



Identity Dynamics in Collegiate Olympic Athletes Post-Tokyo 2020: A Pre-Post Study

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This study employs a pre-post survey design, engaging a purposive-convenience sample of 94 U.S. college athletes who participated in the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics across eight sports and 22 countries. Utilizing validated scales, participants' group, national, and athletic identities were measured weeks before and after the event. Paired sample t-tests and a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance were utilized to understand the effects of time and demographic variables on these identities. Results revealed that after competing in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, college athletes exhibited a significant decrease in their group identity and a significant increase in their national identity, while their athletic identity remained relatively unchanged. The results were qualified by student status interactions such that international students showed a significant decrease in group identity and a significant increase in national identity after competing in Tokyo 2020, with no significant changes observed in these identities for domestic students. The results illuminate a complex process of identity negotiation experienced by collegiate Olympic athletes that transition between Olympic and college sport environments. This study contributes to sport management literature by offering nuanced insights into the dynamics of role-switching, urging stakeholders to utilize these findings to enhance the experiences of college athletes.

Key words: athlete identity, reintegration, Olympics, collegiate sports

Introduction

In recent years, the Olympic Games have experienced a significant increase in the participation of college athletes, reflecting the growing recognition of their talent and potential within the realm of international sport competition (Martinez, 2016; Settimi, 2016). The recent surge in representation in international competition might be credited to the advanced facilities, rigorous training programs, and specialized coaching provided by higher education institutions, which offer favorable environments for developing world-class athletes (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). Moreover, the academic setting offers an opportunity for athletes to develop valuable life skills alongside their athletic pursuits, equipping them with the mental fortitude and discipline required to succeed in high-pressure competitions such as the Olympics (Huml



Journal of Intercollegiate Sport, 2024, 17.1

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et al., 2019). As more and more college athletes make their mark on the global stage, the Olympic Games are evolving into a dynamic platform that celebrates and propels the ambitions of these elite athletes.

Although the participation of college athletes in the Olympic Games has been widely celebrated, it has also elevated some concerns regarding the potential challenges associated with role-switching between collegiate and Olympic competition. For example, athletes that transition from the collegiate sports environment to the Olympic stage experience challenges in adapting to new team dynamics and the heightened pressure to perform at elite levels (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). This shift can lead to a sense of dissonance, as athletes grapple with expectations associated with their Olympic identity while preserving ties to their college team (or group) identity (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Similarly, the reintegration of college athletes into their collegiate teams after their experiences at the Olympic Games might also be challenging due to a potential negotiation of identity and their own evolving sense of self, as they navigate the complexities of transitioning between global mega events and college athletics. This delicate balance between these dual roles may result in psychological stress and a sense of divided loyalty, which may ultimately influence athletic performance and overall well-being (van Rens et al., 2018).

Kim and Hums (2010) discuss cross-cultural adjustments required by collegiate athletes post-participation in international sport events. The transition back to collegiate sports following international competition can be seen as a form of cross-cultural adjustment, where athletes need to traverse the cultural gradations of their collegiate sports environment after having experienced a different cultural context in international competitions. During these international competitions, athletes develop and negotiate varied identities, including athletic, national, and group identities, which might be intensified due to the high-stakes environment.

Once back with their college teams, these athletes often find their identities, potentially amplified throughout international competition, struggling to amalgamate into the contemporary college sports environment, which has evolved significantly in recent years, becoming intensely competitive and commercialized. Such dissonance can lead to latent conflicts and dissatisfaction, as the prestige, attention, and respect that accompany being an elite international athlete may not resonate within the intricate dynamics of their college teams, where the emphasis on commercial appeal and intense competition can overshadow individual accomplishments (Macaulay, 2022; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). To this end, Shimizu et al. (2016) investigated changes in the life skills of college athletes over time, and how these changes relate to career outcomes. This study illuminates how the growth and development of an athlete during international competitions can affect their transition back into collegiate sports. They found that the skills developed during the international competition period potentially creates a discrepancy when reintegrating, as these skills may not be as valued or applied in the context of more commercialized collegiate sports.

Despite the growing interest in the experiences of college athletes participating in the Olympic Games, there remain significant gaps in the sport management literature concerning role switching and the reintegration process upon their return to col-

legiate sports. Specifically, limited research has been conducted on the multifaceted aspects of one's identity transformation, such as group identity, athletic identity, and national identity, as athletes transition between elite and collegiate environments. While some studies have explored the challenges of balancing dual roles in sports and academics (e.g., Nichols et al., 2019), the nuance of one's identity negotiation in the context of team dynamics and national representation remain underexplored. To this end, a more complete understanding of how college athletes navigate these identity shifts could provide valuable insights into the development of effective support systems and interventions to facilitate an easier transition and support overall well-being (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2022). This research aims to address these gaps, focusing on interplays between group, athlete, and national identities, and the implications for athletes' experiences, performance, and long-term development in both the Olympic and collegiate domains.

