The Effect of Major Infractions on Incoming Admission Applications

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College athletic departments, administrators, and coaches regularly make decisions which could leave a lasting effect on an institution (Anderson, 2012). These decisions are evaluated by the community as either positive or negative, depending on the impact on the athletic department, as well as, the impact on the public impression of the University (Hughes & Shank, 2008). Furthermore, intercollegiate athletic team success is instrumental in shaping the brand of the university considering that many athletic departments serve as the “front porch” (Suggs, Lederman, & Selingo, 2003, A17).

Athletic success and its effect on performance outcomes throughout the university has a rich history of empirical examination, particularly in academic admissions (Anderson, 2015; Pope & Pope, 2014; Pope & Pope, 2009; Bremmer & Kesselring, 1993). However, there is little research regarding the impact that athletic department wrongdoing has on the broader university. Athletic misconduct involves an administrator, coach, support staff member, or player committing a major infraction within a college athletic department, which can generate punishments (i.e., sanctions) administered by the affiliated governing body.

The purpose of this proposed research is to explore the impact of major infractions on incoming freshman applications at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I- Power Five (or Bowl Championship Series (BCS) member institutions from 2001 to 2017. The dependent variable will be the natural logarithm of the total number of applications for the school in the observed year. The use of logarithms is vital in due to the nonlinearity brought on by schools with a high number of applications. Furthermore, transforming the dependent variable to the natural logarithm of the total number of applications is consistent with previous research (Byrd & Mixon, 2014; Pope & Pope, 2014; Pope & Pope, 2009; Tucker & Amato, 1993).

Official misconduct by member institutions and punishments are obtained through the NCAA’s Legislative Services Database (LSDBi). From the LSDBi database, the search was limited to only include Division-I Power Five/BCS member institutions that were found with a major infraction during the period January 1st, 1999 to December 31st, 2017. To further investigate the impact that sanctions have on applications, there are numerous control variables included in the model which are classified by team, university, market, and type of infraction factors. The proposed research will use an Ordinary Least Squares Regression estimated with the inclusion of year fixed effects.

The results from the proposed research have many implications for both practitioners and academics. This study will analyze how athletic department sanctions can impact the applicant pool of potential students and whether or not athletic department reputation is meaningful in the college choice. Academically, the research provides insight about the willingness of athletic teams and departments to engage in wrongdoing by committing infractions. Yet, potential research could inspect the reform of the NCAA member institution compliance departments after the announcement of sanctions. For practitioners, as athletic departments continue to see success through conference and national championships, the brand and recognition of the university could also be altered in a negative manner after committing a major infraction.