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Abstract

Motivation among football players drives a team to success or failure. Coaches must be able to create a positive environment that allows players to be motivated. It all starts from the top and trickles down. There are many different actions that coaches use to motivate their players on and off the field. Depending on which type of coaching style is used will determine the methods that are used to motivate. Players also have to have self-motivating traits that drive them to become better athletes. This study consisted of surveys of football players in Division III football. Transfer students and 4th year seniors were the population in this study. Looking at factors that include program tradition, coaching styles, team leadership, team dynamics, and academics it was possible to determine which factors lead to successful football programs. A significant finding in this study showed team unity throughout the team was apparent within the team. The senior respondents all stated that they attended Fisher because of its academic reputation. The other population looked at in this study was transfer students who said one of the reasons they attended Fisher was because they disliked their previous school.

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Motivational Differences Among Traditional and Transfer Football Players

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Abstract

Motivation among football players drives a team to success or failure. Coaches must be able to create a positive environment that allows players to be motivated. It all starts from the top and trickles down. There are many different actions that coaches use to motivate their players on and off the field. Depending on which type of coaching style is used will determine the methods that are used to motivate. Players also have to have self-motivating traits that drive them to become better athletes. This study consisted of surveys of football players in Division III football. Transfer students and 4th year seniors were the population in this study. Looking at factors that include program tradition, coaching styles, team leadership, team dynamics, and academics it was possible to determine which factors lead to successful football programs. A significant finding in this study showed team unity throughout the team was apparent within the team. The senior respondents all stated that they attended Fisher because of its academic reputation. The other population looked at in this study was transfer students who said one of the reasons they attended Fisher was because they disliked their previous school.

Motivational Differences Among Traditional and Transfer Football Players

Motivation among athletes is one of the biggest factors when it comes to successful teams and unsuccessful teams. What is so important about motivation that it can have such an impact on team success? Motivating factors can have an effect on whether a team succeeds or fails. A team's success or failure can affect how individual players are motivated. The goal of coaches is to motivate their players to play at the highest level possible and win games. It is seen throughout college and professional football; if a coach does not win game they will be fired. Coaches are becoming creative with their motivation strategies today. Hanging motivational signs in the locker room can remind players on what the coach is looking for. Playing motivational movies for the team before a big game can inspire players. Playing music to pump up the players during practice or workouts is a way to make it more fun for the team (Lynch, 2011).

College football is the highest level of football a person can play without getting paid. It gives players the feeling of being a part of a group on campus, while still playing the game that they love. Football is a sport that requires a high level of intrinsic motivation especially in the collegiate level (Sloan, & Wiggins 2001). A study was done that looked at players from a Division 1-AA school and NFL players from a single team. The study explored the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation between the two populations. When comparing the different between the two, college players scored higher on the intrinsic factors. Professional players scored higher on the extrinsic factors. College players have very little extrinsic motivations to play football while at school. It takes up a majority of time that could be used to study of

complete school work. They do not receive that money, endorsement deals, or recognition that NFL players do. Most hope to receive all those tangible rewards but when in college, athletes play football for intrinsic motivation rewards only (Sloan, & Wiggins 2001). NFL players only need to focus on being in the best possible shape for the season. College football players also have to make sure they are in the in best possible shape they can be in, but they also have to do all their schoolwork. If they don't, then they could be deemed academically ineligible. At times it can become extremely overwhelming and not every student can handle playing a sport. Sometimes players are torn between whether they should go to football practice or write a ten page paper that is coming due. It is also very difficult to have all the time to complete all the work that an average student receives in a given week. Players need to be self-motivated and be able to manage their time wisely. Players that typically struggle in the classroom will also show the same struggles on the playing field.

Former coach at University of Southern California, Pete Carroll, said that the difference between coaching in the pros and coaching college is like the difference between undergraduates and postgraduates. When he brought his pro style of coaching to UCS he had to "dumb" it down for his players to understand (Maisel, 2001). He had to explain what he thought were simple terms that he used in the pros to his now college players. Coaches cannot assume that every player will know every term that is used in a coaches terminology. College players must be motivated to learn both in the classroom and on the football field.

There are different classes of college football players. There are transfer players and traditional players. Traditional players consist of players that have been at a school for their

entire college career. They have only experience the facilities and program traditions at one school.

