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College Athletics and The Money Behind It

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Abstract

College athletic departments desire the positive attention that is garnered through playoff appearances and championships. Programs believe that if they spend more, they will win more, and gain footing on the national stage. This theory is supported by the tens of millions of dollars currently being spent in college sport. However, this theory is largely untested. Tens of millions of dollars are being spent by college athletic programs to put their teams atop of the national standings. With so much money being spent, programs expect to see results, whether that is playoff appearances or championships, schools want positive attention. This is an unknown by programs who want to gain footing, there is theory that if a program spends more will win more. This research looked at schools in the Power 5 conferences and their athletic budgets to determine if spending all that money equated to wins based on the Capital One Cup standings. The data indicated that men's spendings did not mean more wins than teams that spent less, however women's programs who spent more had more success on the playing surface. Schools should pay more attention to this when they think spending more means winning more.

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College Athletics and the Money Behind it

Everyone has their favorite college teams that they root for, and even cry for. If asked to describe college athletics in a few words they could be electric, heartbreaking, and entertaining. There is just something about college athletics that captivates the audience in ways other sports and events cannot. Athletic events in college, whether they are large or small, attract passionate fans of the team. The fans spend time, money and have a devoted interest in the team. The athletic departments and schools see the fans' love for the school and they want to return that same energy with on the field performance. Colleges and universities have been spending more and more on athletic budgets and expenses as the years have progressed and college athletics has become a billion dollar industry (Caro & Elder, 2017). Colleges have turned to a race against each other to gain the most resources to recruit top tier talent and and increase revenue and expenses. It has created a 'Keeping up with the Joneses' effect across the NCAA, especially the Power Five conferences (Caro & Elder,2017). The schools have essentially been flaunting themselves to show off to other schools and attract better and more recruits.

The approaches taken by these schools have been very deliberate and there has been an all-around effort by schools presidents, athletic directors, coaches, students, and boards to increase revenue so they can turn around and put it back into the athletic departments (Caro & Elder, 2017). College athletics is a chess match, making small but important moves to place yourself in an ideal spot to make that final move to put you atop of the leaderboard. This research paper will dive into the importance of recruiting

and money spent in college athletics. It will also explore what impact conference membership has on winning and money generated.

Literature Review

Recruiting in College Athletics

Recruiting at the college level is almost a sport in itself. With the intricate styles and systems that are used, it is something that changes with the time, much like sports itself (Nolan, 2011). Coaches that can adapt to the changing times will be the most successful. It is almost the sense of survival of the fittest that Charles Darwin came up with. Coaches who cannot change will become extinct in a sense and be rolled over by the next generation of coaches. The recruiting basics in college athletics are getting as many highly touted recruits as possible to become successful (Dronyk-Trosper & Stitzel, 2015). As easy as that sounds, there are one hundred other schools doing the same thing. The NCAA is a tricky organization with rules and regulations in place to protect the recruits. There are live and dead periods where coaches are allowed to contact potential athletes and talk about the future. The organization limits the time coaches or employees of a college have with prospective students so they are able to even the recruiting landscape (NCAA, 2018). The goal of the coaches and institutions are to get a national letter of intent [NLI] signed by an athlete, which ends the recruiting process for the athlete, locks them into the school and allows them to receive scholarships and financial aid (NCAA, 2018). There are numerous steps the student-athlete has to follow before they sign the letter of intent. First, the student athlete will be contacted by college coaches once they appear on the coaches recruiting radar. This usually will take place during the students sophomore or junior year of high school. The athletes will then start

receiving offers from the schools. Athletes are limited to five official visits to the schools. After this process has concluded then the student athlete will verbally commit to that school. This usually means a recruit will be attending the school they verbally committed to, but there have been cases where they change their mind based on other circumstances. After that, they are official commits which means they are done looking at other schools and are planning on signing their NLI (NCAA, 2018).

Coaches, who are the captain of the ship, are placed in charge to implement the rules and regulations of the team. Programs bring in well known coaches not just because they make good play calls but also because they are effective recruiters of young prospects. Ed Orgeron was brought in by Ole Miss football to turn the program around by doing what he does better than any other coach in the business, identify and recruit talent (Feldman, 2008). Each school has until the first Wednesday in February to have a written commitment by a recruit to play at their schools, after which point, this knowledge will become public for the media (Lincoln & Fiedler, 2004). The process of signing a NLI is something that only Division I has to worry about except for the Ivy League schools whose guidelines are a lot more strict where they are only allowed to have verbal commits (Lincoln & Fielder, 2004).

