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WHAT EFFECT DO ATHLETIC FACILITIES HAVE ON RECRUITMENT OF DIVISION I ATHLETES?

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WHAT EFFECT DO ATHLETIC FACILITIES HAVE ON RECRUITMENT OF DIVISION I
ATHLETES?

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Master's Project

Submitted to the School of Human Movement, Sport, and Leisure Studies
Bowling Green State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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In
Sport Administration

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Table of Contents

- Introduction.....3-5
- Literature Review.....6-21
- Hypothesis.....21-22
- Methods.....22-23
- Results.....23-24
- Discussion.....24-25
- Conclusion.....25-26
- References.....27
- Appendix.....28

Introduction

Elite athlete recruitment is the lifeblood of collegiate athletics. Recruiting elite athletes to come and play for your university is paramount in the eventual success of the athletic department and in increasing overall revenue to the school. Studies have shown that the more successful an athletic team is (specifically football and basketball) the greater the number of overall student application numbers the following year. This is attributed to the desire of prospective students to be a part of a winning culture and university. This fact is a huge motivation for athletic directors to push a winning culture onto their coaches and programs. This in turn puts immense pressure on coaches to recruit elite talent in order to facilitate a winning team. According to (Schneider, 2012, p. 2) the ability to understand what factors the student-athlete looks for when choosing a university to play for is crucial for the coach to understand in order to attract better recruits. In today's sporting culture the biggest challenge for collegiate coaches is on the recruiting trail during the off-season.

The transformation of collegiate athletics over the past 30 years into a multi-billion dollar business has changed the focus of athletic departments across the nation. Athletic administrators have realized that by creating winning teams it is not only good for their athletic departments, but it also affects the entire university. The concept of recruiting and knowing what to show potential student-athletes on their campus tours has been troublesome for some coaches across the nation. They have to decide what facilities they include on the tour, the playing/practicing surface, locker room, athletic training room, lounge, athletic support services office or other academic buildings on campus. For example, if the locker room the athlete is going to be using is in disrepair and not a nice facility, the coach might briefly show it on the tour or just skip it

altogether. I know here at BGSU our athletic support services on campus are far away from the athletic complex as well as small and inadequate for the amount of athletes they serve. When coaches bring prospective athletes on a tour of the BGSU campus they skip the athletic support services office altogether because it's not impressive and wouldn't sway a recruit to come here. I believe the importance of having attractive athletic facilities has more influence on potential student-athletes than what most people think. Of course there are more influential factors that play a significant part in the decision making process for these young athletes. For example, the personality and demeanor of the head coach plays a significant role, as well as the amount of financial aid the student will receive if they sign with a certain university. I want to examine the college choice decision making process by looking at a select group of student-athletes and figuring out how they chose their respective institutions.

There has been more research done on college choice factors for normal students than student-athletes, hence where my topic originated from. I want to look specifically at athletes for this study because the recruiting world is so complex, and I think the results could be beneficial to coaches, recruiters and athletic directors alike. There have been a few recent studies done that looked at college choice factors for student-athletes already enrolled in universities and playing their respective sports. The responses have varied depending on what university the athletes attend. For example, in 2012 Schneider conducted a study using 19 Division I hockey players. The top responses as to why they chose their particular institution was the perceived opportunity to play immediately, athletic-related financial aid, perceived future professional sporting opportunities, school's sports traditions and the location of the institution. Interestingly, the athletic facilities and athletic training facilities finished in a tie for sixth most influential college choice factor out of the 24 factors listed. In another, Letawsky (2003) conducted a study on 135

first-year student-athletes enrolled at a large, public, four-year institution. The top five factors most influential in choosing a college included: degree-program options, head coach, academic support services on campus, type of community in which the campus is located and the school's sports traditions. There are other useful studies that examine collegiate athletes and their college choice factors that I will examine later in the literature review.

Over the past twenty years championship teams in football and basketball have led to increases in undergraduate admission applications for the years following the championship (Toma and Cross, 1998), this theory is called the "Flutie Factor". For decades the media has used the term Flutie Factor to describe how universities have an increase in overall applicants and booster donations following a championship year or when one of their football players wins the Heisman Trophy. This phenomenon is due to the fact that when the university's football or basketball teams are successful, the institution's name gets media attention and therefore potential student's attention as well. High school seniors want to be a part of a winning culture/institution so when the athletic teams are winning we tend to see a dramatic increase in applicants the following year. This in turn has caused athletic departments to put a high premium on recruiting the best possible athletes they can in order to not only have successful teams but increase revenue to the institution as well.