Transfer players have a different experience from traditional players. They often leave their previous school because they are displeased there. Football players then look for other programs that have success and have successful coaches. Transfer students have a better understand of what they like and what they dislike.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Theories used for this research consist of Behavioral Theory, Goal Setting Theory, and Positive Reinforcement Theory. Behavioral Theory states that learning is based upon the idea that all behaviors are acquired through conditioning (Cherry, 2011). For this study Positive Reinforcement Theory relates to team leadership.

Behavioral Theory states that leaders are not, born they are made. Successful leadership is based on learnable behavior (Cherry, 2011). As players come into a successful football program as a freshman they are able to see how the leadership among the team works. If captains of the team are positive role models and do what is right for the team, that image will be passed along to the younger players. When it comes time for them to choose a captain for their upcoming season they will know what type of person, on and off the field, to look for. It can also be said that if teams have leaders that have a negative image, the younger players will see that and assume it is the status quo. This factor could lead to an unsuccessful team.

Positive Reinforcement Theory will also be used in this study. Reinforcement theory can be used to shape behaviors. A combination of rewards and/or punishment is used to reinforce a desired behavior or eliminate an unwanted behavior (Croskery, 1992). Coaching styles deal with positive and negative reinforcement. Depending on the type of coach will determine what type of reinforcement will be used. Coaches will get better responses from their players if they use positive reinforcement. Players will feel less stressed and more comfortable on the practice and playing field. Using positive reinforcement also is a confident builder.

The final theory that will be used is Goal Setting Theory. Goal setting theory uses specific and challenging goals along with positive feedback contribute to higher and better task performances (Widmeyer & Ducharme, 1997). Coaches should set achievable goals at the beginning of a season. Goals could include, win eight games, or make the playoffs. Another factor that could be attributed to goal setting theory is team leadership. Along with the coaches the players should set goals for themselves. For example the team captains should set a team goal that states that everyone must come into camp in shape. As players continue to work hard they feel more confident about their abilities and potential to start on the team.

Collegiate Football Players

Playing college football is one more thing on the long list of work a student must focus on. Because football is such a physical sport it can affect how a student completes school work. When a player receives a concussion it cannot only be a setback on the football field but also in the classroom. Many student athletes do report concerns about health issues. Some of these physical health concerns include lack of sleep, continuous tension, fatigue, headaches, and

digestive problems. A study of college athletes stated that 10% of athletes suffered from psychological and physiological problems (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

College football can be considered a full time job. The transition from high school to college can be stressful for any student (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). In 2006 there was a study of over 21,000 college athletes who played a variety of men and women's sports. This survey focused on how many hours a week each athlete spent preparing for their particular sport. Football players reported spending 44.8 hours per week practicing, playing, or training for their sport (Wolverton, 2008). Currently the NCAA has a rule that states that only 20 hours a week can be spent practicing, but that does not include time spent traveling or rehabilitating an injury (Wolverton, 2008). However to succeed in collegiate sports much more time must be spent doing the little things. Watching film, working out, practicing on your own time, are things that allow certain players become better than their competition. This creates a stressful lifestyle for most students. As much as 95% of male athletes were stressed by factors such as tests, papers, missing class because of travel, and making up missed assignments (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

Among other results, the survey found out that college athletes felt that their GPA would be higher if they didn't play a sport. Also the majority of students that were surveyed viewed themselves more as athletes than students. But those who viewed themselves primarily as students had higher graduation rates (Wolverton, 2008). Athletes that see themselves more as student can be implemented from the coaches. If the coaches stress the fact of school comes first, then students have no choice but to see themselves as a student rather than an athlete.

