An Examination of Decision Making Factors in the College Sport Addition Process: A Case of Varsity eSports Programs

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Management - Strategic Management (College Sport)  virtual asynchronous
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  Session: eSport III
Abstract 2020-081

With its growing popularity, esports has evolved into an organized sport competition with the establishment of its own governing body, known as the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE). Esports has also blossomed into the concept of collegiate esports and has started to flourish on campuses. While over 100 institutions have added a varsity esports team, others are slower to adopt.

Athletic administrators today face increased managerial challenges, often forced to restructure their athletic departments by redistributing staff and resources, or by adding to or eliminating sport teams from their programs (Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2013). However, adding or dropping a sport in particular draws far reaching consternation, often beyond campus boundaries. It is important for athletic administrators to utilize a rigorous and thorough decision-making process.

At present, the line of research on the college sport addition process is scant and scattered (Milstein 2014). Accordingly, the purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) To determine decision making factors which influence the college sport addition process; and 2) To examine if there are differential patterns of the decision-making process across different institutional contexts. Specifically, this study will explore and identify factors athletic administrators use when deciding whether or not to include an esports team in the varsity offerings. For the purpose of this study, we utilized the collegiate sport addition process model developed by Milstein (2014) as a conceptual framework and used to differentiate institutional contexts.

For the purpose of this study, press releases were collected on institutions adding sports to the college offerings between 2014-2019. The press releases were analyzed in accordance with Patton’s (1990) strategies for data analysis. By using the Carnegie Foundation school size classifications, a sample of nine schools was purposely selected to examine the patterns of the decision-making process across different institutional contexts.

This study identified factors, priorities, and processed considered by athletic administrators when adding a new sport to their varsity offerings. The findings provide empirical evidence that factors associated with sport adoption process are remarkably different than those for dropping sports. The findings will be presented at conference. This study also confirms differential patterns of the decision-making process across different institutional contexts.

The findings from this study will extend the line of research on the decision-making process in college sport contexts, focusing on the reasons for adding an esports team and factors used in deciding whether to add a sport as a varsity program in different college sport divisions. From a practical perspective, it will also provide insight into what college athletic administrators deem important for adding new sports.