

APPROACHING SIGNING DAY  
THE COLLEGE CHOICE PROCESS OF HEAVILY RECRUITED STUDENT ATHLETES

by

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(Under the Direction of James C. Hearn)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined the factors that heavily recruited high school football players took into consideration when selecting a higher education institution to attend. The model of college choice introduced by Don Hossler and Karen Gallagher (1987), proposes that students' progress through three phases when deciding where they will attend college: predisposition, search, and choice. This study is a result of a survey conducted during the search phase of high school seniors whose success as football players afforded them the opportunity to be recruited by some of the wealthiest and most successful college football programs in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

INDEX WORDS: College Choice, Intercollegiate Athletics, Student Athlete, Recruiting

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
CHAPTER	
1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .....	1
2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	6
Research on College Choice .....	6
College Choice and Diverse Populations.....	9
Big-Time College Sports .....	11
Amateurism versus Professionalism .....	11
Athletic Recruitment.....	15
College Choice of Student Athletes .....	20
High School Experiences of Student Athletes .....	23
College Student Athlete Experience .....	24
Conceptual Framework.....	31
Comparing Populations.....	34
3 RESEARCH DESIGN .....	37
Quantitative Method .....	39
Qualitative Method .....	41
Variables .....	41
Summary .....	51
Limitations .....	52
4 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS .....	54
Models.....	56
Summary .....	68
5 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS .....	71

6	CONCLUSION.....	75
	Comparing Findings.....	75
	Expanding the College Choice Model .....	77
	Implications.....	79
	Changing Landscape.....	81
	Recommendations.....	82
7	REFERENCES .....	86
APPENDIX		
	Athlife High School Football Player College Choice Survey .....	101

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: FBS Conference recruiting expenditure increases .....	18
TABLE 2: NCAA 20 hour rule.....	25
TABLE 3: Hossler and Gallagher three phase model.....	34
TABLE 4: Correlation matrix for academic college choice factors .....	46
TABLE 5: Correlation matrix for athletic college choice factors.....	47
TABLE 6: Means for academic college choice factors and advice received .....	49
TABLE 7: Means for athletic college choice factors.....	50
TABLE 8: Descriptive statistics for statements.....	51
TABLE 9: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the quality of the athletic training facilities at a prospective college as a college choice factor .....	56
TABLE 10: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the college football coach's ability to prepare players for the NFL as a college choice factor .....	57
TABLE 11: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the competitive strength of the football team's conference as a college choice factor .....	58
TABLE 12: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the number of a college's alumni who have played in the NFL as a college choice factor .....	59
TABLE 13: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the number of nationally televised games a college's team plays as a college choice factor. ....	60
TABLE 14: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the opportunity to start as a freshman on a prospective college's football team as a college choice factor .....	61



TABLE 15: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the excitement of the recruiting visit to a prospective college as a college choice factor.....	62
TABLE 16: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the winning percentage of a college’s football coach as a college choice factor.....	63
TABLE 17: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the diversity of major choices available at a college as a college choice factor .....	64
TABLE 18: Three phase model with additions for athletes .....	80

## CHAPTER 1

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Credible arguments exist on both sides of the debate around the relationship between intercollegiate sports and higher education. The unprecedented financial gains, however, are difficult to ignore. In *Football U*, Doug Toma discusses the relationship between athletics and higher education, and frames athletics as a double-edged sword. Athletic endeavors can bring attention and resources to institutions, while also conflicting with institutional priorities. This study looks in part at one half of the transaction that occurs between institutions of higher education and the personnel who are most vital to the college sports enterprise, the student athletes. This study seeks to learn more about the college choice process and how it applies to the unique and important population of student athletes.

With over 4,000 institutions of higher education in the United States, the decision high school seniors make about where to attend college can be a challenging one (Kankey & Quarterman, 2007). Selecting an institution to attend is one of the most important decisions encountered in a student's academic career (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990). The importance of the college decision is directly tied to the value it adds to one's life. People who attend college and subsequently increase their education on average earn higher salaries, increase their career mobility, experience a higher quality of life, and contribute more positively to society (Bowen, 1977; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

When students choose a higher education institution to attend, they can potentially take into account a large number of factors. Some of the college choice factors students are traditionally thought to consider include: college location, the climate where the college is located, whether the college is private or public, and the type of academic departments available at the college. These traditional factors, however, can have their variations depending on the student. For example, Cassanova McKinzy, currently a member of Auburn University's football team, recounted to the press that he chose to attend college at Auburn instead of Clemson University because Clemson lacked an on-campus Chick-Fil-A restaurant (Smith, 2012). Lin (2012) reported that after McKinzy's interview made headlines all over the country, the high school senior responded by stating that his decision did not have anything to do with Chik-Fil-A and that there were more important reasons for his choosing Auburn. Missy Franklin, a multiple gold medal-winning member of the United States Swimming team during the 2012 Summer Olympics, reportedly stopped considering Stanford University as her potential college after the head coach of the Stanford women's swimming team resigned (Keith, 2012).

When Joe Paterno, Penn State University's head football coach and the record-holder for all-time wins in college football, was fired in 2011 after an investigation found that a coaching assistant had sexually abused at least eight underage boys during Paterno's tenure (Wolverton, 2012a), ten members of the Penn State football team subsequently transferred from the institution, and five high school senior football players who had committed to attend Penn State chose to pursue their higher education elsewhere (Fischer, 2012).

McKinzy, Franklin, and the high school football players who previously committed to attend Penn State belong to the unique population of students who are recruited to compete as athletes at colleges and institutions that are members of the National Collegiate Athletic

Association (NCAA). No other college-going population's college choice process is as publicized or as scrutinized as that of heavily recruited high school athletes. Every part of the process, from nationally televised press conferences to the intense courting ritual that institutions engage in to secure a highly talented student athlete's commitment to their institution, adds a layer of complexity to the traditional college choice process of prospective NCAA student athletes.

Founded in 1906 by college athletic leaders, the NCAA was created to reform the dangerous and exploitative athletic practices of the time. According to the NCAA, more than 400,000 students at over 1,000 four-year higher education institutions (divided across three divisions in the United States and Canada) currently compete in sports sanctioned by the NCAA. Football is an NCAA-sanctioned sport that is regarded as the flagship sport among all other NCAA sports. Football programs at Division I institutions are the predominant provider of athletic department revenues. Institutions designated as Division I are subdivided based on football affiliation. Of the 340 higher education institutions designated as Division I, a total of 120 institutions are members of the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). Two of the requirements of the FBS are that schools offer higher financial aid allocations and maintain an average attendance of 15,000 fans at home games over a rolling two year period (Frequently Asked Questions, n.d.). As a revenue generator, college football stands alone as the highest earner among other NCAA sports. The collective revenue of the fifteen highest-grossing NCAA football programs in the United States topped \$1 billion in 2010 (Donahoe, 2012). A college football program's revenue consists primarily of the following:

Cash contributions from alumni and others (30 percent); Ticket sales (28 percent); Payments from conferences, which include revenue from regular-season television contracts, royalties from the NCAA's basketball tournament contract, and football bowl game payouts (17 percent); Local marketing income, such as in-stadium signs and

payments from corporate sponsors, local radio-TV rights fees, etc. (10 percent). (College Sports, 2009).

High school students who excel in a specific sport position themselves to be recruited to compete as student athletes for higher education institutions. Being recruited for the purpose of playing a sport on the college level adds another set of factors to be considered to an already complicated college choice process. The decisions that elite high school football players make about where they will go to college has garnered increasing amounts of attention from sports fans and media alike. Annually, on the first Wednesday of February, high school seniors can sign a binding National Letter of Intent (NLI) stating that they will attend a college or university that is a NCAA member institution. For the more successful programs, many highly-recruited potential signees have opted to hold press conferences announcing their college choice due to the intense scrutiny of their decision. Typically, college campuses with competitive football programs will host receptions for fans where they celebrate the high school seniors who have signed commitments to attend their institution on National Signing Day. According to Caldwell (2012), “there are signing parties all over the place, sponsored by booster clubs and alumni groups (associated with the college or university) and radio stations and on-and-on.” Wolverton (2012b) cited senior national columnist for ESPN.com Gene Wojciechowski, who described national signing day as “absurd, excessive, self-important, and ridiculous beyond belief.” Wolverton (2012b) adds, “The breathless build-up to [high school football players’] college choice decisions helps support what’s become a gargantuan recruiting industry, with companies tracking every move of amateur athletes as they waver on where to [attend]. It makes for great theater, if you’re into it.”

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the collective understanding of the college choice process of a unique and increasingly important segment of the student athlete population.

Previous research has been conducted on high school athletes who aspire to play a college sport. Rarely, however, have these contributions focused specifically on the most heavily recruited high school football players. The role of college football as a revenue generator and its visibility distinguish the population of heavily recruited high school football players from student athletes involved in other sports. Over the last decade, a lucrative industry has come to exist that focuses specifically on the recruitment of high school football players. Every year college sports fans spend millions of dollars on subscriptions to internet based companies whose sole focus is to provide information about highly talented high school football players and where they will potentially attend college (Brown, T., 2013).

The population surveyed for this dissertation comprised a sample of the most talented high school senior football players in the country in 2012. The college choice process for high school football players involves two key parties: the institution(s) of higher education doing the recruiting and the high school football player. This study focuses on the recruited high school football player's recruiting experience. This study utilizes a mixed methods approach to better understand their college choice process.

The importance of the role of college football players in the multi-billion dollar enterprise of college sports is difficult to overstate. College athletic departments in the upper echelon of NCAA football rely primarily on the funding that football provides. These high school recruits are the life-blood of the "big-time" college sports enterprise. Robert Brown (2001) examined financial data from Division I football programs, and his research suggests that an exceptionally talented college football player has the potential to generate over \$500,000 in annual revenues for the college football team and, subsequently, for the athletic department of the college that he attends. The revenue they have the potential to generate is reason enough to

examine how they make the college choice. These circumstances warrant further inquiry into how and why these recruited high school football players move through the phase that Hossler and Gallagher (1987) describe as the search phase of the college choice process.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Research on College Choice**

In this chapter the literature on the college choice process as it is understood broadly and in regards to diverse populations, the realm of “Big-Time” college sports, the population of student athletes, and how student athletes navigate through the college choice process are reviewed in turn. Particular attention is paid to the intermingling of what we know about the college choice process and the unique context that “Big-Time” sports adds to the process for prospective collegiate student athletes.

There is agreement amongst researchers that the stakeholders in the college choice process are institutions of higher education, public policy makers, and students and their families. Increasingly, when students make the decision to pursue higher education, they are setting themselves up to earn higher salaries over their lifetime, have longer working lives, have more career mobility, and an overall higher quality of life than people who do not go to college. (Bowen, 1977; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). While debate exists among economist on the extent and nature of the benefits of a more educated citizenry, there is agreement on macro and micro levels that communities benefit when more people are better educated (McGregor 1994; Wellman 1999).

Public policy makers have put more focus on the role of higher education as it is increasingly seen as an essential component of economic competitiveness in a global society



(Hossler and Palmer, 2008). Beyond the financial benefits of a more educated citizenry, Jillian Kinzie in *Fifty Years of College Choice* cited Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) research that stated that people with increased levels of education who graduate from college are more likely to vote, more likely to assume civic and leadership positions, use new cutting edge technologies, support advanced education for their families and their communities, and are less likely to engage in criminal activities.

According to Bergerson (2009) a deeper understanding of how students decide on a college has potential implications for practice, policy, and research; and the increasing competition for students among higher education institutions necessitates a refined understanding of the college choice process. Examining the process that students go through when choosing a college can potentially provide valuable insight to discussions around student graduation and retention trends and overall student engagement. Several sources (Manski & Wise, 1983; Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Kinzie, 2004) have all examined the relatively recent increased interest in the area of college choice.

Many of the existing models for the college choice process were introduced in the 1970's and 80's as the United States saw an increase in the population of individuals going to college (Hossler and Palmer, 2008). These increased enrollments warranted an increase in research literature on college choice (Astin 1975; Bean 1980), which then increased inquiry and thus added insight into the how students weigh college choice factors.

Typically the college choice process is framed by three perspectives: sociological, psychological, and economic. In general terms, the college choice models that use economics as a lens view the college decision making process as rational. The economic view examines how issues such as price, cost, and market forces influence the decisions that students make (Heller

1997; Zemsky and Oedel 1983; Leslie and Brinkman 1988). The assumption is that students maximize perceived cost-benefits in their choice, have perfect information, and are engaged in the process rationally (McDonough 1997a, pg. 3). Social status as well as social-class and its impact on the development of aspirations for educational attainment and inequalities (as they relate to college access) are examined when the sociological context is employed (McDonough 1997a, p. 3).

One college choice model that emerged based on the need for more information about the process was Hossler and Gallagher's (1987). Their model, later refined by Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999), consists of three phases. In the Hossler and Gallagher model, the first phase is predisposition, the second phase is search, and the third and final phase is choice. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) posit that the predisposition phase, is developmental; it is during this phase that students determine whether or not they would like to pursue higher education. The predisposition phase takes into account some of the student's characteristics, such as their academic abilities and their socioeconomic status. The second phase, search, "includes students discovering and evaluating possible colleges in which to enroll. The model posits that student searches help them determine what characteristics they need and which college offer them"(p.9). It is during the search phase that organizational factors such as a college or universities outreach to students occur. Relatively less inquiry has been devoted to this phase of the college choice process, (Hossler et al., 1989). In the final phase of the model, students decide where they will attend college after evaluating from an established set of possible choices (Hossler Gallagher 1987).

### Hossler and Gallagher's Three-Phase College Choice Model



### College Choice and Diverse Populations

Adding to the body of work devoted to college choice, much research has specified patterns and predictors for specific populations of students (Perna, 2000; Freeman & Brown, 2005; Engberg & Wolniak, 2009) looking at elements that include race and social class as factors within the college choice process for some students. Perna (2000) investigated differences in college enrollment between different racial and ethnic groups and offered strategies to aid practitioners who work with students of color. Perna pointed out that the literature showed that the underrepresentation of students of color at higher education institutions is not “attributable to a lack of interest in or predisposition towards college” but rather an unrefined understanding of the process by those students.

Kassie Freeman in *African Americans and College Choice* examined the college choice of African American student populations, her research cites the gap that exists between the number of African American high school students who strive to pursue higher education and the subsequent number of those who actually enroll. Freeman discusses the factors that affect the college choice process of African American students, some being: family background, socioeconomic status, and the academic profiles of one's secondary school.

Inquiring into the issue of socioeconomic class and its effect on college choice Pat McDonough (1997) researched high school students from different social classes as they went through the college choice process. Her findings highlighted the intricacies and complexities involved in the college choice process, particularly for students from lower socio-economic

backgrounds. McDonough found that family and school influence are shown to play major roles in the choice made by the student; additionally externalities such as colleges, high schools, parents, friends, and the media, were shown to influence the college choice as well.

The research of Engberg and Wolniak (2009), showed that despite the growing body of literature surrounding the issue of college choice, there remains a disconnect with regard to understanding the inconsistencies among different racial groups that requires more in-depth examination. The purpose of their study was to further understand the factors and resources that play into the college choices of different racial groups. They argue that academic preparation, the overall academic quality of a student's preparation, and the strength of feeder networks (between secondary and post-secondary education) students have access to, can create a vastly different college choice process for students from different races and backgrounds. Michael Smith (2009) also found that "African American parents from low socioeconomic status backgrounds involved in the college choice process were bound by their lack of information". Smith argued that more college information for parents of students from lower socioeconomic status is necessary in order for the parents to offer valuable insight able to assist student's matching hers or his potential to a potential college or university.