Athlete Motivation

There is a large amount of research done on athlete motivation. A key part of athlete motivation is the style of coaching that the athlete has. For example one study looked at how coaches influence players off the field. When coaches are present during off season workouts, players tend to work harder (Jovick, Munger, & Mayhew 2007). It states that supervised groups increased their bench press and squat performances by 22 and 33% following a 12 week program. This was compared to 15 and 25% by an unsupervised group. This study was conducted over summer break. The population consisted of college football players that went home for the summer and ones that stayed on or around campus. The players that stayed around campus were training under the guidance of a strength and conditioning specialist. The players that left campus may not have had the extrinsic motivation provided by a conditioning specialist. A conditioning specialist will provide motivation for an extra repetition of a faster agility drill (Jovick, Munger, & Mayhew 2007). This study shows that as players are working out preparing for a season, it is more beneficial to them if there is someone there to push them. It does not need to be a coach; it could just be a specialist that is hired for the players. In fact, the NCAA has restrictions against any organized meetings between players and coaches prior to the start of the season. But if players are planning on staying around campus for the summer, it would be in the best interest of the coaches to hire a specialist that can assist any player than works out in the weight room.

Performing team activities outside the realm of football can build team unity and trust within the team. Brian White who is the head football coach at Hilliard Davidson High School in Ohio says he requires the team to get together for activities like canoeing and other games

besides football (Black, 2007). This strategy is proven to work based on the teams past credentials. His team won the 2006 Division I state championship. Hilliard Davidson High School was also named Ohio's top athletic program by Sports Illustrated (Black, 2007). To ensure team unity the coaching staff will not hand out individual awards at the end of the season. The team is more important than any individuals on the team.

Motivating Football Players

Football is the ultimate team game that requires all eleven players on the field working together to achieve a common goal. Team work is essential for positive results. There are some methods that can be used to help achieve the essential goal of unity of a team. One way is to get the players to praise each other (Powles, 1993). It is one thing for a player to get praise from their coach, but there is no larger confidence builder than receiving compliments from their peers on their performance. Another way to have teammates work together as a team is to promote sideline support (Powles, 1993). It is important to encourage players that are not in the game to stay involved by studying the game and cheering on their fellow teammates. And finally, the players need to love what they're doing (Powles, 1993). If players see a coach's passion for the game every day, it will rub off on them. It is the same situation for players; Individuals have the ability to become a leader and lead by example and motivate their teammates to give 100% every day (Powles, 1993).

Coaching Styles

Coaching is a very important factor for a football team. They set the rules and expectations by which the players must abide by. Every coach wants to get some level of

commitment out of each one of their players. To achieve this, a coach has to do three things: explain what their definition of commitment is, ask the players for their commitment, and explain the benefits they will receive from committing to the team (Beyer, 2000). Most coaches subscribe to the same type of workout regimens, nutrition, skill development, game preparation, and competitive strategy (Baker, 2002). The only thing that changes is the way that coaches go about performing these tasks.

Some coaches may feel the need to be the disciplinarian. They act as a drill sergeant while screaming and yelling at the kids hoping that they will adjust their attitudes to the coach's liking (Lawrence, 2010). This is a dying style of coaching. Today, more coaches take a more laid back approach to their coaching style. An example of a successful coach that uses this coaching style is Tony Dungy. He revolutionized the role of a NFL head coach, using a kinder, gentler motivational style instead of the traditional in-your-face, wining-is-everything approach (Ross, 2007). This is a difficult task involved with this style of coaching. For example, a football team can have upwards of 100 players, and it can get very difficult for a coach to learn what motivates every single one of them. This is true test of a coach's ability. Instead of yelling at a player every time he runs the wrong play or drops the ball, a coach will pull that player aside and talk to him/her. This way, they will be able to find out what is causing the confusion or difficulties. An agreement can then be made to help fix the problem in the future (Beyer, 2000).

One of the most underestimated tools for motivating players is positive reinforcement. If a player never gets positive reinforcement and is only disciplined when he/she does something wrong, it is likely that the player will not value their coaches feedback (Baker, 2002).

Who would want to listen to someone who is constantly putting them down and never gives complements for the positive things that are done?

Studies have shown that athletes that have mentors that act as counselors or positive role models reported a higher degree of comfort to express emotion and commitment to relationships (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998). Being comfortable and being relaxed is a major part of being successful as an athlete. Athletes that are nervous about making mistakes and worried that they might blow the game are typically not successful athletes.

Collegiate coaches are not there just to coach their players and send them on their way; they are there to mentor their players. For most student athletes, the first time they travel away from home is when they go to college. Parents trust the coaches to make sure their child will be safe. Coaches must accept this responsibility if they wish to be successful. The most successful coaches will not only teach players about the game, but they will teach them life skills. John Wooden is known as one of the most successful college basketball coaches that ever lived. He directed his athletes how to be successful in life as well as basketball.

