

International Student-Athletes in Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS): Perceptions, Motivations, and Experiences

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This exploratory study investigated the landscape of international student-athletes participating in Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), the governing body for university sport in Canada, with respect to number, sport, and gender breakdown, as well as their perceptions, motivations, and experiences. Of the over 11,000 CIS student-athletes competing in 2012–14, 5.1% were international. In addition, the sports with the highest number of international student-athletes were basketball and soccer. Semistructured interviews with 16 international student-athletes from the four regional associations determined that the majority of participants were motivated to attend a Canadian university for the opportunity to combine athletics with academics. Furthermore, the experiences of those international student-athletes interviewed were mostly positive. This study may benefit university institutions, their athletics programs, as well as the CIS by providing knowledge of the motives of international student-athletes as well as ways to enrich the international student-athlete experience.

Keywords: intercollegiate sport, international student-athletes

Intercollegiate sport, commonly referred to as “interuniversity sport” in Canada, has provided competitive opportunities for student-athletes for over 100 years. Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), which is the governing body for university sport in Canada, aims to “lead, support, and celebrate excellence in sport and academics” (University Strategic Plan 2013–18, 2014, p. 11). As an organization with extensive breadth and scope, it currently has 56 member universities and over 11,000 student-athletes across Canada who participate in 12 sport disciplines with a schedule of close to 3,000 events running from September to March (CIS, 2015). The CIS is composed of four regional conferences: Atlantic University Sport (AUS), Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec (RSEQ), Ontario University Athletics (OUA), and Canada West Universities Athletic Association (CWUAA).

Although the CIS and the governing bodies in the United States, namely the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Association of

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Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), differ in regard to location, size, depth, level of athletic scholarship support, presence of media coverage, and fan followership, they share commonalities that extend beyond the focus on student-athleticism, amateurism, and sport in general. One major commonality lies in the focus on recruiting quality student-athletes. According to Weston (2006), an achievement-style sport ideology that has characterized American sport has led to the emergence of an “arms race” in American collegiate sport “to recruit top talent internationally, therefore increasing competition among schools to search worldwide for talented players” (p. 835). Often regarded as the primary activity of U.S. athletic coaches, recruiting quality student-athletes not only determines the success of a particular team, but is also regarded as “both intense and expensive as coaches must recognize talent at an early age and from a broad geographic range” (Popp, Pierce, & Hums, 2011, p.176). Consequently, recruiting quality international student-athletes is a growing trend in collegiate athletics as reflected in a student-athlete ethnicity report conducted by the NCAA in 2010 (Zgonc, 2010). Nearly a threefold increase in the number of international student-athletes occurred from 1999–2000 to 2008–09. Across all athletic divisions, the percentage of male and female “non-resident aliens” (i.e., international student-athletes) increased from 1.8% in 1999–2000 to 3.8% in 2008–09 for males, and from 1.5% in 1999–2000 to 4.3% in 2008–09 for females. More specifically, in Division I, the NCAA found an increase in male international student-athletes from 2.4% in 1999–2000–5.5% in 2008–09 while female representation also increased from 2.4% in 1999–2000 to 6.9% in 2008–09. In Division II, male representation increased from 2.4% to 4.5% while female representation increased from 1.6% to 4.5%. Overall, in Division I alone, there were 10,395 international student-athletes in 2008–09, representing 6.2% of all athletes in that division and a threefold increase from 1999–2000. Interestingly, although there is a presence of international student-athletes in the CIS, there is no data available pertaining to the number and/or other specifics of international student-athletes in the CIS.

Furthermore, several researchers have examined various aspects of international student-athletes within the American context, such as sport labor migration (Love & Kim, 2011), sport participation motivations (Berry, 1999; Garant-Jones, Koo, Kim, Andrew, & Hardin, 2009; Stokowski, Huffman, & Aicher, 2013), recruitment and selection (Bale, 1987, 1991; Popp, Pierce, & Hums, 2011; Ridinger & Pastore, 2001; Weston, 2006), experiences and cross-cultural adjustments (Bale, 1991; Chepyator-Thomson, 2003; Falls & Wilson, 2012; Popp, Hums, & Greenwell, 2010; Popp, Love, Kim & Hums, 2010; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000a; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000b), and satisfaction (Trendafilova, Hardin, & Kim, 2010); however, there is an absence of literature surrounding international student-athletes in the Canadian context, specifically the CIS. Therefore, to address these gaps, this study investigates the landscape of international student-athletes in the CIS according to number, sport, and gender breakdown, as well as their perceptions, motivations, and experiences. Determining this information is important as intercollegiate athletics, which is largely a North American phenomenon, exists in both Canada and the United States, and therefore, the inclusion of a new context (i.e., Canada) serves to extend the knowledge base of international student-athletes. Furthermore, this study should aid administrators and coaches in understanding international student-athletes’ experiences in Canada. This, in turn, should ultimately assist in recruiting future international student-athletes.

Informing the presence of international student-athletes in intercollegiate athletics are the processes of globalization and internationalization. Globalization has become the catalyst for internationalization, particularly within the realm of higher education (Knight, 1999). That being said, the presence of international student-athletes competing in intercollegiate athletics is a relevant example that illustrates not only the dynamic forces that shape the globalization and internationalization of sport, but also combines both higher education and sport.

Review of Literature

The Growth of International Students in Higher Education

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “international students”, considered to be a subgroup of foreign students, is a term that refers to students who have essentially “crossed borders expressly with the intention to study” (OECD, 2012, p.63) or who are “not permanent or usual residents of their country of study” (OECD, 2012, p.37). With the accelerated transformation of educational and economic landscapes coupled with the ascent of the “knowledge economy”, international students, and students in general, are receiving more opportunities than ever before to develop themselves and their skills through education (OECD, 2012). Moreover, participating in higher or tertiary education, specifically in other countries, is now being regarded as the means by which students cannot only expand their knowledge of societies, cultures, and languages, but can also “improve their prospectus in globalised sectors of the labour market” (OECD, 2012, p.360).