Literature Review

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT), first posited by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, forms a theoretical framework for understanding the interpersonal and intergroup relationships that permeate different fields, including sport management. The central tenet of SIT posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from a perceived membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These groups can be as diverse as family, workplace, national, or sporting affiliations.

The application of SIT in sport management literature has been extensive. Scholars have employed this theory to understand various phenomena ranging from fan behavior (e.g., Wann & Branscombe, 1990), organizational identification (e.g., Heere & James, 2007), to athletes' group dynamics (Beauchamp & Eys, 2014). Several researchers have found that a person's identity as a fan can significantly influence their emotional responses, behavior, and consumption patterns, as individuals seek to maintain a positive self-image through their affiliation with successful teams.

Similarly, the construct of group identity, in the context of SIT, provides a lens through which we can examine how individuals identify with particular groups, in this case, sport teams. This group identity can be so profound that members often conform to group norms, exemplify group behavior, and respond emotionally to group-related events (e.g., Terry et al., 1999). The concept of national identity also stems from SIT, representing the extent to which an individual identifies with their national group, which becomes especially significant in international sports competitions where the patriotic feelings run high (Crisp et al., 2008). The concept of national identity further intensifies group identity, binding together a diverse set of individuals under a common banner, and fuels fervor in fandom. Finally, the application of SIT in understanding of athletic identity is multifaceted. Athletic identity, according to Brewer et al. (1993), is the degree to which a person identifies with their athlete role. This identity can greatly impact the athlete's behavior, motivation, self-presentation, and performance. Recognizing the importance of group affiliation, team

cohesion, and leadership in sport, the application of SIT helps us to know more about the psychological processes and interpersonal dynamics inherent in team sports.

SIT has played a significant role in shaping our understanding of group dynamics in sports. By understanding how group identity, national identity, and athletic identity form and influence behavior, scholars and practitioners in sport management can better understand and cater to the needs of different stakeholders, including college athletes who transition between global mega events and college athletics negotiating these very identities (e.g., Beauchamp & Eys, 2014; Brewer et al., 1993; Crolley & Hand, 2002; Ronkainen et al., 2016; Sparkes, 1998; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Group Identity

Group identity is the psychological connection an individual feels with a group, leading to the internalization of group norms, values, and behaviors (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Van Kippenburg & Van Schie, 2000). In sport management, group identity has been studied to understand how individuals identify with teams and how this influences behaviors and attitudes. This can manifest in ways such as fan loyalty, consumption patterns, and emotional reactions to team performance (e.g., Boyle & Magnusson, 2007; Collins et al., 2016; Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011). Researchers have also argued that group identity can significantly influence group cohesion, leadership, and team performance among athletes (Beauchamp & Eys, 2014).

Group identity plays a significant role in how athletes identify with their sport teams. As they develop a sense of belonging to the team, their group identity intertwines with their athletic identity. They become more committed to the team, conform to group norms, and work towards the group's goals (Beauchamp & Eys, 2014). This identification can nurture team cohesion and improve performance (Brewer et al., 1993).

However, a unique situation arises when college athletes represent their home countries in international mega events. Upon returning, these athletes may experience identity negotiation as they try to reconcile their group identity with their college team and their amplified national identity following international competition. This negotiation might manifest as a multifaceted psychological process involving cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral adaptations (Sussman, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Zhou et al., 2008).

Delving deeper into the realities of representing one's country, it's essential to consider the considerable amount of time that athletes spend in official national team preparation, travel to, and participation in mega events (e.g., Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Orlick, 1989; Torregrosa et al., 2015). The athletes invest substantial time in training camps, tryouts, and team travels, in addition to the elite skill and training required for an individual to make the team. This extensive engagement with international teams can contribute significantly to their identity formation and development, emphasizing the pivotal role of time and experience in shaping one's athletic and national identities. Furthermore, their sense of belonging may be affected, resulting in potential confusion, conflict, or anxiety, commonly referred to as "identity

conflict” (Sparkes, 1998). The realm of identity conflict is vast, implying that one’s internal struggle can encompass numerous areas such as role expectations, societal perceptions, and self-concept (Greenwald, 2002). This identity conflict can be especially challenging to manage due to the dichotomy between athletes’ roles within their college teams and their national representation. As a result, these athletes may feel divided loyalties, questioning whether their primary identity should align more closely with their college team or their national team. Such can lead to a reevaluation of commitment levels, possibly influencing their interactions with teammates and coaches, and possibly affecting their overall performance (Sparkes, 1998).

Furthermore, role engulfment emerges as a critical dimension in this scenario, whereby athletes are profoundly immersed in their roles, either as a student-athlete or as a representative of their home country. The transitioning process from being role-engulfed as a student-athlete to assuming a similar engulfment as an athlete competing internationally for their country requires nuanced negotiation and adaptive strategies (Aggey-Pinegar, 2010). Assessing this transitioning process can shed light on the multifaceted challenges encountered by athletes, extending current understanding of psychosocial dynamics and offering avenues for improved support (e.g., Kidd et al. 2018; Miller & Kerr, 2003).