This exploratory study is designed to focus on the differences among traditional 4-year football players vs. transfer students on the St. John Fisher football team. The traditional football player is just another name for 4th or 5th year seniors that have been on the Fisher football team for their entire career. Transfer players are players that have left a previous school to attend Fisher. This population will consist of any transfer player that is on the roster in the 2011 season.

There is a reason why students choose to come to Fisher directly out of high school. This study focused on finding why football players decided to attend Fisher after high school. Students that decided to come to Fisher directly out of high school have different reasons for attending than students who transferred in to Fisher.

The effects on these types of motivational differences can be attributed to coaching styles, team history, team leadership, team dynamics or internal motivation among individual players. The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1. What factors motivate football players to attend St. John Fisher?
2. How do traditional and transfer students differ in their motivation to attend?
3. What factors can contribute to motivational differences?

Methods

This study focused on the difference in motivation among 4th and 5th year football players at St. John Fisher and transfer students with previous playing experience. Different factors were looked at to determine the difference, if any, among the two groups being researched. These factors are dependent upon coaching styles at the previous schools and here at Fisher. Team history includes the tradition of the programs, and the winning percentage of a team. Team dynamics looks at the way the team is built. Team leadership is the next factor that will be explored. What kind of leadership skills do the coaches show to the players; do they practice what they preach? Do the captains lead the team in a positive way or do they just say the cliché thing? Do the upperclassmen lead by example? The last factor that will be looked at

is internal factors that could influence the team. This includes the support that the team gets from the school, the fan base, and boosters.

Sample Selection

The participants that were used in the research are football players currently on the St. John Fisher Football team. They are separated into two groups of athletes: transfer students who previously played on another college football team (n=5) and players that played four years on the Fisher team (n=8).

Coach Vosburg, the coach at Fisher has been there for 21 years, so the players are familiar with only one type of coaching style in their college career, in particular the traditional players. From their freshman year, they have been performing the same routine when it comes to football. They have been motivated in one way throughout their entire college career. They are unfamiliar with any other coaching style.

It is much different for players that transferred in from other schools. There are a number of transfer players on the team at this time. Each has their own reason of why they left their previous school and came to Fisher. There are kids from Division I, II, and III schools. They have experience with other coaching styles from their previous school. Whether it is good or bad, they have in their mind a strong opinion of what style they like better.

Data Collection Procedure

For the actual data collection, a survey was distributed the 7th week of the 2011 season. Surveys were given to all senior or 5th year players and all the transfer players. There are 21 traditional players on the team and 19 transfer students. The survey was created using

Qualtrics, and contained 14 questions. Seven of the questions were designed for the traditional players and seven were designed for transfer players.

Questions were aimed at determining the reasons why each population decided to attend Fisher. For the traditional players, questions were designed to understand how they feel about the football program throughout their career. Team unity, motivation from coaches and motivation from captains were measured in order to determine the effectiveness of the overall program. A question that was designed to put a percentage to the amount of change each player felt throughout their career that was attributed to football.

The questions that were aimed at transfer students were meant to understand why they left their previous school, and why they attended Fisher. Factors that were included in the questions were team dynamics, academics, and coaching styles. Finally the final question was designed to compare their experience at their previous school to their current experience at Fisher.

Results

The survey used in this study was designed to understand why football players choose to attend Fisher, whether it be traditional players, or transfer players. Its focus was also to determine motivational differences behind their decisions. Results from the survey among senior football players and transfer football players discovered several differences. Differences included reasons why players attended Fisher, while similarities included the importance of team unity and motivation from captains.

Responses of Traditional Football Players

For senior players the data shows that the main reason they first came to Fisher was for academics. 100% of the senior respondents said one of the reasons they attended Fisher after high school was because of the academics (see Figure 1). The next most frequent answer after academics was the tradition of the Fisher football program (n=7). In recent years the program has seen a large amount of success. Over the past 10 years the Fisher football team has played in the post season each year. This includes three trips to the NCAA playoff tournament and seven ECAC bowl games.