McDonough, Antonio and Trent (1997b) researched the college choice process of African American students attending historically black colleges and universities or (HBCUs) as well as predominately white institutions. Their report explored the college choices of African American college students based on a national sample of 220,757 first-year college students. The report found that school location, the reputation of the school, and influence of family advice were some of the most important factors for students choosing HBCU's. For African American students who chose predominately white colleges or universities, some of the most important

factors were athletic recruitment, location, and the school's academic profile. Robert Sevier (1992) examined the results of a survey developed to distinguish college choice factors of African American students in hopes of developing relevant recruiting tools. This national survey used information from a number of focus groups to develop the instrument for the survey. The survey asked African American students to identify characteristics, individuals, and a variety of other factors that played a role in their attending a specific college. Academic reputation, parental input and a perceived friendly campus were all-important factors in students making their choices.

College choice literature has been expanding its focus on how diverse populations of students go about making the college choice. One group that has seen a relatively small amount of attention is the population of prospective students who pursue college with a strong desire to compete as collegiate athletes in NCAA sponsored sports. This dissertation examines how heavily recruited high school football players weigh the importance of different college choice factors.

### **“Big-Time” College Sports**

#### *Amateurism vs. Professionalism*

Celebrated higher education historian John Thelin's *Games That Colleges Play* chronicles the “peculiar” history of athletics and higher education. The most central and peculiar aspect of college sports is the issue of the amateur status placed upon college athletes by the NCAA. Amateur status is particularly peculiar when discussing the population of college athletes that play football, the largest and most profitable contributor to the revenue that funds collegiate sports.

In discussing college sports, the phrase “Big-Time” is widely used in reference to the most financially successful and prestigious college athletic sports programs. College football,

because of its entertainment value and overall revenue has a large stake in driving the multi-billion dollar college sports enterprise. In “Big-Time” college sports the issue of amateurism is a hotbed issue in-part due to the ticket and broadcast revenues of college sports being in the same class as those of professional sports. *The New York Times* in 2011 pointed out that “College football and men’s basketball have become such huge commercial enterprises that together they generate more than \$6 billion in annual revenue, more than the National Basketball Association”(Nocera, 2011). It is precisely because of the similarities in the profits of college and professional sports that the designation of college athletes as amateurs is debated.

Researchers have picked apart what they consider to be the false concept of amateurism in college sports, they argue that it limits student athletes from what they can potentially earn in the increasingly lucrative world of collegiate athletics ( Smith, 1990; Zimbalist, 2001; Byers 1995; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998).The NCAA roots their argument against student athletes benefiting from the highly lucrative enterprise of college sports in the idea of amateurism, maintaining that institutions’ athletics programs are designed to be an integral part of the educational program and remain distinct from what is seen in the realm of professional athletics.

As a result of the “Sanity Code” adopted by the NCAA after college football saw a dramatic increase in profits and popularity during the 1920’s, current NCAA rules regulate the types of financial aid offered to student athletes. Athletes during the early years of the NCAA were in many instances paid as a result of their athletic success (Zimbalist, 1999. p. 9). The “Sanity Code” inspired legislation that states that student athletes are only entitled to receive financial aid that covered tuition and fees and schools could offer financial aid not based upon athletic ability but rather the individual students financial need. As a result of the changes made to what students could receive from their schools in 1957, individual schools that are designated

as division I or II can now only award athletic scholarships. Currently NCAA member institutions provide more than \$1.5 billion annually in athletics scholarships. These scholarships cover tuition and fees, room, board, and required course-related books. The NCAA maintains that athletic scholarships are educational gifts, a far cry from binding professional sports team contracts. In an article that summed up many of the critiques of college sports and amateurism, Lombardi (2008) outlined amateurism's importance to the NCAA:

Nothing is more central to the enterprise of intercollegiate athletics than the commitment to amateurism. Everyone, whether bitter critic of NCAA sports or ardent defender, acknowledges this requirement. College sports depends on the definition and defense of amateurism for its survival, but the tremendous popularity and financial requirements of the college sports enterprise threatens and has threatened this quality since the early 20th century.... The line we draw to separate amateur from non-amateur is exceedingly thin and often follows a rather convoluted path that reflects the creativity of those who seek to provide commercial benefit to themselves and to the student-athletes.

Two of the more well-known groups serving as outside agencies devoted to reforming college athletics are the Knight Commission and the Drake Group. While both are considered outside agencies, both groups have a significant percentage of academics in their ranks. The Knight Commission's 2001 report contends that while the idea of amateurism is cherished because it positions athletic aspiration as an educational undertaking where young competitors learn the value of fitness, cooperation and perseverance; the influx of skyboxes in arenas, and stadiums and athletic department marketing plans have changed college sports into a pre-professional or minor league athletic system ( p. 13).

R. A. Smith in *Sports and Freedom* and John Thelin in *Games Colleges Play* both examined the history of college sports and the trajectory that has led to sports becoming central to university life of many institutions in the midst of administrators searching for a proper balance between athletics and academics. Thelin's *Games Colleges Play* explores the

implications of the growth of college sports and the abuses that are a part the history of college athletics. He chronicles what he draws as a disturbing pattern of abuse and lackadaisical effort by the NCAA to initiate true reform.

Murray Sperber's *Beer and Circus*, a scathing critique of the state of college sports, argues that the existence of "Big-Time" college sports on campus has been a dangerous addition to the undergraduate experience. Sperber joined a growing chorus of authors who have researched and written on collegiate sports and the abuses associated with them (Byers, 1995; Zimbalist, 2001, Watterson, 2002; Oriard, 2009; Smith, 2010). Walter Byers served as the executive director of the NCAA from 1951 to 1987 and saw first-hand the difficulties associated maintaining the million dollar enterprise that was increasingly lucrative to colleges while keeping the student athletes from accepting any of the money and maintaining a "clean" image.

In *Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, Byers (1995) railed against the state of collegiate sports and posited that what was once believed to be an activity devoted to enhancing the student experience within the context of academia, has been replaced by a multi-million dollar commercial enterprise. Similar to Byers, James Duderstadt a former collegiate athlete who later served as President of the University Michigan for eight years, criticizes the sacrifices made to the academic mission of institutions in the name of commercialized sports. Reflecting back on his tenure at Michigan fondly, he clearly details the errors made that created a gulf between the athletic missions and academic missions of the University. While Byers' *Unsportsmanlike Conduct* is seen more as an exposé on the ills of college sports than Duderstadt's *Intercollegiate Athletics and the American University*, both texts offer readers the critical perspectives of two men who previously held influential positions in the world of collegiate sports during its unprecedented commercial growth. Both of these texts, served as benchmarks in the research



surrounding the issue of athletics and its place in higher education.

### *Athletic Recruitment*

The history of collegiate athletics offers insight into the world of athletics recruiting and the complex layer it adds to the college choice process. The practice of recruiting students for the purpose of pitting them against other colleges' athletic programs dates back to the late nineteenth century. Watterson (2000) points out that the first recognized collegiate sporting event took place when the rowing club from Harvard raced the rowing club of Yale in 1852. Crew was soon replaced as the biggest draw for college sport fans by baseball and football. College football's early years captured the amateur spirit due to the fact that the players were actual college students who came from the general student body. Yale and Harvard felt little need initially to recruit students based on their physical capabilities alone due to the fact that the student body was full of capable young men.

In *College Football*, Watterson, traces the beginnings of college sport to the present day Ivy League schools, as they had the most dominant sports teams and attracted the largest followings in the early years of college sports. Watterson highlights the excitement that many university officials felt for the burgeoning world of intercollegiate athletic competition and the attention it brought to their institutions. This attention led to increased celebration from many within the university over the spectacle of college sports. The popular perspective at the time was that successful sports programs attracted more students to enroll and showed the university in a positive light. Watterson cites a reporter from the *Weekly University Courier's* coverage of the University of Kansas football team. The team was coming off of a winning season and the article made the point that it was the football teams prowess on the field of competition that brought

notoriety to the university as a whole. The newspaper argued, “The influence and result of our football victories can hardly be estimated ... it has advertised the university more than an outlay of a thousand dollars could have done in any other way” (Watterson, 2000).

Recruiting superstars to continue the success higher education institutions were having in sports predictably led to an increasingly competitive market for luring potential students with athletic talent. Watterson points out that as competition between schools grew, the number of players brought in who had lacked an academic connection to the school rose. The argument over professionals versus amateurs began to heat up as reports became rampant of institutions using professional players to compete on their teams. The professional spirit of win-at-all-cost quickly replaced the amateur spirit:

The faster football spread, the more often there were reports of abuse. Taking the inspiration from semiprofessional summer baseball, players mysteriously began appearing on college football teams, sometimes enrolled but often having no formal connection to the university, and then departed after the big game on Thanksgiving or at the end of the semester. At the University of Michigan in 1894 seven out of the eleven members of the starting players neither enrolled in school nor attended any classes. Occasionally the tramps (professional players playing on the college level illegally) jumped from one team to others during a single season, probably as the result of being offered higher sums to play by alumni or boosters. Watterson cites historian Frederick Rudolph who related a story of an Oregon State football team that was startled to see the same opponent on three different teams in three successive games.

This win-at-all-costs attitude was cause for then President Theodore Roosevelt and college athletic leaders to form the NCAA in hopes of reforming collegiate athletics and the practices institutions were employing to get talented athletes to compete for them. (NCAA history). In its 100-year history the NCAA has served as the governing body of its colleges and university members. Current NCAA rules allow for higher education institutions to recruit high school students to play their respective sport for the institutions team. College athletic departments are responding by participating in what has been dubbed an “arms race” in college

sports (Knight 2012). The growth in recruiting budgets, while alarming, remain small in the context of total departmental cost. The Knight commission states:

As with the rest of higher education, which has engaged in an “amenities race” for new laboratory facilities, student unions, residence halls, and other projects, a construction boom has echoed throughout intercollegiate athletics as programs have upgraded existing and created new facilities. Many football stadiums have been refurbished, adding capacity, luxury suites and other premium amenities at a cost often exceeding \$100 million. Basketball arenas have been built or renovated, as state-of-the-art practice, strength training, and tutoring facilities have proliferated. “Recruiting costs remain a relatively small item in most budgets, accounting for only two percent of total departmental cost. However, some argue that facilities construction should be considered a recruiting expense as different athletics programs woo 17- or 18-year-old high school seniors with the most lavish practice facility, shiniest academic study center or snazziest arena.

The methods used by college and university athletic programs to recruit high school student athletes make the college choice process of the student athlete population unique. The institutions with the wealthiest athletic programs, that are designated as FBS in the NCAA, spend the most money recruiting student athletes. Four of the most profitable athletic conferences are: the Southeastern Conference (SEC), the Pacific Twelve Conference, the Big Ten Conference and the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). Solomon (2010) points out that the average spending per student-athlete at schools in each major conference ranges from four to nearly eleven times more than the average spending on education-related activities per student. The SEC led the way, spending \$144,592 per student athlete in 2008 compared to \$13,410 per student. The data was not broken down by sport. Findings from institutional data on the expenditures of athletic department’s recruitment efforts have recently come under criticism for the steep increases witnessed at many institutions around the nation.

**Table 1: FBS Conference Recruiting Expenditure Increases**

FBS Conference	1996-1997	2006-2007	% Increase
SEC	\$6,639,000	\$13,129,700	98%
Big-12	6,663,000	11,538,200	73
ACC	4,401,000	10,748,200	144
Big 10	5,792,000	10,134,600	75
Pac-10	4,625,000	8,834,700	80
Big East	4,334,000	6,125,700	41

Sander, L. (2008). Have Money, Will Travel: The Quest for Top Athletes. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54(47), A1.

Sanders (2008) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* explains Table 1:

Nearly half of the nation's largest athletics programs have doubled or tripled their recruitment spending over the past decade as their pursuit of elite athletes intensifies and becomes more national in scope. Forty-eight percent of NCAA Division I athletic departments at least doubled their recruiting budgets from 1997 to 2007, according to a Chronicle analysis of financial data reported to the U.S. Department of Education. Of the 300 Division I institutions for which data were available, 21 each spent more than \$1-million chasing talented players in the 2007 academic year. On the whole, the 65 biggest spenders shelled out a total of more than \$61-million in 2007, an 86-percent increase from 10 years before. That amount does not include salaries for recruiting coordinators or construction and operating costs of the gleaming multimillion-dollar facilities that help lure prospects.

Sanders goes on to explain that while some of the increases can be attributed to the rising cost of fuel (needed for travel), the numbers do not take into account the new athletic facilities created to attract elite high school athletes. The “Arms Race” that many believe is ongoing between athletic departments across the country includes growing salaries for college coaches, and the creation of infrastructure devoted to intercollegiate athletics. Athletic departments are not coy about admitting they are aware that highly coveted coaches and top notch facilities go a long way in attracting the nation's best athletes, and they are purposeful about making sure that recruits are aware of what their institution has to offer. Institutions have a budget for recruiting

students for the general student body, but in many cases, costs per student pale in comparison to the cost of recruiting individual elite high school athletes. A report by higher education consultants Noel-Levitz found that;

Four-year private institutions spent about \$2,073 to recruit each new student in 2005, more than four times what four-year public institutions spent and 28 times what two-year public colleges spent, according to survey results released.... The median recruitment spending per student was \$455 at four-year public institutions and \$74 at two-year institutions.... The median amount per student for four-year public colleges decreased by about \$60 from 2004 to 2005, while the amount four-year private institutions spent went up about \$170 per student (2005, p.1-2) cited by Rainey (2006).

As institutions of higher education attempt to adapt to contemporary budget constraints, understanding the college choice process of prospective students has become particularly important. Valuable insight into the college choice process has potential implications for practice and policy. Whether it be to compete in the competitive market for students, to increase diversity in higher education, or fine-tune recruiting and marketing efforts, college choice research has increased in importance, and subsequently, the body of research literature has grown. The student-athlete recruiting process, creates a unique context for the college choice process. As Branch (2011) explains :

The United States is the only country in the world that hosts big-time sports at institutions of higher learning. This should not, in and of itself, be controversial. College athletics are rooted in the classical ideal of *Mens sana in corpore sano*—a sound mind in a sound body—and who would argue with that? College sports are deeply inscribed in the culture of our nation. Half a million young men and women play competitive intercollegiate sports each year. Millions of spectators flock into football stadiums each Saturday in the fall, and tens of millions more watch on television. The March Madness basketball tournament each spring has become a major national event, with upwards of 80 million watching it on television and talking about the games around the office water cooler. ESPN has spawned ESPNU, a channel dedicated to college sports, and Fox Sports and other cable outlets are developing channels exclusively to cover sports from specific regions or divisions.

While athletic departments around the country continue to ramp up their efforts to stay competitive in the area of recruiting high school football players they are required to work within NCAA rules while recruiting high school students. With recruiting rules in place, research devoted to the infractions that occur during recruiting has increased. (NCAA rules) Clark and Bautista (2009) cite a number of researchers who argue that there has been a recent and troubling rise in the number of schools not adhering to NCAA recruiting rules (Mahony, Fink, and Pastore 1999; Jordan, Greenwell, Geist, Pastore, & Mahony, 2004). Clark and Bautista (2009) examined the trends in major recruiting violations among FBS conferences and found that FBS conferences that were the most successful were more likely to commit major recruiting violations.

Higher education institutions investing money in their infrastructure to attract potential students is not a new phenomenon. Institutions seeking out the best and brightest high school students are intentional in their efforts to find academically gifted students with diverse talents. Bugeja (2012) reports in *Inside Higher Ed* that increased emphasis on recruitment is rooted in financial matters and that issues around funding in higher education are cause for higher education institutions to pay attention to enrollment numbers as increases can lead to better financial news. Student athletes face many of the same undergraduate challenges that their peers who are not involved in sports face; however, their athletic talent and the role that they play in maintaining the business of college sports makes them distinct. How this population navigates through the college choice process warrants further inquiry.

