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Comprehensive Exam Project Presentation

Midwest University Coach Perspectives on Student-Athlete Recruitment During Unprecedented Disruption

Jonah Bradley

Master's Program Leadership Education – Sports Management

2/3/22



Introduction

One significant result of the pandemic was the cancellation of athletic events, games, and tournaments across various sports. This disruption forced coaches to develop new ways to communicate with recruits, attract student-athletes to campuses, and started a new era in athletic recruitment.

The significant importance of recruitment on college athletic operations, especially in building competitive programs, is one of the most overwhelming challenges. Understanding coach responses to student-athlete recruitment during a crisis may offer tactics for improvement in recruitment practices.



Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore collegiate coaches' perspectives on student-athlete recruitment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study is critical because it is likely that recruitment efforts in the face of disruptions will continue to arise as a challenge for athletic coaches and departments. In addition, first-hand knowledge of how people cope with the changes offers new directions that may not be part of the existing literature.



Theoretical Framework

Organizational Learning (OL) theory offers a framework developing new insights and informing practices. The theory focuses explicitly on the development of new knowledge which is optimal for the consideration and response to the rapid change resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the OL theory seeks to make sense of interactions between people to create organic solutions to common problems (Dixon, 2017).

Further, the selection of OL theory to inform this study represents the acknowledgement of learning as a beneficial response to change.



Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What recruitment strategies did coaches use in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ 2: What challenges did student-athletes face in the recruiting process during the pandemic?

RQ 3: What challenges did coaches face in the recruiting process during the pandemic?



Research Methodology & Rationale

This qualitative study utilized Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Data analysis: Review of interview transcripts.

Rationale:

Five priorities in PAR undergrid the design, implementation and evaluation of such inquiry (Lawson et al).

- Opportunity for local stakeholders to participate in the exploration of problems around them
- Process occurs in practical form
- New knowledge emerges through the process
- Work becomes relevant to practice and policy
- Renewal of focus on local evidence that informs decisions



Project Stakeholders

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

University Athletic Departments

- Administrators
- Coaches
- Current Student-Athletes

Prospective Student-Athletes

- Parents & Guardians

Online Technology Services

- Zoom, HUDL, YouTube



Research Question 1 Findings

RQ1: What recruitment strategies did coaches use in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Theme: Traditional Recruiting Replaced with Technology-enabled Recruiting

One of the greatest challenges in the recruitment process was the shift from evaluating recruits in person to watching games online.



Research Question 2 Findings

RQ2: What challenges did student-athletes face in the recruiting process during the pandemic?

Theme: Roster Management and Player Development Inconsistent with Disruption

As a result of NCAA eligibility rule changes during the pandemic, limited numbers of scholarships presented less opportunity for recruits to play at the college level.



Research Question 3 Findings

RQ3: What challenges did coaches face in the recruiting process during the pandemic?

Theme: Inability to Engage in Person Hinders Interactions and Communication

The inability for coaches to host recruits on campus made it difficult to build relationships with face-to-face interactions.



Findings

Themes	Theme	Percent of Respondents Discussing Theme	Findings From Participant Responses
Theme 1	Traditional Recruiting Replaced with Technology-enabled Recruiting	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Film was very subpar• Difficult to assess skills, attitude, competitiveness• Lack of confidence in assessments of players
Theme 2	Inability to Engage in Person Hinders Interactions and Communication	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited face-to-face interactions• Couldn't meet parents/families• Recruits not able to meet current players
Theme 3	Roster Management and Player Development Inconsistent with Disruption	75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited scholarships• Eligibility & transfer rules changing presented a lack of opportunity for high school student-athletes• Lack of scholarship money



Leadership Implications

Core Course

Leadership Implications

Systems Thinking

This research utilized Organizational Learning theory. This theory focuses on development of new knowledge which is optimal for the response to the rapid changes resulting from COVID-19. OL Theory also seeks to understand interactions between people to create organic solutions.

Change Leadership

This research sought to understand experiences of four college basketball coaches that informed the recruitment process during disruption. The finding from the study highlight the role of coaches in organizational change. Specifically, the need for change in player recruitment, evaluation and development processes must remain aligned with the programs mission, vision and values.

Communications

This research calls attention to the importance of communication amongst stakeholders, especially between coaches and prospective student-athletes. Coaches were forced to find new means of communication to effectively forge new relationships with recruits.



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