Over the last three decades, the number of students enrolled outside their country of origin has risen from 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.1 million in 2010, resulting in a fivefold increase (OECD, 2012). Between 2000 and 2010, this number has increased by 99%, leading to an annual average growth rate of 7.1% (OECD, 2012). Canada, for example, which ranked seventh worldwide as the most popular destination for international students, experienced a 94% increase in international enrollment from 2001 to 2012 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, n.d.). In 2012 there were a total of 265,377 international students in Canada representing 173 countries, 55% of whom were enrolled in university institutions (CBIE, n.d.). Since 2001, the number of students from China, which is the top sending country for Canada, increased 296%. Although the overall percentage of international students is only 6.5% in Canada, the number is steadily increasing and the federal government wants to double the number of students to 450,000 by 2022 (Advisory Panel, 2012). Similar trends are evident in other countries, such as the U.S. In a report released by the Institute of International Education in 2013, there are now 40% more international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities than a decade ago, and the rate of increase has risen steadily for the past three years. Furthermore, international students make up slightly under four percent of total student enrollment at the graduate and undergraduate level combined. With more than 820,000 international students, the United States is by far the largest host country and home to more than a quarter of the world’s international students (Institute of International Education, 2013).

Providing education for international students has the potential to advance and create “trade and foreign policy relationships” with other countries (Advisory

Panel, 2012, p. x). International students are also an important source of revenue. In the U.S., they contributed more than \$24 billion to the economy in 2012–13 (Institute for International Education, 2013). In Canada, international education is one of the few sectors to have grown constantly through the recession, to a value of \$8 billion per year (CBIE, 2014). Furthermore, more than 83,000 jobs have been created. In addition to sustaining the economy through their expenditures, international students are now regarded as commodities in some countries in that they become qualified and skilled enough to fill “skilled labour” shortages prevalent in the country (Advisory Panel, 2012, p. x).

International Student Motivations and Experiences

International students are motivated by a variety of factors to attend school outside their home country. Several researchers have examined this decision-making process and provide a contextual background for the current study. Altbach (2004), for example, discovered that international students choose to enroll in American institutions for a variety of reasons, such as the opportunity to earn an advanced degree not offered in their home country, the prestige of attending an American university, and the potential for employment upon graduation. McMahon (1992) suggested a “push” or outbound model and a “pull” or inbound model to explain why students consider leaving their home country to study abroad. The push factors include economic and social forces, such as the level of economic wealth of the home country, the priority placed on education in the home country, and the availability of educational opportunities in the home country. In contrast, the pull factors include the relative size of the student’s home country economy compared with the host country, economic links between the home and host country, host nation political interests in the home country through foreign assistance or cultural links, and host nation support of international students via scholarships or other assistance. McMahon (1992) used factors such as number of students studying internationally, gross national product figures, and amount of resources nations expend on education, to offer statistical support for his push-pull theoretical model regarding international student school selection. A later study by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) examined the motivations of prospective international students from Indonesia, Taiwan, India, and China to study abroad. Their findings revealed that economic and social forces serve as push factors, whereas there are a variety of pull factors that influence the final host destination, such as knowledge and awareness of host country, the level of personal recommendations made by key influencers to the student, cost of attendance issues, the physical and educational environment or climate of institution, geographic proximity to the home country, and social links the student might have to the host destination.

Despite the commitment shown by institutions to internationalize the student body and the curriculum, many international students experience a reality that does not match the rhetoric (Danylchuk, Baker, Pitts, & Zhang, 2015). International students typically have a more difficult time than their domestic counterparts with the initial transition into higher education and often experience feelings of loneliness, homesickness, and a lack of social support (Rajakpaksa & Dundes, 2003). Some students also experience cultural and language adjustments (Mori, 2000). Whereas Murtaugh, Burns, and Shuster (1999) found that international students are

less likely to be retained compared with domestic students, Kwai (2009) determined that they are more likely to be retained based on their first year spring semester grade-point average, on-campus employment, and the number of courses in which they were enrolled.

Internationalization of Intercollegiate Sport

As the processes of globalization and internationalization have and are currently affecting the field of higher education, the area of sport, particularly intercollegiate sport, is not immune to their effects. The trend toward internationalizing sport has also been occurring in intercollegiate sport and has been examined through various lenses, such as athlete migration. As noted by Love and Kim (2011), “much like the ‘relative infancy’ of sport labor migration research in general, academic inquiry into the topic of labor migration in U.S. collegiate sport appears to be at a similar stage of development” (p. 91). Bale’s work (1987, 1991), which focused on the presence, experiences, and motivations of migrant athletes in U.S. collegiate sport, was particularly significant in setting the stage for further research in the collegiate context. More recently, Love and Kim (2011) used the typologies of migrant athletes developed by Maguire (1999) and Magee and Sugden (2002) to help understand the diversity of factors and experiences associated with athletic migration in U.S. collegiate sport. Their research resulted in a revised typology including the categories of mercenary, nomadic cosmopolitan, settler, returnee, exile, and ambitionist.

Given the imperativeness of collegiate coaches to recruit international student-athletes for the purposes of winning and ultimate success, there has been a growing body of literature in the American context focused primarily on the motivations of international student-athletes to attend U.S. colleges along with their experiences. Popp et al. (2011), for example, determined that international student-athletes look at university sport participation from a different perspective than domestic student-athletes. Not only are international student-athletes well prepared both academically and athletically, but also, international student-athletes place more emphasis on academic achievement as opposed to athletic achievement (Popp, 2006; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000a, 2000b). International student-athletes are also faced with conflicting choices between a professional career and the opportunity for higher education, wherein choosing a professional career means foregoing higher education because of time commitment and vice-versa. The decision to attend American academic institutions ultimately allows the international student-athlete “to continue elite training in hopes of a future professional career, while also allowing them to secure a university degree” (Popp et al., 2010, p. 169).

A variety of studies have examined the motivations of student-athletes attending U.S. colleges. Related to the earlier work of Mazzarol (1998), Popp et al. (2011) examined the pull factors that had the greatest draw for both international and domestic student-athletes. For the international cohort, the factors include the value of an athletic scholarship, the personality of the head coach, a degree from school leading to a good job, the level of competition at which the team competes, and the academic reputation of the school. Berry (1999) and Garant-Jones et al. (2009) also determined similar motivational factors, such as the attraction of receiving an education with an athletic scholarship, the high level of competition

in U.S. collegiate sport, the opportunity to receive well-organized training by expert coaches in U.S. colleges, the high quality of training facilities located on American college campuses, and the attraction of the U.S. itself. In a more recent study, Stokowski et al. (2013) used self-determination theory to compare the motivations of international and domestic student-athletes in Division I U.S. schools. They determined that both international and domestic student-athletes are more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically motivated or amotivated. Specifically, international student-athletes are motivated intrinsically toward accomplishment and stimulation (i.e., the love of the game) and reported significantly higher levels of introjected motivation (e.g., obligation, guilt, compensation) than their domestic counterparts.