### *College Choice of Student Athletes*

Are the choice factors that student athletes consider when deciding on a college different than the factors considered by students not intending to compete as athletes? Exploring the college choice process of the population of student athletes has gained traction and drawn the

inquiry of a number of researchers (Doyle and Gaeth, 1990; Cooper, 1996; Gabert, Hale, & Montalvo, 1999; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen & Palmer, 2003; Langelett, 2003; Goss, Jubenville & Orejan, 2006; Kanky & Quarterman, 2007; Dumond, Lynch, & Platania, 2008; Johnson, Jubenville and Goss, 2009; Bartee, 2011).

Much of the limited research done on the college choice process of student athletes varies in its scope, and different institutional type, and sports programs have been examined. Kankey and Quarterman (2007) surveyed college softball players on the Division I level to determine how the softball players weighed different college choice factors to select a college or university. Some of the factors that they found most influential in were “availability of a major or academic program, head coach, career opportunities after graduation, social atmosphere of the team, and the amount of financial aid. The least influential choice factors were friends, affiliation of the university (religion, public, private), media coverage, softball team sponsorships, high school coach, and ethnic or gender makeup of the university.” Kankey and Quarterman’s analysis of softball is similar to Cooper’s (1996) research that surveyed student athletes who played basketball in the state of Washington, to gauge the importance that they attributed to forty different college choice factors. The survey was sent to thirty-nine schools that ranged from two-year to four-year institutional types. The student athletes indicated that the commitment of the basketball coach to the program and the relationship that they (student athletes) had with the head coach were the two most important factors that they considered when deciding where to attend college.

Doyle and Gaeth (1990) looked at the college choice process of student athletes to see if there were differences based on gender. They surveyed 605 Division I student athletes participating in baseball and softball, two sports traditionally separated by gender. They found

that the student athletes surveyed attributed the most importance to the financial aid package or athletic scholarship when deciding on where to attend college. Their results exhibited a gender gap between how important the academic offerings were to students. They reported that male student athletes (baseball players), placed less value on the academic offerings than female student athletes (softball players).

Examinations that included student athletes from varying sports have found that while student athletes have different factors that influence college choice, they also considered non-athletic-related factors to the same level of importance as non-athletes did (Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003; Goss, Jubenville, & Orejan, 2006; Bartee, 2011). A common thread amongst the studies in the growing body of research literature on intercollegiate athletes and their college choice process is the importance of the following four factors: who the head coach of the athletic team is (Cook, 1994; Gabert, Hale & Montalvo, 1999; Kankey & Quarterman, 2007; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Slabik, 1995) the opportunity to play or the perceived amount of playing time available (Forseth, 1987; Konnert & Gieser, 1987; Slabik, 1995); the amount of scholarship offered (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990); and the institution's academic opportunities. (Cook, 1994; Forseth, 1987; Kankey & Quarterman, 2007; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Slabik, 1995).

The college choice process of Division I football players, which is well-deserving of its own specified examination, has shown that while academic characteristics are important, similar to other student athletes cited earlier, athletic factors are influential in the decision process (Klenosky, Templin, & Troutman, 2001; Langelett, 2003; Dumond, Lynch, & Platania, 2008). Klenosky et al. (2001) interviewed twenty-seven football players utilizing a means end perspective and found that the head football coach was the number one overall factor in their



decision. The football players were all enrolled at the same institution, they ranged in year in school, race, and by the number of institutions that recruited them out of high school.

Langelett (2003) looked at the Division 1A programs in the Associated Press and USA Today final top twenty-five polls and compared them to data gathered from recruiting analysts and found that there is a bi-directional relationship between recruiting and team success: college football programs that are successful in competition were rewarded during recruiting efforts, and recruiting efforts had a direct effect on team success. Dumond, Lynch, and Platania (2008) also found that recruits' decisions were based on factors such as the college's recent football ranking (i.e., measure of team performance), and the prestige of the institution's conference.

#### *High School Experiences of Recruited Student Athletes*

In 2012, it was estimated that approximately 6.4 percent of the 1,095,993 high school football players in the United States would go on to play college football for an NCAA member institution (NCAA, 2012). Most high school students in the United States participate in athletics in some form. In 2003, 57.6% of ninth through twelfth graders reported playing at least one team sport (U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004).

While few high school athlete's reap the benefit of participating on the college level, some have argued that extra-curricular activities like athletics within the high school system positively supplement the academic efforts of students; and that participation in athletics fosters a relationship between the student and the school (Landers and Landers, 1978).

The research literature on the experience of high school athletes being recruited to compete in college is limited, but what has seen increased attention, is the methods that are employed by students seeking to market their talents to potential college athletic programs.

High school football players have traditionally been recruited based primarily off of their success on their high school team. What has changed is the opportunities now available to students desiring to be recruited for college football. New and additional football clinics, and camps have given college football coaches more time and opportunities to evaluate high school football players' talent. The added opportunity to showcase talent in front of college coaches increases the time and energy that student athletes are devoting to their sport.

### *College Student Athlete Experiences*

Researchers have expressed concern over the increasing time that student athletes commit to their athletic endeavors while in college (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Jensen, 1987; Carodine, Almond, & Grotto, 2001; McCormick & McCormick, 2006). Jensen (1987) argues that the time required of student athletes to commit to their sport significantly limits their ability to fully pursue their intellectual interest. NCAA rules state that "Student-athletes may engage in 4 hours per day and 20 hours per week of athletically related activities. An athletically related activity is any activity with an athletics purpose involving student-athletes, that is supervised by one or more institutional coaching staff members." In the offseason students may engage in 8 hours per week. Table 2 reflects the rules:

**Table 2: NCAA 20-hour rule and where it applies**

General rules	Counts toward 20 hours	Does not count towards 20 hours
During the season or designated training periods such as spring football or fall baseball, athletes are limited to 20 hours of countable activity per week and must be given at least one day off. However, travel days can count as a day off if no other activities are planned. The rest of the offseason athletes are limited to eight hours per week and must be given two days off	<p><b>Games-</b> 3 hours per game day, nothing else allowed on game day</p> <p><b>Practice-</b> No more than 4 hours a day</p> <p><b>Film sessions</b> Conditioning</p> <p><b>Individual workouts-</b>If coaches are present</p> <p><b>Meeting called by coaches</b></p>	<p><b>Travel</b></p> <p><b>Hosting recruits</b></p> <p><b>Voluntary, unsupervised workouts or practices</b></p> <p><b>Compliance meetings</b></p> <p><b>Mandatory study hall</b></p> <p><b>Time in training room</b></p> <p><b>Public appearances</b></p>

Source: NCAA

While the NCAA and its member institutions maintain that this rule is honored, there have been a number of high profile incidents that tell a different story, such as the University of Michigan being placed on three years of NCAA probation for major rules violations. Sanders (2010) reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on allegations that Michigan had mandated its players to attend practice and training for more than the allowed twenty hours. The *Detroit Free Press* (2009), after interviewing ten current and former players from Michigan’s 2009 football team, published an article where players “described training and practice sessions that far exceeded limits set by the NCAA.” The players stated that they did not protest the rules violations out of fear of repercussions from the coaching staff. One player stated, “It’s one of those things where you can’t say something.” Another player said, “If you say something, they’re going to say you’re a lazy person and don’t want to work hard.” One former player who transferred to Colorado from Michigan to continue his collegiate playing career stated, “Nothing is fabricated or exaggerated in that story. I was there on Sundays from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. or 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. depending on if guys needed treatment. You were [in practice] daylight to nighttime.”

While the NCAA found in their investigation of Michigan's players claims that they were practicing more than twenty hours per week, that experience is not out of the ordinary, according to a 2010 NCAA study that found "football players in the NCAA's top-tier Division I bowl subdivision said they spent an average of 43.3 hours on their sport—playing games, practicing, training and in the training room—compared with 38 hours on academics" (USA today 2011). Pope (2009) highlighted a similar NCAA study in 2006 where the NCAA found that football players reported to be spending 44.8 hours per week on athletic activities and that seventy percent of major college football players said they spent as much time or more in training or competition in the offseason as they did during their seasons of competition.

In light of the time constraints placed on student athletes who must juggle training and school work, research (Southall, Eckard, Nagel & Hale, 2012) indicates that as a result, college football players are not graduating at the same rate as male college students not playing football, and are graduating at lower rates than student athletes in most other sports. For some of the most successful Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) programs, the graduation gap between NCAA Division I football players and their full-time male student body counterparts not playing sports continues to be sizable, particularly for FBS teams (Southall et al., 2012).

In the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Welch Suggs (2003) reviewed the academic major choices of football players who competed in the postseason bowl games following the 2002 season. What was discovered was a tendency for a significant number of football players from the same teams to major in the same academic discipline. Suggs (2003) reported that every Division I institution in the National Collegiate Athletic Association has major programs that are accommodating those in the student-athlete population that lack the academic skills to compete in the more rigorous academic fields by creating space for less rigorous majors. Suggs reports

“whether or not [schools] admit it, academic advisors sometimes steer athletes into specific courses and degree programs to make it easier for them to meet the NCAA academic standards and maintain eligibility.” More often than not, these advisors are acting on behalf of coaching staffs. In the last decade, the practice of herding student athletes into less rigorous majors has become vital to coaches and administrators who do not see anything wrong with such actions, and see it as necessary to avoid sanctions: Suggs (2003) reports:

Academic advisers say it is bound to become more of a trend as the NCAA phases in new academic standards that will require athletes to complete more of their course work in order to stay eligible for sports. The new rules are supposed to improve athletes' graduation rates, which for years have lagged behind those of their classmates, but the policy may push more athletes into easier academic programs, devaluing the degrees they eventually do earn.

The NCAA's Academic Progress Rate (APR) is a term-by-term measure of eligibility and retention for Division I student-athletes that was developed as an early indicator of eventual graduation rates (NCAA). The APR was created in the 2003 academic year to measure how many student athletes per a given team are on schedule to graduate. While the intent of the APR is to increase graduation, there is concern that the newly implemented rules and consequences for underperformance will lead to schools developing innovative tactics to beat the system and keep student athletes in courses that are less academically rigorous and more likely to result in satisfactory grades (Caprissioso, 2006; Finley & Fountain, 2007).

According to Fountain and Finley (2009), while attention has been paid to the issue of major clustering among football players, no attempt was made to determine whether major clustering is more prevalent among football players when broken down by race. Fountain and Finley researched twelve major college football programs in the Atlantic Coastal Conferences, and found that while student athlete major clustering occurred amongst both white and African American football players, African American football players clustered at a higher rate.

Fountain and Finley's (2009) study found that the concentration of football players into only a few majors occurred at all schools in this study, and the percentage of players in the clustered programs frequently exceeded the 25% cutoff, as defined by Case et al. (1987), by a wide margin. One university had the highest concentration of football players clustered into one major, with fully 73% of the upperclassmen studying Business Management. Six schools had one-third or more of the players in a single major. With regards to race, they found that nearly every school in the study had minority football players clustering into a single major at a higher percentage than their white counterparts. The pattern of minorities clustering more densely into a single program held true at nine of the twelve schools. Four teams had 62% or more of their minority upperclassmen clustered into a single major. Only in one case was the percentage of players in one major as high as (69%).

In an article that appeared in USA Today in November of 2008, Upton and Novak (2008) chronicled what seemed to be a revitalized trend of intercollegiate student athletes pursuing majors considered relatively less rigorous in an effort to stay eligible in their respective sport. When the newly adopted APR was implemented, critics lamented that the added rigor would lead to some schools seeking to cut academic corners. The APR's looming threat was considered by many to be an incentive for schools to encourage their student-athletes to seek out less rigorous programs of study to maintain the ability to compete and train for their respective sports. These additional hours of training are seen as necessary for success on the Division I level by many involved in intercollegiate athletics. Researchers generally agree that the excessive amount of time that student athletes are committing to their sports is detrimental to their academic responsibilities (Simons, Fujita, and Van Rheenan, 1999; Jensen, 1987; Byers 2000). Adler and Adler (1985) discovered after investigating how the mandatory long practices and travel for

games adversely affected the academic motivation of student-athletes. The student-athlete commitment to maintaining a career in a high-profile athletic program increases the potential for he or she to become detached from once held optimistic academic goals.

Steeg, Upton, Bohn & Berkowitz (2008) interviewed a number of former and current student athletes from different Division I institutions about the consequences of having to maintain the strenuous balance of academics and big-time college athletics. Themes that ran through much of their interviews were eligibility and expediency. Steeg et al. (2008) found that in 2007, 34% of the Kansas State football teams' juniors and seniors had an academic major in the social sciences compared to just 4% of the non-athlete student population that were juniors and seniors.

An investigation into the University of Michigan's academic practices as they related to their athletes was recently the subject of a major investigation by the Ann Arbor News. The 2009 report outlines trends that many argue are the blueprints for developing academic safe havens for student athletes in an effort to keep them eligible for athletic competition. The Ann Arbor news reporters worked for close to seven months, talked to more than eighty people and examined more than 3,500 pages of documents. The purpose of the investigation was to look more intently at the academic choices and trends of student athletes at the University of Michigan. With the information gathered, the Ann Arbor news ran a four part series about the University of Michigan's academics and athletics interrelation. The data collected showed, amongst other things, a dramatic increase in student-athletes seeking out a major in a program called General Studies. Sport Management had been for a time a popular major amongst student athletes at the University of Michigan. When it adjusted its admission standards and added more rigor to the

overall program, the Sports Management major was surpassed by the General Studies major as the most popular academic choice for Michigan's football players.

General Studies at the University of Michigan is part of the College of Literature, Science and the Arts. The program is designed to offer an interdisciplinary approach that offers flexibility in the course load. Former University of Michigan President James Duderstadt was critical of programs like General Studies, positing that less rigorous academic programs like General Studies are necessary evils for highly selective institutions trying to maintain dominant sports programs (2003).

The Ann Arbor news report cites critics of Duderstadt's assessment, who believe that an institution like the University of Michigan is void of any easy courses. One critic in particular, Associate Provost Phil Hanlon, who was interviewed for the report, cited peer advising as a reason for the clustering occurring amongst the athletes at Michigan. Student athletes spend extended amounts of time with each other and naturally take the same courses. The socialization and self-segregation that happens on sports teams is generally agreed upon as a valid occurrence amongst researchers ( Coakley, 2001; Adler & Adler, 1991; Snyder, 1985).

According to *USA Today* research, the major clustering of student athletes at Michigan is similar to what is happening with student athletes at colleges all over the country. USA Today researched the majors of 9,000 students athletes participating in football, men's and women's basketball, softball, and baseball at 118 Division I NCAA member schools and found that 83% of all schools had at least one major in which athletes represented a disproportionate percentage compared to the non-student athletes at their institutions.



## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Three-Phase Model of College Choice**

This study utilizes Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase college choice model to organize its findings and employs modifications to the model that incorporate the unique college choice processes of heavily recruited high school football players. Due to the limited research literature about the college choice process of elite high school football players, no conceptual framework exists that addresses populations that consider colleges based in large part on the characteristics of the institution's athletic programs. The first part of this section discusses the phases of the college choice model. The second part expands the model in consideration of the heavily recruited student athlete experience.

The three phases of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model are predisposition, search, and choice. In addition to the students attributes, the model includes the institutional attributes not under the students control, e.g., potential colleges and universities and their high school of origin. Hossler and Gallagher's model is reviewed below.

### **Predisposition**

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) state that the predisposition phase is developmental; it is during this stage that students determine whether they would like to pursue a formal post-secondary degree. This stage takes into account some of the student's characteristics, e.g., the student's academic abilities. The current study will build on the attributes included in the predisposition phase in order to account for additional factors that apply to students with exceptional athletic ability. It will also examine activities designed to market an elite high school athlete's talents to interested college athletic programs.

