THE ROAD TAKEN: NCAA BASKETBALL TRANSFER CULTURE

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis work to my family and friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents, Tony and Carla Hopkins, who never stopped believing in me and held me to an incredibly high standard. They never left my side when things were difficult and always inspired me to rise to the challenges ahead. Likewise, I would like to recognize my brother, Mitchell and aunts, Janice and Carolyn, whose words of encouragement helped make graduate school and the thesis process a little easier.

Furthermore, I dedicate this thesis to my best friends- Monique Oliver, Darriel Gaynor, and Chairese Culberson- who provided endless support as I worked to obtain a Masters in Business Administration from San Diego State University. I will always appreciate their friendship and everything they have done to help make this possible. These ladies were an amazing support system and truly made me believe that anything is possible.

Last but not least, I would like to give a special thanks to my grandmother, Marjorie Lamb who passed 3 months ago in the beginning stages of my thesis work. You are the most amazing woman I have ever known. I never would have made it this far without your unconditional love and constant prayer. Keep smiling down on me and know that everyday I’m working to make you proud. This is for you, grandma. I love you.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Road Taken: NCAA Basketball Transfer Culture
by
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Master of Business Administration
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Every year, as the collegiate basketball season comes to an end, many student-athletes are considering or have already decided to leave their current institution for another. Transferring has become popular in the collegiate realm of sports, as players search for playing time, a more suitable coach, or a program that will allow them to reach their highest potential on the court. Regardless of the reason, athletes are making moves hoping to find that the grass is greener on the other side. This is true amongst all National Collegiate Athletic Association athletes but probably most visible in Division I men's basketball. The national trend has taken over and greatly impacted collegiate programs across the country.

Each university is expected to encourage student success in the classroom and provide a fair opportunity in their respective sports but at the same time, they want to give students the option to transfer when it makes sense for all parties. Rules are in place to discourage athletes from constantly switching schools and of course, the student must seek permission to leave their current institution but none of that seems to matter. The NCAA is seeing more movement amongst student-athletes than ever before and it is becoming increasingly more difficult to explain why. Are universities and institutions to blame for these inconsistencies? Maybe schools are failing to provide accurate information throughout the recruiting process or even making undeliverable promises to prospective student-athletes. Perhaps, the student didn’t “sign up” for the time and effort commitment associated with representing an athletic program. Every situation is different and almost every student-athlete will encounter some sort of difficulty along the road to their degree but why are they are not willing to stick it out? Today, it seems much easier to go somewhere else than face whatever adversity lies ahead.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT ........................................... v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES ..................................... vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES ................................... viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................ ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

1 PURPOSE ..................................................................... 1

2 INTRODUCTION ................................................................ 2

   The NCAA ................................................................ 2
   NCAA D1 Rules and Regulations .................................. 4
   Eligibility/Recruitment ............................................. 4
   Transfers ................................................................ 9
   Transfer Statistics ................................................ 11

3 THE INSTITUTION’S ROLE ........................................... 16

   Marketing ................................................................ 18
   Retention ................................................................ 19

4 WHY TRANSFER? .......................................................... 23

5 FIELDWORK: SURVEY RESULTS AND INTERVIEWS ............... 26

6 REFLECTION AND SELF-ASSESSMENT ................................. 32

7 RECOMMENDATIONS ..................................................... 35

REFERENCES .................................................................. 38

APPENDIX

A STUDENT-ATHLETE TRANSFER SURVEY .......................... 40

B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DI NCAA COACHES .......... 44
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. 2012-13 Transfer Composition of Division I Student-Athlete Population (by Sport) ................................................................. 12

Table 2. 2012-13 Transfer Composition of Division I Student-Athlete Population (Sorted by % of 4-Year College Transfers in APR Cohort) ............................................. 13

Table 3. Trends in Number (Percent) of Transfers into Division I: Men’s Basketball .................. 13

Table 4. Trends in Number (Percent) of Transfers in Division I: Women’s Basketball .......... 14

Table 5. Survey and Interview Results ...................................................................................... 26
LIST OF FIGURES

PAGE

Figure 1. Trends in the proportion of four-year college transfers in APR cohorts. ...............15
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In addition, I want to acknowledge and thank the San Diego State Business School and Graduate division for allowing me to conduct my research and providing any assistance requested. Sarah Mercado, Dr. Nik Variaya, and Dr. David Ely were especially helpful in meeting deadlines and the completion of required paperwork.

Finally, I would like to show my appreciation to all the Division I student-athletes and basketball coaches that assisted me with this project. Their excitement and willingness to provide feedback made the completion of this research an enjoyable experience.
CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE

With about 40% of the student-athlete population switching schools within their first two years and more than 500 Division I players expected to transfer in the 2013-14 year alone, the NCAA is maintaining a nearly decade-long pace of increased player movement (Durando, 2012). It is an unfortunate reality that has garnered a great deal of attention in recent years, as the NCAA searches for answers. Thus, the intent of this paper is to examine this basketball transfer culture through the experiences of collegiate athletes and coaches. By the end of this study, I will provide numerous reasons why the NCAA continues to see an annual increase and will show that recruiting is a key contributor. Collegiate basketball is very much like a business, as success is heavily reliant on an institutions ability to obtain students to represent the program. Factors like the marketing of students and prospective student-athletes, persuasion during recruitment, and retention efforts can be the difference between signing a prospective athlete and actually keeping them for the duration of their playing career. However, as retention rates continue to fluctuate, it is clear that students are no longer buying what institutions are selling.

While exploring these concepts, I will examine the survey findings of 50 transfer student-athletes within the last 10 years (2004-2014) and three current Division I coaches to get their perspectives on the transfer process. My examination of the survey results and of literature on this topic will provide a greater understanding of the specific factors that contribute to the high numbers of Division I student-athletes who decide to transfer.
CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

Beyond formal systems of government, numerous organizations exist in society that have their own systems of social control, in which they develop regulations and sanctions to ensure that their members follow a particular set of desirable practices. Collegiate sport is one such realm that established the National Collegiate Athletics Association to help oversee its operations. The association has grown so much in their efforts to comply with their mission of “governing competition and integrating intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount” (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], n.d.d). They strive to prep students for competition and the real world but it seems some students aren’t getting what they need. “Something” is missing and retention of basketball players is certainly a reflection of the matter. As a result, throughout this study, great focus will be placed NCAA’s student-athlete transfer principle, beginning with its creation, background information and most notable regulations.

THE NCAA

Before the National Collegiate Athletic Association or the NCAA was established in 1906, young athletes were vulnerable to the dangers and harmful practices of sports (NCAA, n.d.a). Every sport had its own strictly enforced rules but there was very little regulation of the players. Most notably, the game of football emerged as a sport desperately needing improvement. Eligibility issues were constantly up for debate and unsportsmanlike conducted resulted in countless injuries and deaths. Such activity prompted many colleges to discontinue the sport until President Theodore Roosevelt intervened. He summoned college athletics leaders to the White House for conferences that encouraged reform and built a 62-member committee known as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS), later taking on its present name, the NCAA, in 1910.

For several years, the NCAA was merely a committee that discussed and evaluated rules. Games were watched carefully and regulated strictly but many aspects were in constant
flux, often having to be adapted for each contest. As time passed a system was put into place, allowing the committee to expand and hold its first championship tournament in 1921 - The National Collegiate Track and Field Championship (NCAA, n.d.a). Gradually, more rules committees were formed and more tournaments were created, including a basketball championship in 1939. At this point, the NCAA was generating a great deal of success but growth in membership and championships introduced new problems and demonstrated the organizations need for full time professional leadership. In 1951, a man by the name of Walter Byers was named executive director of the NCAA and a headquarters was later established in Kansas City, Missouri in 1952.

Byers immediately started making changes to keep up with the diverging athletic programs across the nation, forcing the NCAA to create a structure that recognized varying levels of interest. In 1973, members of the organization were divided into three legislative and competitive divisions- I, II, and III. Seven years later, 1980 turned out to be a historic year for the NCAA. The administration of women’s athletics began and Divisions II and III established 10 championships. The 75th NCAA convention adopted an extensive governance plan to include women’s athletics programs, services, and representation. Nineteen women’s championship events were formed on all levels, many of them Division I. Byers retired October 1, 1987, after 36 years as the Association’s executive director, having established himself as a visionary who created a sophisticated system of governing championships, rules, and finances. Currently, Mark A. Emmert, president at the University of Washington, resides as the fifth NCAA president. He was elected April 27, 2010 and officially took over office duties on October 5, 2010 (NCAA, n.d.a).