Based on a review of related literature, the following research questions were created to investigate the top college choice factors for Division I athletes.

[RQ1] What are the most influential college choice factors in the selection process of NCAA Division I student-athletes?

[RQ2] What effect do the facilities have on the recruitment of NCAA Division I student-athletes?

[RQ3] Is there a significant difference between male's and female's top five college choice factors?

[RQ4] Is there a significant difference between the level of school and athlete's rank of facilities?

Study #1

Canale, J. R., Dunlap, L., Brin, M., & Donahue, T. (1996). The relative importance of various college characteristics to students in influencing their choice of a college. *College Student Journal*, 30, 214-216.

This study investigates the relative importance of certain college characteristics in high school seniors' and juniors' selection of a prospective college. With the growing number of programs and options for college students, universities have had to revamp their program offerings and the overall appearance of the campus in order to attract more students. This specific study was conducted over a two year period in the Hudson Valley region of New York State and the sample size included 434 seniors and 109 juniors from local high schools. The descriptive survey that was administered was designed by certain members of the Marist College psychology department. In addition to asking a number of demographic questions, the one page survey required students to rate certain college characteristics as to whether they were "very important", "somewhat important" or "not important" to them in choosing a college. The survey included college choice factors like: academic reputation, area of study available, cost, excellent teachers, large/small student population, sports/extracurricular programs, teacher availability outside of class and the distance from home. Facilities were not included in this survey as the researchers were examining the population from a more academic basis.

The top five characteristics in descending order were: Excellent teachers, areas of study available, cost, teacher's availability outside of class and the academic reputation of the university. I find it interesting that two of the four college characteristics rated most often as very important had to do with teacher attributes. Apparently, to this sample of high school students the quality of the professors at their future university of choice is very important. Addressing these factors can become troublesome for some universities that rely on adjunct professors or graduate students to teach undergraduate courses, making it more difficult to ensure quality control both in terms of teacher excellence and availability. The overall cost of the university was ranked third overall and shows just how important it is to prospective college students. We see that today with how important athletic scholarships are to prospective athletic recruits. Financial aid ranks in the top three reasons recruits choose one university over another. One major strength of this study was the sample size (543) and the time frame in which data was collected (2 years). By collecting data over 2 years they were able to look at responses by two groups of juniors and seniors which makes their data set even more comprehensive. One major weakness of this study is that it only represents high school students from the New York state area. A more comprehensive study should be done that includes high schools from every region of the U.S.

Study #2

Cooper, C. G., Huffman, L., Weight, E. (2011). Encouraging "best fit" principles: Investigating college choice factors of student-athletes in NCAA Division I, II and III men's wrestling. *Theories & Applications the International Edition*, 1, 98-112.

This study examined the college choice factors of NCAA Divisions I, II and III wrestling student-athletes. The Student-Athlete College-Choice Profile (SACCP) was used as a template

to create the instrument for research. It included 50 individual college choice factors to measure the degree of influence that each of the college choice factors had on the student-athlete's decision to attend a particular institution. A sample of 779 student-athletes was used and the divisional representation was comprised primarily of Division I (444) and Division III (277) wrestlers, with a limited Division II response (58). The results show that these particular athletes put a high significance on academics, the top five college choice factors in descending order were: total academic value of the university's degree, degree programs and academic courses offered, academic reputation of the university, personality of the coaching staff and the perceived opportunity to compete in an NCAA Championship event. Interestingly, the "quality of academic facilities" came in 12th out of 50 and "quality of athletic facilities" came in 16th out of 50. This shows that the condition of the facilities were moderately important to the wrestlers surveyed. The "amount of financial aid offered" came in 18th out of 50 which was surprising to me because in the majority of other studies financial aid ranked in the top five most important college choice factors. The lowest ranked college choice factors in descending order were: Influence from high school teammates, media exposure provided to team, recruiting materials from the athletic department, desire to attend a university away from home and the general climate at the university.

A strength of this study was the sample size of 779 student-athletes across all three NCAA Divisions. This sample created a very good data set that we can draw conclusions from. A major limitation to this study is the sport specific emphasis, which is reflective only of men's wrestling. As such, the individual college choice factor findings cannot be directly applied to other "nonrevenue" or "revenue" sports. Future research should focus on more than one "revenue" or "nonrevenue" sports in order to create a study that isn't so specific to one sport.