Examples of possible influence on an elite high school athlete's predisposition include factors such as involvement on a travel or club sports team. Many students invest time and resources into training and competing in their sport outside of the organized high school sports context. In addition to club team involvement, the influence of peers, teammates, and coaches are also considered influential factors. Other factors include peer group or teammate trajectory in sports, the student's initial motivation for taking up a sport, parental guidance in regards to the sport, and feedback from scouts and recruiters.

In Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) predisposition phase, college and school characteristics would also include the student's high school athletic team's characteristics, such as win-loss record, number of high school alumni who are student athletes, the coaches' win-loss record, and the school's prestige in the athletic realm. Other significant influences would include current and former teammates, as well as elite high school athletes who previously competed at the school and went on to play in college. Finally, educational activities would include—and not be replaced by—club team involvement.

## **Search**

A model that accommodates elite high school athletes would incorporate factors distinct to the heavily recruited high school athlete population. Thus, the search phase would also be seen as the recruitment phase, as this is when colleges are aggressively courting high school athletes to attend their schools. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) point out that the search phase is when potential matriculates start to seek more information about college and universities. This phase includes communication between potential matriculates and colleges. Chapman's (1981) model of choice suggests that the strategies colleges and universities utilize to communicate with potential matriculates has an impact on the student during the search phase. College and

university recruiting efforts vary based on the profile of the student. Sanders (2006) points out that the amount of money spent to recruit student athletes is larger than that spent on non-athletes.

For elite high school athletes, a university's search activities are far more personalized and aggressive than the search activities of the student athlete. According to NCAA rules, high school athletes who are being recruited are allowed only five official visits paid for by the respective institution. Unofficial visits do not have a cap, and elite high school athletes can embark on as many visits as they please as long as they are covering the cost. Student search activities also include sifting through the information that is presented to them by interested colleges and universities.

### **Choice**

In the choice stage of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model, students utilize information to select an institution and complete the enrollment process. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) point out that the institutional characteristics mentioned earlier play an important role in the choice process. Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) also listed institutional factors that play into the final enrollment decision, including "parental encouragement, financial considerations, the student's high school academic resources, the student's educational and occupational aspirations, and, of course, the student's academic abilities" (p. 6). After visiting and communicating with colleges and universities, students will narrow their list of potential colleges in this phase. Hossler (1999) found that financial cost becomes plays an important role during this phase for students. For elite high school athletes, this is the most publicized phase of the college choice process.

**Table 3: Hossler and Gallagher Three Phase Model**

Phases	Influential Factors		Student Outcomes
	Individual	Organizational	
<b>Predisposition (phase 1)</b>	<b>Student characteristics</b>  <b>Significant others</b>  <b>Educational Activities</b>	<b>School characteristics</b>	<b>College options</b>  <b>Other options</b>
<b>Search (phase 2)</b>	<b>Student preliminary college values</b>  <b>Student search activities</b>	<b>College and university search activities- search for students</b>	<b>Choice set</b> <b>Other options</b>
<b>Choice (phase 3)</b>	<b>Choice set</b>	<b>College and university search activities</b>	<b>Choice</b>

Source: Hossler and Gallagher, 1987, p. 208

### **Comparing Populations**

This section describes some of the distinctions and similarities in the college decision processes for heavily recruited high school athletes and their peers who are not involved in sports. This study draws a distinction between revenue sport student athletes (college football players) and the rest of the student athlete population.

Hossler and Gallagher’s model incorporates within its three phases a number of factors that can be linked to the college decision processes of all students. Socioeconomic status, arguably one of the most important background characteristics, affects both populations. Two of the disadvantages in the college choice process for low-socioeconomic students are less parental involvement in academic related activities (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Gutman & Eccles, 1999)

and a lack of valuable information about the college process (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001, McDonough, 1997). Research by Huffman and Cooper (2004) suggested that socioeconomic status accounts for differences in the way recruited football players make the college decision

Similarities and differences exist in how student ability plays a role in the way student athletes and students go about choosing a college. Research has shown that as a student's academic ability increases so increases the chances that they will go to college (Manski and Wise, 1983). There has been much debate over the issue of admission standards and how they are different for students with athletic ability. Heavily recruited student athletes who are not necessarily high achieving academically will likely encounter a different college choice process than their peers who are also not high achieving academically but are not involved in athletics. *US News* (2008) reported on a report by the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* that quantified the differences in SAT scores for college football players and the rest of the student bodies at 53 different colleges and found at least an 88-point gap between the two populations. The report also found that some schools do not use the normal admissions standards for student athletes.

Significant others can play an important part in the in the college choice process for both populations. In general terms, both populations will potentially have the opportunity to seek input from family members, friends, high school administrators, and high school teachers. What has the potential to be distinct is the type of advice offered to student athletes and students who are not athletes. An example of the variance in the type of advice would be a student athlete being advised to consider a college based on who their athletic coach would be while a student non-athlete may be advised to consider a program specifically for one of its academic departments.

Arguably, it is during the search phase of Hossler and Gallagher's model where the distinctions between the college choice process of student athletes and non-athletes are most apparent. Colleges and universities are searching for students at the same time that students are searching for colleges and universities. For the student athlete, the search activities are personalized and more aggressive. High school athletes are visited at home by college coaches and receive personalized letters, emails, phone calls, and text messages during the search phase, all sent in an effort to secure their commitment to attend a respective college. High school athletes will likely be approached by potential colleges, and these colleges will become a part of their choice set. Students who planning on going to college and not playing a sport will likely develop a choice set based off of information that they personally seek out.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This chapter describes the research design and methods used to investigate how heavily recruited high school football players weighed different factors when deciding where to attend college. According to the NCAA, there are roughly 300,000 high school seniors who are playing high school football. Each year, approximately 18,000 or 6.4 percent of high school seniors playing football go on to compete as college football players. While much publicity is focused on the choice of heavily recruited high school football players on National Signing Day, little is known about the process through which these students progress to make their final decisions. College choice research that intends to add insight to the thought process of the population of heavily recruited high school football players considering college needs to include information about the factors related to the athletic experiences that will be a part of this population's undergraduate experience. Two methods were used in this examination. The first tool was a survey that allowed respondents to indicate the level of importance of various factors. The first tool, the survey in its entirety, is in the appendix of this dissertation. The second tool consisted of interviews that asked open-ended questions about the college choice process. These tools were designed to measure the relative weight that high school football players attribute to various factors when selecting a college.

## **Access to Data**

In 2011, Athlife—a non-profit organization based in New York whose stated mission is to provide educational services, life-skill programming, and career resources to amateur and professional athletes—surveyed high school football players to learn how they weigh different college choice factors. After a formal request, Athlife granted access to their college choice survey data. In order to protect the identity of the survey participants, Athlife provided raw data that did not contain the names or the locations of the survey respondents.

The Athlife survey targeted a population of 250 high school football players across the country who were identified by rivals.com (an organization that analyses high school football) as the nation’s most talented players. Athlife disseminated the survey during September of 2011 to correspond with the recruitment phase of these football players. During the first week of September, Athlife sent the survey through email to the 250 high school football players. Athlife set a deadline of February 2, 2012, for the completion of the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary. Of the 250 high school football players that received the survey, 71 responded in either part or full.

Athlife used the list of the best 250 players from the rating board of published by Rivals, an internet organization that annually publishes a list of the country’s top high school senior football players. Their ranking is based on feedback from national and regional recruiting analysts. The following is a description of the recruiting agency rivals.com:

Rivals.com has assembled the top team of recruiting analysts in the nation with both national and regional experts based all throughout the country. With those strengths, players at a number of different positions will be ranked once a month from June until February. The rankings are compiled after countless hours of film evaluation, personal observations and input from professional, college and high school coaches. In the finished product, players are ranked a number of different ways but the most important ways are numerically by position, qualitatively by



stars and a new ranking system that grades players on the expected impact they will make in college. Players are ranked numerically on a national level at their positions. The numerical ranking at each position varies depending on the depth of the talent at the position. Rivals (2012)

## **Quantitative Method**

The Athlife high school football recruit survey was a descriptive, cross-sectional survey. Athlife incentivized student participation by offering to profile ten randomly chosen respondents on their website. The profile on Athlife's website would not include any of the gathered survey information. The profile comprised a photo and biographical information, including the student's year in school, player position, colleges in which the student was interested, post-collegiate career aspirations, and favorite high school sports memory. Student athletes who participated were given the option of having their name selected to be chosen for the profile, but all of the respondents declined.

The instrument was designed to explore the influence that 33 factors had on the decisions made by high school football players intent on playing Division I FBS football. These factors included 13 factors that do not pertain to prospective institution's athletic programs and 18 factors related to the athletic programs of institutions being considered. The survey explored the relative importance of 14 factors. These included the location and region of prospective institutions, the academic offerings of prospective institutions, the size of prospective institutions in regards to enrollment, the diversity of prospective institutions, and the social climate or party reputation of prospective institutions. The other 19 factors dealt specifically with the varsity athletic program of the potential colleges and allowed respondents to indicate the level of importance they place on the following: the coaching staff, the win-loss record of the prospective programs, the athletic conference in which the institutions competes, the number of alumni

playing in the NFL, the consistency of the prospective football team's appearances in post-season bowl games, and the student's gauge of how well a prospective program prepares its players for the NFL. Three of the questions examined the level of importance placed on the advice of parents, coaches, and friends.

The survey was created to capture how heavily recruited high school football players weighed the importance of different college choice factors. The survey consisted of two sections comprising two different types of factors. One section titled "Campus Characteristics" included factors that were characteristics of the college unrelated to campus involvement in athletics. Additional questions in the section were related to location of the college campus, size of the institution and the student body, academic offerings and reputation of the college, social environment of the campus, diversity of the student body, type of facilities, and climate of the region.

The section following "Campus Characteristics" included factors related to the athletic characteristics of the college's football team. These factors were related to the academic profile of the football team, the professional experience of coaches and former players, the winning percentage of the football team, the popularity of the football team among a local and national audience, the academic and training facilities available to members of the football team, the manner in which the coaches of the football team recruit, and the programs ability to prepare its players for the NFL. An additional section related to athletics allowed respondents to record their level of agreement with 8 statements that related to the way respondents felt about themselves, their athletic experiences, and their athletic and academic prospects. Other sections of the survey recorded the respondents' college preparatory activities, influential advisers in the college choice process, academic accomplishments, education of parents, location and type of high school, and

race. Likert scaling was used for the Campus Characteristic and Athletics Characteristics sections. Students had the option of indicating the level of importance ranging from not important to extremely important.

## **Qualitative Methods**

Participants in the Athlife survey had the opportunity to answer five questions about the college choice process. The five questions were related to the questions in the survey that talked specifically about the process. Along with the surveys that were sent out, students were sent information about participating in an anonymous interview. They had the option of participating in an interview over the phone or in-person to talk further about their experiences. Responses from two of the respondents who indicated that they were interested in discussing both how they were choosing a college and their experience as a heavily sought after recruit are included in the qualitative findings chapter.

The five questions that were asked of the participants are listed below:

1. What are the academic factors that you feel are important for you to consider when choosing a college?
2. What are the athletic factors that you feel are important for you to consider when choosing a college?
3. Please discuss the advice that you receive from your parents, high school coach and friends.
4. How important is it to you who the coach is at the college at which you are looking?
5. How would you describe the experience of deciding where to go to college while at the same time being recruited by a number of high profile college football teams?

## **Variables**

This study utilized variables in its linear models that fall into three different categories: background variables, intermediate variables, and dependent variables. The following section

describes these variables.

The first of two background variables is race, which was chosen to capture the racial diversity of the survey respondents, knowing that the racial makeup of the NCAA college football population is predominately African American and White males. Additionally, the graduation gap that exists between African American players and their White counterparts—where African American players graduate at a lower rate—makes the race analysis important to examine. The survey allowed respondents to indicate their race using the following options: White/Caucasian, African American/Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American/Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Mexican American/Chicano, Other Latino, and Any Other. Of the 71 survey respondents, 39 indicated that they were African American/Black, 12 indicated that they were White/Caucasian, and 2 identified as Bi-racial.

The second background variable was father's education. Participants indicated the highest level of education attained by their father. The survey included the following options for father's education: some high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, and unknown. Research has shown that the level of education attained by parents can be a reliable predictor of the educational aspirations and achievement of their children (Haverman & Wolfe, 1995; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). Race and father's education were chosen from a group of background variables that included high school location and mother's education. Both mother's education and high school location had prohibitively extensive missing data; therefore, race and father's education were the only background variables used in the models.

The intermediate variables in this study included the following four indicator variables and four questions. The indicator variables were: grade point average (GPA), advice of high school coach, advice of friends, and advice of parents. Respondents were given the option to indicate

their overall high school grade point average on a scale of 0 to 4. Options for the question about grade point averages ranged from 0 to 4, and respondents who were not sure of their GPA had the option of checking “not sure.” Next was the option to indicate how important they viewed advice received from their high school coaches and advice received from their friends. For high school coach advice and friend advice variables, respondents rated the level of importance on a Likert scale that ranged from “not important” to “very important,” with three variations of importance in between. In addition to those four indicator variables, four questions asked students to indicate their level of agreement to the statement proposed in the survey. Five options for level of agreement were given: disagree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree, and strongly agree. The four statements included as intermediate variables were:

- Colleges are more interested in me as a football player than as a student.
- People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL in the future.
- If I work hard enough, I will make it to the NFL one day.
- College football players should be paid.

The third category of variables was dependent variables and asked for the level of importance respondents attributed to the following in their decision-making: diversity of major choices available at the prospective college; winning percentage of the prospective college’s football coach; strength of the athletic conference in which prospective colleges competed; prospective college coach’s ability to prepare players to play in the NFL after college; number of opportunities to play games on national television; quality of a prospective college’s athletic facilities; how much they enjoyed their recruiting visit; the opportunity to start as a freshman; and the number of alumni from prospective colleges who played in the NFL.

The diversity of major choices was used as a dependent variable as it offers insight into how respondents weighted the number and type of academic opportunities offered by prospective colleges. How important respondents consider the winning percentage of a prospective college

coach potentially gives insight into how prospects are viewing colleges based on a win-loss record. While a college coach's winning percentage in football games has no direct connection to the academic characteristics of an institution, research by George Langelett (2003) suggests that team performance in Division IA football does have the potential to attract high school recruits.

Four of the dependent variables regarding professional football and its connections to college football were chosen because 95 percent of the respondents agreed that if they worked hard enough they would eventually play in the NFL. Those four dependent variables were: prospective college coach's ability to prepare players to play in the NFL after college; the opportunity to start as a freshman; the number of alumni from prospective colleges who played in the NFL; and the strength of the athletic conference in which prospective colleges competed. The strength of the conference has traditionally had a strong link to the number of players that are drafted by the NFL. Hersch (2010) points out that college players are presumed to desire to play in the conferences that produce the most NFL players, and in the 2010 NFL draft 76 percent of all the players drafted came from six conferences: the SEC, the ACC, the Big 10, the PAC 12, the Big East, and the Big 12.