Additional research has focused on the experiences, specifically the cross-cultural adjustments of international student-athletes. Ridinger and Pastore (2000a, 2000b), for example, proposed a theoretical model to assess the adjustment of international athletes coming to U.S. colleges. Their model included adjustment factors, antecedent dimensions to those factors, and outcomes. They suggested college adjustment for international athletes is a multifaceted construct with five main areas: academic, social, athletic, personal-emotional, and institutional. Popp et al. (2010) extended this work by examining the antecedent factors in the Ridinger and Pastore model. Their findings supported all of the antecedents in that model with one exception, and also added the new dimensions of sense of adventure, previous international travel experience, and family influence to a revised model. An additional study by Popp, Hums, and Greenwell (2010) found international student-athletes reported lower levels of adjustment to college in the facets of social adjustment and institutional attachment than their domestic teammates. Finally, international student-athlete satisfaction was further examined by Trendafilova et al. (2010) in the context of Division I-Football Bowl Subdivision athletics. Their findings revealed that international student-athletes are satisfied with the dimensions measuring satisfaction, including academic support services, personal treatment, team social contribution and medical support. In addition, male athletes are more satisfied with external agents (i.e., media, the local and university community) than female athletes.

Despite this growing body of knowledge that is focused on international student-athletes in American intercollegiate sport, there is a gap in the Canadian context. Therefore, this study addresses this void by examining the unexplored landscape of international student-athletes in Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), the governing body for university sport in Canada, along with their perceptions, motivations, and experiences. Specifically, the study was guided by the following four research questions:

- RQ1: What is the status (i.e., number, sport, and gender breakdown) of international student-athletes in the CIS?
- RQ2: What perceptions do international student-athletes have of Canadian interuniversity sport?
- RQ3: What are the motivations of international student-athletes participating in the CIS?
- RQ4: What are the experiences of international student-athletes participating in the CIS?

Method

Research Design

This study consisted of two phases. Due to the fact that the CIS does not monitor the number of international student-athletes competing in a given year across all sports, phase one involved a determination of this number for the two-year period of this study, namely 2012–2014. This process involved manually navigating through every female and male roster on every university intercollegiate athletic website that was a member of the CIS. If the hometown of a university student-athlete was outside Canada, the international student-athlete's full name, gender, sport, university, and hometown were recorded and organized into an Excel spreadsheet. All four regional conferences were included in identifying the international student-athletes.

Phase two of the study incorporated a qualitative research approach using semistructured interviews of a sample of international student-athletes. Interviews were considered an appropriate method as they seek to comprehend the “world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale, 1996, p.1). Moreover, the semistructured interview approach was also considered suitable to draw descriptive and meaningful information from the participants (Merriam, 1998).

Participants

The participants for the interviews involved a cross-section of international male and female student-athletes from the four regional athletic conferences within the CIS (i.e., CWUAA, OUA, RSEQ, and AUS) ($N = 16$). Specifically, the sample consisted of 10 men and 6 women from 13 different universities who were 18 years of age or older. The participants were from a variety of academic disciplines ranging across all four years of undergraduate study with one graduate student. They originated from 11 countries—Australia, Brazil, Cameroon, Egypt, England, France, Germany, Jamaica, Mexico, The Netherlands, and the United States. The study was delimited to male and female student-athletes from the sports that had the highest number of international student-athletes at the time of roster analysis for the 2012–2013 and 2013–2014 academic years (i.e., basketball and soccer for males and females). The total sample size of 16 reflected the concept of data saturation. That is, when no new or relevant information emerged with respect to the interview questions, saturation was considered to be achieved and no further participants were interviewed (Merriam, 1998).

Interview Guide

The interviews began with introductory comments to contextualize the interview and were followed by personal background questions for the purpose of obtaining the participant's current university, current academic year, current year of eligibility, degree, and hometown. Following the personal background questions, the participants were asked about their athletic and academic background as well as their competitive level before coming to university. Sample questions included: Can you tell me what life was like for you growing up in [country] as well as what sports you played? And, what was the level of competition? Following these athletic and

academic background questions, participants were asked about their motivations for attending a Canadian academic institution. Examples of questions pertaining to the motivations of international student-athletes included: What motivated you to play [basketball or soccer] at [university]? And, why did you decide to come to this university? Questions that involved the international student-athletes' experiences included: What was the transition like coming from your hometown to Canada? What was the transition like when you started playing for the school [soccer or basketball] team? Finally, questions relevant to uncovering international student-athlete perceptions of the CIS included: Did you have any thoughts or expectations about Canada, [basketball or soccer], or the student life? And, what are your thoughts on the CIS?

Procedures

The researchers followed the contact requirements of their university research ethics board. First, the athletic directors of the universities that had international student-athletes on their male and female basketball and soccer teams were contacted by telephone to request permission to participate in the study. If permission to participate was received, a Letter of Information that outlined the nature of the study was then emailed to the athletic directors and the head coaches of their basketball and soccer teams. Once the athletic directors and head coaches agreed to approve the request to interview their respective international student-athletes, a participation request and Letter of Information was sent via e-mail to the international student-athletes inviting them to participate. Those international student-athletes who confirmed their interest and participation in the study were then contacted via e-mail by the researcher to arrange an appropriate date, time, and method for the interview. Given the diverse geographical location of the participants, face-to-face interviews were not feasible, hence interviews were conducted by telephone or Skype.

Before the interview, the participants were asked to confirm their 'international' status, which was based on paying international student fees. Interviews lasted approximately 30–60 minutes in length and were audio-recorded with the participant's permission. Detailed note-taking was also undertaken by the interviewer. After each interview was completed, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and pseudonyms were ascribed to each participant to ensure that all personal identifiers were removed. As member checking is considered the "most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314), each participant was provided with a copy of the interview transcript and invited to review it and provide any additional comments or clarifications of the content.