Given the significant role of group identity in collegiate athletes and the potential for conflicts and adaptations when they represent their home countries in international mega events, it is crucial to examine how their experiences in such events may impact their sense of belonging and association with their college teams upon return. Thus, the ensuing hypothesis is postulated:

Hypothesis 1: College athletes who participate in the Olympics exhibit significantly lesser group identity with their collegiate team following participation in the Games.

National Identity

National identity refers to a collective or group identity that stems from individuals identifying with a nation. It encompasses shared traditions, language, culture, and symbols that represent the distinctiveness of a nation (Smith, 1991). This shared identity offers a framework for social cohesion, collective action, and engenders a sense of belonging among citizens (Huddy & Khatib, 2007). National identity can often be strongly exhibited and reinforced through major societal events, including sports competitions (Crolley & Hand, 2002).

In sport management, the concept of national identity has been explored in terms of how sport shapes and reinforces national identity and how this identity influences the behavior of fans and athletes (Crisp, Stathi, Turner, & Husnu, 2008). At the broadest level, researchers show how sports can serve as a medium for the expression of national identity. These expressions are often most visible in international competitions, where national teams and athletes embody their nation on a global stage (Holt, 1999). Mega sporting events like the Olympics often incite national pride and unity, showcasing the strength of national identity (e.g., Stanton, 2014; Tomlinson & Young, 2006; Xu, 2006). Further, sport has been studied as a medium

through which individuals develop and internalize a sense of national identity, as successful national teams often strengthen national identity among citizens through instilled national pride and unity (Crolley & Hand, 2002).

Participation in international sport competitions significantly affects national identity among these athletes (Hognestad, 2006). Representation of the home country intensifies feelings of national identity, as athletes can become aware that they are not only competing for personal accomplishment, but also symbolizing their nation's strengths and aspirations (Houlihan, 1997). Artifacts such as the nation's anthem, flag, and other national symbols used during these events reinforce this identity. However, this heightened sense of national identity can also increase the pressure and expectations placed on the athletes, both by themselves and compatriots (Morgan, 2006).

However, for college athletes who participate in international sports competition for their home countries, negotiating this amplified national identity upon returning to their college sports team may be challenging. This may be particularly true if the athletes' home country differs from the country of their college. This is often a period of identity negotiation, where athletes struggle to reconcile their enhanced national identity with their identity as a member of their college team (Sparkes, 1998). They might experience conflicting loyalties and expectations, as well as cultural dissonance. In severe cases, it can lead to identity conflict and stress, affecting their performance (Ronkainen et al., 2016).

Given the intricate relationship between national identity and international the Olympics, particularly how representation and participation in such events can amplify feelings of national identity among athletes, it is critical to explore how this dynamic unfolds for college athletes representing their home countries. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: College athletes who participate in the Olympics exhibit significantly greater national identity with their home country post-participation in the Olympics.

Athletic Identity

Athletic identity is a self-concept that individuals hold about themselves as being an athlete and the degree to which they identify with the role (see Brewer et al. 1993). This identity is often salient in athletes who invest significant time and energy into their sport and value their role as an athlete highly. Sport management literature has explored athletic identity to understand its effects on behavior, motivation, and athletic performance. For instance, Brewer et al. (1993) suggest that strong athletic identity can enhance commitment and performance but might lead to difficulties in adjusting to career transitions and sport-related injuries. Athletic identity has also been examined in the context of retirement from sport, where transitioning out of an athlete role can create major identity disruption and stress (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Athletic participation in international mega-events, such as the Olympics or World Championships, can influence athletic identity. Given the prestige and global

exposure of these events, they can be perceived as pinnacle experiences in an athlete's career (Schwenkler, 2021). Success on the international level may reinforce and strengthen an athlete's identity, deepening the alignment between their self-concept and role as an elite athlete (Sparkes, 1998). However, for college athletes who compete in international sports competitions for their home countries, this enhanced athletic identity may cause difficulties upon returning to their college teams. The international sport experience, often perceived as a higher level of competition, might lead to a disparity between their self-perception as elite international athletes and their role as collegiate athletes (Ronkainen et al., 2016). This identity dissonance could result in feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction and may influence their interactions and performance within the college team (Sparkes, 1998).

For example, collegiate sports, while competitive, often do not match the intensity and prestige of international competition like the Olympics. Thus, the athlete might feel a sense of under-stimulation or lack of challenge, leading to a decrease in the salience of athletic identity (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Furthermore, Olympic athletes are widely seen as representatives of their home nations, garnering attention and respect that may not be replicated in the context of college sports (Brewer et al., 1993). As such, these athletes may struggle to readjust to their roles within their college team following the heightened responsibilities and status they experienced at the Olympics. This adjustment process might cause them to question or reassess their identity as an athlete (Sparkes, 1998).

Athletic identity, the degree to which individuals identify with the role of an athlete, can be significantly impacted by participation in international sports competitions like the Olympics. Such events can amplify the athletes' self-concept and alignment with the role of an elite athlete, creating a potential disparity in identity salience upon returning to college sports settings. Based on these considerations, the following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 3: Collegiate athletes who participate in the Olympics exhibit significantly lesser athletic identity upon returning to college post-participation in the Olympics.