Today, The National Collegiate Athletic Association is made up of 1,281 institutions, conferences, organizations, and individuals that manage the athletic programs of colleges and universities in the United States. It is the responsibility of various committees to regulate 23 sports, 89 championships, and more than 400,000 student-athletes competing in three divisions (NCAA, n.d.c). Each division creates its own rules for governing personnel and playing/practice seasons; however, they remain consistent with the overall principles of the association. After years of classification and reformation, the system remains in place and is documented throughout official NCAA handbook. Although the NCAA governs three separate divisions and 24 sports, this paper will focus mainly on the rules and regulations of
Division I men’s and women’s basketball transfers in order to examine how these rules contribute to the high numbers of student-athlete transfers. Eligibility, recruiting, and the student perspective will be points of emphasis in evaluating the increased transfer rate and how the NCAA is a key contributor.

**NCAA D1 Rules and Regulations**

The 2013-2014 NCAA Division I manual is complete with 432 pages of guidelines that were established to “initiate, stimulate, and improve intercollegiate athletics programs for student-athletes while promoting and developing educational leadership, physical fitness, and athletic excellence” (NCAA, 2013, p. 1). Since competitive athletics programs are a vital part of education, a governing system was put in place to maintain proper conduct of all intercollegiate participants. Current and prospective student-athletes must adhere to NCAA bylaws to have the opportunity to attend and represent an institution. These regulations are very necessary to say the least but the actual process of getting recruited, receiving a scholarship, and maintaining eligibility can be a daunting task for anyone. Considering NCAA standards, eligibility is probably the most important piece of the puzzle because without it, a student-athlete cannot compete. The NCAA places a great deal of significance on knowing the rules and how they apply to your sport. After all, one mistake in the recruiting process can be the difference in receiving a scholarship and suiting up in the locker room. Every year, thousands of student-athletes miss out on the opportunity of a lifetime because the consciously or unconsciously fail to meet NCAA eligibility requirements.

**Eligibility/Recruitment**

In order to compete for a university that is a member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, a student-athlete must fulfill two components of eligibility: amateurism and academia. Amateurism is simply defined as a person who engages in an activity as a pastime, rather than professionally or for gain (Amateur, n.d.). The NCAA wants to ensure that all intercollegiate sports participants are amateurs, motivated primarily by education and the physical, mental, and social benefits derived (NCAA, 2013, p. 4). Per NCAA bylaws, student-athletes are not allowed to engage in any of the following activities prior to college enrollment to maintain amateurism:

- Enter into a professional contract
Accept salary for competition
• Receive expenses from a professional team
• Compete with professionals
• Receiving benefits from an agent
• Entering into an oral or written agreement with an agent (Peterson’s Staff, 2013)

All of these factors play a key role in determining amateurism eligibility and participation in all Division I athletics certified by the NCAA Eligibility Center or Clearinghouse. The process requires college bound student-athletes to answer several questions regarding his or her sports history. The idea is to develop a better understanding of the prospect’s amateur status and identify any potential issues that might conflict with NCAA rules. If the answers indicate a possible violation, the amateur-certification staff will work with the school to determine the facts. If indeed a violation occurred, an eligibility penalty will be imposed based on the severity of the violation. Penalties may include repayment of money, sitting out a specified number of games or, in rare cases, permanent ineligibility. (NCAA, n.d.e)

As harsh as amateurism penalties may seem, most prospective student-athletes who complete the certification process pass. According to NCAA (n.d.b), “Less than 1 percent of student-athletes seeking certification receive any sort of amateurism-related penalty. Every year, approximately 180,000 college bound athletes register and 90 percent of them are certified.” On average, about 7 percent of prospective athletes every year fall short of meeting the academic standards of a division in which they want to compete and about 600 college bound student-athletes are not certified because of amateurism issues (NCAA, n.d.a).

In addition to maintaining amateurism eligibility, the NCAA also requires Division I student-athletes to meet academic eligibility requirements. The four basic requirements are as follows:
• Graduate from high school
• Complete a 16 core courses
• Earn a minimum 2.0 grade-point average or GPA
• Earn a certain SAT or ACT test score (Peterson’s Staff, 2013)

All prospective students must attain these goals to compete on any given sports team at a Division I school and qualify for an athletic scholarship. The rules are quite simple and
straightforward. The 16 core courses can include: English, math, natural/physical science, social science, foreign language, and religion or philosophy. The 2.0 minimum GPA is set for the average student and further breaks down to a C average in terms of grades received. There is no exception to the NCAA academic standards; however, the fourth and final requirement is somewhat flexible. The NCAA requires all prospects to take either the SAT, a test that consists of math and critical reading, or the ACT, a combination of English, math, reading, and science. Most colleges only require one score, leaving it up to the student to choose the test they can be most successful in. Not to mention, students can take the SAT and ACT as many times as they want until a satisfactory score is obtained. Once the test is taken, the NCAA evaluates the students core course GPA on a sliding scale to determine a minimum score requirement. Thus, the higher the student’s GPA, the lower the test score can be (Peterson’s Staff, 2013).

Determining student-athlete eligibility is a quite a process. Upon clearinghouse certification, all student-athletes that wish to participate in Division I athletics are required to complete a release form that authorizes their high school to send the necessary academic information to the Eligibility Center. After the necessary paper work is in place, it is the responsibility of the student’s collegiate institution to certify the athlete’s amateur and academic eligibility. Unfortunately, meeting NCAA eligibility requirements does not guarantee admission into any specific collegiate institution. It simply means that the student is eligible to compete in Division I intercollegiate athletics, in which that student meets the requirements (Peterson’s Staff, 2013).

Becoming eligible is probably the most important part of seeking an athletic scholarship; however, it is only one aspect of Division I competition. For prospective student-athletes, eligibility leads to recruitment and eventually a scholarship. The NCAA defines recruiting as, “any solicitation of prospective student-athletes by an institutional staff member or by a representative of the institution’s athletics interests for the purpose of securing a prospective student-athlete’s enrollment and ultimate participation in the institution’s intercollegiate athletics program” (NCAA, n.d.f). The recruiting process has proven to be very strenuous on student-athletes. Although many enjoy the idea of endless college coaches beating down the door to have you compete in their school’s uniform, the NCAA had to establish some boundaries to control intrusions into the lives of student-
athletes. Colleges and universities were forced to adopt rules that create an equitable recruiting environment and promote the well-being of the student-athlete. The rules define who may be involved in the recruiting process, when recruiting may occur and the conditions under which recruiting may be conducted (Danko, n.d.).

The NCAA designed the recruiting process to find a balance between the interests of prospective student-athletes and the association’s member institutions. With some schools having a competitive advantage over others, recruiting bylaws promote equity among member schools and also protect the recruited individual from undue pressures that may interfere with their scholastic or athletic interests. Although most schools try hard to comply with the regulations set forth by the NCAA, many recruiting violations occur inadvertent. Problems can range from occasional improper phone calls and text messages to the more serious matters such as the funneling of cash and other illegal benefits to prospective student-athletes and their families. Thus, it is the responsibility of the NCAA to control the process.

The following recruiting rules were implemented until the conclusion of the 2012-2013 NCAA basketball season:

- **Print materials:** Outreach to potential Division I college players can begin as early as the recruit's sophomore year in high school but only in the form of brochures for camps and questionnaires. After June 15th following the recruit's sophomore year, Division I schools may send the recruit letters and other printed materials (Danko, n.d.).

- **Telephone Calls:** Coaches may call recruits beginning June 15th before their junior year. Coaches are allowed one call per month during the junior year, then two calls per week during the senior year. However, recruits may place unlimited calls to the coach of a Division I institution after their freshman year of high school (Danko, n.d.).

- **Email/Fax/Text Messaging:** Coaches may send recruits emails or faxes following the same rules for printed recruiting materials. Text messaging and instant messaging to recruits was banned in 2007. However, contact via social-networking sites like Twitter and Facebook are permissible but only through the direct-message feature. The NCAA forbids correspondence visible to other users of the services (Danko, n.d.).

- **Contact/Evaluations:** The NCAA defines "contact" as, “face-to-face engagement with a recruit or the recruit's parents that does not occur during a campus visit”. Contact can only occur during the recruit’s senior year. When a coach watches a recruit compete or practice, it is considered an evaluation. The NCAA allows seven contacts and evaluations combined (Danko, n.d.).
- **Campus Visits/Expenses:** The NCAA defines two forms of campus visit: official and unofficial. Official visits allow colleges to pay all expenses for the prospective athlete to visit, while unofficial visits are at the expense of the student-athlete. NCAA rules restrict official visits to senior year and limit recruits to five total visits (Danko, n.d.).

- **Quiet/Dead Periods:** The NCAA restricts in-person contact with and evaluations of recruits during quiet periods, which generally cover August and most of the spring. During shorter, more frequent dead periods, the rules forbid contact between coaches and recruits. The NCAA releases a new calendar specifying quiet and dead periods each year (Danko, n.d.).