It was also apparent that the coaching staff played a large part in athletes' decisions to attend this school. The majority of seniors that completed the survey say they were strongly motivated by the coaches throughout all of their four years. The strongest motivation was felt during their freshman and sophomore years. The same was not to be said about motivation from team captains. The majority said they were motivated each year by the team captains with exception to their sophomore year. Only 15% of respondents said they were motivated by their captains their sophomore year. When it comes to team unity the data shows that it increases as the players get older. In their earlier years it showed that they felt moderate team unity but in their later years they felt stronger team unity. All eight (100%) of respondents said they felt strong team unity during their senior year. Every senior respondent said they have changed in one or at least one aspect of their life from the beginning of their football career to the end. These changes included their ability as a football player, emotional maturity, ability to manage time, physical fitness, knowledge of football, and ability to overcome adversity.

Responses of Transfer Football Players

The data shows that transfer students came to Fisher because they were displeased with their previous school. These factors included lack of team unity (n=3), not wanting to play for previous coaches (n=3), and lack of team leadership from the captains (n=3). There were also distinct differences from their experiences at their previous schools compared to their experience at Fisher. Each transfer showed differences between their head coach at their previous school and the head coach at Fisher. Differences included communication between players and the head coach and the relationships coaches develop with their players. Few transfers said they felt like their previous head coach had an open door policy where they could talk to their coach at any time. When comparing that to the head coach at Fisher, 100% of transfer students stated that the head coach at Fisher has an open door policy where they can talk with him when problems arise.

Another major difference was comparing how each head coach takes the time to know their players. Only 20% of respondents said their previous head coach took the time to know each player. 100% of respondents said the head coach at Fisher takes the time to know each player. When asked how motivation from coaches and team captains compared to their previous schools there were also differences. The survey showed 60% of transfer students said they felt more motivated by the coaches at Fisher and 100% of the transfer students said they were more motivated by team captains at Fisher. Also, 100% of respondents felt there was stronger team unity at Fisher than their previous school.

Discussion

The results shown in the data are very significant to the hypothesis. The research questions designed to determine why football players attended St. John Fisher. It also was aimed at discovering what was responsible for their decision making process. While analyzing the data it is apparent that there are many differences between the two. One major difference is team unity between programs. The transfer students indicated they feel stronger team unity at Fisher. They also stated they did not feel strong team unity at their previous school. Each senior respondent expressed strong team unity throughout their senior year. This past year the Fisher football team had great success making it to the quarterfinals of the NCAA Division III playoffs.

Another piece of data that is evident in the data is transfer player feel motivated more by the team captains at Fisher than they did at their previous school. Captains at Fisher play a major role in the program. They make decisions for the team both on and off the field. For example they meet with the head coach and vote on where to eat for away games. They also have the power to dismiss players that hurt the team. Being a captain is more than just a title; the coaches empower these players and in turn the younger players look up to these leaders. As for the senior respondents they stated they felt motivated by the captains in all their four years except their sophomore year.

An interesting finding in this study occurs while looking at why traditional football players attended Fisher. All eight (100%) of respondents said they attended Fisher because of academics. A reason for this could be because while coming out of high school students may feel more pressure from their parents about getting a good education. The coaching staff at Fisher also stresses the fact that academics come first and football comes second (P. Vosburgh,

Personal Communication, 2011). While looking at the reasons transfer students attend Fisher, academics is not as frequent. This could be because when a student decides to transfer they might not feel the same amount of pressure they felt coming out of high school. They tend to be older and more mature and are capable to make their own decision. Transfer students left their previous school because they were displeased with their football program and were intrigued by Fisher's program.

By allowing members on the team to participate in decisions involving the team can stimulate motivation throughout the team (Greer, 2011). This type of decision making process takes place on the Fisher Football team. Members of the team vote for representatives for each class that have meetings with the coaching staff to make decisions about the team. These decisions can include what type of clothing they want to order for the team, and what jersey combination they wish to wear for games. Captains also are required to motivate the players on the team at Fisher. Before each game they have a period of time where only the members of the team are allowed to be present. The captains are then required to give a motivational speech about the upcoming game. This will ensure that the members of the team have the same image of the team captains and the coaching staff (Greer, 2011).