International Versus Domestic Student-Athletes

Various cultural, social, and psychological factors may play a pivotal role in shaping identity dynamics, particularly when examining the differences between international and U.S. domestic student-athletes. For example, one might posit that international students experience notable changes in group and national identity post international representation. Such decline in group identity amongst international students post-Olympics may underscore a possible conflict or reevaluation of affiliations and loyalties, illuminating how mega sport events may potentially lead to a re-configuration of athletes' connection or allegiance to their immediate group or team. Conversely, domestic student-athletes might exhibit stability in their group identity, potentially stemming from a more congruent cultural and national context, which might shield their group affiliations from the influence of international participation (Ronkainen et al., 2016).

In parallel, enhancements in national identity among international students post international competitions may also underscore the potent influence of mega sport events in reinforcing associations and identifications with one's home nation, potentially fueled by the amplified national pride and camaraderie experienced during such competitions (Crolley & Hand, 2002; Houlihan, 1997). Contrastingly, the possible unaltered national identity among domestic student-athletes following a mega sport event would underscore the potentially ingrained and stable sense of national belonging in this demographic, undisturbed by the influences of international competitions (Kim and Hums (2010).

To this end, interaction effects will be examined to determine if the effects of time on group identity, national identity, and athletic identity differs depending on various demographic factors. More specifically, we predict that there will be significant effects of student status (i.e., international student or domestic student) on the dependent variables such that college athletes who are international students will experience greater effects of time than college athletes who are domestic students. As such, the following hypothesis is forwarded:

Hypothesis 4: International college athletes who participate in the Olympics exhibit significantly different (a) group identity, (b) national identity, and (c) athletic identity upon returning to their college team post-participation in the Olympics.

Method

Participants

Participants were drawn from a purposive-convenience sample of current U.S. college athletes who qualified for and competed in the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics. A total of 251 U.S. college athletes competing in 12 different sports for 36 different countries comprised the sample (NCAA, 2021). Due to the prepost design of this study, incoming and graduating U.S. college athletes were deemed ineligible because they would not be able to sufficiently answer pretest or posttest questions related to one or more measures (e.g., group identity). Researchers contacted each of the remaining 166 eligible participants via social media to explain the study purpose and request their participation in the study. Ninety-four U.S. college athletes across 8 different sports and 22 different countries agreed to participate, with 156 usable surveys being collected (pretest: $n = 94$; posttest: $n = 68$; 72.3% postsurvey response rate).

Participants were undergraduate students with ages ranging from 18–24 years ($\bar{x} = 21.2$ years). Fifty-two percent of the sample was male, and 48% female. Seventy-nine percent of the sample classified themselves as White, 8.4% Black/African American, 6.6% Hispanic, with the remaining 6% Asian, Pacific Islander, or Multiracial. Though the sample included U.S. college athletes, 58.5% of the participants had citizenship in countries other than the United States and competed at Tokyo 2020 for the following 22 countries: Australia, Bahamas, Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Jamaica, Jordan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Ni-

geria, Norway, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Tunisia and Venezuela. Table 1 provides a summary of participants' demographic characteristics, student statuses, and athletic backgrounds.

Table 1. Paired Sample *t*-test Results for Group Identity, National Identity, and Athletic Identity

Identity Type	Time	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value	Significant?
Group	T1	5.23	1.24	-2.17	< .001	Yes
Group	T2	4.72	1.07			
National	T1	4.06	1.01	3.44	< .001	Yes
National	T2	4.94	1.19			
Athletic	T1	4.95	1.42	0.04	.197	No
Athletic	T2	5.11	1.12			

Note: "Time" refers to the measurement points T1 (before) and T2 (after) the Tokyo 2020 competition. "Significant?" refers to whether the results are statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Instrumentation

A prepost design was enlisted to measure participants' group identity, national identity, and athletic identity before and after competing at Tokyo 2020. Atkinson and Nevill (2001, p. 820) suggest "research designs that involve correlated data (e.g., repeated measures) are more powerful than those involving separate unrelated groups." To measure the level of identity the participants had with their college teams, we used the group identity scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992), and later refined by Van Knippenberg and Van Schie (2000). This scale comprised six Likert-type items that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*): "When someone criticizes my college team, it feels like a personal insult"; "I'm very interested in what others think about my college team"; "When I talk about my college team, I usually say *we* rather than *they*"; "My college team's successes are my successes"; "When someone praises my college team, it feels like a personal compliment." Reliability of the group identity measure was excellent ($\alpha > .88$). We used Huddy and Khatib's (2007) national identity scale to measure participants' identity with their home nation (i.e., that for which they competed at Tokyo 2020). The scale included four Likert-type items ranging from 1 to 5, such as "How important is being American to you?"; "How well does the term American describe you?"; "To what extent do you identify with your American nationality?"; and "To what extent do you see yourself as a typical American?" Reliability of this measure was very good ($\alpha > .80$). We measured athletic identity using the 10-item Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer et al., 1993). This scale included Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*): "I consider myself an athlete"; "I have many goals related to sport"; "Sport is the most important part of my life"; "Most of my friends are athletes"; "I would feel very depressed if I were injured and

could not compete in sport”; “I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport”; “I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself”; “Other people view me mainly as an athlete”; “I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else”; and “Sport is the only important thing in my life.” The reliability of the measure was very good ($\alpha > .83$). In addition to these previously validated scales, we added to the survey a series of demographic questions to see if these variables would moderate the hypothesized relationships. These questions included student status (i.e., domestic or international), age, gender, and ethnicity.