Data Analysis

Kvale's (1996) stages of investigation for interviews guided the data collection and analysis. In addition, Merriam's (1998) guidelines were followed with respect to the importance of conducting data collection and analyses simultaneously. Therefore, notes were taken by the interviewer throughout each interview, and as data were gathered and transcriptions were completed, the key points were tabulated and categorized. The researchers analyzed the interview transcripts independently. During this stage, a priori coding of the data were conducted according to the aspects of perceptions, motivations, and experiences of the international student-athletes,

which aligned with the study's research questions. Meaningful words, phrases, and responses were identified. Data were then compared with ensure consistency. Emergent themes were determined by the researchers using constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The themes were analyzed, refined, and reevaluated to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity such that commonality existed among codes within a theme, yet clear distinctions were established between themes.

Findings

Demographics of International Student-Athletes in the CIS

Phase one of this study involved determining the demographics of international student-athletes in the CIS for the 2012–2013 and 2013–2014 academic years (refer to Table 1). Upon examination of the proportion of international ($n = 609$) versus domestic student-athletes ($n = 10,992$) for 2012–2013 ($N = 11,601$), the percentage was found to be 5.2%; of this percentage, 4% were male and 1.2% were female. Of the 609 international student-athletes in 2012–13, 77% were male and 23% were female. According to the proportion of international ($n = 585$) versus domestic student-athletes ($n = 11,335$) for 2013–2014 ($N = 11,920$), the percentage was 4.9%; of this percentage, 3.5% were male and 1.4% were female. Furthermore, in 2013–14, of the 585 international student-athletes, 71% were male and 29% were female.

Table 1 Number and Percentages of International Student-Athletes in the CIS (2012–2014)

Year	Male								Total
	RSEQ		CWUAA		OUA		AUS		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
2012–13	142	30.54	116	24.95	106	22.79	101	21.72	465
2013–14	123	29.56	117	28.12	97	23.31	79	18.99	416
% Change within Conference		-13.40		0.90		-8.50		-21.80	-10.50

Year	Female								Total
	RSEQ		CWUAA		OUA		AUS		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
2012–13	44	30.55	38	26.38	29	2≤0.14	33	22.92	144
2013–14	50	29.58	50	29.58	44	26.03	25	14.79	169
% Change within Conference		13.60		31.60		51.70		-24.20	17.40

Table 1 also depicts that for both years, the greatest number of male and female international student-athletes came from the Quebec (RSEQ) conference, followed by the Canada West (CWUAA), Ontario (OUA), and Atlantic (AUS) conferences. Upon closer examination of the nature of the demographics of the Quebec conference, it became apparent that the majority of international student-athletes were from French-speaking countries. Given the fact that the RSEQ is the only regional conference in Canada where the majority of its universities is French-speaking, language may be a factor in influencing French-speaking international student-athletes to attend a university in the Quebec conference.

For 2012–2013, the three most popular sports for male international student-athletes were soccer, basketball, and football. This was a slightly different order for 2013–14, namely soccer, football, and basketball. For 2012–2013, the most popular sports for female international student-athletes were basketball, soccer, and track and field with an equal number, followed by volleyball. In the following year, the most popular sports for females were basketball and track and field, followed by cross country running, ice hockey, rugby, and soccer with an even number.

Finally, with respect to country of origin, the international student-athletes represented a total of 89 different countries, with the largest percentage from the United States (31%) followed by France (14%), Australia (5%), and England (3%). Other countries in the top 10 countries of origin included Nigeria, Germany, Switzerland, Mexico, Brazil, and Bermuda.

The following section reflects the findings from the interviews with 16 participants (10 male and 6 female) who represented 11 different countries, 13 different universities across all four CIS regional conferences, and two sports (basketball and soccer).

Perceptions of Canada and the CIS

Lack of Awareness of Canada and the CIS. Overall, the interviews revealed a lack of awareness of Canada in general and the Canadian interuniversity sport system, and, in some cases, the perpetuation of stereotypical social and cultural norms through media. Several participants constructed their perceptions of Canada and the CIS based on their knowledge and perceptions of the United States, leading to the assumption that the United States was synonymous with Canada. Out of the 16 participants, nine had never heard of the CIS or that Canada had a university sport system, although of those nine participants, eight had knowledge of the NCAA system. Eleven out of the 16 had even applied to the United States before considering applying to any Canadian academic institutions, although in the end, they chose to come to a Canadian university or transferred from either a university in their hometown or in the United States.

Suggestions were offered to address the lack of awareness of Canada and the CIS. Some participants noted the presence of Canadian intercollegiate coaches overseas and in the United States is minimal. For example, Karlo (The Netherlands) remarked: “it’s hard for people to know about Canadian universities if they don’t have somebody talking about them and I think coaches aren’t really looking for international students since there’s already so much talent in Canada.” Therefore, it was recommended that the number of coaches that recruit international student-athletes should be increased, the CIS should do more advertising on a global scale,

and marketing campaigns should be organized at major international youth tournaments to increase the awareness of the CIS and hopefully stimulate its global appeal.

Comparison With United States. The perception of the nature of differences between the American and Canadian university sport systems varied from scholarships to perks to future professional opportunities to respective levels of skill and competition. Part of the allure associated with the United States is its ability to offer “full” scholarships to international student-athletes. Therefore, a common sentiment was that advocating for more financial aid and scholarship opportunities in the CIS was important. For example, Elena (United States) noted:

I think the scholarships would have to start going up from the universities to attract players and get full rides like in the States. I think that’s a big deal. I think that if they wanted to be more competitive like the States then they’ll have to start offering more incentives and stuff to get the athletes to come.

In describing the perks associated with being a soccer student-athlete in the United States, Oscar (Jamaica) indicated, “you can just go in a boot room to get boots, whatever you want...here we get 40% off adidas.” Those who were trying to use the student-athlete pathway to advance their professional athletic career after the academic degree was complete tended to regard the NCAA as superior to the CIS. As noted by Martin (Brazil):

In the United States they’re going to offer you a better opportunity in terms of money, and showcase as well. Coaches, like professional coaches, come watch you, like the games, and if you’re in a good university in the United States it’s easier to make pro.

