

Community College vs. NCAA: The Case of a U.S. Women's Tennis Team with no U.S. Players

Butler, B. Nalani¹ and Wieber, Benjamin²

1: University of Tampa, United States of America; 2: University of Tampa, United States of America

bbutler@ut.edu

Aim

U.S. colleges and universities attract thousands of international student athletes from around the world. Many of these international student athletes compete and play in NCAA Division I, II, or III, NAIA, or NJCAA. The highest division of college athletics is NCAA Division I and in order to be eligible to play division I athletics, one must be in compliance with NCAA amateurism requirements.

In this research study, we will present data on a qualitative exploratory case study in which we observed and interviewed a U.S. community college women's tennis team about their motivations to come to the U.S. to play intercollegiate tennis and obtain a degree. In this presentation, we will examine the motivations of these women to pursue tennis in the U.S. and why they chose to start off playing at a community college over an NCAA institution.

This research study will help coaches, managers, and recruiters to learn more about recruiting and managing international student athletes and the hardships that they may face. Learning how to be proactive in dealing with potential issues may help retention, recruiting, performance, and the overall experience of the international student athlete. In the past, international student athletes such as Enes Kanter have been ruled as ineligible because they did not satisfy the amateurism requirements of the NCAA. Therefore, this study will shed light on the motivating factors for international student athletes who want to come to the U.S. to play their sport and obtain a degree. In addition to the obstacles that they may face before, during, and after the recruitment process.

This research will also add onto the scarce literature on women and sport labor migration. Sport labor migration is a reflection of dynamics within our broad social sphere and a microcosm for understanding how politics, economics, and culture are intertwined (Maguire & Stead, 1998). Therefore, only understanding the motivations of men as sport labor migrants might leave one with a skewed perspective on the sport labor migrant's motivations.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Transnationalism is the theory that was used for this research study. Transnationalism is characterized by the process that one uses to transcend international borders and how a person's agency to migrate plays a role in their motivation and experiences as migrants (Faist, 2010).

Research Design and Data Analysis:

We employed a qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2009) where we had in-person interviews and asked a series of questions on why the participants chose to pursue an academic and athletic opportunity in the U.S. Some examples of questions included (these are only a few of the questions):

- Discuss your decision to pursue a college degree and move to the U.S.

- Can you discuss why you chose a community college over a 4-year institution to start your degree?
- What were your options if you decided to stay in your home country, instead of coming to the U.S. to pursue your athletic and academic career?

We interviewed a total of nine players (this was the entire team). All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded for similarities and differences in responses. We were then able to put the codes in a codebook and come up with themes for understanding the motivations of the participants and why they chose to pursue an academic and athletic career in the U.S., at the community college level.

Results and Discussion

Findings show that the women who chose to come to the U.S. to pursue their athletic and academic endeavors at the community college level did so because they were unable to fulfill the requirements for a NCAA institution, they were recruited heavily by a coach, and/or they were motivated by their athletic scholarship. In addition, participants had limited knowledge of what it meant to be a student-athlete and even now are trying to figure out how to make it to an NCAA institution after attending a community college. Lastly, participants had many issues adjusting to life in the U.S. Participants had a hard time balancing academics and their sport, and many discussed financial barriers that they faced because they were unable to work in the U.S. due to citizenship restrictions.

Conclusion and Implications

This study will contribute to the limited amount of research on intercollegiate sport labor migrants that venture to the U.S. to pursue an academic degree and play a sport, in addition to shedding light on the motivations of women sport labor migrants. This research will also help educate intercollegiate athletic departments on how to understand and better manage issues surrounding international student athletes in regards to cultural adjustment, recruitment, and eligibility requirements.

References

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