Study #3

Galotti, K. M., & Mark, M. C. (1994). How do high school students structure an important life decision? A short-term longitudinal study of the college decision-making process. *Research in Higher Education*, 35, 589-607.

This study outlines the processes used by high school students when they make the important life decision about where to attend college. Over the course of a year, 322 college-bound high school students (88 males, 234 females) participated in up to three survey sessions in which they described their thinking about college decisions. The students came from 18 suburban and rural public high schools in southeastern Minnesota. During their survey sessions, students were asked to list the factors they were using in making decisions about college (i.e. cost, location, program offerings, quality of university). Then in the second column students assigned each factor an importance weighing on an integer scale of zero to ten with ten being the highest. The top five factors that scored the highest, in descending order were: Majors offered, cost, size of school, location and campus atmosphere. The overall campus facilities scored near the bottom with a mean score of 2.5 on the integer scale of 0-10. This study was performed on general students and wasn't specifically examining athletes so the facilities didn't have a huge impact on their college selection process. This is to be expected, because as general students you are only in a certain facility for a few hours while you're in class. Whereas athletes spend an immense amount of time in their respective facilities practicing, competing, watching film and studying in the lounge. So it makes sense that athletic facilities are more of a college decision factor for athletes than non-athletes.

Several gender differences also emerged from this study. Females report relying more heavily on parents, friends and classmates than did males, who were more likely to consult with coaches.

Females were also more likely to consider “dorms/residence halls” than were the males, who in turn were more likely to list criteria pertaining to the category “success of graduates”. Females also gave a significantly higher importance rating to factors such as: Admission process, off-campus study programs, academic calendar, racial/ethnic diversity, quality of the residence halls, social atmosphere and the location. This data suggests that females more than males put a higher significance on the setting, atmosphere and the overall climate of the institution.

This research leads me to question how many of the sample surveyed were going on to play collegiate sports in their respective areas. I think it would have been a good idea to include a question in the survey about whether they were planning on playing a college sport. On the other hand one major strength of this study was the sample size and the descriptive survey used.

Study #4

Kelderman, E. (2008). Small colleges sweat over sports facilities. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54, A1-A11.

This article looks specifically at Division III athletic programs and how they are trying to decide whether the overall cost of new athletic facilities outweigh their potential benefits with recruiting. While the larger Division I institutions usually don't have a problem attracting elite talent to their programs, Division III university's don't have that luxury however, they have to rely on attracting athletes based on coaching and athletic facilities. In today's day in age athletes are entering college accustomed to state-of-the art facilities that have become common in the nation's best high schools. By the time they get to college they expect the facilities to be new and up to date, and if the institution is lacking they will most likely look elsewhere. The opinions of the coaches and administrators quoted in this article all concur that newer facilities give

universities a competitive edge in the recruiting world. A current athlete who is quoted in the article says that the new facilities at Franklin & Marshall College played a large factor in his decision to attend there. The real question here is; does the need for nice athletic facilities directly translate to the Division I level? After all, at the Division I level they can give out full athletic scholarships, so do the facilities really matter?

Study #5

Letawsky, N.R., Schneider, R.G., & Pedersen, P.M. (2003). Factors influencing the college selection process of student-athletes: Are their factors similar to non-athletes? *College Student Journal*, 37, 604-610.

This study hypothesized that by determining current student-athlete's college choice factors universities can be better prepared to attract elite student-athletes. Since intercollegiate athletes not only choose a university, but also a team and coach, their college selection process may be much different than non-athletes. This study looked at the difference between student-athletes and regular student's college choice factors. The participants for this study included all 135 first-year student-athletes enrolled at a large, public, four-year, Research I institution that enrolls almost 40,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. In addition, the University has a large intercollegiate athletics program, involving more than 400 student-athletes and 25 varsity sports (12 for men and 13 for women). Eight students were not present at any of the study table sessions when data was collected and one student who was present refused to participate in the study. The remaining 126 first-year student-athletes who completed survey forms represented 99.2% of all students present during study table sessions and 93.3% of all first-year student-athletes at the University.

