Is There a Difference Between Miami of Ohio and Miami of Florida When You Are a Student-Athlete From Slovakia? Examining the College Selection Process for International Student-Athletes

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Socio-cultural Abstract 2009-027
May 28, 2009 1:30 PM 25 minute oral (Richland A)

Recruiting student-athletes is one of the primary activities of collegiate coaches. The talent a coach brings in determines the success or failure of the team. For many coaches, particularly at the NCAA Division I level, player recruitment is both intense and expensive as coaches must recognize talent at an early age and from a broad geographic range. College athletics departments are also spending increasing amounts of their total budgets on recruiting (Judson, James, & Aurand, 2004). A growing trend in college athletics is the recruitment of foreign athletes. In fact, during the 2006-07 school year, over 16,000 international student-athletes participated in NCAA competition (NCAA, 2008). However, very little empirical research has examined the recruitment process for international student-athletes. With international student-athletes now playing a much more prominent role in NCAA competition (Brown, 2004; Drape, 2006; Litsky 2003), knowing why international student-athletes choose to come to the United States and why they select a particular university would be valuable information to coaches and athletics department personnel, as well as to NCAA staff.

Several researchers have examined the salient factors in the college selection process for domestic student-athletes (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990; Finley & Fountain, 2008; Gabert, Hale, & Montvalo, 1999; Goss, Jubenville, & Orejan, 2006; Judson, James, & Aurand, 2004; Kankey & Quartersman, 2007; Klenosky, Templin, & Troutman, 2001; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003; Mathes & Gurney, 1985), although they have not necessarily come to a consensus on the most important factors in the decision making process. Some have found academic factors, such as majors offered and academic reputation of the school, as the most important variables for student-athletes (Goss, Jubenville, & Orejan, 2006; Kankey & Quartersman, 2007; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003; Mathes & Gurney, 1985). Others have found athletic factors such as the amount of scholarship money offered (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990), the level of competition (Judson, James, & Aurand, 2004), and the coaches (Klenosky, Templin, & Troutman, 2001; Gabert, Hale, & Montvalo, 1999) as the most influential variables during the recruiting process. Other highly rated college selection factors in these studies included: (a) the college campus, (b) teammates, (c) school location, (d) social atmosphere, (e) potential playing time, (f) athletic facilities, and (g) support services available.

Of all the college selection studies reported to date, however, none have examined the college selection process for international student-athletes. Evidence suggests such a selection process should be different for those student-athletes coming to the United States from abroad compared to those born in the United States. One reason is international student-athletes often come from sporting backgrounds in which academics and athletics were not mixed. The United States is one of only a few countries globally in which national sport policy is based primarily on a school-based sport system. Most other nations operate under a club-based system (Chalip, Johnson, Stachure, 1996; Rubingh & Broeke, 1998). Thus, the concept of earning a university scholarship through athletic prowess is a new concept to many international student-athletes. As Bale (1987) pointed out, in many cases international student-athletes are not even aware of such an option until they are contacted by college coaches and recruiters. Bale also suggested many international athletes look to United States colleges for better training facilities and coaching, as well as preferable geographic locales when selecting a college. He also noted relationships with coaches, former, and current student-athletes played a key role in the decision making process. Far more international student-athletes are competing at NCAA schools now than when Bale conducted his study over 20 years ago and NCAA regulations regarding recruitment for foreign athletes has changed dramatically.

Ridinger and Pastore (2000) developed a framework to examine international student-athlete adjustment to college which included important antecedent factors for international student-athletes who travel to the United States. They suggested personality and self-efficacy, perceptions and expectations, interpersonal relationships, and cultural distance from native homeland all played a role in how well an international student-athlete might adjust to college life in the United States. This framework, based on the literature, has yet to be quantitatively tested. One purpose of this current study is to determine what factors are most influential when international student-athletes choose to attend United States universities. A second purpose is to statistically compare such influences with those of domestic student-athletes to determine if significant differences exist between the two groups. Recruiting international student-athletes costs a significant amount of time and money, meaning college coaches and administrators could benefit from understanding the most significant motivations for foreign recruits. To measure the most important factors, the authors developed an instrument based on the literature of student-athlete college.
selection studies. This survey was examined by a panel of experts, including former and current international and domestic student-athletes, international and domestic college coaches, and faculty members with a strong understanding of international sport issues. The final instrument contained 39 items as well as several demographic questions. Participants ranked the items on 7-point Likert-type importance scales.

The sample for this study included nearly 1,000 international and domestic student-athletes from 15 NCAA Division I institutions. Schools were selected based on a need to collect data from purposive clusters of Division I institutions, given certain factors may influence international student-athlete experiences at their United States college such as: (a) school size, (b) size of the community within which the school was located, and (c) geographic location of the school (Bale, 1991). Mean scores for international student-athletes on the 39 items will be used to rank importance. An exploratory factor analysis will be conducted on the data to determine which of the 39 items are correlated with some items but are primarily independent of other items. Relevant factors will then be extracted from the correlation matrix. This will allow the researchers to conduct a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to compare group mean scores from international and domestic student-athletes' responses on the extracted factors. If any significant differences are found, follow-up univariate F-tests will ensue to determine which specific factors were significantly different.

This study is currently in the data collection process. Final statistical results from the study will be presented, including extracted factors and the relationship between mean scores of international and domestic student-athletes. Implications for practitioners--such as coaches and college athletics administrators--and researchers regarding the study's results will be discussed and ideas for future research will be identified.