The dependent variable regarding the level of importance respondents attributed to the number of opportunities to play games on national television was included as there is a correlation between the team's success and the number of nationally televised games they have potential to play in. The dependent variables regarding the level of importance respondents attributed to the quality and newness of a prospective college's athletic facilities and how much they enjoyed their recruiting visit were included based upon the discussion of athletic departments' pervasive spending increases for facilities to aid in attracting recruits (Bennett, 2012). Each of these variables was included in the survey because they covered some of the

academic and athletic characteristics of colleges. Some of the research on college athletics, particularly on the revenue-generating sports of football and basketball, discusses institutions competing against each other for the best high school athletes (Langelett, 2003; Feldman, 2008; Dumond, 2008) and the debate over amateurism and professionalism (Zimbalist, 1999; Yost, 2009; Sack, 1998). The dependent variables touch upon these two issues. Critics have long assailed the recruitment of student athletes in a manner that overemphasizes the potential athletic endeavors of the prospective college or university, and underemphasizes the academic endeavors (Oriard, 2009; Watterson, 2002). This survey was designed to capture the importance high school football players attributed to different college choice factors. The majority of variables chosen reflect the football side of the college choice process to learn more about how important football was in the student athlete's decision making.

The following section contains tables of data from the Athlife college choice survey. Tables 4 and 5 make up sections of the correlation matrix for variables included in the college choice survey. Table 4 reports the correlations of the different factors included in the survey that dealt with the type of advice recruits receive and the type of non-athletic and/or academic factors associated with potential colleges Table 5 reports the correlations of the different factors included in the survey that dealt with the athletic characteristics of potential colleges. Table 5 also correlates three factors that are considered background factors: race, father's education, student grade point average. As stated earlier, the variables were measured on a descending five-point Likert scale, where a score of five was the highest level of importance and a score of one was the lowest level of importance. Following the tables that contain the intercorrelations of different variables in the study are the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the study.

Tables 6–8 are the descriptive statistics for the different variables in the study. The tables are accompanied by descriptions of the content.



**Table 4: Correlation matrix for academic college choice factors (n=51)**

Academic Factors	Cc	Cf	Lc	Sc	Ar	Sf	Dem	Dim	Sd	Sz	Pr	Cli
College is close to hometown												
College is far from hometown	0.48											
College has a large campus	0.42	0.28										
College has a small campus	0.36	0.56	0.27									
Academic ranking of the college	0.21	0.18	0.05	0.03								
Student to faculty ratio at the college	0.14	0.36	0.15	0.2	0.63							
Desired academic major is available	-0.13	0.07	-0.23	-0.15	0.14	0.23						
Diversity of academic majors at college	-0.02	0.29	-0.04	0.15	0.4	0.57	0.53					
Diversity of student body at college	-0.08	0.26	0.15	0.17	0.19	0.37	0.24	0.47				
Number of students at college	0.07	0.18	0.26	0.01	0.27	0.48	0.09	0.47	0.71			
Party reputation at college	0.32	0.28	0.52	0.25	-0.01	0.07	-0.17	0.07	0.07	0.26		
Climate of the region at college	0.12	0.22	0.37	-0.02	0.04	0.02	-0.26	-0.14	0.15	0.22	0.38	

Note: These twelve academic factors were included in the college choice survey. The factors' importance was weighted on a scale that ranged from a score of 5 to a score of 1. The 5-point scales break down in the following manner: 5=Extremely Important, 4=Very Important, 3=Moderately Important, 2=Slightly Important, 1=Not Important.

**Table 5: Correlation matrix for athletic college choice factors (n=51)**

Athletic Factors	HC	NFL	CW	C	CP	NTV	NF	WH	SBP	TNF	GPA	Ded	AfA
The head coach of the college team													
NFL coaching experience of college coach	0.15												
College coach winning percentage	0.14	0.65											
Strength of the football conference	-0.02	0.53	0.48										
College coach can prep college players for NFL	0.04	0.46	0.23	0.37									
Number of nationally televised games	0.16	0.32	0.22	0.43	0.38								
Quality of athletic facilities	0.04	0.3	0.29	0.2	0.33	0.4							
I will make it to the NFL if I work hard enough	-0.09	0.36	0.28	0.31	0.53	0.21	0.17						
College football players should be paid	0.31	-0.06	-0.09	-0.04	0.21	0.47	0.05	-0.11					
People often talk to me about playing in the NFL	0.17	-0.24	0.02	-0.07	0.11	0.17	0.11	0	0.39				
Participant's high school grade point average	-0.05	0.08	-0.01	0.06	0.17	0.08	0.03	0.21	0.12	-0.1			
Father's highest level of education	0	-0.28	-0.29	-0.08	-0.11	0.02	-0.03	-0.17	-0.06	-0.03	-0.28		
African American	0.01	0.22	0.09	0.22	0.13	0.13	-0.01	0.18	-0.03	-0.09	0.34	-0.47	

Note: These twelve factors were included in the college choice survey. The factors included in this matrix are the athletic factors and the factors that indicated the importance of advice received from others. The factors importance was weighted on a scale that ranged from a score of 5 to a score of 1. The 5-point scales break down in the following manner: 5=Extremely Important, 4=Very Important, 3=Moderately Important, 2=Slightly Important, 1=Not Important

Table 6 reports the descriptive statistics for the academic factors that were included in the Athlife College Choice survey. Factors were divided into two sections. The academic characteristics included factors associated specifically with prospective college's offerings that were not considered to be a part of their athletic departments. The table represents the number of respondents who answered the question, the means of the responses, the standard deviations and the percentage of respondents who felt that the factor was either extremely important or very important. The table shows that the factors that carried the two highest means were advice received from parents and whether or not the prospective college had the recruit's desired major.

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics for the academic factors that were included in the Athlife College Choice survey. The athletic characteristics included factors associated specifically with a prospective college's athletic offerings. This tables shows that six of these athletic factors had the highest percentage of respondents who considered them extremely important or very important. Three of the six factors considered extremely important or very important dealt specifically with the attributes of the coach of a prospective football team. These three factors were who the head coach is, the interactions recruits had with the head coach, and the honesty of the head coach during recruitment.

**Table 6: Means for academic college choice factors and advice received**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std.D</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Advice of parent or guardian	66	4.38	0.91	81%
Desired major is available	56	4.34	0.88	85%
Academic ranking	57	4.14	1.03	84%
The diversity of major choices	56	3.84	1.12	69%
Advice of high school coach	67	3.66	1.04	64%
Climate of the region that the college is in	57	3.4	1.08	45%
Student to faculty ratio	57	3.28	1.24	42%
Diversity of the student body	57	3.18	1.31	43%
Size of the student body	57	3.18	1.18	45%
The college is local	57	2.75	1.15	17%
The campus is large	57	2.65	1.34	22%
The college is far from home	57	2.56	1.28	19%
The party environment	57	2.47	1.18	14%
Advice of friends	66	2.42	1.11	20%
The campus is small	57	2.16	1.18	12%

Note: All variable indicators are described in detail in the text. N is the number of survey participants that answered the question. Participants indicated on a five-point scale the level of importance that they attributed to each factor. The mean is based on a five-point scale descending from 5 to 1: 5=Extremely Important, 4=Very Important, 3=Moderately Important, 2=Slightly Important, 1=Not Important. Std.D is the standard deviation. Pct is the percentage of respondents who answered a 4 or 5 for the factor.

The college choice survey included eight questions that allowed participants to indicate their level of agreement with a provided statement. Table 8 reflects the number of recruits that answered these questions, the mean of the answers, the standard deviation, and the percentage of recruits who strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement. These statements offer some insight into the mindset of the recruits. Hossler and Gallagher’s models discuss how impactful the interaction is between individual student factors and organizational factors through the college choice process. These interactions assist recruits in creating a choice set of potential schools. Recruits that are often in discussions about a future in the NFL and strongly believe they

will make it to the NFL if they work hard enough will likely form a choice set where their football experience is prioritize.

**Table 7: Means for athletic college choice factors**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std.D</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
The honesty of the college coaching staff	51	4.88	0.38	98%
The academic support for student athletes	50	4.72	0.61	92%
Interactions with the college coach during recruitment	50	4.6	0.67	90%
The strength of the football conference	50	4.54	0.65	92%
The coach can prepare players for the NFL	51	4.49	0.86	86%
The college football teams head coach	51	4.47	0.81	84%
The recruiting visit is exciting	51	4.16	0.92	80%
The college football teams graduation rate	51	4.12	1.09	72%
The quality of the athletic facilities	50	3.98	0.89	89%
A large number of fans attend the football games	51	3.92	0.93	68%
The winning percentage of the college coach	51	3.84	1.03	68%
The frequency of bowl game appearances	51	3.84	0.78	64%
The grade point average of the college football team	51	3.78	1.15	56%
The opportunity to start as a freshman	51	3.75	1.26	64%
The number of the college's former players in the NFL	51	3.73	1.04	54%
The number of nationally televised games	50	3.62	1.12	56%
The NFL coaching experience of the college coach	51	3.39	1.23	49%
The size of the college football stadium	49	3.31	1.04	48%

Note: All variable indicators are described in detail in the text. N is the number of survey participants that answered the question. Participants indicated on a five-point scale the level of importance that they attributed to each factor. The mean is based on a five-point scale descending from 5 to 1: 5=Extremely Important, 4=Very Important, 3=Moderately Important, 2=Slightly Important, 1=Not Important. Std.D is the standard deviation. Pct is the percentage of respondents who answered a four or five for the factor.

**Table 8: Descriptive statistics for statements**

Statement	N	Mean	Std.D	Pct
People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL in the future.	52	3.58	0.72	94%
Colleges are more interested in me as a football player than they are in me as a student.	51	2.65	1.07	58%
I will make it to the NFL if I work hard enough.	52	3.77	0.51	96%
College football players should be paid.	52	3.12	0.88	82%
Playing football at a college that competes in a major conference is the best route to the NFL.	51	3.04	1.06	70%
College football coaches will be honest with me during the recruiting process.	52	3.12	0.83	75%
My national ranking as a football player determines where I can go to college.	52	2.27	0.95	38%
Receiving a college degree is more important than playing in the NFL.	51	3.51	0.61	94%

Note: Statements were rated on a four-point scale: 4=Strongly agree, 3=Somewhat Agree, 2=Somewhat Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree. Mean was based on scores from scale. . Std.D is the standard deviation. Pct is the percentage of respondents who answered a 4 or 5 for the factor.

## Summary

Parental advice reported as one of the more important factors in the survey. Of the three different parties—parents, high school coach, and friends—parental advice had the highest mean at 4.38. Other factors that were indicated as being highly important were directly related to the prospective college’s football coach. Academic factors that showed as important to most of the respondents include the academic ranking of the college, whether the desired major of the high school student was available at the prospective college, and, finally, the academic support system available to student athletes. While the academic support system was included in the survey section that was titled “Athletic Characteristics,” the question dealt with the academic side of their college experience.

Two factors that appeared less important dealt with the size of prospective institutions. Respondents weighed the size of a potential college’s campus and football stadium as less

important. The means of both these factors were among the lowest of the means. This result was counterintuitive, as the larger college football stadiums have often been seen as evidence of higher fan attendance and higher numbers of games won. The statement statistics show that the respondents' overwhelmingly had strong beliefs about their talent and their prospects to play in the NFL in the future.

The recruits responded overwhelmingly in agreement with the statement that earning a college degree is more important than playing in the NFL. With the statistics showing that the average NFL career is short-lived and that a majority of former NFL players face some financial hardship after their career, this finding sheds favorable light on the mindsets and motivations of the participants. The majority of the recruits also agreed with the idea that playing in a strong conference is the best route to the NFL, and opinion that is supported by statistics that show the majority of players drafted out of college come from schools in the BCS conferences.

The level of agreement or disagreement of the recruits with the survey statements shed light on the motivations of these recruits. While the sample size is too small to make conclusions about the larger population, one of the more unexpected results of this section is arguably their belief about playing in the NFL. In reality, only a small percentage of college players actually go to the NFL.

## **Limitations**

This exploratory examination had unavoidable limitations due to the population of students utilized for the study. The first limitation was the sample size. Athlife sent out college choice surveys to 250 high school senior football players and received 71 that were at least partially complete. The size of the group and the unique context of being "highly recruited" do

not allow for broader assumptions to be made about the larger population of high school football players being recruited to play

Another limitation was due to the fact that this study looked at only one side of the recruiting process. This study examined the college choice process of student athletes within the context of recruiting. As mentioned earlier, college and universities are increasing spending on their recruiting efforts. This study does not examine the institutional side of recruiting.

A third limitation was created by the timing of the survey. The survey was designed to be released so that it corresponded with what would be considered the search phase for these high school football players, the fall and winter of their senior year. The number of activities and responsibilities already placed on student athletes presumably created time conflicts and made filling out a random survey a low priority.

A fourth limitation was the fact that this population of highly touted high school football players faced a significant level of media scrutiny. Added to the media scrutiny were the consistent recruiting efforts by college coaches. Garnering responses from this population was challenging within the framework of the other activities in their lives during their senior year in high school.



## CHAPTER 4

### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

This study examined the level of importance that highly recruited high school football players placed on different college choice factors. The participants in this study included male high school seniors who were heavily recruited for their football talent. The survey was sent to the top 250 seniors playing high school football in the United States in 2012. These players were selected based on the evaluation and subsequent ranking by Rivals, an online sports organization that annually evaluates high school football players across the country. Of the 250 surveys that were disseminated, 71 were returned either complete or partially complete.

Multiple regressions were utilized to examine the results from the college choice survey. The background factors for all of the models were the respondent's race and father's education. These two background variables were selected because they define characteristics about the participants over which they had no control. Race and father's education comprised one of three groups of variables. The other two groups were intermediate variables and dependent variables. Father's education was scored differently than the rest of the variables, as the lowest level of education on the Likert scale corresponded with the highest number and the highest level of education corresponded with the lowest number. Listwise deletion was utilized. As a result,  $n=43$  for the regression models included in the dissertation.

Regressions were implemented on dependent variables that were based on some of the factors that are a part of the Hossler and Gallagher model. This study was strategically conducted

during the time of the football recruits college choice process that corresponded with the search phase of the Hossler Gallagher model. Student preliminary college values and search activities are two factors of the search phase.

Grade point average (GPA) was included as a background factor because it fits into the students' characteristics category. Due to the impact that parents' education can have on students' characteristics, the father's level of education was also included as a background factor. The other predictor variables fit into the criteria of what are considered preliminary college values. The models are reported in the section that follows.

**Table 9: Regression models for the level importance attributed to the quality of the athletic training facilities at a prospective college as a college choice factor**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
African American	0.25 (0.30)	0.37 (0.30)	0.31 (0.30)	0.22 (0.30)	0.12 (0.26)	0.22 (0.29)	0.25 (0.29)	0.20 (0.15)	0.21 (0.29)
Fathers education	0.01 (0.15)	-0.03 (0.15)	0.01 (0.14)	0.00 (0.15)	-0.05 (0.13)	0.00 (0.15)	0.01 (0.15)	0.00 (0.15)	-0.02 (0.15)
GPA	-----	-0.20 (0.12)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of coach	-----	-----	0.25* (0.11)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of friends	-----	-----	-----	0.20 (0.10)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of parents or guardian	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.43** (0.12)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Colleges are interested more in me as a football player than as a student	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.07 (0.10)	-----	-----	-----
People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.03 (0.19)	-----	-----
If I work hard I will make it to the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.16 (0.26)	-----
College football players should be paid	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.20 (0.13)
Intercept	4.12 (0.60)	4.59 (0.70)	3.16 (0.71)	3.80 (0.62)	2.49 (0.69)	4.36 (0.69)	4.26 (0.94)	3.57 (1.08)	4.85 (0.76)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.09	0.13	0.08	0.26	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.07
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.03	0.02	0.07	0.01	0.20	-0.03	-0.05	-0.04	0.00
p-value	0.62	0.30	0.12	0.33	0.01	0.70	0.81	0.73	0.38

Note: The dependent variable is how respondents weighted the importance of the quality of a prospective college's athletic facilities. Background variables were included in every model. See text for definitions of other indicators. N=43. ----- indicates that the variable was not used in the model. Standard errors are shown below coefficients in parentheses (). Significance tests are reported to indicate the strength of relationships, where \*\*\* p ≤ .001, \*\* p ≤ .01, \* p ≤ .05, and + p ≤ .15.

