Do International Student-Athletes View Collegiate Sport Differently Than Domestic Student-Athletes?

Nels Popp, University of Louisville
Mary A. Hums and T. Christopher Greenwell, University of Louisville (Advisors)

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During the 2004-05 academic year, over 10,000 student-athletes competing at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) schools were classified as non-resident aliens (NCAA, 2005). Little research exists, however, examining what life on campus is like for international student-athletes and how they view their sport experience. International student-athletes come from a wide variety of sporting backgrounds and few nations outside the U.S. have adopted a national sport policy founded primarily on school-based sport (Chalip, Johnson, & Stachure, 1996; Rubingh & Broeke, 1998). Because of this, many international student-athletes enter their experience at U.S. universities with far different perspectives regarding the role of sport compared to their U.S. team-mates.

Previous research supports the notion international student-athletes will have a different perception regarding the purpose of college sport compared to their domestic teammates. As Duda (1989) outlined, people participate in sport for several reasons: (a) the intrinsic values of sport such as health and fitness, (b) the social responsibilities sport develops such as teamwork and respect for others, or (c) the individual satisfaction which accompanies success in sport such as fame, notoriety, and potential wealth. Research on international sport policy has shown sport participation opportunities differ from one nation to the next (Chalip, Johnson, & Stachure, 1996; Green, 2005; Palm, 1991; Stahl, Rutten, Nutbeam, & Kannas, 2002) and different levels of sporting opportunity are emphasized quite differently depending on the politics, history, and ideology of a nation and its policy makers (Chalip, 1995; Green & Oakley, 2001; Harvey, Beamish, & Defrance, 1993). Also, many international student-athletes first develop their athletic skills in the club-based sport system, which is quite different from the school-based sport system in the U.S. (Rubingh & Broeke, 1998). Several authors have called for further examination into the differences in cross-cultural sport development (Chalip et al., 1996; Duda & Allison, 1990; Green & Oakley, 2001), but the literature does not address such issues.

A few researchers have looked at various differences between domestic and international student-athletes. Stidwill (1984) looked at differences in athletic motivation between domestic and international college track and field athletes and found a significant difference in perceived athlete confidence, suggesting differences in how international student-athletes perceive college competition compared to domestic student-athletes. Bale (1987) investigated how international student-athletes made migration decisions and how they felt about those decisions. He also documented the history of college recruitment of international athletes and how they reacted to their experiences in the U.S. (Bale, 1991). His qualitative research demonstrated key differences between how international student-athletes viewed their college experience compared to domestic student athletes at U.S. colleges. Ridinger (1998) and Ridinger and Pastore (2000) used quantitative means to assess differences in adjustment to college between four subgroups: (a) international students, (b) domestic students, (c) international student-athletes, and (d) domestic student-athletes. They found international student-athletes were better adjusted to college than the other three subgroups in many of the factors they examined.

The purpose of this study was to examine how international student-athletes' perceptions of the purpose of collegiate sport participation differed from domestic student-athletes. Understanding international student-athletes' perceptions of their college sport experience can help university coaches and administrators better meet the social, psychological, and physical needs of international student-athletes. In addition, detection of differences among international athletes' perceptions of the purpose of sport can play an integral role in evaluating the effects of various national sport policies. We hypothesized international student-athletes would see the purpose of college sport as more about the intrinsic values it creates, while domestic student-athletes would perceive collegiate sport's purpose as more extrinsically rewarding, an idea previously suggested by Popp (2006).

To measure international and domestic student-athlete perceptions of sport, we utilized a modified version of the Purpose of Sport Questionnaire originally developed by Duda (1989). The Purpose of Sport Questionnaire measures seven factors participants find important in sport participation: (a) enhancing mastery of skills and cooperation among teammates, (b) teaching and promoting a physically active lifestyle, (c) becoming a better citizen, (d) being competitive, (e) helping to achieve a high-status career, (f) enhancing self-esteem, and (g) promoting social status. Prior use of this instrument has linked purpose of sport with goal perspectives (task and ego orientation) of high school students (Duda, 1989), semiprofessional and amateur soccer players (Carpenter & Yates, 1997), and professional and amateur rugby players (Treasure, Carpenter, & Power, 2000). In
addition, it has been used to measure differences in perceived purpose of sport between intercollegiate and recreational sport participants (White, 1995). This study is the first to use the instrument across a cross-cultural sample.

In our study, international and domestic student-athletes at several NCAA Division I schools were administered the Purpose of Collegiate Sport Questionnaire, a modified version of the 46-item questionnaire Duda (1989) originally developed for high school students. Participants responded to the stem "An important thing sport should do is." by marking responses to various items on a 5-point, Likert-type agreement scale. Responses were analyzed through factorial multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) tests to detect significant differences in group means, first between international and domestic student-athletes, and then between international student-athletes from different geographical locations. Scores from the Purpose of Collegiate Sport Questionnaire served as the dependent variables. Domestic or international student-athlete status served as an independent variable in the first test, while geographic region of international student-athlete hometown served as the independent variable for the second test. Results and implications of this study will be presented and ideas for future research will be discussed.