

## Outcomes of Distributive Justice in Intercollegiate Athletics: The Perspective of College Athletes

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Athletic directors must make difficult decisions concerning the welfare of their athletic teams and student athletes every day. In turn, the student athletes, whether consciously or subconsciously, make internal judgments as to whether the respective decisions made by their athletic director are fair or unfair. These perceptions of fairness can significantly impact the psychological well-being of an athlete and whether or not his or her team is perceived to be valuable to the athletic director. The majority of studies on distributive justice (perceived fairness of outcomes) in intercollegiate athletics have focused on the precursors or antecedents of distributive justice (Hums & Chelladurai, 1994b; Mahony, Hums, & Riemer, 2002; Mahony, Hums, & Riemer, 2005; Mahony, Riemer, Breeding, & Hums, 2006; Patrick, Mahony, & Petrosko, in press). In particular, these studies highlighted the impact of demographic differences (i.e., gender, division level, and revenue versus non revenue sports) on the perceived fairness of resource distributions among athletic department employees (Hums & Chelladurai, 1994b; Mahony et al., 2002; Mahony et al., 2005) and athletic boards (Mahony et al., 2002; Mahony et al., 2005).

There are several limitations of the existing research on distributive justice in intercollegiate athletics. First, only one study (Mahony et al., 2006) actually attempted to examine student athletes as the target population, even though they are directly affected by the resource distribution system. Mahony et al. (2006) examined the view of fair distribution among student athletes and other college students in hypothetical intercollegiate and sport business settings. However, since the study incorporated hypothetical rather than actual situations, the results do not reflect student athletes' actual perceived fairness in their current situations. Secondly, no research has examined the comprehensive outcomes of perceived fairness on the recipients in a sport organization. Therefore, the primary purposes of this study were to (a) examine student athletes' perceived fairness of outcomes under their current resource distribution system in collegiate athletics and (b) predict how much the athletes' perceptions of fairness influences outcome satisfaction, job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior.

Internet survey methodologies were used in this study. Among 463 distributed questionnaires, 169 questionnaires were returned (36% response rate), and 159 were usable for the study. The survey was a 47-item questionnaire including demographics and previously validated measures of distributive justice, outcome satisfaction, job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors. The range of Cronbach coefficients of the factors was from  $\alpha = 0.777$  (affective organizational commitment) to  $\alpha = 0.973$  (outcome satisfaction). Based on prior research, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Male student athletes will report significantly higher levels of satisfaction than females on the current resource distribution system in collegiate athletics.

H2: Student athletes of revenue generation sports will report significantly higher levels of satisfaction than student athletes of non-revenue sports on the current resource distribution system in collegiate athletics.

H3: The perceived fairness among athletes regarding the current resource distribution system will be a significant predictor of outcome satisfaction.

H4: Satisfaction among athletes regarding the current resource distribution system will be a significant predictor of job satisfaction.

H5: The perceived fairness among athletes regarding the current resource distribution system will be a significant predictor of job satisfaction.

H6: The perceived fairness among athletes regarding the current resource distribution system will be a significant predictor of affective organizational commitment to athletes' teams.

H7: The perceived fairness among athletes regarding the current resource distribution system will be a significant predictor of organizational citizenship behavior.

The results indicated no significant main or interaction effects in terms of gender, scholarship status, and type of sport on the perceived fairness based on equity, equality, and need, so Hypotheses 1 and 2 were rejected. Regression analyses revealed distributive justice was a strong predictor of outcome satisfaction [ $F(3, 155) = 164.68, p < .001$ ], which means Hypothesis 3 was accepted. The bases of need ( $f = .444$ ) and equality ( $f = .419$ ) were the strongest predictors. Outcome satisfaction was not a significant predictor of job satisfaction in this study [ $F(1, 157) = 3.53, p = .062$ ], so Hypothesis 4 was rejected. The perceived

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fairness of outcomes was not a significant predictor of job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior, which means Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 were rejected. Findings from the current study can be used to advise athletic department personnel on how to present resource allocation information to the athletes in a manner to enhance satisfaction, commitment, and positive athlete behaviors that enhance the organization as a whole.