NCAA rules and regulations are constantly changing. As of August 2013, a few of the previously mentioned rules were altered. Most notably, they eliminated restrictions on the way coaches can contact recruits -- no more improper phone calls, illegal text messages, dead periods or quiet periods (Mandel, 2013). New regulations allow unlimited contact to begin on July 1, after a prospect's sophomore year. That's nearly a year earlier than the current calendar, in which coaches are allowed to call once during the spring of a prospect's junior year, then not again until September 1 (Mandel, 2013). Coaches can also set up off-campus visits during prospects' junior years (Mandel, 2013). The idea behind the changes was to place more focus on things related to the institution, as opposed to devices and how/when communication takes place. In deregulating, the NCAA trimmed 25 pages off the official handbook and enabled recruits to form deeper relationships with prospective coaches (Mandel, 2013). Only time will tell if these changes can impact transfer numbers but restrictions of the past have certainly hindered communication and added to the difficulty of connecting with young prospects. It is equally possible that other NCAA requirements have contributed to the transfer process and we will determine that as we progress through the study with an emphasis on the longstanding recruiting rules that were in place during the collegiate careers of the surveyed participants.

The recruiting process ends with a signed agreement in the form of a National Letter of Intent. Even if the student-athlete makes a verbal commitment to a school, the NCAA does not consider it binding on the recruit or school until a signature is placed on the dotted line. Recruits may sign letters of intent during one of two specified periods of the year, a one-week early signing period in November or a month long period in the spring. Under the letter of intent, a school must provide financial aid to the athlete for one year (Danko, n.d.). This grant-in-aid is the athletic scholarship that all prospective student-athletes seek. Colleges and
universities of the NCAA are responsible for rewarding these scholarships; however, the NCAA partially supports prospective student-athletes through revenue distribution. Annually, the NCAA Division I and Division II members provide more than $2 billion in athletic scholarships to more than 126,000 student-athletes (NCAA, n.d.c).

Athletic scholarships, like most merit-based scholarships, are limited to one academic year. At the end of that year, the collegiate institution has until July 1 to notify the student-athlete if their scholarship will be renewed for the next academic year. Athletic scholarships may be renewed for a maximum of five years within a six-year period of continuous college attendance and in most cases the coach decides who gets a scholarship, what it covers, and whether it will be renewed. Per NCAA guidelines, all collegiate Division I basketball programs are awarded 15 full scholarships that cover tuition fees, room, board and required course related books. Conversely, it is not uncommon for a student-athlete to receive partial aid (Danko, n.d.).

Once a student-athlete signs a National Letter of Intent and accepts a scholarship from a college or university, they are committed to academia, athletic participation, and compliance of NCAA rules. A successful college experience requires the effort of everyone associated with the institution’s athletic program to gain a better understanding of what is expected and demanded of the student-athlete. Many don’t understand why so many NCAA rules exist but where would collegiate order be without them. The regulations are in place to lessen unfortunate situations, although sometimes it creates them. For example, the NCAA transfer policy has become the most controversial student-athlete process to date.

Transfers

NCAA rules are strict, straightforward, and require very minimal decision making on the part of student-athletes. Besides selecting the number on the back of your jersey or what to eat for pregame meals, athletes don’t have many choices, except when it comes to the transfer policy. Just as the NCAA has a right to impose their rules and regulations, student-athletes can exercise a fundamental right of their own: to leave. However, athletes can’t come and go as they please, especially if they wish to compete at another institution.
To ensure an athlete is eligible to transfer, they must follow an extensive process. First and foremost, to be considered a NCAA transfer student, one must meet any one of the following conditions:

- The student was officially registered and enrolled in a minimum, full-time program of studies in any quarter or semester of an academic year, certified by the admissions office, and present at the institution on the opening day of classes (Infante, n.d.).
- The student attended classes in any quarter or semester and was enrolled in a minimum full-time program of studies (Infante, n.d.).
- The student reported for a regular squad practice (including practice or conditioning activities that occur prior to certification and the beginning of any quarter or semester). Participation only in picture-day activities would not constitute "regular practice" (Infante, n.d.).
- The transfer student participated in practice or competed in a given sport even though the transfer student was enrolled in less than a minimum full-time program of study (Infante, n.d.).
- The transfer student received institutional financial aid while attending a summer term, summer school or summer-orientation program. A recruited student who receives institutional aid is subject to the transfer provisions, except that a prospective student-athlete (recruited or non-recruited) who is denied admission to the institution for full-time enrollment shall be permitted to enroll at another institution without being considered a transfer student (Infante, n.d.).

After the athlete qualifies as a transfer student, they must receive permission to transfer and speak with coaches at perspective institutions. The compliance office within the university’s athletics department grants this request. Generally, the institution must approve or deny the request within seven business days, otherwise the release will be granted by default (NCAA, 2013). Believe it or not, transfer requests are often denied, partially or in-full by coaches and institutions. As if the process isn’t extensive enough, universities can derail a student’s plans to leave their school and even restrict their ability to attend others. For example, a student can be granted permission to transfer but not to a list of restricted schools. The list is usually limited to universities within the conference but many coaches will add rivals or the competition as well (Russo, 2014).

There are a few rules associated with being an approved transfer. The most important of which being the athlete’s inability to play for one season. All transfer students will not be able to compete at your new university until they sit out a full year, or two academic semesters, not including summer school. At this time, the student can practice and participate
in all team activities besides games (Russo, 2014). Fortunately, there are a few common exceptions that have given basketball players favorable outcomes.

First and foremost, the graduation exception allows students to compete immediately at a second institution if they have completed a bachelor’s degree at their initial institution before their athletic eligibility expires. A full year of competition must remain and the initial institution must approve the request and/or not offer an athletic scholarship for the upcoming year. The military exception, also allows a student-athlete to transfer and play immediately if they are returning from at least 12 months of active military service. Finally, the family hardship exception, which is a very controversial waiver decided by the NCAA. In this case, the student is hoping to play immediately based on the fact that they are only transferring to assist with an ill or injured family member. The NCAA reviews these cases with respect to the nature of injury, the athlete’s responsibility to the injured, and the chronology of events (Infante, n.d.).

Even if a student is lucky enough to qualify for an exception, the certification process is still not finished. No matter the circumstance, every athlete is required to show degree progress and meet grade point average requirements of the perspective school. Meaning, if the student attended the first institution for one year, they must have completed 24 hours of credit (including 18 hours in the fall and spring) and at least six in the previous semester. Furthermore, 40% of the student’s major must be completed after two years and 60% after three years before transferring. Student-athletes who attempt to transfer while academically ineligible at their original institution, are not allowed to receive an athletic scholarship at another school (Infante, n.d.).

Transfer Statistics

According to the NCAA’s annual report of student-athletes, transfers have plagued basketball over the past several seasons. Although the NCAA has attempted to make transferring difficult by imposing rules that discourage such movement, their efforts have had very little effect. In 2012-2013 alone, men’s and women’s basketball transfers reached their highest percentages to date amongst 4-year institutions. Table 1 illustrates transfer status by major sport based on whether the student-athlete entered their current Division I school from high school, a 2-year college or another 4-year college within 2012-13. The bottom line, in
Table 1. 2012-13 Transfer Composition of Division I Student-Athlete Population (by Sport)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Baseball</th>
<th>Men’s B-ball</th>
<th>Football</th>
<th>Women’s B-Ball</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Transfers</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>86.6%</td>
<td>83.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-year Transfers</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year Transfers</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


particularly, demonstrates that men’s basketball had almost double the amount of football and baseball transfers combined for the year (NCAA Research, 2014).

Although basketball transfer numbers are the highest amongst major collegiate sports, it just so happens that tennis tops the NCAA charts. Both men’s and women’s tennis have the most transfers, with basketball falling shortly behind. Comparatively though, basketball has led all collegiate sports in annual growth over the last ten seasons and research points to numerous reasons why. The personal experiences of players and coaches will put basketball on notice and allude to the interesting fact that collegiate tennis is experiencing a gradual decline under the same rules and regulations. At this rate, it is assumed that basketball will surpass tennis in the 2013-2014 season but the NCAA has not made that information available yet. Table 2 references the transfer percentages of 4 year institutions amongst NCAA sports in 2012-2013 (NCAA Research, 2014).