Teams with a storied history and past success are able to recruit with ease because they have already stamped their name in the record books (O'Neil, 2015). These are schools like Duke men's basketball. With coach Mike Krzyzewski at the helm of the ship and his 1,000 plus wins there is not much selling he has to do on his end, he is known for getting young talent and letting them blossom into NBA phenoms (O'Neil, 2015). Schools like Clemson football, who has had recent success by winning the

national championship in 2016 and been to the College Football Playoffs numerous times the past few years have had to put in a substantial amount of money to develop a brand that can match up with the Texas and Alabama's of the world (Berkowitz & Schnaars, 2017). Even with Dabo Swinney being an A+ coach, he didn't have success until years into his coaching tenure (Lentz, 2017). Dabo prided his team on not living in the spotlight of the last team who won the National Championship the year prior which is demonstrated by his quote below,

"Every team has their own challenges, their own journeys, but this bunch right here, man, you know, because everything coming into the spring was, Oh, man, you won a national championship, how do you stay focused? We had checked the box, so now we're going to quit working at Clemson. What else? We're going to go lay on the beach or something" (Lentz, 2017, p. 1).

Coaching in collegiate athletics does not have an off-season that begins at the conclusion of your last game of the year. It shifts to a new area of focus, recruiting and getting better for that next season.

Recruiting in the 21st century has become easier, more efficient and cost-effective for some of the coaches due to the recruiting databases like Rivals.com and Scout.com (Nolan, 2011). With this new technology at the fingertips of the coaches, there is an endless amount of tape to watch on high school talent. The generation they are recruiting is the biggest technology crazed people that they will ever have recruited (Nolan, 2017). With YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter all being used as tools by players and coaches to get and be seen, it has made recruiting more competitive and entertaining (Dronyk-Trosper, & Stitzel, 2015).

Conference Affiliation Coinciding with Recruiting and Winning

Top tier Division I programs have recruiting budgets that could rival that of a small military. There is a trend in college athletics to increase spending on facilities, salaries, recruiting and other budgets (Berkowitz & Schnaars, 2017). This has started an arms race between universities across the nation. An arms race can be defined as occurring when an increase in spending in School A triggers an increase in spending at School B, which then feeds back into pressure on School A to further raise its own spending (Caro & Elder, 2017). This is exactly what is going on in college athletics but on a much bigger scale. Since the addition of the College Football playoffs in 2014, there has been a spike in revenue and spending (Berkowitz & Schnaars, 2017). Clemson has put a lot of money into their extravagant facilities that make them a one of a kind program. The \$55 million complex at the University of Clemson complete with a miniature golf course, laser tag, bowling lanes, and a movie theater is just one scenario at the college football level (Caro, & Elder, 2017). If schools in the ACC want to stay competitive in the recruiting process with schools like Clemson, they will need to step up their efforts to be on the same level. Recruits see facilities and the money schools put into the program and it persuades them more than people would think.

The University of Texas enjoyed a large athletic budget upwards of a \$100 million per year as a result of on-field success and their attraction of some of the best young talent (Nolan, 2011). Texas has had a few underwhelming seasons in their high profile sports. With their football team supporting a pair of 5-7 records in 2015 and 2016 and a 7-6 record in 2017. With this kind of budget, University of Texas cannot afford to keep having down years for their revenue generating sports. Prior to the 2011 season, Texas announced its intentions to launch its own network, separate from the Big 12

conference. ESPN and Texas reached a lucrative deal that would be the first of its kind in college. Texas is spending this money intentionally. Texas is spending this way to position themselves to look good to recruits, despite their recent lack of success (Nolan, 2011).

In 2011 there were drastic TV deals that were being shifted around with the major stations like ESPN, FOX, CBS, and NBC. These deals were record-breaking for NCAA sports. These contracts would go to the conferences and then be trickled down the schools and they can decide what to do with the funds. With more and more money being pumped into the athletic departments this just influences the recruiting efforts. The money being spent by these athletic departments will catch the eye of all the recruits. If you can promise the recruits a one of a kind program they will take a serious look at the school (Nolan, 2011). The Power Five conferences are the teams that are going to be seeing the most money from these deals and contracts from outside companies because they are the most desired and are known for their high level of play and competition.

Conference Affiliation Predicting Wins and Money

An important measure of success in college athletics is demonstrated by the Capital One Cup standings. Capital One sponsors a cup each year that is awarded to one men's and one women's program at the end of each year.

