulness of those services, their perception of how their resume amounts to that of their peers, and other questions regarding career aspirations and preparedness.

Results

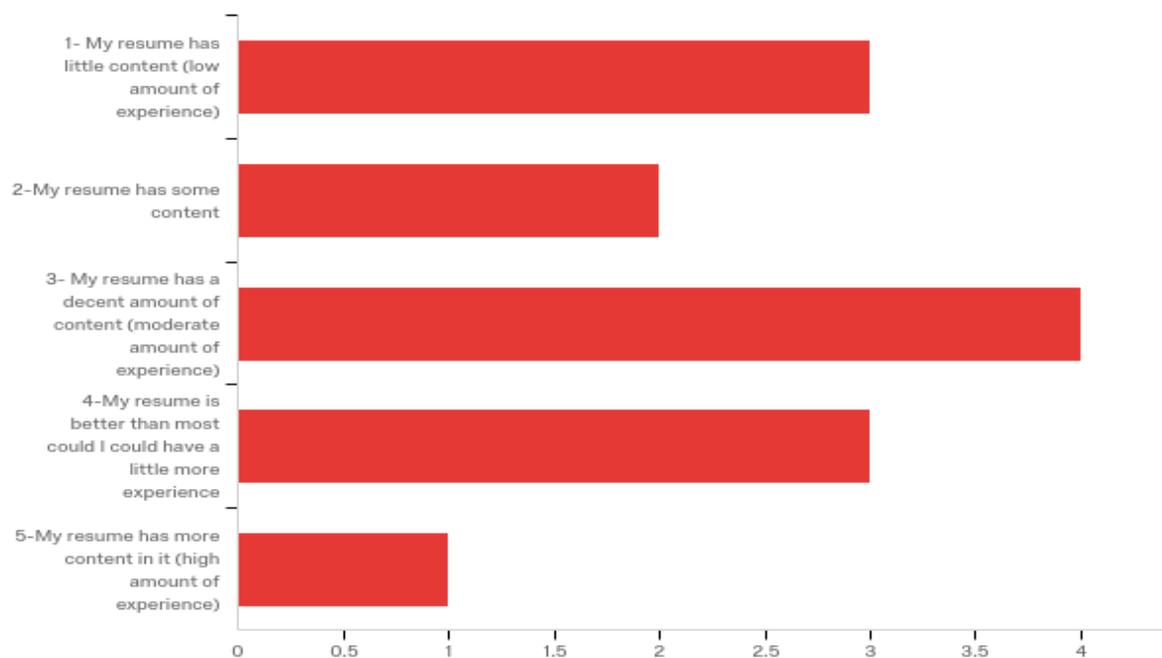
Thirteen surveys were completed in total between Bowling Green State University and the University of Toledo's combined one hundred and sixty-three football players. This gives a response rate of 7.96%. This happened, because we had direct access to the emails for these two teams, whereas we had to try and go through the person of contact for the football team for all of the remaining eighteen universities.

First, looking at the majors of the football players who completed the survey, we found that 76.9% of the participants were either in Sport Management or in a business related field, the other participants were in majors such as Apparel Merchandising and Product Development, Theatre, and Exercise Science. Eight of the thirteen participants took between 15-18 credit hours while in season. No one took above eighteen credit hours and none took below twelve hours, because they need to remain NCAA eligible.

Just over half of the athletes had a cumulative GPA between 3.26-3.75, while three players had above a 3.75, and three players had below a 3.26 GPA. This is important to look at, because to remain compliant with the NCAA, athletes must have above a 2.3 GPA to remain eligible to participate, as well as, to keep scholarships.