Across 323 NCAA Division I men’s basketball teams, the student-athlete transfer population continues to rise. Not including graduate student transfers, almost exactly 10% of the 4,433 scholarships available in men's basketball teams have changed hands in 2012-2013 (Auerbach & Prisbell, 2012). Although that percentage has held steady for nearly a decade, records also show the transfer rate in men's basketball is 36% greater than the rate of the overall student-athlete population (Auerbach & Prisbell, 2012). With the exception of 3 seasons, growth has occurred annually between 4 year institutions. Table 3 provides a breakdown of men’s basketball transfers in terms of percentage and number of students within the last 10 seasons. The 2011-2012 season ended with 490 transfers, growing an additional 51 students the following year (NCAA Research, 2014).
Table 2. 2012-13 Transfer Composition of Division I Student-Athlete Population (Sorted by % of 4-Year College Transfers in APR Cohort)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men’s Sport</th>
<th>4-year</th>
<th>Women’s Sport</th>
<th>4-year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>Skiing</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiing</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track (Indoor)</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>Track (Outdoor)</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track (Outdoor)</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>Track (Indoor)</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football (FCS)</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>Water Polo</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>Bowling</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifle (Co-ed)</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>Ice Hockey</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Hockey</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football (FBS)</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Polo</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3. Trends in Number (Percent) of Transfers into Division I: Men’s Basketball

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003-2004 (73.9)</th>
<th>2004-2005 (72.6)</th>
<th>2005-2006 (72.0)</th>
<th>2006-2007 (71.9)</th>
<th>2007-2008 (73.6)</th>
<th>2008-2009 (73.8)</th>
<th>2009-2010 (74.7)</th>
<th>2010-2011 (74.0)</th>
<th>2011-2012 (73.5)</th>
<th>2012-2013 (72.6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Transfer</td>
<td>3,030</td>
<td>3,071</td>
<td>3,023</td>
<td>3,003</td>
<td>3,077</td>
<td>3,060</td>
<td>3,108</td>
<td>3,055</td>
<td>3,035</td>
<td>3,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-year transfers</td>
<td>685 (16.7)</td>
<td>729 (17.5)</td>
<td>750 (17.9)</td>
<td>724 (17.3)</td>
<td>652 (15.6)</td>
<td>643 (15.5)</td>
<td>634 (15.4)</td>
<td>638 (15.4)</td>
<td>605 (14.6)</td>
<td>591 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year transfers</td>
<td>385 (9.4)</td>
<td>412 (9.9)</td>
<td>425 (10.1)</td>
<td>450 (10.8)</td>
<td>452 (10.8)</td>
<td>444 (10.7)</td>
<td>418 (10.0)</td>
<td>437 (10.6)</td>
<td>490 (11.9)</td>
<td>541 (13.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NCAA women’s basketball has also caught the transfer epidemic. Although the numbers aren’t increasing at an alarming rate, the overall trend is the same. Women are leaving (just as their male counterparts are) to find more suitable situations. The difference in numbers however is somewhat related to the nature of female athletes. Studies have shown that most male athletes transfer because of playing time and the inability to wait their turn. Women on the other hand, have more patience and are willing to wait a little longer before calling it quits on a program. In addition, many Division I men have aspirations of playing basketball professionally after college or even before their eligibility ends. Thus, playing immediately and impacting a program are important to their success. Some women have similar goals but cannot compete as professionals until they have obtained a degree, so a year of limited minutes doesn’t matter as much. Regardless of those differences, movement of women’s basketball players is becoming increasingly more common. The 321 NCAA team breakdown of the last 10 seasons is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Trends in Number (Percent) of Transfers in Division I: Women’s Basketball

| Trends in Number (Percent) of Transfers into Division I: Women’s Basketball |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                             | 2003-2004 (82.5)            | 2004-2005 (83.1)            | 2005-2006 (84.2)            | 2006-2007 (83.6)            | 2007-2008 (83.5)            | 2008-2009 (83.8)            | 2009-2010 (83.5)            | 2010-2011 (83.3)            | 2011-2012 (84.2)            | 2012-2013 (84.0)            |
| Non-Transfer                |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |
| 2-year transfers            | 448 (9.9)                   | 434 (9.6)                   | 406 (9.0)                   | 417 (9.2)                   | 426 (9.5)                   | 398 (8.9)                   | 398 (8.9)                   | 372 (8.4)                   | 348 (7.8)                   | 336 (7.5)                   |
| 4-year transfers            | 343 (7.6)                   | 332 (7.3)                   | 308 (6.8)                   | 326 (7.2)                   | 315 (7.0)                   | 329 (7.3)                   | 342 (7.6)                   | 368 (8.3)                   | 358 (8.0)                   | 383 (8.5)                   |


Within the last 10 seasons, the overall NCAA transfer population is down. Major sports like baseball have dropped tremendously. Football has remained consistent, with little to no increase and other non-majors like tennis, seem to be making huge strides. Basketball is the only sport struggling to find answers and apparently athletes that are devoted to the commitment that they’ve made, as illustrated in Figure 1.
The collective findings of 272 baseball teams, 323 men’s basketball teams, 321 women’s basketball teams and 229 football teams within NCAA Division I sports illustrate that we are in the midst of a transfer epidemic (NCAA Research, 2014). Today, basketball has reached a rate where scholarship players cannot be replaced as fast as they are leaving to go somewhere else. Perhaps the problem is difficult to address, with numerous issues facing the NCAA and athletes everywhere but change shouldn’t remain out of the questions. Whatever the problem is, there must be a solution to it or an explanation that could lead to fewer collegiate transfers in the future.
CHAPTER 3

THE INSTITUTION’S ROLE

For decades, the NCAA and its member institutions have served as one of the biggest sports platforms in the country. Collegiate basketball, in particular, has created an irreplaceable atmosphere that every student-athlete wishes to be a part of. The team comradery, media attention, and national tournament give student-athletes the opportunity to showcase their skills, as they represent their institution. In exchange for the student’s hard work and dedication, the institution provides a scholarship to obtain a degree. Considering all of these things, the agreement seems rather mutual except for the fact that most institutions are generating a great deal of money from their players. The NCAA will be the first to tell you that athletics comes secondary to education but even the nature of recruitment tells us otherwise. With the exception of maybe Ivy League institutions, not too many coaches hit the recruiting trail searching for the smartest basketball players they can find. They want ballers, athletes, and winners. That is, they want players that are going to bring in revenue, recognition, and championships.

It seems “a fair exchange between college athletes and educational institutions involves more than room, board, books, and tuition” (Rheenan, 2013, p. 563) but this is not the case. NCAA member institutions are heavily favored once a student-athlete signs a national letter of intent. They know student-athletes want and need to be a part of their association to get a free education or to advance their playing careers and they take complete advantage of this fact. The odds of an institution making significant money off their players is great and the demands of a student-athlete far exceed the cost of their scholarships. The typical elite Division I student-athlete works much more than a typical 40-hours per week. Along with a full schedule of classes, these players must spent hours in the gym, attend long practices, and travel all over the country to play the sport they love. Let’s not forget that an athletic scholarship does not include the costs of living. Some of these student-athletes walk around campus in sweatpants and eat ramen noodles for dinner because they simply can’t afford anything better.
As NCAA institutions collect more sports revenue, the more prevalent athletic exploitation becomes. “Exploitation is defined as an unfair exchange between two parties” (Rheenan, 2013, p. 563). In this case, student-athletes are over worked and under compensated for their efforts. Their ability to perform, fill the seats, and win games is what drives revenue into the athletic program. Basketball and football, in particularly, also have the tall task of funding non-revenue teams that’s cannot pull their own weight (Rheenan, 2013). Meanwhile, the NCAA and its member institutions give up what they believe is the deal of a lifetime- a scholarship. They will have you believe that if they help graduate an athlete they have done that athlete life’s greatest favor, even though it is clear that some degrees are worth far more than others. Consider the athletes that are “routinely clustered into majors” that don't set them up to succeed later in life, mainly because those majors are easy enough for athletes to focus on their sport (Trahan, 2014). If an athlete majors in general studies, it’s usually because that’s all they could handle or the coach has directed them to do so. Then the athlete is faced with huge disservice and will likely have little to fall back on if basketball doesn’t work out (Trahan, 2014). If all degrees were treated equally and the vast majority of student-athletes were becoming engineers, accountants, and physiologist, then maybe the NCAA’s argument would hold some legitimacy. But given how the academic experience for many athletes actually works, it could not be further from the truth. It’s a cycle that goes far beyond academics and athletics because it’s a matter of fulfilling needs. Players just want to play, be comfortable, and showcase their skills, while institutions want athletes from whom they can benefit. Thus, when either party feels their desires aren’t met, they are likely to fill the void with someone or somewhere else.