The Intercollegiate Student-Athlete Questionnaire (Gabert, Hale, & Montalvo, 1999), developed through consultation with athletic department personnel from various institutions, was adapted for use in this study. The instrument was designed to explore the degree of influence that 25 college selection factors had on the decision made by prospective student-athletes to attend the University. Permission to administer the survey at study-table sessions was obtained from the assistant athletic director. Each student was told the purpose of the study and received directions for completing and returning the survey.

The five factors most influential in choosing a college of student-athletes included: degree-program options, head coach, academic support services on campus, type of community in which the campus is located and the school's sports traditions. Factors in the athletic environment were also rated as very influential in this study. Among the top ten were the head coach, school sports traditions, athletic facilities, athletic training facilities, and the official on-campus visit. Among the least influential factors were college choice of friends, the prospect of television exposure, other (non-athletic related) financial aid, school colors, and opinions of high school teammates.

The major strength of this study was their high number of participants they were able to use as well as the college choice factor questionnaire that was implemented. The questionnaire used was very comprehensive in supplying 25 different college choice factors the athletes could choose from. However, their major weakness was the overall student-athletes that responded. The majority of athletes reported they participated in either football, cross country/track, swimming/diving and soccer. This presents a problem because it doesn't represent all of the varsity sports at the university. It could also skew the results because usually football has more scholarships to give out compared to track and swimming, so the football respondents could have answered that the amount of financial aid they received played a big part in them choosing the

university. The condition of the facilities each sport practices/plays in could also skew the results of the facility questions in the survey.

Study #6

Pauline, J. (2010). Factors influencing college selection by NCAA Division I, II, and III lacrosse players. *Journal of Research*. 5, 62-69.

This study looked at college choice factors for lacrosse athletes across Divisions I, II and III. It examined 3 factors: (a) The relative importance of specific categories that influenced the athlete's college selection decision (b) if there were any differences between male and female lacrosse players and (c) if there were differences between Divisions I, II and III players. The participants in this study were 792 male and female NCAA lacrosse student-athletes who participated on teams located in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States. Of the 792 respondents, females accounted for 54.7%, while males accounted for 45.3%.

The participants completed the Influential Factors Survey for Student Athletes — Revised (IFSSAR). The IFSSAR consisted of 53 items with the responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important). The research team made initial contact, via email, with all head lacrosse coaches at NCAA Division I, II, and III institutions throughout the Northeast at the beginning of their competitive seasons. The email requested the team's participation in the study. Once coaches indicated interest, they received an email confirmation thanking them for their willingness to participate, and then a survey packet by mail.

Based on the results of this study, the authors believe academic factors have the greatest influence on collegiate lacrosse players when they are deciding what university to attend. The ten most influential factors in rank order were: career opportunities after graduation, academic

reputation of the university, overall reputation of the university, availability of academic program or major, reputation of academic major or program, social environment at the university, social atmosphere of the team, campus, head coach's personality or style, and academic facilities (i.e., library, computer labs, classrooms). These findings indicate that the academic factors were most important to both male and female lacrosse players across all NCAA divisions. Interestingly, athletic factors and coaching staff were viewed as more influential in the college decision process for male lacrosse players than female players. However, female lacrosse players considered financial aid to be significantly more important than the male players. This is hypothesized to be the case because there are more professional playing opportunities available to male lacrosse players than female players. Males can move on to the National Lacrosse League or Major League Lacrosse. Currently, there are no professional playing opportunities for female players. Therefore, with males having the opportunity to continue their playing careers it makes sense for them to place a higher significance on athletic factors and coaching in order to improve their athletic skills and move on. The five least influential factors were: knowing athletes at the university, ethnic/gender ratio, media coverage of the team, knowing someone on the lacrosse team and number of alumni in professional lacrosse.

The major strength of this study was the amount of participants they were able to survey, which gave them a good data set. This study has a few limitations however; the first is that the participants were drawn from player attending institutions in the Northeast United States. So the results may not be generalizable to other collegiate lacrosse player from other geographic areas. The second limitation was the inclusion of under classmen as well as upper classmen. The upper classmen were more than a year removed from the college selection process, so their recall of the

factors influencing their college choice may have been influenced by time and their experiences at the university.

Study #7

Pauline, J., Pauline, G., & Stevens, A. (2004). Influential factors in the college selection process of baseball student-athletes. *Journal of Contemporary Athletics*. 1, 153-166.