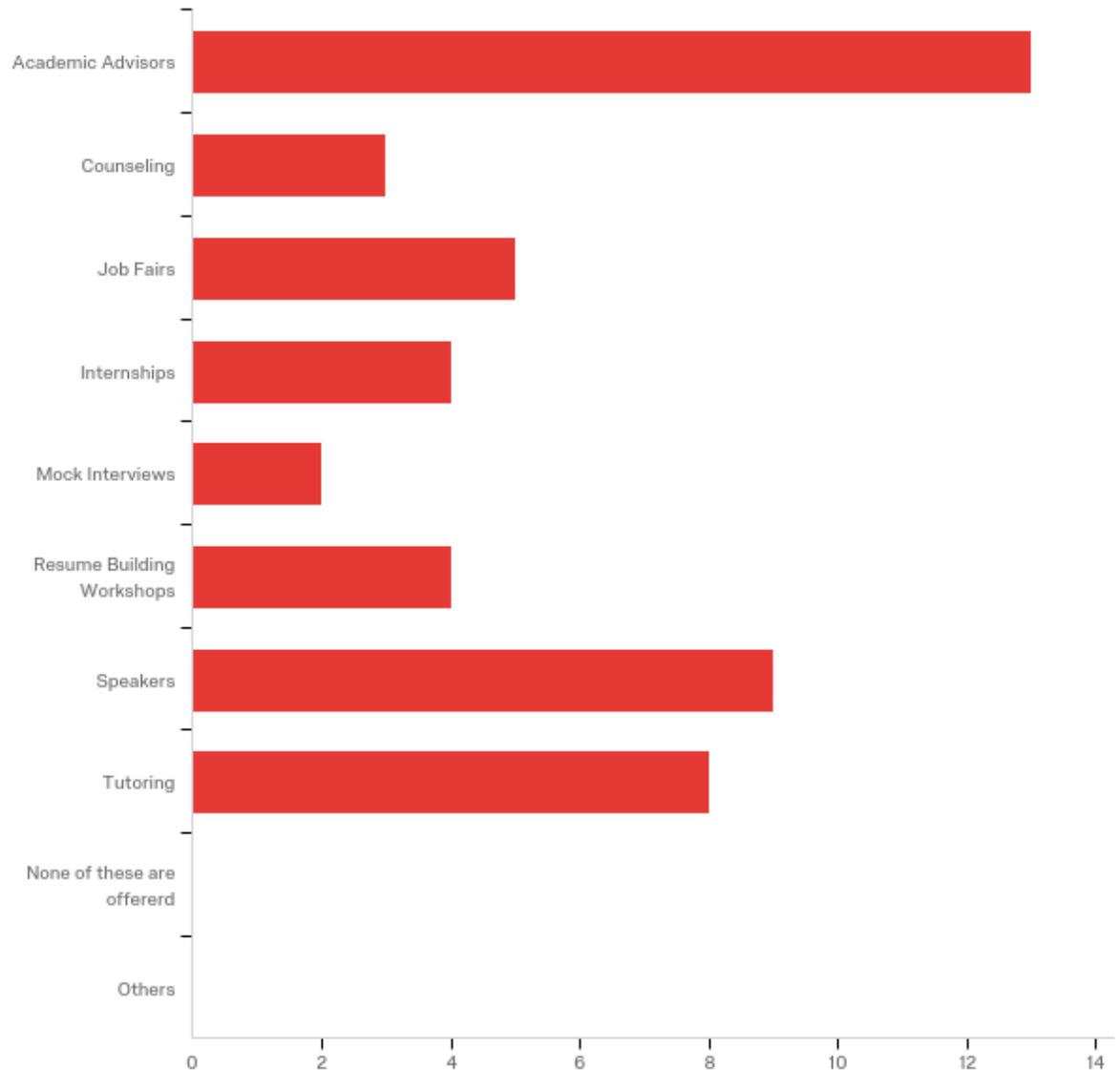
Then, we looked at how other involvement on campus may help not only a player's resume, but also may be geared toward what they want to do when their time in football comes to an end. Out of the thirteen participants, only three stated that they have not participated or been a part of any other organizations on their campus, the other ten mentioned one or more things that they had been a part of. Two participants said that they were a part of SMA or the Sport Management Alliance, which is focused on helping students primarily in Sport Management build connections, as well as, give them opportunities and experiences to help them after college is over. There were also two participants who are a part of their Black Student