“The Capital One Cup is awarded annually to each of the best men's and women's Division I college athletics programs in the country. Points toward the Capital One Cup are earned and tracked throughout the year based on final standings of NCAA Championships and final official coaches' polls. One winning men's and one winning women's program will be crowned after the completion of the final NCAA spring championships. Capital One will award a combined \$400,000 in student-athlete

scholarships and the Capital One Cup trophy to the winning schools at the ESPY awards in July” (Capital One Cup Athletic Excellence, 2018).

With this framework, teams have begun to invest heavily to win, which results in a Capital One Cup trophy. Success on the field or court will not only attract recruits to come to the school, there is also a pattern between wins and donations from alumni. Team success on the field affects the attitudes of the alumni and donors to the school. The idea that athletic success will increase donations to the university originates, in part, from athletic departments (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007). There have been very lucrative donations to schools from wealthy alumni or residents of the community when the team in that town or city is thriving. Oklahoma State alum and CEO of BP, T. Boone Pickens, made the biggest donation know to date of which tallied over \$500 million dollars. He said, “I quit coming to homecoming games because we got beat, I don't like that feeling” (Staley, 2017). This shows how much pride some alumni have in the quality of the product the school puts on the playing surface. \$173 million of that donation was put into the football team and facilities. With donations like this coming in, donors or alum wish to see an improvement in play or greater attention being paid to the program. When recruits see that they have such great support for the alumni it points to the institution a family atmosphere.

A sports team experiencing one year of success would likely have a lower perception of quality in the marketplace than a team that had experience long-term, consistent success (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998). Winning on the field would increase revenue and brand awareness. There are benefits that specifically relate to winning, some of them are: higher attendance, increases in ticket price, parking

revenues, and concession revenues and broadcast-appearance revenues generated by regular season television appearances and postseason appearances (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007). When the recruits come to the schools then feel the pressure to hold up their end of the bargain and make the investment worth it. In sport, there is no substitute for winning athletic contests and receiving postseason invitations (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998). Given the large sums of money flowing into football programs, understanding the importance of recruiting on football success can provide more insight into how football programs should be spending their budgets and time (Dronyk-Trosper, & Stitzel, 2015). Coaches and institutions know that by putting a competitive team onto the field that will win will make the school and alumni base happy for the time being.

Purpose Paragraph

The purpose of the research is take an indepth look into spending of college athletics, finding the pattern of spending equating to wins. This is such an important part of college athletics because there is a tremendous amount of money going into athletic programs. There needs to be more evidence that points to patterns and trends that are show my research purpose so institutions can determine whether spending large sums of money is worth it. There have been studies done by Dronyk-Trosper, T. & Stitzel, B. (2015) & Humphreys, B. R., & Mondello, M. (2007) that have looked at similar research as the researcher plans to use this to help athletic departments, institutions, and coaches to help better the schools perception for recruits. Therefore a similar comparisons will provide a better understanding of athletic spending and success. Consequently to gain the most knowledge of the situation the study was broad and wanted to focus on the recruiting money by the athletic departments and the overall

spending of the programs from the 65 power five conference schools. Therefore the more money being spent and used by the colleges the more they will win, and same goes the opposite way the less they win the less money they will put into athletics. This is a hypothesis that the research will hopefully further along with some other factors with the NCAA and collegiate programs. Decisions by these student athletes could be based off the money being spent and the athletes feel like they are being wanted, but you cannot undermine the fact that college athletics can still be based off relationships between two parties.

1. What is the relationship between athletic department spending and athletic department success?
2. In what ways does recruiting money vary based on conference affiliation?
3. In what ways does conference affiliation explain athletic department success?
4. To what extent can conference affiliation and recruiting money predict wins?

Method

General Research Description

Research into the effects of recruiting on football performance has been a topic of interest recently with numerous accusations of schools using it unethically to benefit their program. This research will dive into the specifics behind college athletics and the money they allocate to recruiting and their athletic budgets. The correlation to big-time spending and the winningest of a program. With the rise in popularity of college sports and the explosion of publicly available data, it has become easier to investigate recruiting questions (Dronyk-Trosper, & Stitzel, 2015). This research is explanatory because it is attempting to explain why colleges spend money on athletics and

recruiting; it may not mean success on the field. It is also descriptive because it is trying to describe a pattern of spending, turning into wins and championships (Jones, 2015).

By looking at athletic departments as a whole, data found will attempt to see if the money being spent and allocated should mean more wins for the programs.

Sample Selection

All 65 teams that are members of a power five conference (Atlantic Coast Conference, Big 10, Big 12, Pacific Athletic Conference, and the Southeastern Conference) will be looked at in this research. The research will use the 2016-17 academic year as it the most recent complete academic year's data available that reflects both institutional spending and overall program success as measured by Capital One Cup standings..