**Table 10: Regression models for the importance of the prospective college football coach's ability to prepare players for the NFL as a college choice factor**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
African American	0.18 (0.34)	0.12 (0.35)	0.23 (0.33)	0.13 (0.33)	0.12 (0.34)	0.24 (0.35)	0.18 (0.35)	-0.15 (0.29)	0.21 (0.35)
Fathers education	-0.03 (0.17)	-0.01 (0.18)	-0.03 (0.17)	-0.04 (0.17)	-0.06 (0.17)	-0.02 (0.17)	-0.03 (0.18)	-0.09 (0.14)	-0.01 (0.18)
GPA	-----	0.11 (0.14)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of coach	-----	-----	0.24 (0.13)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of friends	-----	-----	-----	0.20 (0.11)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of parents or guardian	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.20 (0.16)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Colleges interested more in me as a football player than as a student	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.12 (0.12)	-----	-----	-----
People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.02 (0.22)	-----	-----
If I work hard I will make it to the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	1.14*** (0.25)	-----
College football players should be paid	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.13 (0.16)
Intercept	4.45 (0.70)	4.19 (0.78)	3.50 (0.85)	3.99 (0.73)	3.70 (0.93)	4.03 (0.82)	4.54 (1.12)	0.51 (1.04)	3.95 (0.92)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.02	0.09	0.08	0.05	0.03-	0.01	0.35	0.03
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	-0.04	0.02	0.01	-0.02	-0.03	-0.06	0.30	-0.04
p-value	0.73	0.75	0.27	0.29	0.55	0.66	0.89	0.00	0.72

Note: The dependent variable is how respondents weighted the importance of a prospective college's football coach and his ability to prepare college players to play in the NFL after college. Background variables were included in every model. See text for definitions of other indicators. N=43. ----- indicates that the variable was not used in the model. Standard errors are shown below coefficients in parentheses (.). Significance tests are reported to indicate the strength of relationships, where:

\*\*\* p ≤ .001, \*\* p ≤ .01, \* p ≤ .05, and + p ≤ .15.

**Table 11: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the competitive strength of the football team’s conference as a college choice factor**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
African American	0.31 (0.25)	0.34 (0.26)	0.35 (0.24)	0.24 (0.22)	0.23 (0.25)	0.30 (0.26)	0.31 (0.26)	0.21 (0.26)	0.30 (0.26)
Fathers education	0.05 (0.13)	0.04 (0.13)	0.05 (0.05)	0.04 (0.11)	0.01 (0.13)	0.05 (0.13)	0.05 (0.13)	0.03 (0.13)	0.05 (0.13)
GPA	-----	-0.05 (0.11)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of coach	-----	-----	0.23* (0.09)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of friends	-----	-----	-----	0.27*** (0.07)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of parents or guardian	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.24* (0.12)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Colleges interested more in me as a football player than as a student	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.02 (0.09)	-----	-----	-----
People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.00 (0.17)	-----	-----
If I work hard I will make it to the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.32 (0.22)	-----
College football players should be paid	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.01 (0.12)
Intercept	4.11 (0.52)	4.23 (0.59)	3.22 (0.62)	3.48 (0.49)	3.20 (0.67)	4.19 (0.62)	4.09 (0.84)	3.00 (0.94)	4.17 (0.70)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.04	0.15	0.27	0.12	0.03	0.03	0.08	0.03
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.01	-0.03	0.09	0.22	0.06	-0.03	-0.03	0.01	-0.03
p-value	0.47	0.64	0.07	0.00	0.14	0.67	0.69	0.32	0.68

Note: The dependent variable is how respondents weighted the importance of the competitive strength of the conference in which a prospective college’s football team competes. Background variables were included in every model. See text for definitions of other indicators. N=43. ----- indicates that the variable was not used in the model. Standard errors are shown below coefficients in parentheses (.). Significance tests are reported to indicate the strength of relationships, where:

\*\*\* p ≤ .001, \*\* p ≤ .01, \* p ≤ .05, and + p ≤ .15.

**Table 12: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the number of alumni from a college who played in the NFL as a factor in choosing a college**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
African American	0.04 (0.38)	-0.02 (0.39)	0.11 (0.36)	-0.04 (0.35)	-0.05 (0.37)	0.10 (0.38)	0.03 (0.38)	-0.25 (0.35)	0.09 (0.38)
Fathers education	-0.16 (0.19)	-0.14 (0.20)	-0.16 (0.18)	-0.17 (0.18)	-0.21 (0.19)	-0.153 (0.19)	-0.16 (0.20)	-0.21 (0.17)	-0.13 (0.19)
GPA	-----	0.11 (0.16)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of coach	-----	-----	0.35* (0.14)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of friends	-----	-----	-----	0.34** (0.11)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of parents or guardian	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.31 (0.17)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Colleges are interested more in me as a football player than as a student	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.14 (0.14)	-----	-----	-----
People frequently Talk to me About Playing in the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.01 (0.25)	-----	-----
If I work hard I will make it to the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.96** (0.30)	-----
College football players should be paid	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.22 (0.17)
Intercept	4.07 (0.78)	3.79 (0.87)	2.70 (0.91)	3.30 (0.76)	2.89 (1.00)	3.61 (0.90)	4.14 (1.24)	0.76 (1.26)	3.22 (1.01)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.03	0.16	0.19	0.09	0.05	0.02	0.22	0.06
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.02	-0.03	0.09	0.13	0.02	-0.02	-0.04	0.16	-0.00
p-value	0.58	0.65	0.07	0.03	0.24	0.56	0.78	0.01	0.43

Note: The dependent variable is how respondents weighted the importance of a prospective college football coach's ability to prepare his players to play in the NFL. Background variables were included in every model. See text for definitions of other indicators. N=43. ----- indicates that the variable was not used in the model. Standard errors are shown below coefficients in parentheses (). Significance tests are reported to indicate the strength of relationships, where:

\*\*\* p ≤ .001, \*\* p ≤ .01, \* p ≤ .05, and +p ≤ .15.

**Table 13: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the number of nationally televised games a prospective college's team plays as a college choice factor**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
African American	0.50 (0.44)	0.517 (0.46)	0.55 (0.43)	0.37 (0.38)	0.39 (0.43)	0.69 (0.41)	0.57 (0.43)	0.45 (0.46)	0.67 (0.37)
Fathers education	0.19 (0.22)	0.18 (0.23)	0.19 (0.22)	0.174 (0.19)	0.14 (0.22)	0.23 (0.21)	0.20 (0.22)	0.18 (0.23)	0.30 (0.19)
GPA	-----	-0.02 (0.18)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of coach	-----	-----	0.24 (0.17)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of friends	-----	-----	-----	0.50*** (0.12)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of parents or guardian	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.37 (0.20)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Colleges are interested more in me as a football player than as a student	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.43** (0.15)	-----	-----	-----
People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.50 (0.27)	-----	-----
If I work hard I will make it to the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.17 (0.39)	-----
College football players should be paid	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.72*** (0.17)
Intercept	2.67 (0.90)	2.71 (1.01)	1.73 (1.11)	1.54 (0.82)	1.29 (1.16)	1.25 (0.96)	0.73 (1.37)	2.07 (1.63)	-0.03 (0.99)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.03	0.08	0.30	0.10	0.20	0.10	0.03	0.33
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.01	-0.04	0.01	0.25	0.03	0.13	0.04	-0.03	0.28
p-value	0.50	0.71	0.34	0.00	0.21	0.03	0.20	0.66	0.00

Note: The dependent variable is how respondents weighted the importance of a prospective college football coach's ability to prepare his players to play in the NFL. Background variables were included in every model. See text for definitions of other indicators. N=43. ----- indicates that the variable was not used in the model. Standard errors are shown below coefficients in parentheses (. Significance tests are reported to indicate the strength of relationships, where:

\*\*\* p ≤ .001, \*\* p ≤ .01, \* p ≤ .05, and +p ≤ .15.

**Table 14: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the chance to start as a freshman on a prospective college’s football team as a college choice factor**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
African American	0.71 (0.51)	0.87 (0.52)	0.66 (0.51)	0.71 (0.52)	0.74 (0.53)	0.76 (0.53)	0.76 (0.51)	0.54 (0.53)	0.79 (0.51)
Fathers education	0.18 (0.26)	0.13 (0.26)	0.18 (0.26)	0.18 (0.27)	0.20 (0.27)	0.19 (0.27)	0.20 (0.26)	0.16 (0.26)	0.23 (0.26)
GPA	-----	-0.28 (0.21)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of coach	-----	-----	-0.23 (0.20)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of friends	-----	-----	-----	-0.01 (0.17)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of parents or guardian	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.08 (0.25)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Colleges are interested more in me as a football player than as a student	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.11 (0.19)	-----	-----	-----
People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.40 (0.33)	-----	-----
If I work hard I will make it to the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.54 (0.45)	-----
College football players should be paid	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.33 (0.23)
Intercept	2.61 (1.05)	3.28 (1.16)	3.53 (1.31)	2.63 (1.14)	2.94 (1.42)	2.23 (1.24)	1.08 (1.65)	0.73 (1.89)	1.36 (1.36)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.08	0.07	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.07	0.09
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02
p-value	0.39	0.31	0.36	0.60	0.58	0.53	0.35	0.35	0.28

Note: The dependent variable is how respondents weighted the importance of a prospective college football coach’s ability to prepare his players to play in the NFL. Background variables were included in every model. See text for definitions of other indicators. N=43. ----- indicates that the variable was not used in the model. Standard errors are shown below coefficients in parentheses (). Significance tests are reported to indicate the strength of relationships, where:

\*\*\* p ≤ .001, \*\* p ≤ .01, \* p ≤ .05, and + p ≤ .15.



**Table 15: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the excitement of the athletic recruiting visit to a prospective college as a college choice factor**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
African American	-0.24 (0.29)	-0.24 (0.30)	-0.25 (0.29)	-0.28 (0.29)	-0.21 (0.29)	-0.27 (0.30)	-0.22 (0.29)	-0.27 (0.30)	-0.24 (0.29)
Fathers education	0.02 (0.15)	0.02 (0.15)	0.02 (0.15)	0.01 (0.14)	0.03 (0.15)	0.01 (0.15)	0.02 (0.15)	0.01 (0.15)	0.02 (0.15)
GPA	-----	-0.00 (0.12)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of coach	-----	-----	-0.02 (0.11)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of friends	-----	-----	-----	0.14 (0.09)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of parents or guardian	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.09 (0.14)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Colleges are interested more in me as a football player than as a student	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.06 (0.11)	-----	-----	-----
People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.21 (0.18)	-----	-----
If I work hard I will make it to the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.08 (0.26)	-----
College football players should be paid	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.01 (0.13)
Intercept	4.45 (0.59)	4.47 (0.67)	4.54 (0.75)	4.12 (0.62)	4.82 (0.80)	4.65 (0.70)	3.65 (0.93)	4.16 (1.08)	4.40 (0.79)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.08	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.02
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.01	-0.04	-0.04	0.01	-0.03	-0.03	-0.01	-0.043	-0.04
p-value	0.55	0.76	0.75	0.34	0.64	0.69	0.49	0.73	0.76

Note: The dependent variable is how respondents weighted the importance of a prospective college football coach's ability to prepare his players to play in the NFL. Background variables were included in every model. See text for definitions of other indicators. N=43. ----- indicates that the variable was not used in the model. Standard errors are shown below coefficients in parentheses (.). Significance tests are reported to indicate the strength of relationships, where:

\*\*\* p ≤ .001, \*\* p ≤ .01, \* p ≤ .05, and + p ≤ .15.

**Table 16: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the winning percentage of a college’s football coach as a college choice factor**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
African American	-0.20 (0.39)	-0.11 (0.40)	-0.13 (0.37)	-0.29 (0.36)	-0.25 (0.40)	-0.13 (0.40)	-0.19 (0.40)	-0.39 (0.39)	-0.23 (0.40)
Fathers education	-0.34 (0.20)	-0.37 (0.20)	-0.34 (0.19)	-0.36 (0.18)	-0.37 (0.20)	-0.33 (0.20)	-0.34 (0.20)	-0.37 (0.19)	-0.36 (0.20)
GPA	-----	-0.14 (0.16)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of coach	-----	-----	0.34* (0.14)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of friends	-----	-----	-----	0.35** (0.12)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of parents or guardian	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.17 (0.19)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Colleges are interested more in me as a football player than as a student	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.16 (0.14)	-----	-----	-----
People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.09 (0.25)	-----	-----
If I work hard I will make it to the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.61 (0.34)	-----
College football players should be paid	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.14 (0.18)
Intercept	4.97 (0.80)	5.32 (0.89)	3.66 (0.95)	4.17 (0.79)	4.31 (1.07)	4.45 (0.93)	4.62 (1.28)	2.86 (1.41)	5.50 (1.06)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.07	0.08	0.18	0.23	0.09	0.09	0.07	0.14	0.08
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.01	0.11	0.17	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.07	0.01
p-value	0.22	0.29	0.04	0.01	0.28	0.24	0.38	0.10	0.31

Note: The dependent variable is how respondents weighted the importance of a prospective college football coach’s ability to prepare his players to play in the NFL. Background variables were included in every model. See text for definitions of other indicators. N=43. ----- indicates that the variable was not used in the model. Standard errors are shown below coefficients in parentheses (. Significance tests are reported to indicate the strength of relationships, where:

\*\*\* p ≤ .001, \*\* p ≤ .01, \* p ≤ .05, and +p ≤ .15.

**Table 17: Regression models for the level of importance attributed to the diversity of major choices available at a college as a college choice factor**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
African American	0.20 (0.38)	0.19 (0.40)	0.28 (0.35)	0.11 (0.35)	0.03 (0.35)	0.05 (0.37)	0.19 (0.39)	0.26 (0.40)	0.11 (0.37)
Fathers education	-0.18 (0.20)	-0.17 (0.20)	-0.18 (0.18)	-0.19 (0.18)	-0.25 (0.18)	-0.20 (0.18)	-0.18 (0.20)	-0.17 (0.20)	-0.23 (0.19)
GPA	-----	0.01 (0.16)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of coach	-----	-----	0.40** (0.14)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of friends	-----	-----	-----	0.34** (0.12)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Advice of parents or guardian	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.54** (0.16)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Colleges are interested more in me as a football player than as a student	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.32 (0.13)	-----	-----	-----
People Frequently Talk to me About Playing in the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.10 (0.25)	-----	-----
If I work Hard I will make it to the NFL	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.19 (0.34)	-----
College football Players should be paid	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-0.38* (0.17)
Intercept	4.28 (0.79)	4.24 (0.88)	2.73 (0.90)	3.50 (0.77)	2.26 (0.94)	5.34 (0.86)	4.68 (1.25)	4.96 (1.43)	5.71 (0.98)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.05	0.05	0.21	0.21	0.25	0.17	0.05	0.05	0.15
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.00	-0.02	0.15	0.15	0.19	0.10	-0.01	-0.01	0.09
p-value	0.351	0.55	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.05	0.52	0.49	0.07

Note: The dependent variable is how respondents weighted the importance of a prospective college's diversity of major choices available as a college choice factor. Background variables were included in every model. See text for definitions of other indicators. N=43. ----- indicates that the variable was not used in the model. Standard errors are shown below coefficients in parentheses (). Significance tests are reported to indicate the strength of relationships, where:

\*\*\* p ≤ .001, \*\* p ≤ .01, \* p ≤ .05, and +p ≤ .15.