Furthermore, the role of the institution and the lopsidedness of their agreement with a student-athlete are key in the transferring process. In signing a national letter of intent, the student-athlete basically relinquishes their rights and “lack ownership and control of their own labor in the process” (Rheenan, 2013, p. 555). The institution then holds all the power, including the right to release them and determine the next school they attend. Considering all these things, it’s difficult to argue that the NCAA’s primary goal is to look out for the student’s academic well-being. Institutions don’t seem to care if students get their education elsewhere, they care about them potentially competing and making money for another team (Trahan, 2014).
MARKETING

NCAA institutions recognize the power of having a successful basketball program. Not only does it influence the number of student applicants, alumni donations, and media attention but also makes recruiting easy by attracting marquee players. Coaches understand that the student-athletes college choice process is unlike that of a regular student because they consider an entirely different set of criteria. Both attribute and reputation will influence a student-athlete in their decision-making. Those who are unfamiliar with an institution and its athletic program will likely look to the school’s image to guide them (McCarty-Judson, 2002). Additionally, student-athletes know participation is contingent on remaining academically eligible per NCAA specifications, while also remaining physically competitive, barring injury or illness. Given these contingencies, they may seek the best athletic facilities and academic support to enable their success on and off the court (McCarty-Judson, 2002). Thus, in the big business of college basketball, the value of marketing an institution to outstanding student-athletes cannot be taken lightly, as it will ultimately contribute to the success of the team. These targeted efforts, however, often lead to the criticism that an overemphasis on “business” exists on many college campuses today. NCAA basketball has developed an occupational persona, in which coaches are employers, and student-athletes during recruitment are customers until eventually signing to become employees.

“Marketing is often referred to as the art of getting and keeping customers” (Kotler, 1991, p. 50). Coaches understand that the livelihood of their basketball team depends on the players they obtain so they market to student-athletes hoping to be their institution of choice. Although the NCAA would like to suggest otherwise, student-athletes are selected and given a scholarship based on their athletic ability. Coaches show interest and the student-athlete can then elect to play for the institution, assuming an offer has been made. The process seems as simple as picking a school but to the student-athlete, they are really picking a sports team or better yet, the team is picking them.

Recruiting is a multilayered process that every coach must face. It is their responsibility to identify young players that can impact the program now, with the potential to grow and improve later. As coaches are given the tall task of filtering through thousands of players across the country, it would seem nearly impossible without a marketing scheme- a detailed plan of when, who, and where to look. The talent search relies heavily on knowing
the level of your program and the caliber of players that fit. For example, A low major
Division I program probably has a slim chance of signing one of the top 50 high school
prospects in the country so they would be better suited to target players they could actually
obtain. However, once a player is on the radar, the necessary contact info is obtained and the
recruiting pitch is heavily applied.

Let’s not forget the competitive nature of the recruiting process. At the Division I
level, there is a very slim chance that only one institution is recruiting a student-athlete.
Many coaches are seeking to sign the same player and must have a marketing scheme that
gives them separation or an upper hand. “In order to provide greater satisfaction than
competitors, an organization must communicate with customers and understand their needs
and wants on a deeper level” (McCarty-Judson, 2002, p. 41). This comes with developing a
relationship and taking an interest in the aspirations and goals of the student-athlete. Coaches
must understand that the little things make a world of difference and “recruiting is the lifeline
to any athletic program” (Judson, James, & Aurand, 2004, p. 24). Unfortunately, they also
know that the hard part is over once a commitment from the student-athlete is received.
Institutional marketing efforts focus heavily on the “getting” aspect of a player and neglect to
focus on the “keeping” (McCarty-Judson, 2002). Retention of student-athletes, like the
retention of employees, is dependent upon an evolving beneficiary relationship, in which the
institution remains fully invested in meeting the needs their players and in turn, they will
respond on the court. Coaches, in particular, will benefit considerably from gaining deeper
insight into the expectations, desires, and wishes of their student-athletes (Judson et al.,
2004).

**RETENTION**

Perhaps the NCAA’s most pressing problem in basketball is the negligence of
student-athlete scholarships. Players commit to one institution, only to abandon them for
another when the opportunity presents itself. The issue is likely related to the ‘employee’
image associated with playing for an NCAA institution. “The coaches have control over
nearly every aspect of the players’ private lives by virtue of the fact that there are many rules
that they must follow under threat of discipline or the loss of a scholarship” (D’Aquila &
Rudolph, 2014, p. 39). Like employees, student-athletes sign contracts (or a national letter of
intent) in which they relinquish certain rights to their employer (institution). These restrictions include but are not limited to living arrangements, outside employment, the use of personal vehicles, off-campus travel, social media interactions, alcohol/drug use, gambling, and academic pursuits (D'Aquila & Rudolph, 2014); most of which are universally enforced by all NCAA institutions. However, rules related to the personal lives of a student-athlete are subject to the coach, which can create controversy and negatively impact player relationships. There isn’t a platform for student-athletes to voice their beliefs and attitudes regarding the team, as bargaining would be considered a sheer act of entitlement.

The nature of a scholarship only supports the idea that athletes are in fact, employees. If the NCAA allowed players to transfer with far fewer restrictions, then one could argue that the organization is looking out for athletes' well-being. However, since the scholarship essentially amounts to a contract that gives the institution all the power, it appears that protecting economic interests is the NCAA's top priority (Trahan, 2014). The work (basketball), the payment (a scholarship), and the control (the institution/coach) are all bound together with the authority, while the student-athlete is left to follow an exhaustively detailed code of conduct that even restricts their right to leave.

Undeniably, the NCAA transfer policy maintains these extreme levels of control. While coaches can “fire” players at any time by not renewing their scholarships, student-athletes have limitations regarding where they can go- potentially interfering with their academic and professional goals (Trahan, 2014). There is no regard for the student-athlete or the NCAA’s mission statement at this point. The student’s paramount experience ends in disappointment at the initial institution and begins with a transfer to the next, as a result of sport. “These players are clearly much more on the employee side of this equation. Their work is not related to the main mission of the university, which is education” (Wolverton, 2014). This type of relationship makes one question how the NCAA is preparing student-athletes for the real world. Perceptions rarely match the more complex reality. Especially in Division I basketball, the majority see themselves as athletes first but the likelihood of their making an athletic career is extremely small (Gibbard-Cook, 2011). Thus, when the cheering stops in a student-athlete’s life, their college experience should have taught them valuable lessons. Time management, perseverance, goal setting, and honoring commitment are just a few of the things an athlete should acquire (Ewers, 1998).
The NCAA seems unaware of the power they possess. Institutions and coaches resent the idea that they are too controlling and that student-athletes are employees of the program. If anything, they believe their mission depicts players as customers, who are being provided a service. Although the facts demonstrate otherwise, the NCAA should choose to treat them as such. Anderson (1991) refers to customer satisfaction as the buyers post purchase evaluation of his or her experience. The increased number of transfers in NCAA basketball is an indictment of the student-athlete experience at their respective institutions. Satisfied student-athletes, like satisfied customers, are more likely to remain loyal to their school, while dissatisfaction may prompt a student-athlete to transfer (Gibbard-Cook, 2011). Given the amount of time and money an institution spends on recruiting, one would consider retention to be of extreme importance. Instead, retaining student-athletes has become problematic because institutions are unwilling to maintain or put forth the same effort it took to recruit them. Once a player signs, coaches fail to monitor the student-athletes’ levels of satisfaction at various points in their college careers. This would be considered routine in corporate America. In addition to the typical win-loss record criteria, student-athlete satisfaction levels would be used as a basis for evaluating an athletic program (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997). Yet, assessments of satisfaction beyond the recruiting process seem to have been overlooked in collegiate basketball.

Businesses understand that hiring employees is just a start to creating a strong workforce. After employees are hired comes the most important part, keeping them. Retention is vital to any company because of the costs associated with hiring and training. An annual increase of employees leaving would not only raise red flags but alert human resources that something needs to change. Business owners would then implement several strategies to improve employee turnover, time, and productivity. Although NCAA institutions don’t have HR departments, they have coaches and institution officials that need to take note of the costs associated with losing a student-athlete. Recruiting funds and thousands of scholarships dollars are forfeited when they depart to another school. Thus, from a business standpoint, the NCAA and its member institutions should demonstrate a parallel concern and address the matter as any company would.

In lieu of an HR presence, it’s possible for NCAA retention to improve through the use of an innovative program called “Personal Best.” It was created by Dr. Amy Schmitz-
Sciborski and Marsha Weinberg to help student-athletes make the transition from high school to college (Gibbard-Cook, 2011). The new online course uses positive psychology to help students gain a deeper understanding of themselves while dealing with the trials and tribulations of being an athlete. Not only does the program monitor the collegiate experience but also encourages student-athletes to think critically and analytically on and off the court. With such a perspective, the student-athlete will hopefully reconsider transferring when placed in adverse situations. “Personal Best” will empower them to work towards a more balanced approach of academics and athletics—gaining greater control of a destiny that may or may not include sports (Gibbard-Cook, 2011).
CHAPTER 4

WHY TRANSFER?

There are many reasons why a student-athlete might consider transferring institutions. In most cases, the athlete initiates the move but there have been several instances where a coach drives a player away from the program. The most common reasons are as follows:

- **Playing time:** Whether they deserve the minutes or not, almost every student-athlete wants to see the court. Players come in with expectations to play significant minutes and when that doesn’t transpire, they immediately look for a way out. Bench warming doesn’t sit well with most athletes, especially highly touted recruits that anticipate starting or having a huge impact on the team (Galehouse, 2013).