Variables and Measures

Success is defined as the accomplishment of aim or purpose (Humphreys, & Mondello, 2007). In college athletics, the aim or purpose of each season is wins and championships. Every year teams are ranked and scored in competition for an increase of scholarships through the Capital One Cup, and these rankings will be the first independent variable. The Capital One Cup standings are equated by Group A and B both have separate scoring systems for men and women. For example, Group A for men consists of cross country, golf, tennis, volleyball, and sports of that caliber. Group B sports are soccer, football, basketball, lacrosse, and baseball. For Group A they are scored as 1st place receives 20 points and then following that it goes 12, 10, 8 and on until 10th place. For Group B they are scored as 1st place receives 60 points. 2nd, 36 and that decreases by increments of 6 and 3. It is the same for the women's side of

things they just have altered sports receiving sports instead of football. These scores represent a ratio scale. This variable will be measured by taking the number of points earned and each team that has an affiliation with Division I will be scored. Additional variables used for this study include, men's and women's recruiting budgets and their overall operations budgets, each measured on a ratio scale. A final independent variable, measured on a nominal scale, will be conference membership. The dependent variable was how much the recruiting budget would impact wins over the course of the season. By figuring out which schools spend the most on the athletic and recruiting budgets we will be able to see if that equates to wins and championships.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

The research will be using a blank spreadsheet to collect information on all variables. The first column of data will contain the name of each of the power five schools. The remaining column headers include variable labels for the conference, Capital One Cup points, recruiting budget and total expenses for each of the men's and women's programs. An additional column that represents a percentage calculation of the recruiting budget to overall expenses is also present.

To acquire information on the school budgets, the database of Equity in Athletics Data Analysis will be used. This website provides a searchable database to look at what institutions are using for their athletic budgets including recruiting. Each of the power five conferences will be searched and their spending and recruiting budgets transferred into the Excel spreadsheet. Findings for the ranking system were pulled from CapitalOneCup.com which ranks the teams every year to receive scholarships. The rankings are by placement of each of the respected seasons and are finalized as the

academic year is complete. The bigger sports such as football basketball and baseball are weighted more so the higher you finish the more points you receive. The other sports like tennis and golf also receive points but are less than the money generating ones. At the conclusion of the academic year the list is finalized and a rank from 1-100 are released. The knowledge we gain from the Capital One Cup standings helps even further the point of the correlation between winning and spending. There is no bias behind this research since there are no ties to the schools and the databases where the figures are coming from.

Data Analysis Procedure

To prepare for analysis, the researcher created formulas for identifying the percentage of the recruiting budget compared to the overall expenses. A re-coding of Capital One Cup standings was also done to eliminate violations in statistical tests. All 65 team standings were translated into quartiles based on overall Capital One Cup standings. Ranking 1-25 will be in quartile 1, ranks 26-51 would be classified as quartile 2, 52-76 would be quartile 3 and 77 and on would be in quartile 4.

The researcher will take a look at the data collected and examine the differences and similarities between teams and conferences. Each column of data will be analyzed to uncover the minimum, maximum and mean. From there the averages of each conferences recruiting budget and total athletic expenses will be looked at to give the viewer a understanding of the numbers being used. Along with that, the research looks for correlations between conferences and the money being spent equating to wins.

Results

Throughout this research process, there were questions answered about whether or not spending more will achieve you more wins and some were still left to the discretion of the decision makers, such as asking the question; does it come down to the conference and possibly institutions? This research was attempting to uncover any possible relationships between athletic department spending and schools success.. Along with that, the research looks for correlations between conferences and the money being spent equating to wins. The data demonstrated a wide range of spending between men's and women's programs as well as between schools. The average recruiting budget at these power five conference institutions were \$1,314,040 for men's and \$485,518 for women's. The average spending went up exponentially when looking at total expenses. For the schools in this time period, the total expenses by the athletic departments were averaged at \$47,300,980 for men's and the women's came out to be \$18,011,651 (see Table# 1).

The results that were found were unexpected, originally the research was thought to have schools that spend more money on their athletic programs would have more success, however that is not what the results interpreted. There were no correlations between recruiting spending or total athletic spending and rank for the Capital One Cup for the men's side of recruiting and expenses (see Table # 5). However, for women's there was a correlation between the the total expenses and the Capital One Cup standings. This was meant to see if the conferences who spend the most money equates into the first tier of the Capital One Cup standings. I found that there is no absolute way to determine if spending more will actually increase your

chances of winning and finishing in the top 25 of the rest of the country. The top 25 was considered to be in the top quartile, but in total 4 quartiles existed (See table # 2).