Limitations and Future Directions

Certain bias's that exist in this data is that only 14 members of a potential 40 responded to the survey. There was an even mix between the transfer and senior players that completed the survey. This small sample might leave people to believe that the data is not relevant but the

data that was collected shows significant results. Other limitations that exist in this study are only one football team was targeted. Looking at other colleges in the surrounding area would have greatly increased the chances of getting a larger and more diverse sample size, and strengthened the significance of the findings. Also for future research information from different parts of the country could be important. By taking many different schools from many different regions of the country will give a more diverse response from athletes.

Taking the initial findings in this study researchers can build off of it by looking at each division that exists in college football. Factors that influence Division III student athletes could be completely different than factors that influence Division I athletes. The same goes to say for Division II athletes. Division III is the only one that is unable to give scholarships to its football players. Being a scholarship athlete would be a motivating factor to attend a certain school. This would also increase the overall population of athletes that would be surveyed. This would help avoid the problem that this study had of not having a large population of athletes.

The findings in this study can be used for future coaches to discover what strategies can be used to create a successful football program. Fisher football has been successful for many years due to coaches' philosophies and motivation among the players. By looking at what gets kids into Fisher to play football and what makes kids transfer to Fisher, coaches can build off the success to enhance the program to new heights.

Academics are the most influencing factor when it comes to a high school athlete choosing a Division III College. Students look first for a quality education before they are influenced by the athletic program. Transfer students search for different factors. When looking

for a school to transfer too they look at program reputation, and displeasure of previous school.

To obtain transfer students programs must sustain a quality program with strong tradition.

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Figure 1. Reasons Traditional Football Players Attended Fisher

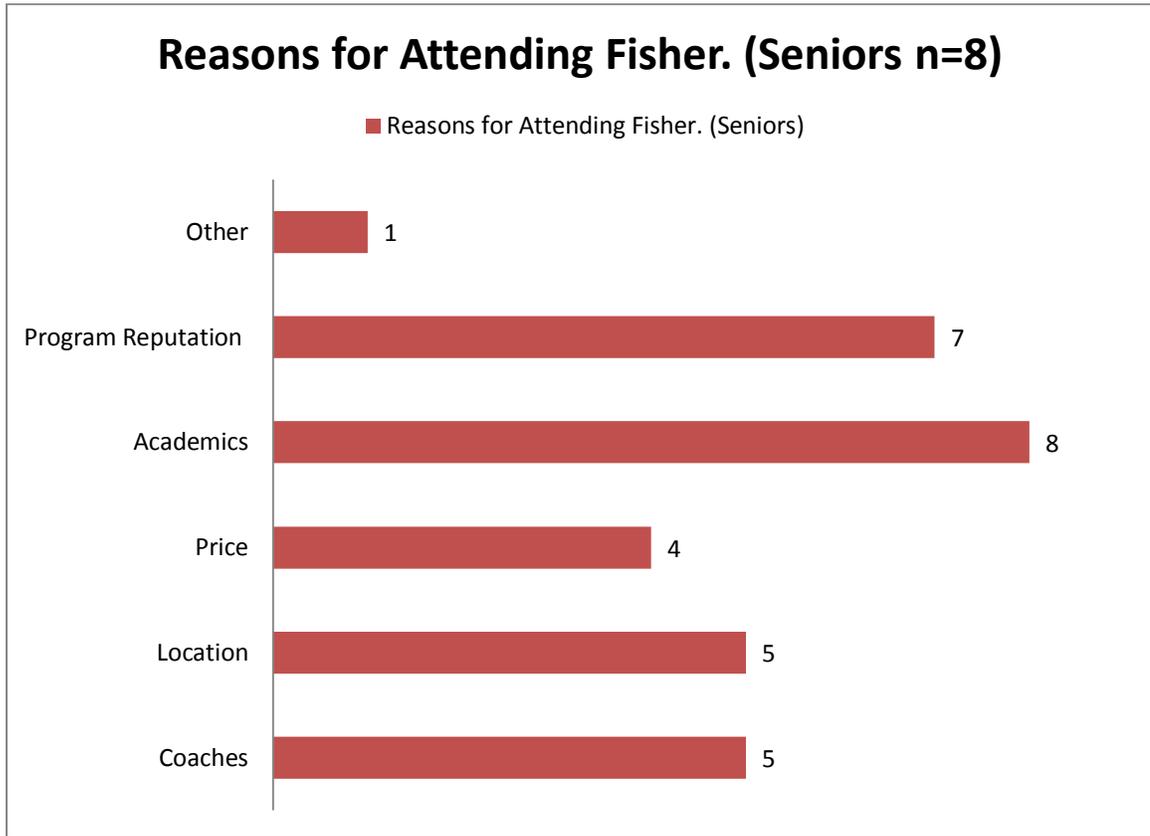


Figure 1. Shows the responses of each senior’s respondent and their reasoning why they attended Fisher.