- **Injuries:** Many careers have been cut short by serious injuries. When athletes get injured and cannot play, they often become depressed and lose focus. There are certainly mental and physical hurdles to climb after suffering an injury and many players struggle to bounce back. They become different players and can no longer athletically fulfill the desires of their coach on the court (Galehouse, 2013).

- **Coaching:** Generally, the coach of the team plays a significant role in the student-athlete accepting a scholarship to an institution. The player-coach relationship is key and often translates to playing time, role establishment, and team impact. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for a student-athlete to land on a team with a coach they just don’t mesh with. Sure everything seems amazing throughout the recruiting process but after joining the team, students quickly learn that they are just another player. Small conflicts of interest and lack of communication then create big problems that lead to less playing time and an un-coachable attitude. In less extreme cases, institutions make coaching changes that students disagree with. It is an uncontrollable and sometimes an unfortunate situation for the athlete so they choose to leave. Many athletes want to play for the coach that recruited and signed them (Galehouse, 2013).

- **Academics:** Let’s be bluntly honest here; many student-athletes are not student-athletes, but rather athletes who are inconvenienced by going to classes. Unfortunately, students who are not committed academically to their institution have trouble succeeding. The main reason being that an athlete must pass their classes in order to compete. Ideally, the whole point of receiving a scholarship is to get a degree, which requires focus and energy to academia on the part of the athlete. Perhaps student-athletes choose institutions that are too difficult with many required, hard, demanding courses. While athletics can compound this problem, there are many majors that are not for “everybody,” whether you are an athlete or a regular student. Many engineering, chemistry or physics programs require long hours in the classroom as well as labs that student-athletes simply cannot miss. Coaches are generally aware...
of the demanding majors as well and will often discourage or not allow an athlete to pursue a certain program (Galehouse, 2013).

- Style of play: Different players fit different systems. Some coaches prefer zone over man, transition over half court, and even fundamental over flashy. Thus, it is not uncommon for a basketball player to complain that the team and coach do not fit his style of play. Athletes want to excel on the court and get the best out of their athletic ability (Galehouse, 2013).

- Rule Breaking: Unfortunately, some student-athletes show the inability to follow institution and team rules. This usually results in the student-athlete breaching some sort of policy, whether academic or team related, in which they are asked to leave. Academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and failure to pass a certified drug test are some of the most common obstructions.

- Loss of interest: Playing college basketball sounds great but it can be very demanding at times. Waking up at 6 am to run followed by 4 hours of class, practice, and weights makes for an extremely long day. Sometimes athletes don’t know what they are getting themselves into, as a serious commitment of time and effort is required. Student-athletes must be extremely passionate about their sport to play in college at any level and must be prepared to play through fall, winter and spring (Galehouse, 2013).

- Location: Distance isn’t always important but can play a role in the student-athlete’s ability to perform. Homesickness is very common for athletes who leave their hometown for the first time. Sometimes being too far away from your support system results in depression, lack of focus, and an eagerness to get back home (Galehouse, 2013).

Every transfer student-athlete switches institutions with good intentions. They are hopeful that the grass will be greener at their new school and the obstacles of their previous institution will no longer stand in their way. Unfortunately, this isn’t always the case, as there are many positive and negatives associated with transferring.

First and foremost, transferring requires almost every athlete to sit out a year of competition. Although some students use the extra academic year to their benefit, most athletes wish to play immediately, especially those who left their previous institution because of playing time. The extra year generally allows the student to pick up a minor or begin grad school but if they are not big on academics, the student is just creating more work to obtain a degree. In addition, there is the possibility that the new institution doesn’t offer the same program of study and all completed credits don’t transfer in. In this case, many course credits will be forfeited and new courses must replace them, prolonging graduation in the future.

Secondly, every student is placed under a 5-year clock of eligibility. Student-athletes who wish to transfer more than once are still subject to complete their 4 seasons of
competition in a 5-year period. Thus, transfer happy students will forfeit a potential year on the basketball court upon their second transfer. Inability to compete for a season can hinder a player with aspirations of playing at a professional level. Scouts want every possible opportunity to see a potential prospect play and international coaches may question your commitment to a team as a result of constant switching.

Finally, transferring is not for everyone and doesn’t always equate to immediate gratification. Situations occur all the time, where students switch institutions and become worse off. They dig themselves into holes academically, get injured, or possibly see the same amount of action on the court as they did before. Unfortunately, the student-athlete won’t know if their previous situation was as bad as it seemed until they have something to compare it to. Transferring is a gamble and a risky decision on the part of the athlete so a well thought out plan and understanding of the pros and cons is vital.
CHAPTER 5

FIELDWORK: SURVEY RESULTS AND INTERVIEWS

As alluded to in the beginning of this paper, 50 transfer student-athletes were surveyed and two Division I coaches were interviewed to obtain research for this study. The goal of their participation was to examine why those students transferred and to comparably provide the insight of coaches that have been on both sides of the transfer process. To begin the survey, the student-athletes were asked to select their main reason for transferring. Academics, coach, playing time, location, and other were amongst their choices and everyone answered accordingly. Table 5 reflects student-athletes individual responses and collectively illustrates the main reasons they transferred.

Table 5. Survey and Interview Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transfer Reason</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing time</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on these findings, it’s clear that both the coach of the institution and playing time greatly impacted the student-athletes eagerness to find another program. Together, those reasons combined for 82% of the surveyed population and greatly overshadowed academics at just 12% and location/other at merely half of that. In addition, the student-athletes were asked to select their main reason for choosing their new institution and to no surprise the results were nearly the same. Whatever the student-athlete lacked at their old institution, they attempted to fill the void at a new institution. Appendix A provides a template of the 15-question survey, which further inquiries about the student-athlete transfer experience. In order to obtain more detailed and descriptive responses, the remaining 13 questions were presented in short-answer format. This makes the collection of statistical data difficult but
provides responses unique to each and every student-athlete. All 50 participants had a story to tell and the study was designed to reflect that.

While filtering through responses, a few notable themes appeared. First and foremost, I observed that the student-athletes felt wiser when choosing a university the second time around (during the transfer process). On a scale of 1-5 (1 being least difficult and 5 being extremely difficult), more than half of my participants suggested that it was easy to select a transfer institution. Although some weren’t granted their release as easily as others, their familiarity with the process and prior experience in a collegiate athletics program really helped. They knew what to look for and what questions to ask, as they searched for a place to continue their careers. Secondly, I noticed a significant absence of academics as an important factor in the decision-making in numerous survey responses. It was unreal to see how many participants failed to even mention their major or the classes they were taking. While my participants were chosen at random, the study demonstrated some bias, as majority of my student-athletes were especially strong in athletics. As far as I could tell, I surveyed many “athlete-students” and academia was of very little importance. Finally, I sensed minimal regret from the student-athletes when asked about the decision they made to switch institutions. Many discussed how transferring was advantageous to them, while others admitted that transferring didn’t solve all of their problems but was the best decision in the end. Apparently, the experience taught them many valuable lessons about life and themselves.

My acquisition of student-athletes from all over the country, allowed me to collect a wide range of responses without restrictions. My sample was not limited to things such as conference or location, which made the study even more genuine. Transferring amongst Division I basketball players was happening everywhere as a result of coaches leaving the program, having deficient relationships with players, and offering little to no minutes. To further understand the difficulties of these student-athletes, I included some survey excerpts below.

The coach that recruited me accepted a position at another school. We had a great relationship that was unmatched by the guy that replaced him. I had to leave. We just didn’t see eye to eye. – SDSU male transfer

My coach made it seem like I would have a huge impact as a freshman but that didn’t happen. I sat the bench for several games when I knew I should be out
there. I just wanted to play and I wasn’t going to waste another season hoping it happened. – Louisville female transfer

My head coach told me I was her top recruit and that I had one week to accept a scholarship from her before she moved on to another player. This was very intimidating to me because I needed a scholarship and wanted to play basketball. I didn’t have many options and felt I had no choice but to accept. – Austin Peay female transfer

Hard work didn’t get you playing time at Washington State. I out-hustled and out-played several girls on the team in practice but on game days they would play 30 minutes and I would play 10. I knew I could have a bigger role at Fresno State so it was an easy decision for me to leave. - Fresno State female transfer

While athletic opportunity developed as a common theme amongst most of my participants, I had few student-athletes who left because they were homesick or unsuccessful in the classroom. They believed transferring closer to home and/or enrolling in a less challenging institution would be to their benefit. Regardless of the reason, I found it very interesting that the majority of my participants were unbothered by the NCAA’s “sit out” clause as a result of transferring. Some expressed the difficulty of watching their team battle without them but ultimately, they benefited from the extra year. A men’s basketball transfer at San Diego State suggested:

Not playing in games was tough but sitting out for a season allowed me to work on my game and become a better player. Practice was hard and intense, which elevated my game for the upcoming season. If anything, it helped me more than it hurt me.