This study examined the factors that were most influential in the college selection process of Division I, II and III baseball student-athletes. The participants for this study were 320 collegiate baseball players from 12 colleges and universities in the Midwest. They completed the Influential Factors Survey for Student Athletes (IFSSA) which is a 32-item survey that can be separated into five sections (athletics, coaching, staff, academics, financial aid, social and multivariate). The study revealed the top five factors for the participants in this study were: A winning program, opportunity to play early in career, baseball specific facilities, coach's personality/philosophy and the tradition of the athletic program. The five least influential factors were: religious affiliation of school, knowing other athletes at school, having other friends at school, extracurricular activities and knowing someone on the team. Interestingly, facilities came in third overall most important college choice factor. This is the highest that facilities have ranked in any of the studies I have examined. It could be that baseball student-athletes are more conscientious about the facilities they play in, or that this group of athletes just places a higher importance on the baseball specific facilities. This is a good indicator for my study, even though baseball is not a revenue sport, but it is a major men's sport at the majority of Division I institutions. A good follow up study to this would include universities across the U.S. and not just from the Midwest in order to get a sample from a broader student-athlete base.

Study #8

Price, I., Matzdorf, F., Smith, L., Agahi, H. (2003). The impact of facilities on student choice of university. *Facilities*. 21, 212-222.

This study investigates the degree to which facilities and locational factors influence the decisions undergraduates make when choosing where to attend college. This study focused specifically on general students not athletes. Although this study was conducted in the United Kingdom it still provides some useful information about student's college choice decisions. The researchers hypothesized that many institution's facilities, where provided to a high standard, are perceived as having an important influence on students' choice of institution. They are trying to prove that facilities have a high influence on student recruitment and retention. The participants for this study were freshmen undergraduate students enrolled in several universities starting in 2000 and continuing through the 2001 freshmen class. A descriptive survey was implemented and had a total of 87 closed questions. They sought rankings of importance on a standard 5 point Likert scale. A total of 12 questioning modules were used and included: type of university, reputation of city, accommodations, social facilities, sporting facilities and overall university environment. The facilities were contacted and most of them responded favorably, meaning they were willing to participate in the study. From there they distributed the surveys to all the current freshmen students enrolled during that semester. This study found that over the two years the most important factors for freshmen deciding what university to attend were the reputation of the city/university, the university environment and the degree offerings. This result is probably due to the fact that collegiate sports is not nearly as prevalent in the U.K. as it is here in the U.S. The university's facilities ranked within the top ten in importance for this study, which proves even

when sports aren't as popular and a high standard is put on academics the facilities are still relatively important to incoming freshmen looking for a university to attend.

The major strength of this study was the fact that they collected data over a two year period at multiple universities which gave them a great data set as well as a good set of useful participants. This study naturally leads me to question how the athletes in the U.K. choose which university to attend. It would be a good follow up study if someone conducted research and looked specifically at the athletes at those specific universities then compare the results to just the general student population.

Study #9

Reynolds, G. L. (2007). The impact of facilities on recruitment and retention of students. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 63–80.

This study looked specifically at the influence campus facilities have on the recruitment of undergraduate students across the nation. The data was gathered via an anonymous survey given to 46 institutions across the U.S. Ultimately, 16,153 students filled out the survey during the spring semester 2005. The students were attending institutions in twenty-seven states with a fairly even distribution across the East, South, Midwest and West. Ninety-five percent of all respondents were full-time and five percent were part-time. Overall, sixty-eight percent of the respondents were female and thirty-two percent male. Before the survey began the respondents were asked to give their opinion on a number of institutional general characteristics. The top five institutional characteristics in descending order were: Strong major in field of interest, excellent teachers, preparation for career, accessible professors and customizable education. Interestingly, the overall quality of campus facilities came in 6th overall. Furthermore, when asked what it was

important to see during a campus visit, academic facilities were cited frequently. Next, the respondents were asked what facilities on campus were most influential in their college selection process and they cited: The facilities for major, library, classrooms, residence halls and the exercise facilities. This study also examined the gender differences between male and female respondents. The results indicate that it was more important for women than men to see residential facilities on campus, facilities related to their major, library, classrooms and the student union. In contrast, it was more important for men than women to see computer and technology facilities, research and lab facilities and athletic facilities.

In future research it might be beneficial to replicate this study every 5-10 years to see if current generation students think any differently about the facilities on campus. This could help institutions become more knowledgeable about what attracts current students to their universities. A major strength of this study was the amount of participants (16,153) that responded with usable surveys. This gave them a very wide range of students that made up their data set, making their study's validity increase.