Figure 2. Reasons Transfer Football Players Attended Fisher

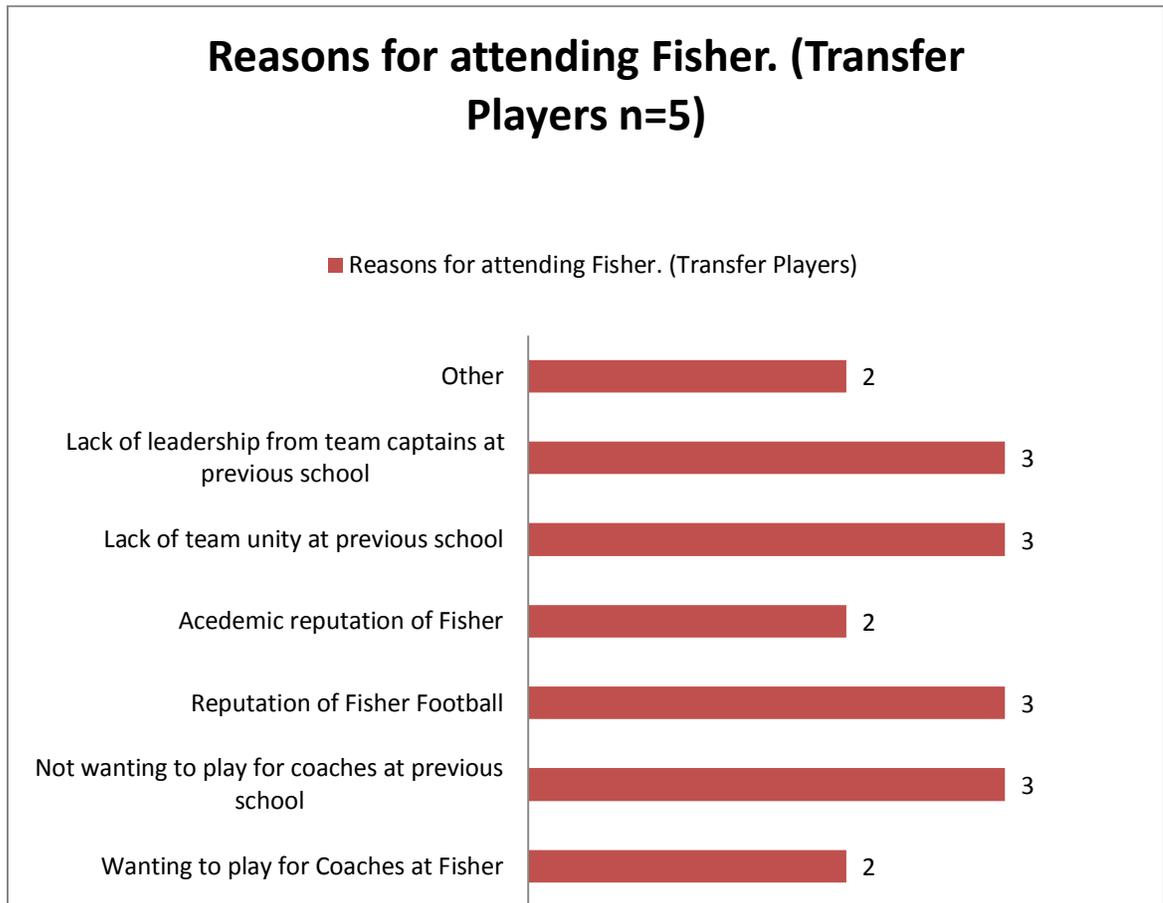


Figure 2. Shows the responses from each transfer respondent and their reasoning why they attended Fisher