Similarly, Oscar noted that the emergence of the Major League Soccer (MLS) coupled with the nature of NCAA soccer serving as a feeder system to the MLS attracts more foreign talent.

The notion and nature of being a “student-athlete” versus an “athlete-student” was also discussed and contrasted. The differences revolved around the primary focus of the university sport systems. Specifically, there was a major consensus that the American university sport system was predominantly athletically focused, hence the term “athlete-student”, whereas the CIS was more academically focused in their mission, hence the term “student-athlete”. Several participants alluded to the respective academic rigor and degree of difficulty associated with each term. For example, in commenting on the “athlete-student” predominantly found in the United States, Elena explained that university was easier and more lenient for student-athletes in that it was harder for them to fail out of university. As noted by John (England):

They seem to be more lenient towards the student-athletes than over here in Canada...if you have star players struggling in school I think that sort of gets pushed under the carpet a little bit and there’s ways around staying in school and playing...whereas over here in Canada it’s like you are a student and you are an athlete but at the end of the day you’ve got your main focus—you’re here to get a degree.

In contrast, however, in analyzing the two university sport systems, six out of 16 international student-athletes believed that the NCAA and the CIS, aside from the financial discrepancies and professional opportunities, were on par with each other. According to Mandy (United States), who had previously played in the United States:

There weren't really many differences. I think the only difference I could say is that, back in the U.S. we definitely practiced a lot more and we ran a lot more, did a lot more fitness, but that was about it. Other than that...it was pretty much the same.

A similar sentiment was expressed by John (England) who had also played against several NCAA teams: "It's still a decent standard in Canada, and I still think that in comparison to the States, it's not that much different at all, and I think it is a good competitive high standard, and at first I was surprised."

Motivations for Coming to Canada

Key influencers in identifying Canada as an option for study included personal connections (i.e., family members, close friends, and/or former coaches) who spoke positively about their own experiences studying in Canada, university campus visits that allowed the opportunity to see the university and meet the coaching staff and players, and ongoing communication with the head coaches following these visits. However, there were three significant themes that emerged as motivations for making the actual decision to come to Canada.

Academic and Athletic Opportunities. Fourteen of the 16 participants were motivated to attend a Canadian university because of the academic quality of Canadian universities coupled with the desire to continue playing their sport at a competitive level. For some of these individuals, the global reputation of the Canadian universities and the subsequent "worthiness" and value of the degree was a major factor in influencing their decisions to not only attend a Canadian university, but also, in some cases, to turn down offers from the United States. While some participants reported being motivated to attend a Canadian university strictly to continue playing their sport at a high level or to advance their athletic careers, they later revealed that as they progressed through their degrees, the strength of the academic programs was an invaluable asset and an indirect motivation. In contrast, there were some international student-athletes who reported that the academic quality and reputation of Canadian universities was their sole motivation and subsequently viewed playing an intercollegiate sport in Canada as strictly recreational. For example, Mark (Egypt) suggested, "my main focus was definitely education, but I also wanted to continue playing soccer but obviously not to become professional, just to play for my own, because of the love of sport."

The combination of completing their studies and playing at a competitive level was also related to the inability to do so in their respective hometowns, bringing to attention the difference in sport and education systems in various countries. Aside from the American-born participants, all other participants expressed the difficulty in trying to play a competitive sport while completing their studies. Martin indicated that, "it's almost impossible in Brazil, you either go to school or you play soccer, and it's tough to combine both."

Financial Incentives. The use of financial incentives or scholarships was also a factor expressed by 14 participants for motivating them to select both Canada and also a specific university. Of the 16 participants, 12 were on some form of a scholarship to subsidize the cost of paying international student fees. Without this financial support, it was unlikely that they would have considered coming to Canada. Although these participants had varying degrees of financial aid from scholarships, the issue of high costs associated with being an international student-athlete was an issue of contention. Aside from the American participants, six out of 16 international student-athletes stated that attending university in their respective hometowns was either free or heavily subsidized. Thus, not only were these international student-athletes making enormous sacrifices to pursue their goals and dreams, but they were doing so in the hope that they would receive a scholarship.

For Martin, the appeal of North America was its ability to offer a higher education system that combined both education and competitive sport with the opportunity to receive scholarships.

They don't offer scholarships for people in university in Brazil. You either play professionally or you just play for fun. They don't have the budget to offer students scholarships. When I heard about the opportunity to combine study and playing soccer, I knew that's what I was looking for.

Furthermore, in some countries, such as Australia for Ky and Mick, the university system did not incorporate an athletic or intercollegiate dimension, and thus, these athletes had no choice but to leave their countries. On the other hand, those international student-athletes who were playing at a provincial or national level found it very difficult to enroll in a university in their hometown given the time commitment to their sport.

New Life/College Experience. The ability to have a university experience, and subsequently, a new life experience was emphasized by the majority of participants. More specifically, the ability to travel, explore new cultures and cities, meet new people, and live an independent life was expressed throughout the interviews. For example, Martin (Brazil) noted:

I was finishing university and I felt like I haven't traveled, I didn't know English before and I kind of was looking for something more challenging in my life. You study, you learn a different language, and that kind of interested me and that's the main reason I came to Canada.

Challenging U.S. Intercollegiate Experiences. Although this theme could not be classified as significant, it is noteworthy as it relates to the previously mentioned tendency to compare the CIS with the NCAA. Five out of the 16 participants had attended an NCAA, NAIA, or a junior college institution before arriving in Canada. Of those five, three had reported a negative student-athlete experience that was a major factor for transferring to a Canadian university. Veronica (Germany), for example, who had accepted an offer from a junior college, had high expectations of advancing herself in the United States but found it, "a little bit disappointing." Her perceptions and expectations of life as a student in the United States were contrary to what she experienced in reality: "I always thought I'd like it, but once

I went to the States, I actually hated the American way of playing.” When asked about her prime motivation for transferring to Canada, she replied, “I was fed up with American culture to be honest.” Unlike Veronica, Martin’s (Brazil) decision to transfer out of his American university was primarily due to the realization that he could further his athletic career at a bigger university but was prevented from doing so because of his coach and NCAA rules:

I wanted to transfer to a different university. But to transfer the rules are very strict and you need to get a release from the coach, so the coach said, “Martin, I’m the one that brought you here, I want you to play for me and you don’t need to be playing against me or for a different university.” So he kind of made it difficult for me to go somewhere else and I really didn’t want to stay.