Data Collection

A pretest survey consisting of all measures was administered to participants one month prior to the Opening Ceremony of Tokyo 2020. We selected the pretest timeframe to ensure that all participants could complete the survey at least one week prior to their traveling to Tokyo (the earliest travel schedule for a participant was three weeks prior to the Opening Ceremony) and to avoid all “blackout” periods imposed on the participants by various governing bodies (Geurin & McNary, 2021). The posttest survey consisting of all measures was administered to participants two weeks after the Closing Ceremony of Tokyo 2020. We used a shorter posttest timeframe to limit potentially confounding factors and participant attrition (Price & Murnan, 2004). As such, we can be more confident that any changes observed between pretest and posttest surveys were the result of participants’ experiences at Tokyo 2020. The surveys were web-based and created using Qualtrics online software, after which data were exported to and analyzed using SPSS 23.

Data Analysis

We used paired sample *t*-tests to test for statistical significance between measures in the pretest and posttest surveys, and a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance was used to determine if any of the demographic variables moderated the influence of time (i.e., Olympic experience) on group identity, national identity, and athletic identity. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations were computed to better understand the relationships between all variables.

Results

A paired sample *t*-test was conducted to compare participants’ group identity before (T1) and after (T2) they competed at Tokyo 2020. Findings showed a significant difference between T1 ($M = 5.23, SD = 1.24$) and T2 ($M = 4.72, SD = 1.07$); $t(67) = -2.17, p < .001$. These findings revealed support for H1 as levels of group identity decreased among participants following their experience at Tokyo 2020. A second paired sample *t*-test was used to compare national identity among participants before (T1) and after (T2) they competed at Tokyo 2020. Findings showed a significant difference between scores at T1 ($M = 4.06, SD = 1.01$) and T2 ($M = 4.94, SD = 1.19$); $t(67) = 3.44, p < .001$, providing support for H2 as levels of national identity among participants increased following their experience at Tokyo 2020. A paired sample

t-test was used to compare the participants' athletic identity before (T1) and after (T2) their experience at Tokyo 2020. The findings showed no significant differences between T1 ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.42$) and T2 ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.12$); $t(67) = .04$, $p = .197$, indicating a lack of support for H3. The results of these paired sample *t*-tests are summarized in Table 1.

A repeated measures analysis of variance was used to explore any interaction effects of demographic characteristics and time on the dependent variables. Findings indicated there were no interaction effects involving age, gender, or ethnicity. A significant main effect for time was observed for group identity and national identity but was qualified by student status interactions (student status \times group identity and student status \times national identity). As illustrated in Table 2, international students exhibited a significant decrease in group identity following the experience of competing at Tokyo 2020 [$F(1,67) = 19.33$, $p < .01$]. We observed no significant differences of group identity among domestic students before and after Tokyo 2020. Similarly, international students demonstrated a significant increase in national identity after competing at Tokyo 2020 [$F(1,67) = 17.64$, $p < .01$] as illustrated in Table 2. We observed no significant differences for national identity among domestic students before and after Tokyo 2020. Figure 1 and Figure 2 provide illustrative summaries of the results of the repeated measures ANOVA for interaction effects of time and student status on group identity and national identity, respectively.

Table 2. *Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for Interaction Effects*

Variable	Interaction	F-value	p-value	Significant?
Group Identity	Student Status	19.33	< .01	Yes
National Identity	Student Status	17.64	< .01	Yes

Note: "Variable" refers to the tested variable. "Interaction" denotes the interaction term in the ANOVA model. "Student Status" refers to International and Domestic groups. "Significant?" refers to whether the results are statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Figure 1. Repeated measures ANOVA results for interaction effects of time and student status on group identity.