Study #10

Schneider, R. G., & Messenger, S. (2012). The impact of athletic facilities on the recruitment of potential student-athletes. *College Student Journal*, 46, 805-811.

This study was conducted in 2012 at Bowling Green State University. Dr. Schneider hypothesized that although athletic facilities and their seeming importance in the recruitment of top level student-athletes are popular in intercollegiate athletics, the athletic facilities may not play a significant role in the recruitment of student-athletes to play Division I college hockey. Nineteen Division I student-athletes participating in men's ice hockey were the population for

this study. The nineteen represented all four classes (freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior), with varying degrees of athletic scholarship and financial aid. They completed a two page survey titled "College Choice Factors". The main body of this instrument asked the student-athletes to rate the degree of influence each of the 24 college choice factors listed had in their decision to select the institution they would attend. The nineteen Division I hockey players were given the surveys and additionally, there were two demographic questions, and one open-ended question to answer. The data was collected and examined by the two principle investigators. The results of this survey showed that the top three reasons student-athletes chose to attend their respective institution were the perceived opportunity to play immediately, receiving athletic-related financial aid, and the perceived future professional playing opportunities. Clearly, receiving scholarship money is an overwhelming factor to student-athletes when they are being recruited. Interestingly, the athletic facilities and hockey training facilities finished in a tie for 6th out of 24 most influential college choice factor. The five least influential factors were the prospect of television exposure, residential facilities, school's win/loss record from the previous year, school colors and the college choice of their high school friends.

The major strength of this study was that the hockey players surveyed are a part of a Division I program and they all had the talent to go to other Division I schools. So by looking at what made them choose BGSU over other programs is very useful in determining where the facilities rank in importance to them. These results can impact not only future hockey teams at BGSU but all the other athletic teams as well. The major weakness of this study is the small sample size of only 19 hockey players. The study could be improved by looking at other Division I hockey programs here in the Midwest and compiling a larger data set to derive results from, this in turn would provide more reliable results.

Study #11

Toma, J. D., & Cross, M. E. (1998). Intercollegiate athletics and student college choice: Exploring the impact of championship seasons on undergraduate applications. *Research in Higher Education*, 39, 633-661.

This study examined success in high-profile intercollegiate athletics and how winning seasons can have an effect on undergraduate applications the following year. Winning a national championship in one of the two most visible college sports, football and men's basketball, is routinely accompanied by significant positive attention for the specific institution. That attention seems to translate into increases in applications received during the next admission cycle. They compared year to year changes in the number of applications for undergraduate admissions for NCAA Division I schools following a national championship in either football or men's basketball. The study ran from 1979-1992 and included 11 different institutions that won the basketball tournament and 16 different universities that won the national title in football. The researchers got their admissions statistics from the Pederson's Guides database, which publishes admissions reports every year. They found that of the 16 schools that won or shared championships in college football, 14 showed some increase in the number of applicants the following year. Additionally, 7 had an increase of 10% or more and 2 school had an increase of 20% or more. For the institutions that had basketball teams win the national championship 10 of the 13 schools experienced some increase in applications in the admission year following the championship however, only 2 schools saw an increase of 10% or more. This shows that a winning football team is still the best sport to attract more applicants to your institution.

While having winning teams is very important in the college selection process of athletes, previous research also shows that the athletic facilities play a key role in attracting elite talent to specific universities. I'd like to see a similar study done in today's business driven collegiate

athletic world to see if there has been a dramatic increase (greater than 20%) in undergraduate applications following a championship year. A strength of this study was that it was done over multiple years and included multiple institutions that either won the football or basketball championship. This gave the researchers very accurate data to draw their conclusions from.

The general consensus among the majority of limited research I've found is that the top five college choice factors for Division I athletes are: Amount of financial aid offered, head coach, perceived opportunity to play immediately, perceived future professional sporting opportunities and the location of the university. Although all of these are important factors to consider when deciding on a university to play for I believe the condition of the facilities plays a more important role than originally thought. Some of the studies asked questions about the athletic facilities and they were all ranked within the top 10 of responses out of an average of 25 questions. This leads me to believe that in today's athletic climate, facilities play a more important role than originally thought.