Martin ended up returning to his home and then coming to Canada.

Experiences and Challenges of International Student-Athletes

Privilege and Respect. All participants reported overwhelming positive experiences with their current intercollegiate teams, and went as far as indicating it was a privilege and an advantage to participate. Overall, the advantage of being an international student-athlete stemmed from the athlete’s ability to combine their sport with academics, the recognizability of their degree and the university, as well as the ability to gain new experiences with different individuals and cultures. Four participants praised the level of competition and the standards of the league, claiming, in some cases, that the CIS was a more quality league than what they had experienced in their hometowns. For example, Karlo explained that, “the level of competition at [university] and in the CIS is definitely higher than some of the competition back home in Holland that I’ve seen so far.”

Moreover, the participants commented on the amount of dedication and commitment required, and thus concluded that being a student-athlete not only denoted a sense of uniqueness, but also that the student-athletes were in some way distinct from the regular students at their university. According to Elena (United States):

I have a lot of respect for the people who come here to play because you may receive some athletic scholarship, but you’re not receiving everything paid for, and so basically you’re making the decision to put your body through this, and putting the stress on you and making that commitment...it takes a lot of maturity.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment and the Role of the Team. Thirteen participants reported not having lived on their own before coming to Canada. Thus, the challenges of living an independent life with work, school, and athletic responsibilities, along with experiencing a new culture, was an aspect that required some adjustment. According to John (England), “it was different because at first there was a lot of things that I had to, sort of settle into...I was very homesick at first and I was sort of thrown into the deep end...I was in a residence building on my own and stuff like that.” Similarly, Stephanie (France) noted, “school started in September, so that first month was just horrible. I’m shy, so I couldn’t speak with the family...my first week, I was crying in my room.”

Aside from four participants, the others reported having a smooth and easy transition as well as a positive cross-cultural adjustment during their first months at their Canadian universities. In looking back at her transition from the United States, Veronica (Germany) explained, "Canada's more of a hybrid between European and U.S. culture so I felt more at home, I felt people were more welcome, they were more sincere in their kindness." In speaking about his transition, Ky seemed overwhelmed with the amount of support he received:

I feel like coming from Australia to Canada, it's not too much of a culture shock, culturally we're all pretty similar....Canadians are very friendly... especially out here on the East Coast...it's been pretty good and especially at school everyone's out there to help you...the transition was definitely good.

All 16 participants found that the task of managing their academic obligations coupled with adhering to their athletic commitments was overwhelming, and at times, challenging. In addition, some participants noted the difficulty in getting used to the "style" of play that predominated the CIS, specifically the level of competition and the amount of training compared with their hometowns. In talking about the differences, Peter (Cameroon) remarked:

It was a completely different way of play. In Europe it's a lot about technique and finesse as opposed to here where it's about strength and explosive power. So I had to get used to that given I'm not really that strong compared to everyone else.

Finally, most non-native English speakers found that language was an ongoing major challenge. For example, Suzanne (France) explained, "the first three months felt like everyone was going so fast and I was missing half of the words that they were saying...it was still a challenge, especially the pace."

Despite these challenges, the role of the team was instrumental in alleviating many of the difficult cross-cultural adjustments faced by the participants. For 13 out of the 16 participants, the team was seen as a mechanism not only to combat homesickness and the stress of living in a new country, but it was also used to integrate the international student-athletes into university life by meeting new people and attending social events. According to Stephanie, "I think if I was not in the soccer...I would have come back to France...soccer was my motivation to stay here and to continue." Elena's (United States) love of basketball stemmed from her ability to use it as an outlet, and valued sport for its social appeal as a way to relax as well as to socialize and bond with her teammates. In the eyes of the participants, the intercollegiate teams at their universities embodied the role of a family, so to speak, wherein they all shared a common bond. For example, Mick (Australia) explained:

We're just a family like everybody, we're so close together. We're very close and we do a lot of things together and we hang out a lot together and it's definitely that sense of family and brotherhood.

All 16 participants also reported having excellent coaching staff who took a vested interest in them ensuring that their needs and concerns were met and addressed.

Interestingly, seven participants indicated that they plan to remain in Canada upon completing their degree to pursue a career in their respective fields. They

noted more opportunities and connections in Canada compared with back home. An additional four expressed an interest in pursuing further education such as a Master's degree, PhD, and/or medical school. Only three participants indicated they had plans to move back to their respective hometowns. Finally, three participants noted an interest in pursuing a professional career in their respective sports, with all three having designated Europe as their destination of choice (one participant who wanted to pursue further education also expressed a desire to play professionally). Thus, there was a self-realization that, for the majority of the participants, their competitive athletic careers were finished. Long-term goals tended to focus on their career aspirations and using their academic degrees to find and take advantage of new opportunities. Even for those participants who reported wanting to pursue a professional athletic career, they all acknowledged the need to properly balance realistic career aspirations with their athletic ambitions, alluding to the fact that they would not be playing long-term. According to Ky (Australia), "unless you can get a really good contract right out of university, I wouldn't want to join an NBL team and not get paid much money...I just want to get that balance between pursuing basketball and having a career path."

Discussion

Phase one, and specifically RQ1, addressed the landscape of international student-athletes within the CIS during the 2012–2014 academic years. The findings revealed that the majority of international student-athletes were spread across the four regional conferences, although the greatest number were from the Quebec (RSEQ) conference. The majority were also male. Moreover, the two most popular sports were soccer and basketball for both males and females, with track and field and football falling close behind. The international student-athletes originated from a diversity of countries, although a third came from the United States, followed by France, Australia, and England. Over the two-year period, the percentage of international student-athletes was small (5.1%) when compared with the percentage of domestic student-athletes. However, the percentage was quite similar to the number of international students studying at Canadian universities, which was 6.5% in 2012 (Advisory Panel, 2012).