The results for the regression models run on how important the quality of a prospective college's athletic facilities were to recruits are reported in table 9. Of the regressions that were run, Model 5 has the highest R-squared at 0.26. This indicates that 26 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the variables *African American*, *father's education* and *advice of parents or guardians*. Model 5 is the best model, and, since the p-value is 0.01, it is significant at the 5% level. The only variable that is significant is *advice of parents or guardian*. These results suggest that the students who viewed the advice they received from parents or guardians as important also viewed the quality of a colleges athletic training facilities as an important college choice factor.

Following the regression for the variable *quality of facilities*, regression models were implemented for the dependent variable *the college coach's ability to prepare college players to play in the NFL*. Table 10 reports the results of the regression models. Model 8 provides the highest R-squared at 0.35, indicating that 35 percent of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the variables *if I work hard I will make it to the NFL*, *African American*, and *father's education*. The p-value of 0.00 is significant at the 5% level, and the only variable that is significant is *if I work hard I will make it to the NFL*. One likely explanation for this outcome is that students who agreed with the idea that if they work hard they will make it to the NFL also viewed the prospective coach's ability to prepare college players for the NFL as important.

Table 11 reports the results for the regression models run on how important the competitive strength of the conference was to recruits. Of the regression models that were run, Model 4 has the highest R-squared at 0.27, indicating that 27 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the variables. Model 4 is the best model, and since the p value (0.00) is significant at the 5% level, the only variable in Model 4 that is significant is *advice of*

*friends* which suggests that the students who viewed the advice they received from friends as important also viewed the chance to play in a competitive conferences as an important college choice factor.

Table 12 reports the results for the regression models run on how important the number of alumni playing in the NFL is as college choice factor to recruits. Of the models, Model 8 has the highest R-squared at 0.22, indicating that 22 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the variables *African American*, *father's education*, and *if I work hard I will make it to the NFL*. Model 4 is the best model, and since the p value is significant, the only variable that is significant is *if I work hard I will make it to the NFL*. This suggests that the students who viewed the advice they received from friends as important also viewed a colleges number of alumni playing in the NFL as an important college choice factor. Model 4 is also significant and seems to show that an increase in the level of importance recruits place on their friends advice increases how important they consider a college's number of former players in the NFL.

Regression models were run on how important the number of nationally televised games that a potential colleges football team plays was to recruits as a factor when choosing a college. Table 13 reports the findings. Model 9 has the highest R-squared at 0.33. This indicates that 33 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the variables. Model 9 is the best model, and since the p value is significant at the 5% level, the only variable that is significant is the variable *college football players should be paid*. These findings suggest that the students who agreed that college football players should be paid also considered the number of nationally televised games that a potential college's football team plays an important factor when choosing a college. Models 6 and 4 are also significant and worth noting. Model 6 reflects the

fact that an increase in the level of agreement with the variable *colleges are more interested in me as a football player than they are in me as a student* corresponds to an increase in the importance attributed to the number of nationally televised games played.

Regressions run on the data indicating how important starting as a freshman on a potential college's football team was to student decision making process are reported in Table 14. Model 9 has the highest R-squared at 0.09. This indicates that 9 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the variables in the model. The variables in the model are *African American, father's education, and college football players should be paid*. Model 9 is the best model. Since the entire model is not significant, however, it is hard to draw firm conclusions about the relationship between the independent variable predictors and the dependent variable

Table 15 reports the results for the regressions run on how important an exciting campus recruiting visit to a potential college was as a factor to recruits deciding where they would go to college. Model 4 has the highest R-squared at 0.08, this indicates that 8 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the variables in the model. Model 4 is the best model, however since the entire model is not significant it is hard to make firm conclusions about the relationship between the independent variable predictors and the dependent variable

Table 16 reports the results for the regressions run on how important the winning percentage of a prospective college's head football coach was to recruits. Model 4 has the highest R-squared at 0.23, so 23 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the variables *African American, father's education, and advice of friends*. Model 4 is a better model, and since the p value is significant and the only variable that is significant is *advice of friends*, this suggest that the recruits who considered winning percentage an important factor in

the college choice process also considered the advice that they receive they received from friends an important factor.

Results for the regressions run on how important the diversity of major choices at a potential college was are reported in Table 17. Model 5 has the highest R-squared at 0.23. This indicates that 23 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the variables. Model 5 is a better model, and since the p value of 0.00 is significant at the 5% level and the only variable that is significant is *advice of parents*, this suggests that the recruits who considered the diversity of major choices at a prospective college an important factor also considered the advice they receive from a parent or guardian an important factor. Models 3 and 4 were also significant models.

## **Summary**

The preceding regressions looked at variables that were used to examine how heavily recruited high school football players weighted different factors when choosing a college in an effort to identify potential relationships. Of the nine dependent variables, the two that were the most difficult to predict were how students weighted the importance of recruiting visits that they made to prospective colleges and how important recruits felt the opportunity to start on a college football team during their first year was. The dependent variable “recruiting visit” was the most difficult to predict, as the model with the highest R-squared could only explain 8 percent of the variation in the dependent variable. This could be a result of the way the question was phrased. The question read “How important is the excitement of your recruiting trip as a college choice factor?” An informative recruiting trip does not necessarily equal an exciting recruiting trip.

The dependent variables that were the least difficult to predict were how recruits weighted the importance of a prospective coach’s ability to prepare college players for the NFL,

and how recruits weighted the importance of the number of nationally televised games that a potential football team played. Of these two dependent variables, the coach's ability to prepare college players for the NFL had the highest R-squared and 35 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the best model. The respondents who indicated on the survey that they agreed that their hard work would lead them to earning a job in the NFL are likely also looking for a program or a coach that will best benefit that pursuit.

Across all of the tables, the variables "advice of coach" and "advice of friends" showed as significant in more regressions than other predictors. Perhaps this is explained by the importance of their friends and peers during high school and assumes that their friends are also involved in athletics and share many of the same values. Coaches as well have played a significant role in the athletic development of these recruits, and potentially have advice on the recruit's athletic goals that parents cannot offer.

Overall, a clear theme was the importance of advice from significant others. In Hossler and Gallagher's model, significant others play a key role in the college choice process, and the findings of this study certainly support that. In further discussing the theme of advice seeking, one of the dependent variables that did not directly deal with the athletic characteristics of an institution was the diversity of majors available to prospective students. The importance of advice from all three (parents, friends, coach) showed as significant for the dependent variable "diversity of major choices." This dependent variable is considerably more academic than the other dependent variables.

Race, father's education, and grade point average did not show as significant in any of the regression models. This was somewhat surprising as there was an expectation that at least one of those background factors would show a significant effect on the dependent variables that



are reported in this study. The factors that dealt with the recruits mindset regarding playing professional football in the NFL did not show as significant in the regression models run for the importance of the quality of training facilities. One would think that a high school football player who aspires to play in the NFL would put a high value on the type of athletic training facilities available at a potential school. This could potentially be connected to the wording. The question asks how important it is that the facilities are new and high quality. The idea of new can be relative especially with the current “arms-race” in college sports where a new facilities are constantly being built as athletic departments are looking for ways to attract recruits. This could potentially suggest that facilities are not as important to the recruiting process as what is currently assumed based on the current trend that shows a rise in athletic departments building new facilities (Bennett, 2012). Also “new and high quality” might not necessarily mean better. Consider an older but historically significant stadium that might be attractive to play in.

Another factor that surprisingly did not show as significant in any of the models was, people frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL in the future. Many of the dependent variables dealt with athletic aspirations, and 94% of the survey respondents agreed that people often talk to them about playing in the NFL. Therefore there was little deviation among survey respondents in how often they felt people talk to them about playing in the NFL.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **QUALITATIVE FINDINGS**

This section reports some of the findings from the qualitative methods used to examine how highly recruited high school football players weight different factors when deciding where they will enroll in college. In addition to the surveys that were disseminated, recruits that were identified as part of the top 250 players in the country were also offered the opportunity to anonymously discuss their college choice process experiences.

The following excerpts are from interviews that recruits gave to Athlife during the time they were in the search phase of the college choice process. All of the high school football players who were sent the survey were offered the opportunity either to be interviewed or to provide written feedback about what they experienced while deciding where they would go to college. Two recruits provided interviews in person, and the remaining respondents chose the written feedback option. Both recruits who interviewed in person would eventually sign letters of commitment to Division I FBS schools.

Participants in this study were given the option to answer five questions that were related to the sections in the survey that asked specific questions about the college choice process:

- What are the academic factors you will consider when choosing a college?
- What are the athletic factors you will consider when choosing a college?
- Discuss the advice that you receive from your parents, high school coach and friends.
- How important is it who the coach is at the college you are looking at?

- How would you describe the experience of deciding on where to go to college while being recruited by a number of high profile college football teams?

Two of the themes that stand out from the feedback from recruits were the coach's influence and the importance of the program's connection to the NFL (whether through the coach's ability to prepare players for professional football or the overall football program's alumni that were currently in the league). A third theme that has been discussed throughout this study is the layer of complexity that recruiting adds to the college choice process. Recruiting sees schools actively pursuing student athletes. In many cases the student athletes know very little about the institutions reaching out.

When respondents were asked to talk about the role the head coach of a prospective college team played in their decision-making, two of the respondents talked pointedly about their families' influence on the issue.

Respondent #1:

No doubt who the coach is, is very important I mean my mom would just stop talking to a school if she did not like the coach, it didn't matter what the school had to offer. Really important. My mom did not like the coach [then] I couldn't go to the school, She couldn't stand some coaches so that would eliminate the school regardless how good they were.

Respondent #2:

My parents told me not to dwell too much on the coaches, because they come and go. They can be fired or take another job at any time. I mean, they can't make any promises to my parents and coach told me to not think about that too importantly. But then it's different when you think about it's almost impossible to avoid the importance of the coach. The schools I am looking at now, my top five, is [sic] in large part due to the comfort that I have with the coaches. They seem like great guys. That comfort, like some of these coaches really make you feel at home.

Linear models were implemented to look at the importance that high school recruits attributed to a college football team's reputation for sending players to the NFL, and how

important recruits felt it was that a coach be able to prepare players for the NFL. The respondents discussed the importance of a program's ability to prepare them for the NFL:

#### Respondent #1

Yeah I would say for me it was very, very important to know how many players were in the league when I was looking at schools— I know there are programs that have put guys that play my position in the NFL for the last like 5 years straight so that is extremely important. They have a track record of putting guys in the NFL.

#### Respondent #2

I think some schools really stand out I am thinking about the ones who really have a lot of guys who go on to play in the league, it is something I think all recruits are aware of, you have to be, I mean I know the stat is huge for some schools and that is important. I mean some schools really stand out and that is definitely important and I do pay attention to that.

One of the recurring themes in this study is the impact of recruiting on the college choice process itself. The organizational factors—such as recruiting—play a significant role in the college choice process for these players. In discussing their recruiting experience, the participants said the following:

#### Respondent #1:

It was kind of overwhelming; once people started hearing about me the calls and letters started pouring in. I pretty much committed early but the early time was overwhelming without a doubt. I was always hearing from schools and letters, it has slowed but before I feel like I got a flurry of text messages from all over the place, multiple coaches I didn't know who they were, I would have to Google the area code to try to figure out who it was. I got like 40 offers so like I said it was overwhelming. It was intense there were a lot of schools offering me scholarships. It was hard to keep track. Schools I knew nothing about. Big 10, Big 12, ACC SEC, also because my parents thought it was a good idea I took a lot of unofficial visits to schools I knew nothing about but they were recruiting me so we checked them out.

## Respondent #2

My parents went to college so I feel like they have given good advice. I have been thinking about this for a while now so it's not like I haven't been thinking about it. When I was a freshman there were guys getting recruited who were seniors so I have had the chance to see it for a while. Wasn't overwhelming I enjoyed it enjoyed learning different things It was hectic and it was hard to say no to people, I enjoyed the last two years I think a lot of my friends felt it was hectic but I don't think it was hectic it was fine, it was hard to turn coaches down though.

The feedback offered by these participants highlights some of the intricacies of the college choice process as it plays out for students who are being recruited to play football in college. The three themes covered in this chapter add to the college choice process for student athletes in ways that merit further examination. The first factor, the influence of the coach, points out the vital role they play in recruiting. To add context to the discussion around coaches, in 2012 the average salary for head coaches at major colleges was \$1.64 million, nearly 70 percent higher than what it was in 2006 (Brady, 2012).

These two recruits paid special attention to the number of alumni from prospective schools who had gone on to play in the NFL. They indicated that this statistic made a difference between schools they considered and schools they eliminated. The last recurring theme in this study is the overarching effect recruitment as an organizational factor (as defined by Hossler and Gallagher) has on the college choice process. While only one respondent defined it as "overwhelming," both respondents indicated a lot of information and activity was involved in the process.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

Significant contributions have been made to the research literature focusing on organized athletics in higher education. Those contributions have primarily explored issues such as academic integrity and the increased commercial profits associated with colleges sports (Sperber, 2000; Zimbalist, 2001; Byers, 1997; Yost, 2009). What remains lacking is research on the college choice process of high school student athletes who are recruited to compete in college, and thus such research stands to contribute valuable insights to the discourse around athletics in higher education. William Bowen, after researching college athletics on his campus, posited that “the root of many of the problems we see with student athletes in college is not so much the time athletes spend practicing and playing as it is the recruitment process itself, and the interests and motivations of the different sets of students captured by it” (2011). To better understand those kinds of interests and motivations, this exploratory study assessed the perceived importance of different college choice factors to heavily recruited high school football players.

#### **Comparing findings**

The findings of this study align with some of those previously mentioned in the review of the literature. The importance of the head coach in this inquiry supports the findings of much of the research on the college choice process of student athletes in general. In studies that included athletes from different sports, the head coach was reported as an important theme (Cook, 1994;

Gabert, Hale, & Montalvo, 1999; Kankey & Quarterman, 2007; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Slabik, 1995). While Kankey and Quarterman's analysis of softball players and Cooper's study of basketball players differ in the student athlete type, both their surveys of student athletes found that the head coach was one of the more important factors to prospective students.

The review of the literature discusses some of the studies that have looked specifically at football players. One study in particular by Klenosky *et al* (2001)—a means end theory examination of the college choice factors of 27 Division I football players—found that the head coach was the most important factor in the players' college choice. These findings are consistent with the results of the current study, which included the attributes of the head coach as one of the most influential factors.

Langelett (2003), who looked at the relationship between recruiting and team success, found that increased winning percentages led to more successful recruiting efforts. Similarly, Langelett, Dumond, Lynch, and Platania (2008) also found that recruits' decisions were based on factors such as the college's recent football ranking (i.e., measure of team performance) and the prestige of the institution's conference. The Athlife survey findings are consistent with these studies and show that success and conference strength are potentially important factors for high school football players making the college choice. Ultimately, athletic factors seem to be an important part of the equation for high school football players.

This study is distinct from others due to the fact that it surveyed student athletes prior to their deciding upon a college. Unlike studies by many other studies that surveyed current college students and had them take a retrospective look at their college choice process, this study was purposely timed to correspond with the student athletes while they were in high school and preparing to make their final college choice. Many other studies have found that the amount of

financial aid is an important factor for high school athletes. This study and its results differed in that the participants were already offered full scholarships by multiple schools due to their talent level. In fact the survey included an opportunity for them to share how much they agree with the idea that college football players should be paid, this is a distinction from populations of other sports and is related to the revenue producing nature of football.

### **Suggestions for Expanding the College Choice Model**

While athletic participation in high school sports shares similarities to participation in other high school activities, its uniqueness merits it being set apart, particularly when dealing with a population of students who are considered the elite or most talented in their sport. Hossler (1999) states that student activities such as athletics have a minimally significant influence on a student's predisposition. The rise of participation in activities associated with sports outside of the already vibrant world of scholastic sports warrants an increased understanding of the role this participation plays in the college choice process.