A Mississippi State junior women’s transfer agreed, as she asserted:

I don’t really consider redshirting a penalty. I obviously transferred to get more minutes but the extra year of school was a plus. I replaced the few credits I lost and was able to double major in my final season.

Evidently, the NCAA has failed in its attempt to discourage transferring. Student-athletes have taken complete advantage of their “punishment” and the NCAA has contributed too very little suffering. In fact, many of my participants blame lack of information, poor decisions, and the coaches that head these member institutions for some of their disappointing careers. Although they recognize the inequalities within the organization, like literary assertions that student-athletes have become “employees,” they accept the NCAA governing body for what it is and show little resistance to the rules of the lengthy handbook.

My research suggests that unfair circumstances also lead to a student-athletes desire to transfer. Some of the survey responses were absolutely heartbreaking and I feel for the
students that never found happiness throughout their collegiate careers. Several student-athletes even alluded to the fact that transferring didn’t solve all of their problems. Some found themselves in worse situations and never accomplished their goals and aspirations as a student-athlete. To further support these claims, I included a few more quotes from the participant’s surveys.

I did everything that was asked of me. Poured my heart into the team for two years. I played a few bad games at the conclusion of the season and was told shortly after that I wasn’t developing like I should be. Not only did I not have a scholarship for the following season but I was advised by my coach to consider playing Division II. – SDSU sophomore transfer

After working hard and holding a losing team together, my coach told me I demanded too much respect from my teammates. He said, “This team has become yours, not mine so I won’t be renewing your scholarship. – University of San Diego male transfer

I tore my ACL midway through my freshman season. I made a full recovery but struggled my sophomore year. Coach told me I was damaged goods and that his program could no longer use me. - UCSB female transfer

I transferred twice. Coach said I wasn’t good enough to play at state, although I was their “top recruit” out of high school. Moved to my second school and tore my Achilles. I can probably count on 2 hands the number of games I played in my years of eligibility. - South Carolina University female transfer

For the sake of argument and my ability to conduct an unbiased study, I used the student-athlete responses and developed questions (as illustrated in Appendix B) to present to current Division I basketball coaches. In two interviews, I obtained their insightful prospective on the transfer process and annual numbers continue to increase. Cal State Fullerton assistant women’s basketball coach is not surprised by the NCAA transfer culture and believes the reason is simple:

Student-athletes and their support systems (parents, club coaches, and high school coaches), are not informed enough on the process of recruiting. They do not know the right questions to ask coaches and don’t build relationships. The process should be about finding the right fit based on the goals and aspirations of the student-athlete and researching a coach/institution would reveal those things. Plus, there are so many coaches out there recruiting a number and not necessarily a kid that fits their system and shares the characteristics and values of their program. (personal communication, July 22, 2014)

Evidently, these inconsistences have contributed to increased transfers numbers and devalued the commitment of a player to an institution and coach. Both parties are to blame, as we have seen student-athletes who ask to transfer and coaches that decline to renew
athletic scholarships. However, it is believed that coaches should be held more accountable for the student-athletes experience.

Recruitment out of high school involves a child and an adult. At the time of a commitment, the prospective student-athlete is usually under the age of 18, making one of the biggest decisions of their life. One might assume that these kids are aided in the recruitment process but that still doesn’t guarantee that they land at the best fitting institution. Student-athletes make emotional decisions based on what the prospective coach tells them. A current San Diego State men’s basketball coach expressed the manipulation that takes place in recruiting and how it results in and unfavorable situation for the student athlete. He exclaimed:

Many college coaches make false promises about playing time, team chemistry, housing and meal plans, travel, and classes. They’ll tell a player anything to sign them because they know they aren’t held responsible for the things they do. Then when it comes time to produce and develop a player as promised, they can’t even find minutes for them on the floor. They’ll overpromise, oversell, and finally, over-recruit that student-athlete if someone better comes along. (personal communication, July 25, 2014)

Unfortunately, this is the harsh reality of the recruiting process and both interviewed coaches agree that this type of conduct comes from the pressures of representing the athletic program of an institution. Sport, especially basketball, is a big deal at most Division I universities. They expect coaches to win and obtain student-athletes that aid them in doing so. “As a coach, you recruit so many players that sometimes unfortunate things happen. I’ve made my share of mistakes. I’m not exempt from some of the things your student-athletes suggested,” expressed the SDSU assistant, “But I try to remain open and honest during the recruiting process because I think that attracts quality kids” (personal communication, July 25, 2014).

Finally, both interviewees were asked about their roles in the collegiate basketball transfer culture and NCAA’s implementation of the policy. The Cal State Fullerton assistant was happy to report that she can count on one hand the number of players that have transferred from the programs she’s been associated with. “I haven’t had many transfers but I’ve obtained a few by building relationships during the recruiting process. Even if a kid tells me “No”, I wish them well and if they need to transfer they will remember and call,” she urged (personal communication, July 22, 2014). The SDSU men’s assistant, on the other
hand, has had his fair share of student-athletes transfer but feels those experiences have contributed to his growth as a coach. He now considers San Diego State University a landing pad for transfers, as last year’s team contained six when their title run ended in the sweet 16. As a consistent top 25 team, his program has increased its reputation and chances of getting big time recruits. He asserted:

Now, I only present what SDSU has to offer. I don’t mention the competition because if I’m going after a player, I believe we’re good enough. If the student agrees, we’ll hopefully get a commitment and if they don’t, I hope they find what they’re looking for somewhere else. (personal communication, July 25, 2014)

The relationship factor seems to be the “missing” piece to the puzzle for most student-athletes. It has proven to be the main reason for numerous transfers over the years and is related to many others. If players and coaches communicated their feelings about production, playing time, academics, and homesickness, the possibility of transferring would likely decrease. The NCAA, however, cannot do more than they have already done. The principle, like every other regulation, has established guidelines for coaches and student athletes to follow but cannot influence retention without preventing transferring all together. Hence, it is the responsibility of the prospective student-athlete to research the coaches and institutions he comes in contact with. “The goals of every coach should exceed basketball and help the student-athlete grow as a positive, productive, member of society” (Cal State Fullerton women’s assistant coach, personal communication, July 25, 2014).
CHAPTER 6

REFLECTION AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

As a former Division I transfer student-athlete, I was associated with the NCAA for five years. I went through the basketball recruiting process twice, once as a prospect out of high school and once as a Duke sophomore transferring to San Diego State University. As a result, not only do I have a thorough understanding of the NCAA transfer policy but I contributed to the 8.3% of women’s basketball transfers in 2010. The process was very difficult and a somewhat uncomfortable transition. I remember thinking as a kid that I had my life all planned out. I was going to Duke to play ball for the number 3 team in the country and I was going to get my degree in business. It never occurred to me that things wouldn’t turn out that way and till this day, I wonder where I would be if I stayed with the blue devils. Ten games into my freshman season, I suffered from a knee injury. I underwent surgery and returned two months later, only to find out at the conclusion of the season that I needed surgery again. Two surgeries in five months was completely devastating. Not only was I physically hurt but emotional hurt that I would never see significant playing time again. Everything changed, from my role on the team to my relationship with the head coach and shortly after, I was asked to leave.

Fortunately, transferring to San Diego State University was one of the best decisions of my life. Per NCAA rules, I sat out my first year and made a full recovery from my knee injuries, excelled at the point guard position under Coach Beth Burns, and was named team captain for my junior and senior season. In addition, I started every game, received national recognition, and was accepted into the master’s program of business administration in my 5th year. I was lucky enough to benefit from the NCAA transfer process that is often abused today. Thus, my own personal interests and the decade long increase we’ve seen in collegiate basketball transfer numbers, inspired me to conduct this study and find answers.

The research I have presented in this paper has led me to several conclusions about the NCAA transfer rule, its member institutions, and the athletes they govern. First and foremost, the ability to transfer in collegiate sports it’s absolutely necessary. Just as coaches
have the option to leave one school and accept a position somewhere, student-athletes should be given the same right. I think certain aspects of the rule seem harsh but in actuality, they are appropriate to keep students from constantly switching institutions. One might argue that it shouldn’t matter if a student decides to transfer multiple times but it does because the action affects multiple people. Consider the coach who has to now fill a void on this team or the institution who has invested a great deal of time and money into an athlete only to have it all go to waste after a year. NCAA institutions are trying to prepare students for life and the real world, in which commitments are honored and challenges are accepted.