In addition, over the two-year period, the percentage of male international student-athletes was 3.8%, whereas the percentage of female international student-athletes was 1.3%. When compared with the percentages noted in the student-athlete ethnicity report published by the NCAA in 2010—3.8% for males and 4.3% for females across all divisions—it appears that the number of male international student-athletes in both countries is identical, whereas the number of female international student-athletes in Canada is lower than in the U.S., and also lower than their male counterpart. Caution should be exercised when comparing these statistics, however, because the Canadian statistics are slightly more recent than the U.S. statistics. Furthermore, the percentages noted in the NCAA report are slightly higher in Division I (5.5% for males and 6.9% for females) and Division II (4.5% for both males and females).

According to the international student-athletes who were interviewed in this study, possible reasons for the low number of international student-athletes predominantly revolved around the lack of full athletic/academic scholarships as well

as the fact that the CIS is not a globally recognized intercollegiate sport system. Although the CIS regional associations do offer athletic scholarships, the amount is significantly less than in U.S. intercollegiate sport. Aside from its lack of global appeal, it was found that many international student-athletes believed that competitive sport essentially stopped at the CIS level in Canada and that the CIS did not provide its players with any professional opportunities.

From a timely aspect, the CIS has recently adopted a new five-year strategic plan that will take the sport organization to the year 2018. Within this new strategic plan, the CIS's main goal is to be a "world leader in university sport". Moreover, the CIS is committed to enhance its visibility and relevancy stating that by 2018, university sport will be a "vibrant and visible sport system" (Lafontaine, 2013, p.13). Although this plan is nationally focused, its commitment to increased global visibility may ultimately benefit the international student-athlete contingent by addressing their concern of making it more visible. Furthermore, a strategy that will involve a pilot program to offer full athletic scholarships to all female ice hockey players may in the end also assist in making the CIS a more attractive destination for international student-athletes. The implementation of this pilot program would seem to be a change in the right direction for the purposes of not only retaining quality domestic student-athletes from venturing south of the border, but also for attracting international student-athletes and the benefits that they bring to the table. Finally, the plan to identify and develop strategic relationships with Canadian sport organizations, including professional and national sport organizations, may also address the concern expressed by many international student-athletes regarding the lack of professional opportunities beyond graduation.

Phase two of this research study sought to determine the perceptions, motivations, and experiences of international student-athletes for participating in a Canadian academic institution (i.e., RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4). A major theme that emanated from the interviews was the perpetual tendency by the international student-athletes to compare the CIS to the NCAA and NAIA. Their perceptions revealed a general lack of knowledge of the CIS and sentiments that there was a certain aura surrounding the NCAA as a big-time league that offered larger athletic scholarships, a higher level of competition, more professional opportunities after graduation, and a greater degree of exposure during their eligibility. That same level of attraction and aura associated with the NCAA was not initially associated with the CIS. Nevertheless, the CIS was regarded as more focused on the academic component, that is, the "student-athlete" in contrast to the "athlete-student", and less lenient toward the student-athlete.

The findings further revealed a difference between the CIS and NCAA and NAIA with respect to recruiting international student-athletes. While coaches in the NCAA and NAIA recruit broadly for international talent which corresponds to Weston's (2006) arms race ideology, it appears that is not the case for the vast majority of university coaches in Canada, particularly within soccer and basketball. Whether that is due to a lack of resources, funding, or interest, remains unknown. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that one of the recommendations of the participants was for Canadian coaches to recruit more globally.

The decision made by the international student-athletes to come to Canada were both push and pull factors, some of which were consistent with those identified by McMahon (1992) and Mazarol and Soutar (2002), such as greater educational

opportunities in the host country (i.e., Canada), the financial incentives via scholarships, the level of personal recommendations made by key influencers to the student (i.e., family and/or friends who could provide knowledge and awareness of the host country), and the physical and educational environment of the institution. The opportunity to combine athletics with academics and thereby earn a degree while playing at a competitive level, however, was a primary motivational factor and an overarching theme, whereby all other motivations seemed to stem from this theme. That is, other motivating factors such as campus visits and ongoing communication were ways in which the international student-athletes were able to solidify their decision.

Although the ability to combine athletics with academics is consistent with the American literature (e.g., Garant-Jones et al., 2009), there are some findings that are unique to our study. Whereas Popp et al. (2011), for example, identified the value of an athletic scholarship and the personality of the head coach as two key factors, along with a degree from school leading to a good job, the level of competition at which the team competes, and the academic reputation of the school, our study determined that financial incentives were more related to scholarships that were not necessarily tied to the athletic component. Furthermore, our participants relied more on what they heard about their potential coach from personal connections or through campus visits and ongoing communication, rather than through formal recruitment from these coaches in their home country. The motivational factors for the international student-athletes identified in our study appear to be less focused on the athletic component per se than in the NCAA. For example, Garant-Jones et al. (2009) identified the high level of competition in U.S. collegiate sport, the opportunity to receive well-organized training by expert coaches in U.S. colleges, and the high quality of training facilities located on American college campuses as key motivational factors. These were not as significant to the participants in our study, and aligns with their comments about the greater focus on the student-athlete versus the athlete-student in the CIS. In speaking to their academic degrees, the international student-athletes were attracted to Canadian universities because of the reputation they had with offering quality academic programs. Moreover, a major factor in their decision-making process was the global recognizability of the university as being a known “good academic school” as well as having a degree that would be transferable. In that sense, many of the international student-athletes also felt that universities in Canada were superior to those in the United States as well as in their respective hometowns.

The experiences of the international student-athletes in this study were positive, and they were pleased with their decision to come to Canada and to the specific university. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted in the American context (e.g., Love & Kim, 2011). The interpersonal antecedent dimension identified by Ridinger and Pastore (2000a) in their cross-cultural adjustment model is also particularly relevant to our findings. They suggested that international student-athletes adjust better when they form positive interpersonal relationships with their teammates, coaches, and faculty/staff in the early stages of their arrival. In our study, a supportive, friendly, and caring coaching staff that took an interest in them and made an effort to ensure that their needs were met was instrumental in how the international student-athletes rated their experiences and how well they dealt with the challenges of their transition from their respective

countries. Furthermore, the intercollegiate team and the fellow teammates became increasingly important as a social network to establish new friendships, integrate them into Canadian society, alleviate the stress and challenge associated with moving and living in a new country, and in some cases, serve as a motivating factor for preventing them from leaving the university. It became apparent that the international student-athletes who had been at their universities for several years even regarded their teammates as “family” having shared and spent so much time together. This finding was supported by Falls and Wilson (2012) who found that the bond and relationship established by the athletes “with their teammates and the shared identity they developed was crucial in their attempts to deal with the larger and smaller challenges they all faced during their transition” (p.584).