Union on campus. There was also involvement in We Are 1 Team (WAIT), Screech Team (athletic marketing), RallyCap Sports, Bike for Tikes, Vanguard, volunteer work, and fraternity involvement between the remaining participants. Seeing that a majority of the football players who completed this survey were or are involved with other organizations on their campus is highly important to keep their experience a positive one. This goes along with what Kleiber, Greendorfer, Blinde, and Samdahl talked about from exiting a collegiate sport (1987). Those who have a more positive exit, whether they were just involved in football or other things on campus as well, tend to be better prepared than those who have a more negative exit to college and football (Kleiber, 1987).



It was then decided to ask how each of the participants thought that their resume amounts to that of their peers. Nine participants thought their resume had a decent amount of content (a moderate amount of experience), some content, or a low amount of content (little experience).

This is often due to football players having packed schedules where they do not have enough time to go get experiences such as internships and jobs.



A way to help build resumes and experience to become career is by taking advantage of services offered on campus, whether to all students or just to athletes. The responses we received were quite puzzling, because all the responses came from two schools yet there were varying numbers as far as who thought what services were offered. This means that certain services are

pushed for and more advocated for than others, though some of these services may be more beneficial depending on the person's needs. Mock interviews were the service that the fewest number of participants said were a career service provided for athletes by the university. However, all participants said that they had academic advisors available to them, and eight or more said that they had counseling, job fairs, internships, resume building workshops, speakers, and tutoring.

Even though there were people who knew such services were offered, at least one or more people who knew the service was offered did not use it. However, everyone used academic advising at some point. This is most likely because teams and often schools require athletes to meet with an academic advisor a certain amount of times to make sure they are still on track for their trajected graduation time, they are still into the major(s)/minor(s) they selected, and that their grades are where they should be for their specific program and to remain NCAA eligible.

Out of the services each player indicated as one they knew about or used, they used many of them. Two said that they used at least one of these services daily, two said weekly, while several others said that they used them often or that they used them at least once each and others talked about some of these services being required so they have to use them.

We asked the participants "do you believe these services were useful in preparing you for your career after sport?" Nine participants said it useful or at least useful to a point. One of the biggest things that was surprising was that the services were helpful during their time in school, "but very little adds to our resume/gives us necessary experience for real world jobs."

We then asked what each participant's career aspirations are to then gauge their answer to "what have you done as an undergraduate to prepare for that career?" Out of the thirteen

participants, only one said that they were undecided as far as what they want to do after their time in football is over, so that participant said they had not really done anything to prepare, because they do not have a specific career to prepare for. Networking/meeting with organizations was the biggest similarity between the responses to how they were preparing for their potential career, and they were not all pursuing the same career, with one person looking at sports writing and analysis and the other two wanting to go into marketing. One participant wants to become a Certified Public Accountant, and so they have taken classes focusing on that, and they have looked into graduate programs so they can meet the required number of hours to get certified. Other participants are looking into sales, front office jobs, fashion, athletic director, team leader in corporate design and community relations, coaching football, doctor of osteopathy, and theatre.

Many participants mentioned taking career specific classes, but they also mentioned that it is difficult to do much besides that due to their class and practice schedule. However, some programs, like the Sport Management program, require their students to do internships to graduate, which a participant mentioned will help to hopefully get them into a position in the front office of a sports organization. By having these required internships, even athletes with intense schedules, are able to get experience to put on a resume and that helps towards their career goals.