Attention then focused to differences between conferences, performance, and spending and whether or not there were any correlations or patterns found. It was found to be significant between conference and men's and women's recruiting budgets as well as women's overall athletic expenses (See table #3). Then focus shifted to see the predictive values of conference affiliation and if that could determine if wins would be more frequent. The findings were that the only thing you could prove would be that women's recruiting effects the win probability more than the other categories.

Discussion

The money being spent on the sports in college athletics is not worth what some institutions are paying. There is no clear evidence that points to the fact that programs that spend more have any more success than teams who spend less annually. The findings from the data hint that there is more success from women's spending than men's, and women's programs are spending significantly less than their counterparts. The theory of an arms race happening in collegiate athletics is a fact and all the power 5 conference teams are partaking in it but there seems to be no correlation in it actually changing the results of the contests. Schools should be aware of how much they want to invest in their programs before they get in too deep.

The scope of this research changed a couple times throughout this project and including the women's side of athletics was something added later to the research. This actually

turned out to be a good thing because it showed that there is success in spending more money and the women's programs are showing how to do it.

Limitations

This data was only over a course of the 16-17 school year but there is clear evidence that it may not be worth the extra cash being thrown around. Having only one year of data could have skewed the results, whether that was because of parody in college athletics that year or there wasn't enough information to see a direct correlation between data sets. There are also other factors that cannot be measured when talking about recruiting equalling wins. There is no way to measure history and relationships that the school may have with their players, and it is all up to the athletes to determine what they value more when choosing an institution.

Conclusion

In the beginning of the data collection process it seemed to be a no brainer that schools who spend more on their facilities, team, etc. would be more successful after the year concluded, but the data once collected refuted that information.

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Appendix A

Table # 1

Exploration of Team Spending

| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Men's Recruiting Budget | \$593,603 | \$2,826,068 | \$1,314,040 |
| Women's Recruiting Budget | \$293,055 | \$825,428 | \$485,518 |
| Men's Total Expenses | \$28,272,753 | \$82,008,236 | \$47,300,980 |
| Women's Total Expenses | \$10,072,916 | \$26,983,859 | \$18,011,651 |
| Percentage of Men's Budget Spent on Recruiting | 1.0 % | .055 % | 2.8 % |
| Percentage of Women's Budget Spent on Recruiting | 1.4% | 4.6 % | 2.8 % |

Note. Table values indicate the reported value for the 2016-17 Academic Year.

Table # 2

Quartile Ranking in Capital One Cup Points

| | Men's Programs | Women's Programs |
|---|----------------|------------------|
| Ranked 1-25 | 20 | 22 |
| Ranked 26-51 | 16 | 17 |
| Ranked 52-76 | 12 | 10 |
| Ranked 77 or lower | 2 | 5 |
| Note. Table values indicate the number of schools in the sample that fell into each quartile. | | |

Table # 3

Differences Between Conferences, Performance, and Spending

| | | Conference F | Capital One Quartile Rank F |
|------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Men's Programs | | | |
| | Recruiting Budget | 2.540* | .227 |
| | Total Expenses | 1.940 | .505 |
| | Percentage Budget Spent on Recruiting | 1.031 | .349 |
| Women's Programs | | | |
| | Recruiting Budget | 5.750** | 1.005 |
| | Total Expenses | 1.127 | 7.517** |
| | Percentage Budget Spent on Recruiting | 1.647 | 2.612 |

Note. Table values represent ANOVA results. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table # 4

Predictive Values of Conference Affiliation

| | | R | R ² |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Men's Programs | | | |
| | Recruiting Budget | .075 | .006 |
| | Total Expenses | .011 | .000 |
| | Percentage Budget Spent on Recruiting | .105 | .011 |
| | Capital One Cup Ranking | .083 | .007 |
| Women's Programs | | | |
| | Recruiting Budget | .272* | .074 |
| | Total Expenses | .114 | .013 |

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|------|------|
| | Percentage Budget Spent on Recruiting | .127 | .016 |
| | Capital One Cup Ranking | .250 | .063 |
| Note. Table values represent Regression analysis *p<.05, **p<.01 | | | |

Table #5

Correlations between Spending and Capital One Cup Ranking

| | Men's Standings | Women's Standings |
|--|-----------------|-------------------|
| Recruiting \$ | -.079 | -.121 |
| Total Expenses | -.133 | -.439** |
| Recruiting/Expenses | -.018 | .351** |
| Note. Table values indicate the correlation between variables. **p<.01 | | |