The major focus of their experiences revolved around having the opportunity to travel to a new country, explore new cultures, meet new people from various backgrounds, as well as receive a degree while playing a competitive intercollegiate sport. According to John (England):

This is probably the best thing I think I've ever done...moving to another country and experiencing everything and traveling around, playing, meeting new people, and of course getting a degree out of it at the end. Once I realized it, I haven't looked back.

These international student-athlete experiences were also positive in the sense that they not only adequately prepared the students for a life after university, but also fostered growth, development, and positive change within the students themselves.

Implications

In the process of conducting phase one of this study, it became apparent that the CIS, unlike the NCAA, does not monitor or keep track of the number of international student-athletes competing in a given year. Thus, a major implication of this study suggests that there may be a role for the CIS to not only begin monitoring how many legitimate international student-athletes are playing in the CIS every year, but also to keep track of their country of origin, gender, as well as the sports they are playing while in Canada. This information could assist the CIS in targeting the nature of their niche market for particular regional conferences and sports. Knowing their niche market could help the CIS design appropriate and efficient marketing strategies.

The findings from the participants who were interviewed in this study reveal implications on both an individual and systemic level. On an individual level, the findings suggest the need for universities to focus on creating a smooth and seamless transition for the international student-athletes coming to Canada. It is important that universities with international student services offices recognize the international student-athlete population as a distinct group. These offices could collaborate with the coaching staff of their intercollegiate athletic teams to ensure that the needs of the international student-athletes are being met through such means as peer mentors and academic counselors.

On a more systemic level, with the growing trend and interest toward internationalization on university campuses and the importance of providing students with an international perspective, the findings from this study may provide university

institutions and their interuniversity athletics programs with some insight into the motives of international student-athletes and perspectives of their experiences. This information could be useful to universities and their interuniversity athletic programs for attracting more international students and student-athletes. Information generated by this study may also assist athletic administrators and coaches in attracting and recruiting international student-athletes by serving to educate them on aspects of university life that are desired by international student-athletes. Having knowledge and insight into the motivations and interests of international student-athletes could be tailored by athletic administrators and coaches based on what they can offer.

Furthermore, this study may provide direction to the CIS regarding ways to enrich the international student-athlete experience and the postsecondary education experience in general. The CIS can use this information to address the issues that were raised by the international student-athletes, such as offering more scholarships, marketing themselves on a more global scale, and offering more professional opportunities or avenues for student-athletes who wish to advance their athletic careers beyond the university walls. The new five-year strategic plan proposed by the CIS is a positive step in the right direction to ensure that Canadian universities and the CIS, in general, are not only recognized on a global level, but are regarded as *the* destination for international students and student-athletes to study and compete.

Ultimately, the findings of this study have provided additional insight to the sport management literature that is focused on the growing body of knowledge of internationalization. As intercollegiate athletics is largely a North American phenomenon, this study extends the body of knowledge that has up until this point focused solely on the American context, and therefore has implications for sport managers in both the United States and Canada.

Conclusion

This exploratory study determined that there is indeed a presence of international student-athletes in the CIS who are motivated to attend a Canadian university primarily by the opportunity to combine athletics with academics. Notwithstanding the student-athletes interviewed in this study arrived with little knowledge of the CIS, their experiences once they began were mostly very positive. The aforementioned Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy that was formed with the support of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada in 2011 ultimately advocated for the increase in international students at Canadian universities citing numerous and pervasive benefits that would affect all areas to sustain and improve Canada's economy and longevity. Thus, from an international student perspective, having international student-athletes in Canada is ultimately contributing toward the advisory panel's goal of doubling the number of international students by 2022. Whether the international student-athletes enhance the quality of sport in the CIS is still unknown and should be investigated. Furthermore, one should keep in mind that according to Barnes (2008), approximately "2,000 Canadian student-athletes cross the border to pursue their university in the United States" per year (as cited in Falls & Wilson, 2012, p. 572). This prompts the question whether more effort should be made toward keeping these 2,000 student-athletes in Canada.

Limitations

This study was not without its limitations. Due to the absence of a database by the CIS that tracked and quantified the status of international student-athletes currently studying and playing in the CIS, the researchers had to manually navigate through the athletic team rosters of every CIS member. Through the verification process with athletic directors and coaches, it was determined that some rosters were not completely accurate. For example, in several instances the international student-athletes had either recently left the university or had become permanent residents of Canada, or had Canadian citizenship from birth and had spent the majority of their lives living in another country. In other instances, additional student athletes who had just arrived through student exchange programs were not on the original rosters. Although every effort was made to update the rosters during this study, they were only as accurate as the information at the time of data collection.

A second limitation relates to the sample of international student-athletes who were interviewed. The study was delimited to soccer and basketball student-athletes ($N = 16$). Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings of this study to other sports.

Finally, the international student-athletes who resided in the Quebec (RSEQ) conference were French-speaking, with English as their second language. As the interviews were conducted in English, the language barrier ultimately hindered the researchers' ability to recruit more international student-athletes in this conference who were confident enough to be interviewed in English. Furthermore, this language barrier could have hindered the responses from the interviewees who may not have understood or could not express themselves fully in English.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the limited sample size that included only international student-athletes from the sports of soccer and basketball during one year, future research should include not only additional sports, but should also encompass a more longitudinal study to determine any trends. Furthermore, the perspectives of only student-athletes were sought. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of athletic directors and coaches who could provide an in-depth perspective on their perceptions and knowledge of the international student-athlete population. This added dimension could allow researchers to come to a greater awareness as to if and how programs actively pursue and recruit international athletic talent, and also whether recruiting international student-athletes is beneficial for intercollegiate teams. Finally, the current research could also be broadened by incorporating the perspectives of domestic student-athletes for comparative purposes.

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