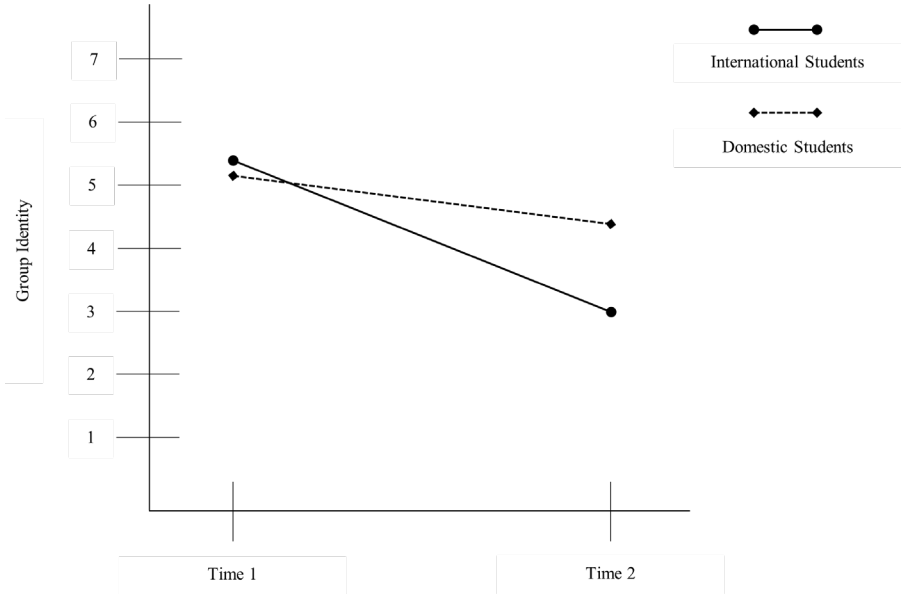
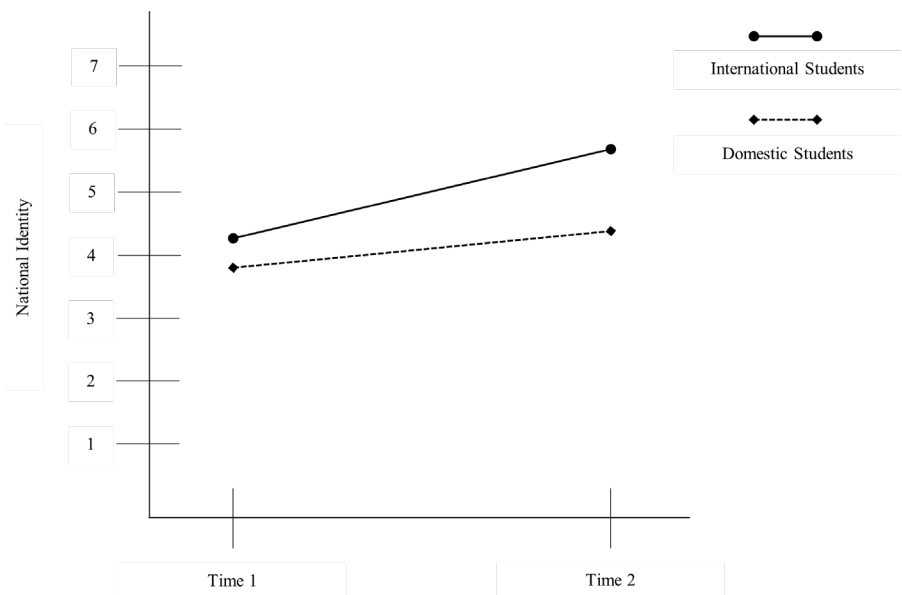


Figure 2. Repeated measures ANOVA results for interaction effects of time and student status on national identity.



Discussion

This research aimed to examine the changes in group, national, and athlete identities of participants before and after their engagement in Tokyo 2020. The application of paired sample t-tests served as a robust methodology to provide comparative insights into these changes. The initial analysis examined the shift in the sense of group identity among participants. The results suggested that the experience of the participants at Tokyo 2020 resulted in a significant decline in their group identity with their respective college teams following the Games. This change in participants' perceived identity endorses the concept that college athletes who participate in an international mega event during their time at university may experience a decline in their sense of unity with their college teams following the event.

A subsequent part of the research focused on studying changes in participants' national identity. It was observed that the sense of national identity among the participants underwent an augmentation following their participation in Tokyo 2020. This observable increase in national identity following the Games supports our contention that college athletes who participate in an international mega event will experience an enhanced sense of national pride as a result of their involvement in the event.

Further, the last segment of the study sought to determine alterations in the participants' athletic identity in the wake of Tokyo 2020. Contrary to expectations, the results suggested that the event had little to no significant impact on participants' self-perceived athletic identity. The stability in the sense of athletic identity counters the third hypothesis, which assumed a possible transformation in college athletes' identification with their athletic roles after returning to their college teams following an international mega event.

The study delved into possible interaction effects between demographic characteristics and time on the dependent variables, using a repeated measures analysis of variance. Analyses revealed no detectable interactions involving age, gender, or ethnicity on the studied outcomes. However, a significant main effect for time on group and national identity emerged, which was qualified by notable interactions with the participants' student status. Our results underscored a nuanced interplay between student status and the transformations in group and national identity post participation at Tokyo 2020. Specifically, international students experienced a discernible decline in group identity following their involvement. This delineates that their experiences at Tokyo 2020 affected their sense of unity and belongingness with their respective college teams, possibly pointing towards a conflict or re-evaluation of their affiliations and loyalties. This may be indicative of a wider phenomenon in sport mega events, wherein international representation leads to a reconfiguration of one's connection and allegiance to their immediate group or team, necessitating further investigation into the psychosocial mechanisms underlying such shifts. In contrast, domestic students did not manifest alterations in group identity. The differential effect illustrates how domestic students may retain a more stable or resilient group identity, potentially due to a more congruent cultural and national context, mitigating

the influence of international participation on their group affiliations.

