

An Examination of International Student Athletes Traveling to the US to Play Collegiate Sport

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(including questions)**

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A review of the literature surrounding the journey of foreign students to American colleges and universities paints a rather foreboding picture filled with indecision, financial concerns, interpersonal strife, and issues related to cultural adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Bean, 1982). As a subgroup of the international student body, similar arguments can be made regarding the recruitment and subsequent adjustment issues of International Student Athletes (ISA). Their journey likewise can be rather convoluted and difficult. Despite the context, ISAs are not immune to negative outcomes. In order to fully grasp and appreciate the difficult task faced by foreign student athletes, this line of inquiry must continue especially given the fact that ISA enrollment figures have doubled within the last decade (DeHass, 2009).

Described as the most prevalent form of sport migration today (Bartolacci, 2010; Yukelson, 2008), an ISA's journey to American institutions of higher learning involves political, cultural, geographical and economic pressures in which individuals in positions of power have a profound influence over the structuring of a migrants life in the new host culture (Maguire & Falcous, 2010). Here athletes from foreign countries go through a resettlement process for an array of reasons which may include, gaining access to better coaching and training facilities, working towards a degree, financial gain or for an opportunity for a better life. Accompanying these increased numbers, the literature appears to largely support the stance that there are a multitude of adjustment issues being faced by ISAs. From the expectations placed on them from coaches and teammates alike to the increased competitive nature of collegiate sports, foreign student athletes are exposed to a great number of stressors that may put them at a disadvantage and create an environment prone to failure (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005). While ISA recruitment has contributed to the globalization of sport, it has conversely created an environment of 'dependent development' (Maguire & Falcous, 2010) where sporting organizations including US institutions of higher learning, have placed a heavy emphasis on foreign talent.

The purpose of this study is to assess the reasons why international student athletes come to the US to play college sport through an examination of male soccer players from the Trinidad and Tobago. Proposed are different typologies in which an individual may fit into depending on their motivational aspirations (Maguire, 1999; Magee & Sugdan, 2002). Typologies such as Mercenaries, Settlers and returnees have been shown to be applicable in explaining one's desire to travel to the US. The question now is can the journeys of a ISAs be considered sport migration and does this new motivational drive have any effect on ISA adjustment? With cultural assimilation and acculturation frameworks at the forefront of most the studies focusing on international students in American higher education, are these cultural influences also applicable to ISAs traveling to the US? John Bale (1991) claims that due to better coaching and training facilities, ISAs are highly motivated to travel overseas. Popp, Hums and Greenwell (2009) argue that ISAs see an opportunity to receive an education with sport being the vessel. More recently, Trendafilova, Hardin, and Kim (2010) reports that ISAs generally speaking have higher levels of social satisfaction with campus services offered and are highly motivated once they have arrived. In addition to the varied findings, researchers using sport migration as a motivational explanation allude to a trend that foreign athletes may now be using collegiate sport as a form of internationalization according to McGovern (2002). All said, some clarity is needed in the aforementioned areas.

Using semi-structured interviews, a total of 8-10 participants are being interviewed on two separate occasions. The first interview is being used to gather pertinent data framed against labor migration theory, which will allow for the identification of categories and areas for further exploration. The same student athletes will be interviewed a second time for the elaboration and clarification of established themes. Interview questions were generated from the literature and included family dwelling, income and the educational levels of parents as variables. These variables

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have traditional application towards predicting one's ability to adjust to a new host culture (White, 1982). A Discussion will be framed against the theoretical underpinnings of immigrant studies and educational literature concerning international student adjustments. In regards to cultural influences on ISA adjustment, studies pertaining to assimilation and acculturation, socioeconomic status (participant's parents), spatial concentration (location of choice), language and the friendship patterns of ISAs may hold important information that can be used to understand their adjustment process.

With the purpose of exploring the reasons why ISAs come to the US to play sport, this study will bring attention to elements not previously considered in a review of prior literature. Exploring economic and settlement patterns with reference to examining the validity of the sport migration typologies will constitute its main direction. Further, sampling techniques and participant selection of earlier studies were often questionable and not adequately explained. To address these concerns and achieve the overall objectives, participants in this study are male soccer players from one country of origin. This controls the variability issues that were present in prior studies. The implications of the study will build the foundation towards developing theoretical frameworks for explaining the reasons why ISAs journey to the US.