University athletics administrators are under increasing pressure to generate greater gate revenues, while simultaneously facing declining attendance at college sporting events (Solomon, 2014). In fact, Fulks (2015) reports ticket sales comprise 25% of generated revenues at the NCAA Division-I level. Equally as important is the fact that ticket sales, unlike revenue from conference distributions, are within the direct control of the athletic department (James & Ross, 2004). To address this challenge, college athletics departments are modeling professional sports franchises and hiring proactive, outbound ticket sellers (Carter & Meitin, 2014). Irwin and Sutton (2011) contended structured sales training is an essential key to the success of any ticket sales endeavor. Sales representatives are often the primary contact between the organization and customer. As such, the relationship between the two parties has a significant influence on a customer’s purchase decision (Williams & Attaway, 1996). Anecdotally, hiring additional ticket sales professionals has been shown to improve ticket revenues (Spoelstra, 1997; King, 2010).

Despite the role of the sales team in terms of generating revenue, ticket sales operations and personnel are not always viewed as a priority by sports organizations (Smith & Roy, 2011). This is particularly true within intercollegiate athletics, where the training of sales team members, both initial and ongoing, is scant (Bouchet, Balloul, & Bennett, 2011; Popp, Simmons, & McEvoy, 2015). Relative to other sport industry segments, those working in sport sales have a high rate of employee turnover (King, 2010; Smith & Roy, 2011). This is a troubling trend as employee turnover leads to additional costs associated with hiring and training, and the deterioration of relationships developed between sales representatives and consumers (Boles, Dudley, Onyemah, Rouzies, & Weeds, 2012).

While research on sport sales training is limited (Irwin & Sutton, 2011; Smith & Roy, 2011); business scholars have attempted to identify a link between sales training and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Pettijohn, Pettijohn, and Taylor (2009), for example, found level of job satisfaction varied based on the amount of initial sales training received among retail sales associates. Results suggested those receiving greater amounts of introductory training reported significantly higher levels of job satisfaction than those receiving less training. Further, time devoted to sales skills training specifically (i.e. approaching, prospecting, identifying need, negotiating, closing) was inversely related to intent to leave the organization. Sales representative who value these sales skills have also been shown to be more satisfied with their jobs and less likely to leave (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Taylor, 2007), speaking to the importance of skills training within initial and ongoing training/coaching efforts.

These studies offer guidance as to the role sales training plays with respect to perceptions of job satisfaction and turnover intentions; however, this relationship has yet to be empirically tested within the sport industry. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to examine the extent to which the amount and perceived quality of sales training received impacts job satisfaction and occupational turnover intentions among ticket sales professionals working in NCAA Division I college athletics departments.

Method

An online survey was emailed to 658 individuals whose primary job function involved outbound ticket sales within NCAA Division I college athletics. Online staff directories were consulted to collect email addresses of these individuals. The survey contained 10 items designed to assess the amount of both initial and ongoing sales training received, the perceived quality of training received, overall job satisfaction (Camman, Finchman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979), and occupational turnover intentions (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). An additional 12 items were included to ascertain demographic data, as well as background information pertaining to the respondents’ career in sales.
In total, 140 (21.3% response rate) usable surveys were returned; 52% of which identified as sales managers, while the remaining 48% identified as sales representatives. MANOVA was conducted to examine differences in job satisfaction and occupational turnover intentions based on role within the sales department (RQ1), the amount of initial sales training received (RQ2), the amount of ongoing sales training received (RQ3a), and the perceived quality of ongoing sales training received (RQ3b). Multiple regression was utilized to determine the relationship between the level of sales goals met, and job satisfaction and occupational turnover intentions (RQ4).

Results

The MANOVA for RQ1 was statistically significant (Wilk’s $\Lambda = .877$, $F (2, 95) = 6.637$, $p = .002$). Subsequent univariate analyses revealed sales managers ($M = 4.12$) are significantly more satisfied with their jobs than sales representatives ($M = 3.73$), and are less likely to leave the sales occupation ($M = 2.35$) than sales representatives ($M = 3.13$). With respect to RQ2, the MANOVA was not significant (Wilk’s $\Lambda = .940$, $F (6, 206) = 1.084$, $p = .373$); however, mean score directionality suggests the more time individuals spend in sales training, the more satisfied they are with their job, and the less likely they will leave sales in the future.

The effect of ongoing sales training was also found to influence the dependent variables in this study. MANOVA results were statistically significant with respect to time spent (RQ3a) in ongoing sales training (Wilk’s $\Lambda = .934$, $F (2, 104) = 3.686$, $p = .028$). Respondents spending more than two hours per month in ongoing sales training were more satisfied with their job and indicated lower turnover intentions than those receiving fewer than two hours of ongoing training per month. In terms of perceived quality of ongoing sales training (RQ3b), the MANOVA was again statistically significant (Wilk’s $\Lambda = .892$, $F (4, 204) = 2.992$, $p = .020$). Results of the univariate analyses indicated those offering positive evaluations of ongoing training were significantly more satisfied with their job ($M = 4.32$) than those offering neutral ($M = 3.95$) or negative ($M = 3.60$) evaluations. The relationships between likelihood of achieving sales goals (RQ4) and job satisfaction ($\beta = .260$, $p = .011$) and turnover intentions ($\beta = -.334$, $p = .001$) were also statistically significant.

These findings echo the work of Pettijohn, Pettijohn, and Taylor (2007; 2009) suggesting a significant connection between job type and training on occupational satisfaction. Organizations desiring to improve retaining rates and job satisfaction levels of sales employees should consider greater and more on-going training. Additional implications for practitioners and ideas for future research in this area will also be discussed.