Hypothesis

As collegiate athletics move away from the amateur status they were originally designed for and continue to transform into more of a business, the concept of recruiting elite athletes is at the forefront of every athletic department across the nation. I want to examine the specific factors that potential student-athletes base their collegiate decision on. If the facilities are new (within the last 10 years) it will have a significant impact on the decision of athletes to attend a university. I believe if the athletes are trying to decide which university to attend, the condition of the facilities plays an important role in their decision.

Independent Variable

The independent variable for this study is the individual facility the athletes practice and play in.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study is the athlete's thoughts/perceptions on a university they were contemplating on attending.

Methods

Participants

Sixty-seven male and female BGSU varsity athletes from 14 different teams responded to the survey. They range in experience from freshman to graduate students and from ages 18 to ≥ 24 . Participants include athletes from 14 different teams who are either on a full/partial scholarship or a walk-on.

Instrument

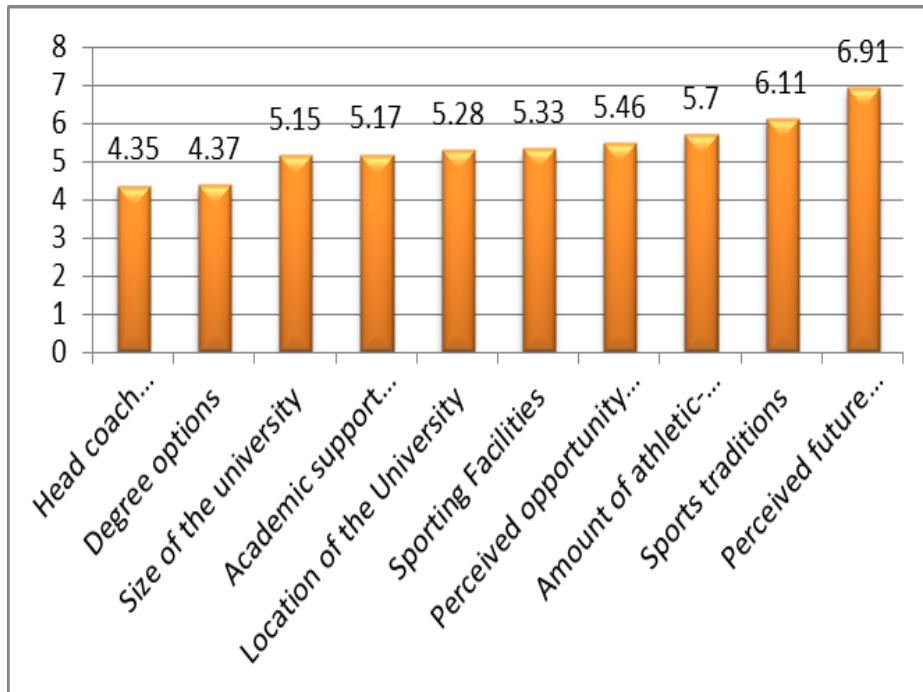
A descriptive survey instrument was developed to explore the degree of influence that 10 college choice factors had on the decision made to attend/play for BGSU. Popular reasons listed were based on top five results of previous research. The survey examined the individual's (1) gender, (2) age, (3) level of school, (4) scholarship status, (5) sport and (6) top ten reasons they chose to attend/play for BGSU. Athletes were then asked to rank the reasons they chose to attend/play for BGSU on a forced ranking scale (1=most important, 10=least important).

The reasons listed on the survey included: Amount of athletic-related financial aid offered, head coach personality/philosophy, perceived opportunity to play immediately, perceived future professional sporting opportunities, location of the university, sporting facilities, degree-program options, academic support services on campus, size of the university and sports traditions of the university. Athletes were sent an email via their university email addresses with a link to the survey.

Results

When examining the respondent's rank of most influential college choice factors as a whole we see that sporting facilities is basically tied for 5th place among the athletes surveyed.

The most influential college choice factors as reported by the whole group are as follows. The mean is reported in each column.



An independent t-test was used to examine differences between male's and female's rank of facilities. Only completed surveys were compared. Males (n=9) had a $M=6.44\pm 1.87$. Females (n=28) had a $M=5.14\pm 2.04$.

A one-way ANOVA was used to examine differences between the academic level of the athletes and where they ranked facilities in their top ten. Freshman (n=15) had a $M=5.40\pm 1.72$. Sophomores (n=7) had a $M=5.85\pm 2.03$. Juniors (n=4) had a $M=6.50\pm 1.73$. Seniors (n=8) had a $M=5.37\pm 2.87$. Graduate students (n=2) had a $M=3.00\pm 1.41$. Cronbach's $\alpha=.712$ for this survey.