Then, participants were asked “what steps do you need to take in order to achieve that aspiration?” Many answers were as expected, such as pass classes with good grades, look at/go to graduate school, keep working, and take internships when possible. There was one answer that very much stood out though, and it was “stop playing football.” While all other participants were

saying they really just needed to well in school and try to get experience where they are able to, this person thinks that the way to attain that goal is to be done with the sport that this research is centered around. This answer may be because there is a lack of opportunities such as internships for athletics, because of the aforementioned busy schedules.

All but one participant said that they have a plan set up for when their time in football is over. The most detailed response was that one participant said they “have interviewed with various companies,” and as graduation gets closer the search for positions will get narrower. So, it is good that everyone who said they had a specific career aspiration for after football seem to have a plan to achieve that aspiration. The only person who responded they do not have a plan in mind is the participant who, at the time of the survey, was undecided in what career they wanted to pursue after football comes to an end.

Finally, they were asked about their plan or if they had not created a plan yet, do they believe it would be beneficial to have one? Two participants are hoping to play for as long as their eligibility and their institution allows, and then their plan will vary based on that time of graduation. Two mentioned getting internship opportunities, so they could gain experience, and then possibly apply to their place of internship. All other participants also have goals to reach those career aspirations when they are done with football, including interviews, graduate school, taking over a family business, have career opportunities in different states, medical school, and residencies.

Discussion

This study had several limitations, the largest of which is the fact that we were unable to directly email players on eighteen of the twenty teams we were trying to collect

information from. Since we were unable to directly send the survey to several players, this survey ended up not getting as many responses, causing a lack of qualitative and quantitative data. Also, because we were trying to go through a person of contact for the football teams, they may not send the survey out to their players if they feel their university may not be reflected in the best light, because they may not offer as many services as other universities or their players may not think highly of their education at their institution.

Another limitation of this survey was that participants knew what this survey was about, so they could choose to disclose this information. Participants may have saw the title and thought that they had ideas as far as their career readiness whereas non-participants may have seen the words “career readiness” and thought that they were not ready for their time after football.

Then, looking at former research helps analyze our results. Though we looked at career readiness, it ties into coping, which is talked about by Grove, Lavalley, and Gordon (1997). Athletes who have a more positive coping method when coming out of sport are better off than those who turn to drinking, gambling, drugs, etc. (Grove et al., 1997). By the athletes in this study having used services offered, taking classes, and building a plan to achieve their career, they have found that positive way to cope with the fact of leaving sport (Grove et al., 1997).

Klieber et al. also talked a lot about how it is not even always just the sport that these athletes may have a hard time parting from, but also factors like the atmosphere that was created and the friendships that came with it (1987). In this study, though not everyone knew exactly what they wanted to do yet, each of them had a plan to keep moving toward their goal/aspirations, such as applying for jobs and internships, networking, and even just simple steps that they themselves want to achieve. By having this set up prior to their exit from sport, it

makes that transition easier, because hopefully those friends and atmosphere are supportive, and thus they will hopefully not have as difficult a time parting.

Lavallee has an emphasis on sports psychologists helping athletes on that transition out of sport into the next phase of their life (2005). This research is similar in the fact that while Lavallee is encouraging psychology, we were asking about student services primarily pertaining to academics (2005). Student-athletes who are offered these services have a greater chance of success when transitioning out of sport, because through academic advisors, tutoring, job fairs, etc. they will have a great background for when they are done.

There need to be more studies done on career readiness in football players, but also in other collegiate and even professional sports as well. By doing this, primarily colleges and universities will be better able to figure out what needs their athletes have off the field of competition. Also, if there were more studies like this one, then there could be a correlation conducted instead of a summary analysis of information.

This is also important, because people may often disregard the effects the transition out of sport may have on an athlete. Even though the services listed in this survey may be offered at their schools, such as internship opportunities, it is important to recognize they may not always be able to take advantage of that because of their participation in sport. By showing people who work with student-athletes this, they may realize that this is more than a game and that they need to make sure their athletes are given opportunities that other students have. This is necessary, because otherwise these student-athletes will be behind compared to those peers.

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