Division III Athletic Facilities and College Choice Factors

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Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, and Palmer (2003) examined college choice factors of athletes and non-athletes. They found the most important factors for athletes included the academic degree or program offered, head coach, academic support services, type of community the campus is located and the sport tradition at the school. Similarly, Kankey and Quartermoan (2007) examined factors influencing university choice of NCAA Division I softball players. The results of this study were very similar to that of Letawsky, et. al.: they found the factors that had the most influence for college softball players include availability of academic major or program, head coach, potential career opportunities, social atmosphere of the team and the amount of financial aid. Whereas the factors they found least influential include friends, media coverage, team website, high school coach and ethnic or gender ratio of the university. Lastly, Schneider and Messenger (2012) examined Division I college hockey players and the impact that athletic facilities and other college choice factors have on recruiting. They found that athletic facilities do not play a big role in the recruitment of Division I college hockey players. In fact, the participants of this study thought their athletic facilities were only average compared to other facilities they have visited.

This study then is examining how athletic facilities, as well as those other college choice factors, impacted the decision-making process of student-athletes who chose to attend a Division III college. In particular, this study surveyed 147 student-athletes at Adrian College, a Division III school in the MIAA. Adrian has 36 varsity sports and further, in the last 10 years, has spent in excess of $20 million dollars in order to upgrade its athletic facilities, including $7.2 million on the football stadium and $6.2 million on the ice rink.

A variation of the “College Choice Factors” (Schneider & Messenger, 2012) survey was utilized. Each student was asked to rate, on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, the “degree of influence” that each of 20 listed college choice factors had on their decision to attend Adrian College, and then, each participant was asked three demographic questions (year, sport, gender) and an open-ended question (other influential factors). College choice factors included athletic facilities, training facilities, opportunity to play, degree programs, head coach, chance to win a championship, and financial aid.

Preliminary results suggest that overall, athletic facilities, opportunity to play, degree program, and financial aid were the top reasons that student-athletes chose Adrian College, and further, that there were significant differences between males and females in the importance of degree programs, win/loss records, and chance to win a championship. This study was intended as a first step in an expanded study that will examine these college choice factors among all MIAA schools (many of which have also invested in/upgraded their athletic facilities including Alma College which spent $12.65 million to renovate their Hogan Center in 2008), and beyond. The poster presentation will include the complete results as well as discuss implications for the future.

References