In recent years, many student-athletes have taken advantage of the transfer policy and created this misconception in college basketball that “if you don’t like an institution, just transfer.” It has become culturally acceptable for an athlete to just get up and leave, even under the smallest circumstances. On the other hand, there are many justifiable cases for students to switch institutions. By all means, if the student is not wanted then it makes perfect sense to leave. A coach should be happy to have you apart of their program and should consider every member an important part of the team. Anything less than that warrants the student to find a better suiting situation to insure they have the best collegiate athletic experience possible. Believe it or not, NCAA member institutions play a significant role in this aspect. My findings suggest that it’s rare for a student to flat out dislike an institution that they thoughtful chose. An unfortunate occurrence, forfeited opportunity, or false expectations led them to believe they had to leave. Thus, some adjustments on the part of the institution could potentially increase student athlete retention rates in the future.

Regardless of the reason, transferring will always create some sort of controversy. There will be critics who say college basketball is now plagued with transfers, students that take advantage of the policy, and athletes that feel they have no choice but to leave in order to be successful. I understand every side to these stories and as a transfer, I am in no position to say whether or not a student’s decision to transfer was justifiable. However, I do believe the collegiate experience as both a student and an athlete is what you make it. Every day on the court or in the classroom may not be enjoyable. Its hard work and NCAA member institutions are going to be sure they get their money’s worth out of every player’s scholarship. We have to change the reputation of transferring as an “easy way out” option that is often encouraged without a second thought. Student-athletes have to overcome
difficulties, be willing to work hard and fight through adversity. Trust me when I say, success feels so much better when you’ve had to overcome obstacles to get there. Yet, if it’s not possible, then and only then, should transferring become the last resort. It should be a decision made after the student-athlete has exhausted all options and it has been made clear that he or she won’t prosper at the given institution. Transferring for the right reasons should mean the student-athlete did everything they could to make it work and the decision to leave was logical, educated, and necessary.
CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS

The major goals of this study was to shed light on the collegiate basketball transfer culture and provide insight on how we can lessen the annual increase of every season. Thus, there are many things for both student-athletes and coaches to consider throughout the recruiting and transfer process that could ultimately improve things in the future. Student-athletes, my suggestions for you are as follows:

- Do your homework. Student-athletes should know exactly what they are getting themselves into when they select an institution. Examine the team roster, speak with current players, and become familiar with the team’s style of play. Upon arrival, the student should have a fairly good idea of what lies ahead on and off the court. In addition, be sure the institution offers a degree program that is to your liking and conducive for a 6-month basketball season (Lancaster, 2011).

- Take your time and choose wisely. Unfortunately due to pressure, fear, excitement, lack of truth, and a variety of other things, student-athletes often make quick, uncertain decisions about their future. Student-athletes should not get caught up in the emotions of others or something that hinders their ability to make the best decision for them (Lancaster, 2011).

- Build relationships. The recruiting process is the perfect time to get to know an institution’s coaching staff and school officials. Don’t take this opportunity for granted because it can make a huge difference in your collegiate experience. A hopeless player-coach relationship almost always ends with disappointment, whereas great communication often solves any problems or concerns. The new rules that allow unrestricted communication by the NCAA should certainly help with this matter and allow players to better connect with potential coaches.

- Consider the risks. Many things affect student-athletes once they choose to transfer to another institution. When considering this option, it’s important to think about the possible year of sitting out, the credits that may or may not transfer over, the new scholarships being offered to you (if at all), and the possibility that your coach and athletic department will allow the transfer to happen. Sometimes playing a few extra minutes isn’t worth the sacrifice (Lancaster, 2011).

- Try not to burn bridges. The decision of a student-athlete to leave an institution should be carried out with the utmost respect. Even if the student-athlete has ill feelings towards their former coach, it’s important to remember that they have the power to deny your transfer request or limit your transfer options. Also, the student-athlete should keep in mind that once you request a transfer, your scholarship is...
generally gone. If you test the waters and find that no other teams are interested in your services then you’re likely without a scholarship and possibly, a team (Lancaster, 2011).

- Understand the life-long impact of your decisions. Every student-athlete should think about life beyond basketball when they select an institution and program of study. This is why the decision doesn’t come easy and should be carefully considered before any commitments are made. The choices you make will ultimately affect the people around you, the lifestyle you choose to live, and the job offers you receive in the future (Lancaster, 2011).

Coaches, my suggestions for you are as follows:

- Recruit Honestly. It is important for coaches to set an example and do things the right way. Don’t add to the difficulty of the recruiting process by speaking negatively of other institutions to student-athletes. Build up your institution and show the student-athletes what your program has to offer.

- Don’t promise things you can’t deliver. Coaches shouldn’t discuss playing time and things of that nature with student-athletes until they have earned it. Players often feel entitled when they are offered a starting spot and 40 minutes of playing time before the set foot on campus and those expectations lead to disasters when they don’t transpire.

- Recruit players that fit your system and program. Coaches should avoid recruiting just a number but a student-athlete that has the proper skill set and attributes to succeed at your institution. Just because a student-athlete is talented, doesn’t necessarily mean he will excel on your team. If you have to spend 3 years of eligibility trying to mold a player into an ideal fit, chances are they didn’t belong at your school in the first place.

- Build relationships. Coaches must get to know their players and know them well. After all, players generally commit to them and not the actual institution. Having a good relationship with a player can be advantageous in solving problems in the future.

- Implement a strategy to assess the satisfaction of your student-athletes. Whether you meet with them regularly or monitor the results of a program like “Personal Best”, it is important to pay attention to their college experience both on and off the court.

- Prepare your players for life beyond sports. The best coaches understand that basketball isn’t everything. Young adults need guidance and real world preparation from their coaches. The values and principles instilled in a program can build a foundation that will stick with the student-athlete forever.

Considering the previously mentioned recommendations, it is my hope that these small changes will lead to a decline in the NCAA basketball transfer culture. This study has proven that both student-athletes and their prospective institutions are responsible for the large number of transfers we see today. Students have failed to do their research and find the
most suitable environment for them. While institution officials, specifically coaches, use false antics to recruit players that don’t fit their programs. College basketball has become solely about advancing as an athlete and transferring has not only supported this notion but enabled it. If the NCAA wants to hold true to their mission statement of “integrating intercollegiate athletics into higher education,” we cannot allow athletic opportunity to reign supreme. Retention rates must increase to prove that preparation for life beyond basketball is taking place.

Once the ball stops bouncing, student-athletes will be left with their degrees and the experiences they endured along the way. Transferring might inevitably be amongst those experiences but the process will ultimately reveal character and aspirations. With any luck, NCAA student-athletes will get it right the first time and switching institutions will become an afterthought for those who invest their time wisely and make the most of the opportunities basketball has given them.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

STUDENT-ATHLETE TRANSFER SURVEY
Student-Athlete Transfer Survey

Current student status (please circle): Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  Senior  Graduate

Name of institution that you transferred from:

Name of the institution that you transferred to:

Fill in the bubble that corresponds to the main reason you chose the institution you transferred from:

- Academic (different or improved degree program/major)
- Athletic program
- Relationship with coaches/teammates
- Location
- Institution’s reputation
- Other

Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question and how it influenced your decision to initially choose the institution that you transferred from.

Please describe your experience at the institution you transferred from.

Fill in the bubble that corresponds to the main reason you chose the institution you transferred to:

- Academic (different or improved degree program/major)
- Increased playing time or team role
- Improved relationship with coaches/teammates
- Location
- Institution’s reputation
- Other
Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question and how it influenced your decision to transfer to a new institution.

Please describe your experience at the institution to which you transferred.

On a scale of 1-5, how difficult was the transfer process? (1=easy and 5=extremely difficult) ________ - Please elaborate.

Did anyone assist you in the transfer process? If so, how?

How could someone have assisted you to make the transfer process better?

What advantages or disadvantages did you gain from transferring (if any)?

What could the institution you transferred from have done better to retain you?

Were you treated differently at the institution you transferred to (compared with how you were treated at the institution you transferred from)? If so, how?
What were the penalties for transferring in terms of athletic competition and how did you handle the consequences?

Do you believe the institution you transferred to helped you achieve your educational/athletic objectives? If so, why?

Do you regret the decisions you made in leaving or staying at the given institutions? Why?
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DI NCAA COACHES
Interview Questions for D1 NCAA Coaches

Occupation:

Experience in Division I college basketball (Years):

What are your thoughts on why there are more and more student-athletes transferring institutions?

What do you think causes student-athletes to transfer?

Do you believe institutions are false advertising to their recruits? If so, how?

What can institutions do better to retain their student athletes?

As a coach, how have you been able to obtain transfer student athletes and/or keep your student athletes from transferring?

What do you offer student-athletes that their previous institution did not?
How effective do you think it is to talk up your institution while downplaying another to obtain a recruit? Have you ever tried this technique yourself?

Ideally, what do you hope an athlete accomplishes as a result of attending your institution?

What do you think players and coaches can do to minimize the number of student-athletes that transfer to another university?

As such, the relationship between college athletes and institutions of higher learning may well be exploitive.