Similarly, with regard to national identity, international students exhibited a significant enhancement post-Tokyo 2020, suggesting that such international exposure and representation amplified their association and identification with their home nations. This enhancement could be attributed to the intensified national pride and camaraderie experienced during international competitions, offering a richer, more diversified platform for expressing and reinforcing one's national identity. In contrast, the domestic students' national identity remained static post event, emphasizing the varying dimensions and stability of national identities among different student categories. An absence of significant change in national identity among domestic students may signal the presence of a more ingrained and established sense of national belonging, potentially undisturbed by the external stimuli provided by international competitions.

The research findings reveal a complex picture of the impact of participation in major international mega events like Tokyo 2020 on the subjective identity of athletes. Specifically, while there are observable changes in team and national identities, the athletes' sense of their athletic identity remains resilient and unaltered. The implications of the results are critical to understanding the role such events play in shaping an athlete's identity perceptions and open pathways for more detailed explorations in the future.

Practical Implications

This research provides important implications for sport management, college athletic administrators, and athlete support services, revealing how participation in international mega-events like Tokyo 2020 might impact college athletes' identities on different levels. Firstly, the significant decrease in group identity among participants post-Tokyo 2020 implies that athletic administrators should be cognizant of the potential changes in athlete's sense of unity with their college teams following such international experiences. It may be beneficial to create strategies aimed at reinforcing and fostering this sense of team unity upon athletes' return. The strategies could include team-building exercises, group debriefings, or team retreats that may function to recalibrate group dynamics and re-establish a collective identity among team members. To this end, Berg and Warner (2019) emphasize the essential role of social support in promoting athlete development, especially during transitions between sporting arenas. These authors highlight the utility of a supportive network (i.e., coaches, peers, and family) in facilitating smooth transitions and fostering a sense of belonging. Dean and Reynolds (2017) expand on this, emphasizing the reintegration of student-athletes using a strengths perspective from social work, thus harnessing athletes' inherent capabilities to effectively manage transitions.

Secondly, the observed increase in national identity following participation in Tokyo 2020 suggests that these events can be a powerful medium for enhancing athletes' pride and connection to their home nations. Athletic administrators should therefore acknowledge and celebrate this strengthened sense of national identity. For example, hosting a welcome-home ceremony or public acknowledgment event could

serve to support this strengthened national pride, simultaneously fostering community support and engagement.

Thirdly, the stability of college athletes' self-perceived athletic identity, despite their participation in a major international event, highlights the resilience of this identity facet. This provides reassurance to sport management and athlete support services that such involvement does not disrupt these athletes' personal identification with their athletic roles. Such a continuity of athletic identity can be considered a positive aspect for athletic administrators, suggesting the athletes maintain their athletic dedication and focus, despite potential changes in their team and national identities.

Lastly, the differential impact of mega sporting events on international and domestic students underscores the necessity for tailored support strategies for different statuses of athletes. For instance, recognizing the potential for a sharper decline in group identity among international students could prompt the provision of additional resources or supportive interventions targeting this group upon their return. Stoa et al. (2020) draw attention to the requisite of effective identity management during such transitions. They show how stress can considerably affect an athlete's intrinsic motivation, which becomes critical in high-pressure competitive environments such as college sports. As such, international student athletes' identity negotiation becomes increasingly important as they are tasked with reconciling their multiple identities derived from diverse sport arenas (Ronkainen et al., 2016; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Therefore, interventions that aid athletes in managing their multiple identities can mitigate potential identity conflicts stemming from the dramatically different cultural arenas of mega sport events and collegiate sports.

Theoretical Implications

Firstly, this research builds on the foundational theories of group identity, offering a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play in athletes' identity perceptions within international sporting events. The observed decline in group identity post-participation in Tokyo 2020 resonates with the theoretical propositions of Tajfel (1981), Tajfel and Turner (1979), and Van Kippenburg and Van Schie (2000), emphasizing the intricate psychological connections individuals forge with groups and the subsequent internalization of group norms, values, and behaviors. This study corroborates earlier research suggesting that group identity significantly influences behaviors and attitudes, including fan loyalty, consumption patterns, and emotional reactions to team performance (Collins et al., 2016; Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011), expanding current understanding of how engagement in global contexts may challenge "local" affiliations, specifically college teams. The potential disjuncture between local affiliations and global experiences opens avenues for extensive theoretical examination into the mediating or moderating factors that potentially affect relationships between social identities, context, and experiences, and encourages a reevaluation of existing frameworks on group identity in sport management literature.