In the predisposition phase of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model, parents and significant others influence the college choice process of students. But indicating that significant others have an influence is not enough, considering that significant others can include athletic coach's (AAU, club, and travel ball) who have been historically scrutinized. In *Sole Influence*, authors Dan Wetzel and Don Yaeger examine the controversial world of sports recruiting for high school basketball players. Wetzel and Yaeger discuss the role of AAU affiliated coaches and the role that they can potentially have in the college choice process of the athletes they coach. The text argues that sports apparel companies like Nike and Adidas play prominent roles in the recruiting game. For example, recruits that are affiliated with Nike sponsored AAU programs are likely to go to colleges that outfit their student athletes with Nike apparel. It is precisely because



of the presumably high influence that AAU programs have on recruits that the NCAA has ramped up efforts to gain a better understanding of how AAU programs work and to enact policies that limit their influence.

The NCAA worries that football recruiting is mimicking the world of basketball recruiting in that college football scouts are increasingly going away from the model where the primary mode to assess high school football players was in a scholastic setting. Assessment is now done in camps and clinics put on by agencies with no affiliation to high schools. Pete Thamel (2011) wrote about the fact that third parties are showing up in the form of off-season trainers, Seven-on-Seven team coaches. Seven-on-Seven football is a modified version of a football game that occurs in the off season. It is a mobile version of high school football that allows for recruits to showcase their talent nearly year-round. Thamel quoted Rachel Newman Baker, the NCAA's director of amateurism activities, who stated that outside third parties are a huge concern and have extensive influence over families and student athletes.

Increasing focus on the role played by athletic talent that attracts third parties would expand the Hossler and Gallagher model. Due to the fact that high school football players and basketball players cannot directly turn professional in the NBA or NFL, higher education could be potentially seen as a means to a career with the student not necessarily attending an institution of higher education for the intrinsic academic opportunity. Another addition to the Hossler and Gallagher model would be including the college and university search activities in the first phase's organizational factors to see how much of an effect the increased money spent on recruiting has on students involved in sports.

Finally, the search phase would be replaced by the recruitment phase, as it is during this time that heavily recruited high school athletes are sought by colleges. In this stage, college and

university search activities peak, heavily recruited student athletes' homes are visited by head coaches, and recruits are inundated with personalized recruiting pitches through mail, phone, and text messages, all sent in hopes of securing a commitment from a high school recruit.

Additionally, the experience of the heavily recruited high school athlete is often covered in the media. Unlike the college selection process of traditional student athletes, much of the heavily recruited football players' process is played out in the public eye.

### **Implications**

The college choice decision is one of the most difficult and important academic decisions that students make (Doyle, 1990). The results of this examination suggest that high school football players who are being recruited to play in college consider athletic factors that are distinct from factors the rest of the college-going population take into account. The results of this survey also suggest that the respondents were interested in potential colleges based largely on the head coach of the college football team, as well as the football program's and coach's ability to prepare players for the NFL. If this sample is representative of a larger part of college football's student-athlete population, the implications suggest a need for further discussion around the coach's role, responsibility, and relationship to the college choice process of highly recruited high school football players.

**Table 18: Three phase model with additions for student athletes**

Phases	Influential Factors		Student Outcomes
	Individual	Organizational	
<b>Predisposition (phase 1)</b>	<b>Student characteristics</b>  <b>Significant others</b>  <b>Significant athletic influences: coaches trainers, recruiting analysts</b>  <b>Educational Activities</b>  <b>Athletic Activities: Sports camps AAU and travel teams-college recruiting combines</b>	<b>School characteristics</b>  <b>Athletic sports team characteristics</b>  <b>Travel team characteristics</b>	<b>College options</b>  <b>Other options</b>
<b>Search (phase 2)</b>	<b>Student preliminary college values</b>  <b>Student search activities</b>  <b>College athletic department recruiting activities</b>	<b>College and university search activities- search for students</b>  <b>Recruitment activities of college athletic team</b>	<b>Choice set</b> <b>Other options</b>
<b>Choice (phase 3)</b>	<b>Choice set</b>	<b>College and university search activities</b>	<b>Choice</b>

Given the difficulty and complexity of the college choice process for any student type, as mentioned earlier, colleges and universities need to be aware of the individual and organizational factors facing students during the college choice process. Hossler asserts that “[i]n addition to the individual factors which influence the college choice process, there are organizational factors which interact with the individual student factors to influence student college choice.” Hossler identifies a college or university’s search activities as an organizational factor, and thus Hossler

points out that the search activities of colleges in the form of athletic recruitment should not be overlooked in the broader college choice discussion (1987).

### **Effects of a Changing NCAA Landscape**

In 2013 the NCAA passed proposals that have the potential to alter the landscape of recruiting in college athletics. One of these proposals effectively deregulates the number of times a college can initiate contact with a prospect. According to Allie Grasgreen from Inside Higher Ed, proposed rules like 13-3 “would eliminate existing restrictions on how colleges can get in touch with athletes they are recruiting, ending bans on text messaging and remove limits on the frequency of other forms of contact, like telephone calls” (Grasgreen 2013). Prior to this proposal, the NCAA limited phone contact between coaches and recruits. Division I coaches were allowed to contact a recruit just once a month between June 15 after their sophomore year and July 31 after their junior year. Starting on August 1 after their junior year, coaches were allowed just two contacts per week (2013). Additionally, one of two proposals that has been put on hold following pushback from NCAA members would deregulate who can perform recruiting tasks for the college. Currently, recruiting tasks are carried out by full-time football staff who have on-the-field duties as part of their job description. The proposal under review would allow for individuals not directly affiliated with the coaching staff to actively recruit high school prospects. Schools would be able to hire a full-time staffer whose main job would be to find the most talented high school prospects and convince them to commit to their college.

While the NCAA reviews Proposal 11-2, which would allow colleges to hire full-time recruiters, Proposal 13-3 immediately allows coaches more deregulated access to recruits. In particular, Proposal 13-3 stands to potentially bring significant change to the already frenzied realm of college football recruiting. Within the larger student-athlete population, college football

players represent a specialized population, with the most notable difference being that the revenue produced by football surpasses most other NCAA-sponsored sports. Football revenues fund the majority of an athletic department's financial operations. Another notable difference is that college football players graduate at lower percentages than student athletes from other sports. Given those unique characteristics of college football student athletes, more research exploring the relationship between their college choice process and their academic outcomes and collegiate experiences is merited.

### **Recommendations for Stakeholders in the College Choice/Recruiting Process**

This section highlights a total of three recommendations for practitioners and policymakers. Two of the recommendations are for higher education practitioners who work with college student athletes, while the third recommendation is for policy-makers who create and enforce the policies that directly affect the athletic endeavors and experiences of college athletes.

*First Recommendation:* Practitioners must be keen to the possibility that high school football recruits, especially those whose talent increases the attention they receive from prospective colleges, will consider a variety of factors when considering where they will go to college, factors that go beyond those considered by the typical student. The survey results suggest that this particular group of highly recruited football players place a higher level of importance on factors that are related to their athletic endeavors. The five factors indicated as most important were: 1) team winning percentage, 2) the academic support structure available to athletes, 3) interactions with head coaches during recruitment, 4) the ability of the head coach to prepare students for the NFL, and 5) who the head coach was. It is important that coaches recognize their level of importance in the minds of prospects in the midst of the college choice

process (Cook, 1994; Gabert, Hale, & Montalvo, 1999; Kankey & Quarterman, 2007; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Slabik, 1995).

*Second Recommendation:* Higher education personnel and athletic department personnel need to assess their current recruiting practices to ensure that recruits are made aware of other non-athletic factors of their respective institutions. With the findings that athletic factors are influential in a student athlete's college choice process, colleges need to make sure that recruits are aware of what the institution has to offer more broadly. Recruits need to make a decision that takes their educational experience as a whole into consideration instead of only considering their identity as athletes.

*Third Recommendation:* Policy makers should make information about the graduation and transfer rates of NCAA institutions and their respective coaches more readily available to recruits and their families. Currently, the NCAA offers information on the following areas for all of its Division I member institutions: the Academic Progress Rate (APR), the APR of individual Division I head coaches from all of the sponsored NCAA sports, the Graduation Success Rate, and the Federal Graduation Rates of Division I NCAA members. The NCAA's database does not currently link graduation rates directly to specific athletic coaches. Directly linking the transfer rates and team graduation rates to coaches would potentially present useful information to recruits.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

This section presents four recommendations for further research. The first recommendation is to examine a single institution using a longitudinal study. A longitudinal study could focus on high school football players from different entering cohorts, starting during the search process and following them through graduation. A longitudinal study could allow

researchers to compare the outcomes and experiences of college students based on their initial college choice process.

A second recommendation would be to include more background variables that would allow for the scope of the study to be examined. This study did not include background variables about socioeconomic status, or information on the high school student's past or current participation in activities designed to serve as platforms for them to gain notoriety as an athlete and subsequently attract the attention of college coaches seeking to recruit high school football players. Football camps and clinics have increased in number and now allow high school football players to showcase their talents outside of the traditional scholastic context. Researching the effects of participation in football clinics or travel teams could add greatly to the research literature about high school football recruits.

A third recommendation is to carry out this study with more interviews to learn more about the recruiting process from coaches, athletic administrators, and high school recruits. Sports media often cover much of the information about the recruiting and college choice process, but an academic inquiry into this process could provide valuable insight.

The fourth and final recommendation from this study is for researchers to look into the recruiting process itself. As recruiting expenditures continue to increase—and with new moves to deregulate recruiting looming—the effect that this organizational factor has had and will continue to have on the college choice process merits inquiry.

This exploratory study has contributed insight into how some of the most heavily recruited high school football athletes weigh the importance of different factors in considering where they will attend college. The conclusions are specific to this group of respondents. In sum, the results of this study suggest that when considering where they would attend college, the

heavily recruited high school football players surveyed based their decisions on factors such as who the head coach of the prospective college or university was, the interactions they had with the coach during the search process, the coach's ability to prepare players for a career in the NFL after college, what the football team's winning percentage was, and the academic support structure available to athletes. Knowing that recruits are weighing these factors when making the important decision of where they will pursue their post-secondary education can aid in higher education's understanding of this population of students, and thus aid in higher education's ability to serve them and ensure an enriching educational experience.



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APPENDIX: ATHLIFE College Choice Survey

**College Choice Survey**

<b>Factors important in choosing your college? Advice:</b>	<b>Extremely Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Moderately important</b>	<b>Slightly important</b>	<b>Not important</b>
Advice of Parents or Guardians	5	4	3	2	1
Advice of High School Coach	5	4	3	2	1
Advice of friends	5	4	3	2	1
Advice of Foothill college coaches	5	4	3	2	1

<b>Factors important in choosing your college? Characteristics of Campus:</b>	<b>Extremely Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Moderately important</b>	<b>Slightly important</b>	<b>Not important</b>
College is close to hometown	5	4	3	2	1
College is a long distance from hometown	5	4	3	2	1
The college campus is large	5	4	3	2	1
The college campus is small	5	4	3	2	1
The academic ranking of college	5	4	3	2	1
The availability of desired academic major	5	4	3	2	1
The number of academic major choices	5	4	3	2	1
The ethnic diversity of student body	5	4	3	2	1
The size of the student body	5	4	3	2	1
The party-reputation of school	5	4	3	2	1
The climate of the region where the college is	5	4	3	2	1



<b>Factors important in choosing your college? Athletic Characteristics:</b>	<b>Extremely Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Moderately important</b>	<b>Slightly important</b>	<b>Not important</b>
The graduation rate of the college football team	5	4	3	2	1
The grade point average of the college football team	5	4	3	2	1
The number of players from college who have made it to the NFL	5	4	3	2	1
The professional coaching experience of the college football teams coaches	5	4	3	2	1
The winning percentage of current college football coach	5	4	3	2	1
The chance to play in a highly competitive conference	5	4	3	2	1
The college football teams frequency of bowl game appearances	5	4	3	2	1
The honesty of the college football teams coaching staff	5	4	3	2	1
You feel that the college football teams coaches can prepare you for the NFL	5	4	3	2	1
The size of the football stadium at the college	5	4	3	2	1
A large number of fans attend the college football teams home games	5	4	3	2	1
The number of nationally televised football games	5	4	3	2	1
The chance to start as a freshman	5	4	3	2	1
The athletic program has new and high quality training facilities	5	4	3	2	1
The strength of the academic support system available for student athletes	5	4	3	2	1
The chance to play in a highly competitive conference	5	4	3	2	1
Your interactions with the college football teams coaches	5	4	3	2	1

**Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I will make it to the NFL if I work hard enough	4	3	2	1
College football players should be paid	4	3	2	1
Receiving a college degree is more important than playing in the NFL	4	3	2	1
My national ranking as a football player determines where I can go to college	4	3	2	1

Colleges are more interested in me as a football player than they are in me as a student	4	3	2	1
People frequently talk to me about playing in the NFL in the future	4	3	2	1
College football coaches will be honest with me during the recruiting process	4	3	2	1
Playing football at a college that competes in a major conference is the best route to the NFL	4	3	2	1

<b>How often have you had discussions about choosing a 4-year college with the following people:</b>	<b>Many times</b>	<b>A few times</b>	<b>Never</b>
Your parent(s)/guardian(s)	3	2	1
A high school counselor	3	2	1
A teacher at your school	3	2	1
Other students in your school	3	2	1
Current college student-athletes	3	2	1
A sibling or other relative	3	2	1
A college representative or recruiter	3	2	1
A high school sports coach	3	2	1
A junior college sports coach	3	2	1

**Please indicate if you have taken any of the tests below: (Circle all that apply)**

**PSAT**

**SAT I**

**AP test**

**ACT**

**SAT subject test**

**PLAN**

**How many times have you taken the SAT or ACT?**

**0**

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4 or more**

**Indicate your overall grade point average in high School: (circle one)**

**3.5-4.0**

**3.0-3.49**

**2.5-2.99**

**2.0-2.49**

**1.5-1.99**

**0.0- 1.49**

**not sure**

**Please indicate your ethnic background  
(select all that apply)**

**White/Caucasian**

**African American /Black**

**American Indian/Alaska native**

**Asian American/Asian**

**Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander**

**Mexican American/Chicano**

**Other Latino**

**Any Other**

**Since entering high school, how many times have you done the following:**

	<b>0 times</b>	<b>1-2 times</b>	<b>3-5 times</b>	<b>5-10</b>	<b>10 or more</b>
Visited a college or university	0 times	1-2 times	3-5 times	5-10	10 or more
Attended a college information workshop, college night, or college fair	0 times	1-2 times	3-5 times	5-10	10 or more
Viewed a college or university website	0 times	1-2 times	3-5 times	5-10	10 or more
Took an ACT or SAT test prep course	0 times	1-2 times	3-5 times	5-10	10 or more
Attended a financial aid workshop	0 times	1-2 times	3-5 times	5-10	10 or more
Read a college guidebook (e.g., Fiske, Barron's, Peterson's)	0 times	1-2 times	3-5 times	5-10	10 or more
Read a college rankings magazine (e.g., US News, Money)	0 times	1-2 times	3-5 times	5-10	10 or more
Took a class for college-level credit (AP, IB, or Dual Enrollment)	0 times	1-2 times	3-5 times	5-10	10 or more

**Parents Education**

**Mother** (Some High School ) (High School Graduate) (Some College) (College Graduate) (Unknown)  
**Father** (Some High School ) (High School Graduate) (Some College) (College Graduate) (Unknown)

**Location of High School**  
(select one):

- Small town**
- Rural area**
- Suburban Area**
- Urban**

