

Mapping the Rink: Migration Patterns of Male and Female NCAA Division I Ice Hockey Student-Athletes from North America and Europe

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Aim

Given the shortage of empirical research on university ice hockey, this study provided an opportunity to map out aspects of the movements of male and female ice hockey migrant athletes into the US university sport system. Given the booming international population within NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) Division I Ice Hockey, very little is known about the ways in which these migratory processes have developed or changed over time. Therefore, this study provided a preliminary overview of the multidirectional flows of male and female ice hockey student athletes' initial migration into NCAA Division I Ice Hockey.

The aim of this paper was to examine the home regions, university destinations, and ensuing professional ice hockey leagues of male and female ice hockey players who have participated in NCAA Division I Ice Hockey. This study was guided by the following two research questions: 1.) Empirically, what are the migratory trails that comprise the student-athletes of NCAA Division I Men's and Women's Ice Hockey teams? 2.) What explanations for this migration can be made based upon the argument that NCAA men's and women's ice hockey in the United States is a zone of prestige for the game around the world?

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

The 'zones of prestige' theoretical framework created a critical lens to examine such migrant labor movements through both economic and political lenses. Zones of prestige refer to multiple or singular centers where culturally impressive activities are produced, displayed, and consumed (Maguire, 1996). Despite the developments of human made indoor ice surfaces in non-traditional ice hockey regions in the 20th century, research still points to certain regions in North America and Europe as holding advantages in terms of developing ice hockey player talent (O'Connell, 2015). Further, ice hockey player production hotbeds have been identified as Scandinavia, Ottawa, and Minnesota as the predominate regions of ice hockey talent respectively in Europe, Canada, and the United States (O'Connell, 2015). Hence these regions were categorized as the main exporters of ice hockey talent and arranged as the hypotheses accordingly.

Increasingly in the twenty-first century, NCAA Division I Ice Hockey has emerged as the preeminent place in the world for both male and female players to face premier competition, receive top-tier coaching and prepare for the level of international play, all while receiving an education (Haase, 2017). College hockey players in the US receive more than \$30 million annually in athletic scholarships and are the primary feeder system for the National Hockey League in North America (Haase, 2017). However, hockey migration research to this point has mainly revolved around male athletes and professional leagues, in particular the NHL. This study provided a unique approach to investigating sports labor migration by incorporating data from both male and female athletes within a single sport and thus comparing the migratory patterns relative to the respective political economies that comprise international men's and women's ice hockey systems.

Research Design and Data Analysis

Data collection included each player's self-identified home country, Canadian province, or U.S. state as listed on NCAA and professional ice hockey team websites. Based on publicly available data, player information was collected across eleven seasons (2007-2017) and eight seasons (2011-2017) respectively for female and male ice hockey players. Using stratified sampling and a series of multiple regression analyses, this study captured the home regions, university destinations, and professional leagues of $N = 16,998$ distinct ice hockey players.

Conclusion and Implications

The majority of ice hockey player movements coincided with the hypotheses as Canadian ice hockey student-athletes mostly resided from Ontario and Europeans predominantly from Scandinavia comparatively to non-Scandinavian countries. Male university teams at Alaska-Anchorage, Clarkson, and Rochester Institute of Technology appear to have a near perennial preference players from Ontario and Scandinavia. On the female side, the majority of European ice hockey players primarily resided from Scandinavian countries. However, female Canadian players were found more frequently to migrate from the province of Quebec as opposed to the hypothesized Ontario province. In terms of U.S. athletes, male and female players who moved to universities outside of their home states were found to come primarily from the state of Minnesota.

The analysis has charted some of the centripetal forces attracting players to the zone of prestige where, over the course of increasing circles of worldwide mutual identification, formerly more or less independent national groups are becoming increasingly interdependent (Agergaard & Tiesler, 2014). By painting a clearer picture of the migrations and athlete movements taking place, this study carries implications for athlete migrants seeking collegiate or professional opportunities as well as ice hockey coaches, agents, and managers facilitating player production. In conclusion, these data help debate whether for non-US nationals, the NCAA may be seen as a sporting preparatory school or a step towards a "global finishing school" (Maguire, 1996, p. 10) for men's and women's ice hockey players.

References

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