Discussion

Data shows that the top five college choice factors of the student-athletes surveyed range from (1) head coach personality/philosophy, (2) degree options, (3) size of the university, (4) academic support services and tied for (5) are the sporting facilities and the location of the university.

Ranked (7) was the perceived opportunity to play immediately, (8) the amount of athletic-related financial aid, (9) the sports traditions and (10) perceived future playing opportunities.

Interestingly, the overall rank of facilities was ranked higher than the amount of athletic-related financial aid offered and the perceived opportunity to play immediately. I expected these two choice factors to be in the top five and they ended up being ranked 7th and 8th respectively. The fact that head coach personality/philosophy was ranked number 1 overall shows that today's athletes put a lot of stock in if they like or dislike the head coach. This can help athletic departments by showing athletic directors that the likeability of their coaches plays a major role in potential athlete's decision making process.

Data gathered from this study also suggests that female athletes consider the condition of the athletic facilities to be in their top five college choice factors at $M=5.14$. While the male athletes ranked facilities just behind at $M=6.44$, this is an average difference of 1.3. This data can be useful to athletic departments who may have lacking facilities for their sports teams. Knowing that (based on this study) female athletes put a greater emphasis on the condition of their sporting facilities, maybe it will force athletic departments to invest in their non-revenue sport's facilities more. In order to attract the best athletic talent to your specific institution, you need to have attractive facilities to help entice young athletes in order to better your athletic department, which in turn can have a significant impact on the overall institution.

The data also shows that graduate students (M=3.00), seniors (M=5.37) and freshman (M=5.40) consider the condition of the sporting facilities to be among or barely outside their top five college choice factors. The sophomores (M=5.85) and juniors (M=6.50) ranked the facilities around 6/10 for importance. This data shows that the overall condition of the facilities plays an important role in whether these particular athletes chose to attend/play for BGSU. The biggest factor to look at here is the freshman; they considered the sporting facilities to be in their top 5 college choice factors. This is significant because they were just recently recruited and chose to attend/play for BGSU and based on the data the facilities had a major role to play in their decision. Another interesting factor here is that the graduate students ranked facilities in their top 3, higher than any other student. This particular subset isn't necessarily representative of all graduate student-athletes however, because only two of them responded to the survey.

Conclusion

According to this study the sporting facilities ranked on average in the top five for the most important college choice factors for these particular BGSU athletes. Female athletes consider the condition of sporting facilities to be slightly more important than their male counterparts. Freshman, seniors and graduate student athletes consider the condition of the facilities to be within their top five college choice factors. As previous studies have shown, the more successful an athletic team is (specifically football and men's basketball) the greater the number of overall student application numbers the following year. This is attributed to the desire of prospective students to be a part of a winning culture and university. This fact is a huge motivation for athletic directors to push a winning culture onto their coaches and programs. The concept of recruiting, and knowing what facilities to show potential student-athletes has become an increasingly important issue for athletic departments. This study has shown just how important

the sporting facilities are to current BGSU athletes. This data confirms my hypothesis and reiterates the importance of having the best facilities possible in order to attract the best athletic talent to your institution. By examining the reasons Division I athletes chose to play for a university we can expand our understanding of how young athletes prioritize important life choices. Future research should include multiple NCAA Division I institutions in order to increase the diversity and number of participants in the study.

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Appendix

College Choice Questionnaire

Purpose: To examine the college choice factors of NCAA Division I athletes.

1. Gender

- A. Male
- B. Female

2. Age

- A. 18
- B. 19
- C. 20
- D. 21
- E. 22
- F. 23
- G. \geq 24

3. What level of school are you currently?

- A. Freshman
- B. Sophomore
- C. Junior
- D. Senior
- E. Graduate student

4. What is your scholarship status? (i.e. full, partial, walk on) _____

5. What sport do you participate in? _____

6. Rank the reasons you chose to attend/play for Bowling Green State University. Rank them in order of importance, with 1 being “most important” and 10 being “least important”.

Amount of athletic-related financial aid offered _____

Head coach personality/philosophy _____

Perceived opportunity to play immediately _____

Perceived future professional sporting opportunities _____

Location of the University _____

Sporting Facilities _____

Degree-program options _____

Academic support services on campus _____

Size of the university _____

Sports traditions _____