Secondly, this research substantiates theories positing the potent influence of international sporting events in intensifying national identity, providing a rich context to explore the intertwining of personal and national aspirations (Smith, 1991; Huddy & Khatib, 2007). The observed increase in national identity post-participation corroborates the findings of Holt (1999) and Crolley and Hand (2002), underlining the mega sport event as a conduit for expressing and reinforcing national identity. Athletes, while seeking personal accomplishment, find themselves embodying their nation's ethos and aspirations, thrusting them into symbolic and representative roles that echo the distinctiveness of their nations' traditions, culture, and symbols. The nuanced implications of this research emphasize how national symbols and anthems serve to consolidate this intensified national identity during such events, as indicated by Houlihan (1997), and how it can mold the behavior and perceptions of athletes.

Thirdly, these findings refine our comprehension of athletic identity, spotlighting the resilience and stability of this self-concept even amidst transformative experiences such as the Olympic Games (Brewer et al., 1993). The continuity in athletic identity post-participation in international events suggests that the salience and value attributed to the athlete role are deeply fixed elements of athletes' self-concepts (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Schwenkler, 2021). This lends support to the assertion that athletic identity might not easily waver one way or the other, even when juxtaposed against experiences of elevated responsibility and heightened status, such as mega sport events that come with their own prestige and global recognition (Sparkes, 1998).

Lastly, insights into the distinct challenges faced by international student-athletes during reintegration accentuate the critical importance of addressing cross-cultural adjustments and the intensified negotiation of identities developed during international competitions (Kim & Hums, 2010; Macaulay, 2022; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The theoretical discourse is enriched by the revelation of the intricate interplay between national, athletic, and group identities, and the profound implications these have on the experiences of reintegration, particularly spotlighting the struggles and potential identity conflicts of international students with heightened national identities (Sparkes, 1998). Discussions surrounding role engulfment and stress management may introduce nuanced dimensions to our theoretical understanding, indicating potentially significant implications of an imbalanced emphasis on athletic identity and the associated stress on athletes' self-concept and overall identity development (Stoa et al., 2020; Zvosec et al., 2023).

Limitations

There are several potential limitations to this study. Firstly, the design of the study was cross-sectional with measurements before and after the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Thus, the study might not capture long-term changes in identities or any changes that could occur during other significant events or over a more extended period. Second, the data were collected using self-reported measures, which could lead to response bias. Participants might respond in ways they perceive as socially desirable or personally favorable rather than providing accurate responses. Third,

the rate of attrition (i.e., the drop-out of participants between pretest and posttest) could introduce bias in the results. If the athletes who dropped out of the study differed systematically from those who stayed, it could skew the findings. Fourth, the use of Likert-scale items may be subjected to cultural interpretation, and language nuances may have affected the responses. This is especially relevant given that a significant portion of participants were international students. Fifth, while the study controlled for a few demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity, it did not consider other potential influencing factors like socioeconomic status, years of experience in the sport, or prior participation in Olympic or other international competitions. Finally, though the researchers have attempted to minimize potential confounding variables by the timing of the surveys, there could be other factors influencing the athletes' sense of identity during the Olympic period that the research does not account for. These could include personal factors such as stress or success in the sport competition, or broader social and political factors.

Future Directions

The current research unveils the complexities and intricacies of identity negotiations experienced by college athletes transitioning between the Olympic and collegiate environments. The research underscores the necessity to consider these identity shifts when providing support systems for athletes. Additionally, it illuminates the role of team, athlete, and national identities in shaping athletes' experiences, performance, and long-term development. The insights gained from this research may serve as a foundation for the establishment of targeted interventions and programs designed to better manage athletes' role-switching, thereby facilitating their athletic achievement and overall well-being. Although the process of transitioning between the Olympic Games and college sports presents unique challenges, it also offers invaluable opportunities for growth and development. Therefore, it is imperative for stakeholders to exploit these findings to enhance the experiences of college athletes and, by extension, continue to elevate the status and impact of the Olympic Games. The results of the study make notable contributions to the sport management literature by illuminating the multilayered dynamics of role-switching, ultimately inspiring future studies in the intersection of elite and collegiate sports.

This research also underscores the need for future research that continues to explore the intricate interplay of personal characteristics, experiences, and the different facets of identity in sport contexts. Future research should indeed extend the scope of this study to comprehensively explore the experiences of international athletes at universities and their transitional experiences between collegiate and international competitions, such as the Olympics. Longitudinal data and analysis could offer invaluable insights into the seeming evolving dynamics and implications of such transitions, allowing for a deeper understanding of how athletes interpret and navigate such shifts. These could include investigating the psychological, social, and cultural ramifications of transitioning between varied levels of competition and representation, and how such transitions influence athletes' sense of identity, belonging, and performance.

Moreover, this research opens a broad avenue for exploring the multifaceted dimensions of identity negotiation and reintegration for athletes in diverse contexts. Investigations can delve into how the various elements of athletes' identities (i.e., group, national, and athletic), interplay and recalibrate during such transitions. The distinctive experiences and challenges faced by our international athletes in reconciling their enhanced national identities with their roles in college athletics can be explored in greater depth, offering nuanced understandings of the identity flux experienced by athletes. By doing so, subsequent studies could frame a richer, more integrated narrative around the complexities inherent in international athletes' journeys, contributing to a robust research line that studies the intricate intertwining of identity and representation in both the collegiate sports and global sports domains.

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