

## Student athlete careers in Japan: which sports help student-athletes get better jobs?

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### Research Question/Goal

In Japan, whose population is declining, many sport governing bodies/national federations of sports (NFs) have strived to increase their younger membership. NFs want to develop and retain more members, so they have to create a better environment for younger players to keep playing after graduation. Currently, many young athletes suffer from anxiety because they struggle to secure equitable employment after graduation. Therefore, understanding the “career creation mechanism”, especially in terms of the transition from school to work, is more important than ever. In the United States, many have criticized the college sports system that exploits “big-time” student-athletes, many of whom leave college without graduating (Branch 2011, Nocera and Strauss 2016). Meanwhile, in Japan there exists a myth that most college athletes will get better jobs more easily than their non-athlete student counterparts. This myth has been believed since the beginning of Showa era until recent days (Tsukahara, 2008; 2011). However, it’s still unclear what differences exist between particular sports, and it remains uncertain what sorts of sports aid or stifle career development.

Given these problems, our research was conducted to explore the current correlations between particular sports that college athletes play, and details about their first jobs. In doing so, we hope to offer valuable insights to stakeholders such as NFs, universities, coaches, and student-athletes themselves.

### Literature, definition, and backgrounds of question

In our study, we define “student-athlete” as a student who belongs to a sport club that his/her college/university “officially” manages, which means we exclude “circles” or temporary groups that voluntarily play infrequently from our study. In Japan, many studies on the transition from school to work have come out of the fields of labor economics and educational sociology (Hirasawa, 2005). However, empirical discussions regarding the effects of belonging to athletic clubs that are officially managed by colleges/universities has been limited. Previous studies have revealed that: a) students engaged in sport tended to get better jobs than non-athlete students; b) among female students of literature, belonging to a sport club makes their employment more “regular” and raises their wage (Umezaki, 2004, Hara, et al., 2004); and c) being a student-

athlete predicts a significantly longer stay at one’s first job (Tsukahara, 2011). Although these studies help us understand the effects of belonging to any college athletic club, we are unable to recognize which sports help or don’t help their transition, and we are also unable to construct an effective support system for their first employment. Therefore, this study attempts to clarify the relationship between college sports participation in particular sports and the receipt of “unofficial job offers” (naitei).

### Methodology

We conducted cross-tabulation and binary logistic regression analysis of data profiles of 11,984 student-athletes, including their sport, the company from which they received their naitei, their college’s/university’s prestige, their major (cultural arts, social science/natural science), how they matriculated (by academic examination, or by achievements in sport), their English level, and the position they played in their clubs during Japanese 2013-2014 academic year. The purpose is to investigate the effects of sport participation for their naitei from higher-ranked companies (male: Top 800; female: Top 1,200) under conditions statistically controlled by other profile valuables. The data is provided by the Athlete Planning Co. Ltd., which has supported student-athlete careers as a prior business for over a decade in Japan. Japan is a highly gendered society, especially in the way it treats new graduates entering the labor market as well as in terms of sport participation, so our data was also analyzed by gender.

### Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The valid sample was 8,247 (56.3%) males and 3,737 (52.8%) females, among whom 671 (8.1%) male and 273 (7.3%) female students received naitei from higher ranked companies. The results are summarized as follows: 1) all models were statistically significant, but the largest contributor was a college’s/university’s prestige; 2) the particular sport played was the second largest contributor in both models. For example, for males, field-hockey (Odds Ratio (OR): 3.219,  $p < 0.001$ ), baseball (OR: 2.646,  $p < 0.001$ ), American-football (OR: 2.553,  $p < 0.001$ ), rowing & surfing (OR: 2.222,  $p < 0.01$ ), lacrosse (OR: 1.672,  $p < 0.05$ ), and soccer (OR: 1.550,  $p < 0.05$ ) were the most statistically significant. For females, golf, ski, & skate (OR: 2.771,  $p < 0.001$ ), tennis (OR: 2.306,  $p < 0.05$ ), and lacrosse (OR: 1.977,  $p < 0.01$ ) were the most statistically significant. For both genders, playing these particular sports helped them gain a naitei from a better company than they would have had they participated in a different club.

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